

Mrs. GARDINER

60 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE ACT II

ELIZABETH. (*Tenderly*) All right, my sweet; believe in her as you do everyone. One comfort—even she can't persuade Charles that he doesn't love you.

JANE. (*After a pause*) But how can I marry him if his sister is against it?

ELIZABETH. *That you must decide for yourself, my dearest little saint. If—you decide that the anguish of disoblighing his cat of a sister is more than equal to the joy of marrying him—then I advise you to refuse him.*

JANE. (*Laughing through her tears*) You naughty girl, Lizzie. You know very well that I should marry him if it vexed every relative he has. But if he doesn't come back—Lizzie, Lizzie—I couldn't bear it. (*Wisfully*) I think I should die.

ELIZABETH. He must come back—he won't be able not to— (*Both look toward door as Mrs. BENNET re-enters R.C. from L.*) (*WARN Curtain.*)

Mrs. BENNET. (*At table c.*) Jane, dear, your father and I have decided to let you accept your Aunt Gardiner's invitation—to spend a few months with her and my brother in London.

JANE. (*Rises; goes to Mrs. BENNET—overjoyed and astonished*) But, Mama—I didn't know my aunt had invited me—

Mrs. BENNET. (*As diplomatically as she is able*) Never mind about that, my love. My letter will be on the way to London tomorrow, and your father is willing to take you up there as soon as you can make ready.

JANE. (*Seizes her mother and hugs her*) Mama! ELIZABETH. (*Rises, looking at her mother in unaccustomed admiration and nodding*) Well, Mrs. Bennet—you certainly don't believe that marriages are made in Heaven—

Mrs. BENNET. (*Sitting. Dryly*) From what I know of men, my dear—if we left it to them and Heaven—we should all be old maids!

ACT II PRIDE AND PREJUDICE 61

ELIZABETH. (*Rushes to Mrs. BENNET*) Mama— (*Kneels. As ELIZABETH starts down—*)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE II

SCENE: AUNT GARDINER'S home at Cheapside, London. A month later; early spring afternoon.

*The room is small, simple, but bright and cheerful. Up Centre is a large curved bay window looking out over a garden. Against the window to the Right, a small love seat. Right of that a comfortable chair. Left Centre, also in the bow of the window, a gate-leg table set for tea—a large elaborate tea. Left of the table, another chair. A flower stand up Centre.*

*There is a door in the Right wall leading to the front portions of the house, and a door Left leading to the pantry or kitchen.*

AT RISE: Mrs. GARDINER discovered r. MAGGIE enters L. with tea tray; places it on table.

Maggie. Isn't it grand, ma'am, to see Miss Jane out at last? 'Tis lovely she looked going for her walk.

Mrs. GARDINER. I hope Mary takes good care of her— (*Anxiously*) I do so want the dear child to have nice pink cheeks today—

Maggie. 'Tis wild she is about the tay party, ma'am. Do you like the way I've laid it?

Mrs. GARDINER. (*Crosses to table. Examining table*) Oh, but Maggie—why only three cups?

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 himself 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*

*end*