

JANE

MAGGIE. Blessed be to God, ma'am—I thought only the grand Miss Bingley was afther comin'.

MRS. GARDINER. (Smiling) Miss Bingley has a brother, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Oh, ma'am dear—do ye mane it? Himself is comin' too?

MRS. GARDINER. (Smiling) Wait and sec. In the meantime, bring another cup and saucer—and remember, everything must be perfect for Miss Jane's sake. This is a great day for her.

MAGGIE. Rely on me, ma'am—I'd lay down and die for Miss Jane—

MRS. GARDINER. We must show Miss Bingley that we may not be as grand as she but we are just as genteel even though we do live in Cheapside.

JANE. (Enters r. with a letter in her hand. MAGGIE exits l.) Auntie, I've had such a lovely walk—I feel almost well again now—

MRS. GARDINER. (Crosses to JANE) After Miss Bingley's visit, I am sure you will feel better still—Eh, darling? (Smiles.)

JANE. And wait till I tell you the news about Lizzie. (Sets parasol.)

MRS. GARDINER. (Remembering suddenly) What, you've had a letter from her?

JANE. (Chuckling) Yes! What do you think, Auntie—she's actually staying at Rosings—with Lady Catherine de Bourgh—she was invited with Mr. and Mrs. Collins!

MRS. GARDINER. Mrs. Collins? (Astounded) But I thought that silly young man had made an offer to Lizzie.

JANE. Yes—and after she rejected him he tried Charlotte Lucas—with better result— (Laughs) Mama has refused to kiss Lizzie good-night ever since.

Mrs. GARDINER. (Crosses to table; arranges

flowers) I should think Mrs. Bennet would have thanked heaven instead.

JANE. Oh, no. Mama regards any husband as better than no husband. (Taking off coat, places it on sofa. Demurely) Only Papa and Lizzie happen to think differently. (Pauses) About marriage, Mama is not very romantic. (Sits on sofa.)

MRS. GARDINER. That is the most penetrating observation I have ever heard from your innocent lips, Jane. (Laughs.)

JANE. I wonder how Lizzie will like Lady Catherine de Bourgh? I hear she is even more imposing than Mr. Darcy. He is at Rosings, too. Lizzie detests him but I have always liked him. I feel that under that proud shy manner he is—

MRS. GARDINER. (Interrupting. Crosses to c.) You like all the world, darling, bless your sweet heart!

MAGGIE. (Enters l. with teacup, which she sets on table) Sure, ma'am, 'tis herself that's driving up to the front door now in the grandest carriage. Miss Bingley, ma'am, it must be, for I never see the like of the two horses and the coachmen.

JANE. Is Miss Bingley alone, Maggie?

MAGGIE. I couldn't see plainly, but 'tis sure I am myself must be sittin' in the carriage beside her.

MRS. GARDINER. Hurry, Maggie. Go and open the door! (To JANE as MAGGIE exits r. Wishing to leave her alone to greet the BINGLEYS. Kisses her tenderly) Thank goodness you look so bright. Well, Jane— (Takes JANE's things) I'll take your things and go and see that the scones are hot— (Exits r. JANE, trembling, watches r. door. Rises. Expecting CHARLES and CAROLINE.)

MAGGIE. (Enters r.; announces. MAGGIE's face is sad; her voice pitched unconsciously lower) Miss Bingley— (Exits l.)

Miss BINGLEY. (Enters r. Quite aware of JANE's

shocked look) Jane, dear, I have been pining to see you.

JANE. Dear Caroline. I'm very happy to see you again. (Miss BINGLEY sits in chair R. of sofa.) Is everyone well—? Mr. Darcy? Your brother? (She sits.)

MISS BINGLEY. Oh, very well indeed, my dear. We have all be so busy. Miss Georgiana Darcy is up in town for her first season, you know. She and her brother have been entertaining vastly at the Darcy house.

JANE. Mr. Darcy is quite devoted to his sister, isn't he?

MISS BINGLEY. (Archly) He is not the only one. Indeed, she is so lovely one can't wonder—and all that fortune. Why, do you know, she will have twenty thousand pounds when she is of age. Quite a breath-taking sum, isn't it? Not that money matters to either Charles or myself—still, one can't have too much of it.

JANE. (Starts, but instantly recovers herself) But I am sure that with such a sweet girl as Miss Darcy, money counts very little. She has many suitors, I suppose— (Wistfully—still unsuspecting.)

MISS BINGLEY. Naturally—but you can be sure that the Darcy family will only allow her to take a young gentleman of the highest connections. (Pauses) You don't look as well as you did in the country, my dear. Have you been poorly?

JANE. Oh, no—I have never felt better. I am always a little pale in the city; I miss the fresh air.

MISS BINGLEY. Oh! (Pause.)

JANE. Are you—and your brother staying much longer in London, Caroline—?

MISS BINGLEY. Only until the conclusion of this affair.

JANE. (Looks mystified, then frightened, then controls herself) Some business, Caroline?

MISS BINGLEY. (In an affectedly confidential tone) I wouldn't confide this to anyone else—but you and I are such close friends—even though I have had no time at all to give myself the pleasure of visiting you here—you promise to keep it a secret?

JANE. Of course!

MISS BINGLEY. (Leaning forward; in a low tone) I am hoping to hear the happy news any day now. I know you will be the first to wish them joy—

JANE. (Faintly) Them? Joy?

MISS BINGLEY. Charles—and dear Georgiana—

JANE. (Softly) Indeed, indeed, I wish them joy—if they truly love each other.

MISS BINGLEY. (Sentimentally) Oh, the dear boy is so much in love—I tease him all the time. He is never home now—escorting Miss Darcy here, there, everywhere—balls, routs, the playhouse. Mr. Darcy and I have wanted this match for ever so long. Thank you for your wishes. I'll convey them to Charles!

(MRS. GARDINER enters R.)

JANE. (Making an effort. Rises) Miss Bingley, may I present my aunt, Mrs. Gardiner?

MRS. GARDINER. Permit me to welcome you, Miss Bingley.

MISS BINGLEY. (Simultaneously with Mrs. GARDINER) I'm vastly pleased, ma'am. Oh, I forgot in all my excitement—Charles sends you his best respects.

JANE. Thank him for me. (MAGGIE enters L. with tea and scones on tray; sets it on table up L.)

MRS. GARDINER. (Crosses to table and begins pouring tea) May I offer you some tea, Miss Bingley?

MISS BINGLEY. (Sitting) Thank you, just the tiniest cup—

MRS. GARDINER. (Pouring tea) Sugar? And milk, Miss Bingley?

JANE cont.

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Miss BINGLEY. No, thank you.
 JANE. It is so sweet of you to find time to visit my aunt, dear Caroline.
 Miss BINGLEY. I should have been here earlier, only I have been really persecuted with invitations. (MAGGIE serves Miss BINGLEY.)
 Mrs. GARDINER. Jane, dearest, I've made your tea stronger. (Hands cup to MAGGIE, who serves it to JANE.) Jane is over-tired—gadding about so much since she came to London.
 Miss BINGLEY. But I didn't know you had any acquaintances here— (Astonished.)
 Mrs. GARDINER. (Quietly) Is that why you have been so attentive to her?
 Miss BINGLEY. (Embarrassed) I didn't know she had come to London until she called—
 Mrs. GARDINER. Nearly a month ago.
 JANE. Auntie, I have no claim on Miss Bingley's time. She has many friends in London of much longer standing.
 Miss BINGLEY. (Rising. JANE and Mrs. GARDINER rise.) Indeed, dear Jane, you understand perfectly. (MAGGIE crosses and takes Miss BINGLEY's cup and takes it back to table L. To Mrs. GARDINER.) She is always so sweet about one's difficulties— (Mrs. GARDINER bows graciously.) Even this short visit has simply bankrupted my time. Mr. Darcy's visiting his aunt at Rosings means that I have to take Miss Georgiana entirely under my wing until his return. (Simperting. To Mrs. GARDINER) I can't leave those two young people alone, you know—the betrothal is not announced yet. It has been so nice to meet you, Mrs. Gardiner— (WARN Curtain.)
 Mrs. GARDINER. Attend Miss Bingley to her coach, Maggie. (MAGGIE crosses and exits R.)
 Miss BINGLEY. Goodbye, dear Jane. It has been a delight to see you again. (Kisses JANE's cheek) Good

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afternoon, ma'am. (To Mrs. GARDINER, who returns her courtesy. Miss BINGLEY exits R.)
 JANE. Oh, Auntie! (Turns to Mrs. GARDINER, crying.)
 Mrs. GARDINER. (Crosses to JANE; embraces her) There, there, my darling, I know— It's the disillusionment that cuts the very heart—
 JANE. (Weeping) But to abandon me—without a word! What could I have done to him? He loved me, Auntie—he did, he did! (Low) He kissed me once—and— (Shamefacedly) I kissed him. (Looks anxiously into her aunt's face) You believe—don't you—that I should never have done that if I hadn't been sure he wanted to make me an offer—don't you, Auntie?
 Mrs. GARDINER. Of course I do, my lamb! (She sits on sofa, holding on to JANE's hands.)
 JANE. And do you suppose he understands that too? I wouldn't have him think ill of me.
 Mrs. GARDINER. It's all a mystery to me— (Reflects, puzzled) When I met him at Longbourn he seemed such a properly sweet young gentleman—
 JANE. (Kneels) Oh, he is— I do assure you, Auntie—he is—and now it's all over— I can't bear it: I can't, I can't— (Bursts into low, broken sobs. During this speech JANE sinks upon the floor beside Mrs. GARDINER. Breaks into sobs, her head in Mrs. GARDINER's lap.)

CURTAIN

SCENE III

SCENE: LADY CATHERINE DE BOURGH'S drawing room at Rosings Park, Hunsford, Kent. Morning.
 A Regency drawing room with deep Empire-green walls and white woodwork. There is an