

LADY LUCAS

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ture!—inheriting our home! You entailing your estate away from your own daughters.

BENNET. Is it really impossible for you to grasp the fact that the Law of Entail was not of my devising, Mrs. Bennet? *(Slowly, as if talking to a child)* The Law dictates that all estates shall be inherited by male descendants only, and we have no son, as possibly you remember.

MRS. BENNET. Mr. Bennet, how can you criticize me? You have no compassion on my nerves. *(Whimpering.)*

BENNET. You are mistaken, my dear. I have a high regard for your nerves. I have heard you mention them with consideration for these last twenty years.

MRS. BENNET. Yes, but you don't know what I suffer. *(Whimpering through this speech.)*

BENNET. That's right, my dear, have a nice little cry. It always seems to help your nerves. *(After a slight pause, HILL enters r.c. from r.)*

HILL. Lady Lucas and Miss Lucas, madam. *(He exits r.c. to r.)*

BENNET. Oh, good Lord! I think I'll go out and get some air—my horse needs exercising. *(Rises, crosses above Mrs. Bennet, then comes back a step; pats her on the shoulder)* I'll be back in half an hour—for tea. *(Exits down stage door of conservatory up L.)*

MRS. BENNET. Back for tea. Let him miss his tea. It will do him good. *(She rises as LADY LUCAS and Miss LUCAS are ushered in r.c. from r. by HILL. She crosses to them.)* Oh, how nice! I have been pining to see you. *(She kisses LADY LUCAS. To HILL.)* Find the young ladies, Hill, and then tea. *(Sits in chair at table c. HILL exits r.c. to L.)*

LADY LUCAS. *(Crosses to fireplace r.)* Let me get near the fire. I am positively frozen. We only have a few moments to spend with you.

begin

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MRS. BENNET. Have you heard about our new neighbors?

LADY LUCAS. Yes, we have met the young man, Mrs. Bennet. Charming, perfectly charming! Charlotte is quite smitten with him, aren't you, my love?

CHARLOTTE. *(Has crossed to back of sofa)* Oh, it's no use being smitten—the moment he sets eyes on Jane!

MRS. BENNET. Yes, we'll really have to get Jane put of the way. *(JANE and ELIZABETH enter r.c. from L.)*

JANE. Who's going to get me out of the way?

ELIZABETH. Not if I can prevent *(Almost simultaneously.)*

it. Lady Lucas! Hello, Charl! *(They curtsey to LADY LUCAS, then go over and kiss CHARLOTTE.)*

LYDIA. *(Comes flying in r.c. from L. as ELIZABETH is kissing CHARLOTTE.)* Hullo, everybody! *(Mrs. BENNET motions her to remember her manners.)*

I mean good afternoon. Mama, did you hear? *(Mrs. BENNET shushes her. LYDIA crosses to back of sofa. ELIZABETH and CHARLOTTE cross to fireplace r.)*

CHARLOTTE. *(As they are crossing)* How do you like my new bonnet?

ELIZABETH. I think it's sweetly pretty.

MRS. BENNET. Girls, Lady Lucas has met Mr. Bingley. *(CHARLOTTE sits on chair down r. ELIZABETH sits on bench.)*

LADY LUCAS. Sir William had already met him in London and is delighted with him. Young, handsome, extremely agreeable—and rich, my dears! *(HILL enters r.c. from L. with tea tray and sets it on the table c. Exits r.c. to L.)*

MRS. BENNET. *(Begins to pour tea)* I simply must insist that Mr. Bennet calls tomorrow.

LADY LUCAS. You'll have to wait a few days. He has gone up to London on business.

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Mrs. BENNET. (*Over her shoulder as she continues to pour*) Are you sure?

LADY LUCAS. Certainly. He was to dine with us yesterday and we received a note of regret that he was called to London. Charlotte was so disappointed. (*JANE takes tea from c. table.*) Weren't you, dear?

CHARLOTTE. (*Who is conversing with ELIZABETH*) Oh—er—yes, Mama. (*JANE serves tea to LADY LUCAS and CHARLOTTE.*)

Mrs. BENNET. Indeed! But I can't imagine what he can have to do in London so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire. (*JANE goes back to tea table.*) I do hope the young man won't be flying about from one place to another instead of settling down at Netherfield as he ought.

ELIZABETH. (*Laughing*) Surely, Mama, he has a right to go to London if he wishes? (*JANE hands plate of sandwiches to LYDIA, which LYDIA serves.*)

LADY LUCAS. He only went for the night. He may be back today. He's giving a ball at Michaelmas.

Mrs. BENNET. (*Anguished*) I must get Mr. Bennet to call—(*JANE serves tea to LYDIA and sits on sofa.*)

LADY LUCAS. He is bringing his sister Caroline back with him. She is to keep house. Also a Mr. Darcy, squire of Pemberly, a princely estate. He is even wealthier than Mr. Bingley, and they are inseparable friends.

Mrs. BENNET. Also a bachelor?

LADY LUCAS. Yes, but reported to be engaged to his cousin, the daughter of the Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

Mrs. BENNET. I never believed in marriage between cousins. The engagement is *only* a report, Lady Lucas?

LADY LUCAS. Yes, so far. But he's a very high and mighty young man, Mrs. Bennet. He wouldn't look at anyone under a peer's daughter. His mother

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was the Lady Anne Darcy, sister of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Oh—very old family!

Mrs. BENNET. (*With satisfaction*) Then Charlotte is not in the running either.

ELIZABETH. Mama! Please!

LADY LUCAS. (*Sweetly*) You forget, dear Mrs. Bennet, that since Sir William was knighted by His Majesty, Charlotte has been presented at court. (*CHARLOTTE and ELIZABETH exchange looks.*)

Mrs. BENNET. (*Still more sweetly*) Mr. Bennet was born a gentleman, dear Lady Lucas. Isn't it fortunate for us? My girls don't need to be presented.

JANE. (*Rises and going to LADY LUCAS.* *Anxious to change subject*) Lady Lucas, do let me give you some fresh tea.

LADY LUCAS. (*Rising*) No, thank you, dear. (*All girls rise.* *LADY LUCAS hands JANE her cup; CHARLOTTE hands LYDIA her cup; JANE hands LYDIA LADY LUCAS' cup, which LYDIA places on c. table.*) Come, Charlotte, we have other calls to make.

Mrs. BENNET. (*Inquisitively*) On any mutual friends, Lady Lucas?

LADY LUCAS. (*Evasively*) Oh, only the Longs and perhaps the Hamiltons—

CHARLOTTE. (*As she kisses JANE.* *She then kisses ELIZABETH*) Dear Jane.

LADY LUCAS. (*To JANE*) Ah, my child—I wish Charlotte had been endowed with a quarter of your good looks—(*To JANE*) You'll certainly be the belle at the Bingley Ball. (*Turning to Mrs. BENNET*)

Though it is true that sometimes men prefer character. Goodbye, Mrs. Bennet. (*Curtises to Mrs. BENNET.* *CHARLOTTE curtises to Mrs. BENNET.* *LADY LUCAS and CHARLOTTE cross to the r.c. door.*)

Mrs. BENNET. (*Curtises to LADY LUCAS*) Goodbye, Lady Lucas.

LADY LUCAS. Goodbye, my dears. Thank you for the delightful tea. (*They exit r.c. to r.*) *J end*