

BENNET #1

Begin
Bennet.

Lizzie! Lizzie! Where are you, Lizzie? Are you upstairs?

ELIZABETH. In here, Papa.

BENNET. (*Rushes in R.C. from L. to ELIZABETH, who meets him*) Here, read this! (*Hands her letter. Both Women look up in alarm at his tone. He paces up and down while ELIZABETH quickly reads.*)

Mrs. BENNET. What is it, Mr. Bennet? You look vexed about something?

ELIZABETH. Papa! This is frightful—

Mrs. BENNET. I really think I am as deserving of your confidence as my daughter Lizzie, Mr. Bennet. (*ELIZABETH is about to hand the letter to Mrs. BENNET when BENNET takes it from her.*)

BENNET. (*To Mrs. BENNET*) Colonel Forster informs me that your daughter Lydia has gone off with Mr. Wickham.

Mrs. BENNET. But where—?

BENNET. What does it matter where? The important thing is that she went anywhere with the scoundrel! (*Down to her*) They have eloped—do you understand? (*Paces up to door R.C.; stands thinking. Mrs. BENNET smiles at this, rather pleased.*)

ELIZABETH. (*Sits at L. end of sofa*) Wickham! It seems incredible!

Mrs. BENNET. (*Not grasping the true implication of the elopement*) Oh, the dear child—and without wedding clothes! Mr. Bennet, you must send money at once—only how will she know what warehouses to choose? Lizzie, my love—I—

BENNET. (*Back to Mrs. BENNET, interrupting her*) They left Brighton at midnight on Saturday and were not missed until eight o'clock yesterday morning.

ELIZABETH. (*Anxiously*) But he will certainly marry her, Papa?

Mrs. BENNET. (*Rises. ELIZABETH also rises.*)

What? They are not married? Oh, that is impossible! My Lydia would not do such a thing!

BENNET. Kindly control yourself, Mrs. Bennet. This is no time for hysterics. Listen to this— (*Reads*) "Your daughter left a message for my wife stating that she and Mr. Wickham were gone to Gretna Green. I at once set off after them—and traced them as far as Clapham but there lost all clues; for on entering that place they removed into a hackney coach—"

Mrs. BENNET. (*Begins to whimper*) Oh, my poor, innocent child!

ELIZABETH. (*Crosses to Mrs. BENNET*) Mama! (*Embraces her.*)

BENNET. If you will restrain your outcries for just one moment until we ascertain the exact situation, then you may resume them again if you wish— (*Crosses to bench in front of R. fireplace.*)

Mrs. BENNET. But how could she get married? She has no wedding clothes— (*This thought seems quite unendurable.*)

BENNET. (*Crosses back to R.C., quite exasperated*) Mrs. Bennet, for once in your life I entreat you to try not to be silly. (*ELIZABETH makes her a sign to be quiet.*) "All that is known after this is that they were seen to continue the London road. After making every possible inquiry on that side London, I am sincerely grieved to tell you— (*Slowly*) that I can find no further trace of them and no word—of any marriage ceremony—" (*Mrs. BENNET emits a cry or wail.*)

ELIZABETH. Hush, Mama! (*Places her in the chair c.*) Colonel Forster's letter only says that he has found no trace of the ceremony yet— That doesn't mean—

BENNET. (*Pacing up and down R.C. Interrupting*) Whatever it means, you can rest assured that I will

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attend to that young man— (*Paces down to fireplace and back to r.c.*)

MRS. BENNET. (*Her hand to her heart*) Mr. Bennet, you frighten me out of my wits— (*Points to her heart*) ELIZABETH soothes her. MRS. BENNET is now sobbing) Oh, I know your father will fight Mr. Wickham and be killed— The Collinses will turn us out before he is cold in his grave.

ELIZABETH. Oh, do hush, Mama! (*Mrs. BENNET is sobbing uncontrollably.*)

BENNET. (*Touched by her distress, goes to her*) There, there, my dear, don't be so upset. (*ELIZABETH crosses to bell pull; pulls it.*) We must all keep our heads. I'll help you upstairs, and Mrs. Lake will get you a sleeping potion.

ELIZABETH. Try to stand up, Mama. (*Comes back to Mrs. BENNET*) I'll get Mrs. Lake— Papa and Hill will help you upstairs. (*HILL enters r.c. from l.*) ELIZABETH goes to door of conservatory, gently opens it, beckons to Mrs. LAKE, who enters, closing it softly) Mrs. Lake, will you prepare a potion for my mother? She is not well and needs some rest. (*BENNET helps his wife to her feet.*) MRS. BENNET leans against him whimperingly. MRS. LAKE takes her other arm and helps her off r.c. to l.)

BENNET. (*To HILL*) Assist your mistress upstairs, then pack my bags quickly—

MRS. LAKE. I can manage alone, sir. (*To Mrs. BENNET*) Lean on me, ma'am—that's the way— (*Mrs. BENNET goes out, led by Mrs. LAKE, whimpering like a child.*) BENNET crosses to fireplace r., HILL waiting respectfully for orders.)

BENNET. Get the carriage ready. You'll drive me to the post house (*Looks at the watch; crosses to c.*) I'll catch the mail easily.

HILL. Yes, sir. (*Exits r.c. to l.*)

BENNET. (*Crosses to ELIZABETH by French win-*

dows. *Looks at her anxiously*) My child, I must leave at once. Can you manage things here?

ELIZABETH. Of course, Papa. BENNET. Don't you worry, I'll find them. I'll make that scoundrel marry her—

ELIZABETH. Just get them married, Papa. Never mind about punishing Wickham. But—how could Lydia have done this?

BENNET. That shameless girl! She would have eloped with anything in uniform.

ELIZABETH. It's our fault, mine especially. I had been warned about Wickham. I could have saved her. We never bothered about the poor child except to criticize her.

BENNET. (*Takes her in his arms*) I too am to blame—but my heart has it own bitterness.

ELIZABETH. (*Low*) I know, Papa, dear, I know. BENNET. (*Gently pats her head*) I'll say goodbye to your mother and get my things. *end*

MAID. (*Enters r.c. from r.*) Mr. Darcy, sir, and Mr. Bingley. (*They enter r.c. from r.*)

DARCY. I hope we are not intruding, sir. BENNET. Not at all, sir. You will excuse me, I am posting up to London for a few days and must be off. Goodbye, Lizzie. Take care of yourself.

ELIZABETH. Yes, Papa—I'll manage. BENNET. (*Bowing*) Gentlemen!

DARCY and BINGLEY. Your servant, sir. (*BENNET goes out r.c. to l.*) BINGLEY comes forward.)

BINGLEY. Miss Elizabeth—may I be permitted to see Miss Jane?

ELIZABETH. (*Resentful of BINGLEY's desertion*) She is gravely ill, Mr. Bingley.

BINGLEY. I was shocked to hear it. I was told of her illness only today. Mr. Darcy learned of it at Rosings, and found me in London and brought me here. I know that you and your family have every reason to think ill of me, Miss Elizabeth, and I

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over a space of years. A table with lamp above fireplace. An empire drop front desk in upper right corner; a wire front commode in hall; a spinet up Centre; a small table or stand down Left; a chair down Right. Peacock table in conservatory. Bell pull Left of Right Centre door.

AT RISE: MR. BENNET is sitting in easy chair below small fireplace L., reading a book and smoking his pipe. HILL, the butler, enters r.c. with bucket of coal and in placing some coal in grate makes a noise which disturbs MR. BENNET.

BENNET. Hill! You know I don't like to be disturbed while reading.

HILL. Yes, sir.

BENNET. Hill! Take this book to the library. I don't want Miss Lydia to read it.

HILL. Very good, sir. (He exits r. Mrs. BENNET enters excitedly r.c. from L.; crosses to Mr. BENNET; stands back of chair opposite his.)

Mrs. BENNET. My dear Mr. Bennet, have you heard the news?

BENNET. I have not.

Mrs. BENNET. It's of tremendous importance to all of us.

BENNET. Can't it wait until I finish this chapter?

Mrs. BENNET. No. This means more than any book that has ever been written. The great house at Netherfield has been let at last.

BENNET. Not really!

Mrs. BENNET. Yes, it's true. Mrs. Long has just been here and told me. (He looks unimpressed and continues to patiently survey her.) Don't you want to know who has taken it?

BENNET. You want to tell me. I have no objection to hearing it.

Mrs. BENNET. Well, my dear— (Sits opposite BENNET) he's a young man of large fortune from

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the North of England. He's already installed with a retinue of servants.

BENNET. What's his name?

Mrs. BENNET. His name is Bingley.

BENNET. Married—or single?

Mrs. BENNET. Oh, single, my dear, to be sure. With four or five thousand a year! What a splendid thing for one of our girls!

BENNET. How so—how can it affect them?

Mrs. BENNET. Mr. B., how can you be so tiresome? You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.

BENNET. Is that his design in settling here?

Mrs. BENNET. (Impatiently) Design? Nonsense. It's quite likely that he will fall in love with one of them, so you see you must visit him as soon as possible.

BENNET. I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go—or you may send them by themselves. That may be wiser—for you are as handsome as any of them. Mr. Bingley might like you the best of the party. (Chuckles.)

Mrs. BENNET. My dear, you flatter me. But when a woman has three grown daughters it's time she gave over thinking of her own beauty. But you will call on Mr. Bingley—at once?

BENNET. Oh, come now—that's going rather far. You know my habits.

Mrs. BENNET. Mr. Bennet, do you never think of your daughters' futures? Do you realize that with our estate entailed they will be practically penniless when you die? To think of that odious cousin of yours—that Collins.

BENNET. (Suddenly remembering) Oh, I've had a letter— (Reaches in his pocket.)

Mrs. BENNET. (Interrupting) Now, Mr. Bennet, don't try to change the subject. We're not talking about letters—we're talking of Collins—odious crea-

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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, and 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.

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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 out 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.)*

Lady Lucas! Hello, Charl! *(They curtsy 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 cautions 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.