

ELIZABETH #1

32 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE ACT I

LADY LUCAS. (Crosses to Mrs. BENNET) Such a well-behaved young lady!

Mrs. BENNET. Yes, I like her prodigiously. She's not a bit pretty.

LADY LUCAS. I've noticed how fond you are of my Charlotte.

Mrs. BENNET. (Actually embarrassed) Oh, Lady Lucas—indeed you must not feel that way. Dear Charlotte is such a sensible girl.

LADY LUCAS. (Dryly) That means it's going to be difficult to find her a husband— (Quietly) You should know how little regard gentlemen have for sense in young ladies—dear Mrs. Bennet—

Mrs. BENNET. You see, I'm not much of an authority on such matters—I was married so young.

LADY LUCAS. (Half to herself) Yes, I know that. Mrs. BENNET. Ah, to be young again! Mr. Bennet is not a bit romantic! Don't you think our husbands—

ELIZABETH. (Enters R.C. from L. with CHARLOTTE. Stands just below R.C. door) [Tipping, Mama? And you, Lady Lucas? Shame on you! (LADY LUCAS steps up stage.)

Mrs. BENNET. There's nothing in this, Lizzie. Your dear papa promised.

ELIZABETH. Then my dear papa must have been a bit absentminded when he made the mixture. It's violently potent.

Mrs. BENNET. Oh, dear Lady Lucas, perhaps we'd best not finish our cups. (Crosses to spinet, finishing hers before she sets goblet down.)

ELIZABETH. Your guests are awaiting you, Mama. Mrs. BENNET. Charlotte, my dear—I do hope you'll be particularly nice to Mr. Darcy.

CHARLOTTE. As nice as I may be, Mrs. Bennet. Mrs. BENNET. (To LADY LUCAS, as they go out R.C. to L.) None of my girls can abide him!

ELIZABETH. Is it not a relief to get away from all

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those dancing derivishes? Will you have some of this shrub, Charlotte? (Places fan on table C., her scarf on chair; goes to punch bowl.)

CHARLOTTE. (Crosses to table C.) Mr. Bingley was saying what a good idea it was to have it away from the supper room "where a fellow could have his tipples in peace." Nice young gentleman, isn't he?

ELIZABETH. Quite charming! Jane seems to think so too. How lovely the darling looks tonight. Her eyes are like stars. I wonder if her shyness is such an asset, though?

CHARLOTTE. You fear Bingley might need encouragement?

ELIZABETH. Few men possess enough heart to be really in love without it, Charl.

CHARLOTTE. I imagine Bingley will get the needed encouragement this evening. He seems to be enjoying himself immensely.

ELIZABETH. I hope so. For myself, I call it deadly dull. All I can see is a number of brainless young men and eager young ladies prancing about awkwardly to the strains of tepid music. Do you think this sort of thing is fun, Charl? (Crosses to chair below L. fireplace; sits.)

CHARLOTTE. (Crosses to chair opposite ELIZABETH; sits) It's a means to an end. Surely, Miss Caroline Bingley is warning enough against spinsterhood.

ELIZABETH. Is a warning necessary?

CHARLOTTE. Did you notice the fair young Lydia's triumphant progress in the ballroom—right under the maternal nose too, and your mother just beamed on her.

ELIZABETH. Yes. Mama is shocked if a gentleman glimpses our ankles, but to let him understand that he may attain complete possession is perfectly proper.

CHARLOTTE. (Rubbing her feet) Dear me, my feet ache.

ELIZABETH. What do you think of that new man,

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Mr. Wickham? Very attractive, isn't he? (MUSIC stops.)

CHARLOTTE. (Feeling one of her slippers feet tenderly) That delectable Collins trod all over me. ELIZABETH. But are you trying to evade my question, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. About Wickham? I noticed Miss Bingley refused to stand up with him.

ELIZABETH. (Mocking the proper Darcy) I expect she models herself on Darcy and only stands up with members of the peerage.

CHARLOTTE. (Laughs) To be quite sincere—I feel there's something not "right" about this Wickham. (Looks searchingly at ELIZABETH) Don't waste your time, dear. Concentrate on Darcy—rich, aristocratic—

ELIZABETH. (Rises) —priggish and snobbish— CHARLOTTE. Well, we must take what offers, my dear. When do we ever meet the knights of our dreams? Men were put into the world to teach women the law of compromise.

ELIZABETH. (Laughs; rises) Don't be ridiculous, Charlotte. (Come, we must speed the few remaining guests. (CHARLOTTE rises; goes to ELIZABETH. MUSIC starts.)

AMANDA. (Entering R.C. from L with Young Man) Oh, Miss Elizabeth! ELIZABETH. I'm vastly sorry you are leaving, Amanda.

AMANDA. (Crosses to CHARLOTTE) It has been a truly delightful evening. Shall I see you tomorrow, Charlotte?

YOUNG MAN. We can go out this way. The carriage is near this door.

ELIZABETH. Oh, we'll see you out.

AMANDA. It was a most excellent ball. CHARLOTTE. I saw you going down the dance hall.

All the gentlemen were struck with you. (Ad lib. as

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they exit. As they go out into conservatory, DARCY comes on R.C. from L., followed by BINGLEY. DARCY crosses to up L.C.)

BINGLEY. (Enters; crosses to punch bowl; takes goblet of punch) Darcy! What are you thinking of? The evening is nearly over. You must dance. Come, be a good fellow.

DARCY. (Crosses to fireplace L.; leans on mantel) I realize that I am not contributing much to the gaiety of the assembly. But it is difficult to "be a good fellow" on such an occasion.

BINGLEY. (Crosses to R. of DARCY) But aren't you of the young ladies to your taste?

DARCY. I should call them all uncommonly pretty.

(ELIZABETH and CHARLOTTE appear in conservatory.)

BINGLEY. And Miss Jane is the prettiest of all. Really, Darcy, you're notoriously lacking in appreciation, but did you ever behold anyone more exquisitely lovely?

DARCY. If you wish me to agree with you, I shall be glad to do so.

BINGLEY. And what of her sister? She's quite pretty, too.

DARCY. Miss Elizabeth?

BINGLEY. Yes. DARCY. She is the one above all others that I prefer to avoid.

BINGLEY. But, really—she is most agreeable.

DARCY. On the contrary, she is one of the most disagreeable young women I have ever had the ill-luck to encounter.

BINGLEY. Shame on you, Darcy. (Takes him by the arm) She is a delightful girl. Find out for yourself.

DARCY. (Submitting and going toward R.C. door with BINGLEY. BINGLEY places empty glass on table

end

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ACT II

FITZWILLIAM. Very well. What would you say if I told you that he stayed tied to London all last winter—just to keep a friend away from temptation?

ELIZABETH. Temptation?

FITZWILLIAM. The temptation of king a disastrous marriage.

ELIZABETH. Oh!

FITZWILLIAM. This friend of s—chap named Dingley or Bingley or something like that—evidently conceived a consuming passion for a designing minx he met at some outlandish place in the country.

ELIZABETH. That happens so often, doesn't it?

FITZWILLIAM. Yes, doesn't it! Of course, she cared nothing for him. (*Looks at him.*) Only wanted his name and his fortune. She was aided in her nefarious schemes by a particularly awful specimen of a mother.

ELIZABETH. Perhaps it was one of those mothers whose kind intentions are often fatal to those she most wishes to help.

FITZWILLIAM. Probably. But in addition to that, the girl had a pair of sisters who must have been veritable she-wolves. Poor Bingley was as good as caught. (*Crosses to table r.c.*)

ELIZABETH. (*Rises, turning to him*) But Darcy snatched him from the jaws of the she-wolves? (*Crosses up to fireplace.*)

FITZWILLIAM. Exactly. Oh—he only mentioned it to me because I happened to ask him why he'd stayed so unusually long in town. It was really a frightfully decent, unselfish thing for him to have done.

ELIZABETH. Indeed it was! And I see I have been underrating Mr. Darcy. I did not know he was made of such heroic stuff.

FITZWILLIAM. (*Uneasily*) Yes—rather! I say, Miss Bennet, are you laughing at me?

ELIZABETH. Oh, no, Colonel, not at you! (*Crosses to chair l. of table r.c.*)

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FITZWILLIAM. I did want you to know the truth! Darcy. (*Entering r.*) Oh, Fitzwilliam, are you going out?

FITZWILLIAM. I was, but I'll wait.

Darcy. No, no— If you will take the same road as we discovered yesterday, I will join you a little later.

FITZWILLIAM. Good. Au revoir, Miss Bennet— (*He bows; exits quickly r.*) ELIZABETH sits chair r. of l.c. table.)

Darcy. Miss Elizabeth—I wish to speak to you.

ELIZABETH. I should have thought it evident that I wished to finish my letter.

Darcy. You're not very polite. You were such a stickler for politeness in Hertfordshire. (*He smiles.*)

ELIZABETH. We are most of us sticklers for virtues in other people. (*Continues writing.*)

Darcy. (*Moves to table*) Miss Elizabeth—

ELIZABETH. (*Looks up and stops writing*) Sir? (*He moves away c.*) She looks after him. He turns. What is it, Mr. Darcy?

Darcy. (*Paces up and down; suddenly crosses to r. of ELIZABETH*) It's no use— In vain have I struggled; my feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you. (*She rises.*) I've fought with myself all these months— (*ELIZABETH stares at him, too stunned to speak.*) You may think I am speaking without due thought—that my feeling for you outweighs my common sense—that this love for you that consumes me is a thing that will pass. But it is not so, Miss Elizabeth. I have learned that in the bitterness of my self-abasement. (*Pause*) I love you.

ELIZABETH. Do you expect me to take you seriously? Have you so quickly forgotten the inferiority of my family?

Darcy. I have forgotten nothing about you—I love you.

ELIZABETH. Have you considered my unsuitability in the eyes of your exalted world, Mr. Darcy?

DARCY. I have considered it—and I love you.

ELIZABETH. (*Angrily*) You need not say it again, sir! What am I supposed to reply to this extraordinary harangue? One can scarcely call it an offer of marriage. You do not, I suppose, expect me to feel flattered?

DARCY. But do you expect me to be glad that your family is inferior to mine? Or blame me for being honest and sincere when making the most momentous decision of my life?

ELIZABETH. Decision—?

DARCY. Yes, my dearest. I have decided to ask you to marry me.

ELIZABETH. (*Facing him*) I suppose I should be overwhelmed at this honor.

DARCY. (*Drawing back*) But—

ELIZABETH. I ought to congratulate you on overcoming the battle between your unwilling affection and my unworthiness—but you see, I happen to be quite uninterested in your problems—(*Crosses down c.*)

DARCY. Elizabeth— (*He approaches her again, his hand out. She repels him with a proud gesture. He is about to speak.*)

ELIZABETH. (*Turns to him*) If you were not so lacking in perception, sir, you might have spared yourself my refusal—

DARCY. (*Dumbfounded. He crosses a step to her*) You refuse me?

ELIZABETH. (*Quietly*) You might have noticed the fact long ago. I have never hidden it. I neither aspire to nor could I ever return your affection. As for your scruples about marrying into my family—don't let that ever concern you again. (*Crosses to table L.C.*)

DARCY. Is that all the reply I am to be honored

with? I might perhaps deserve to be told why I have been rejected—and with so little civility.

ELIZABETH. I also might deserve to know why you consider my feelings so little while expressing your own.

DARCY. (*Takes step to her*) Please—if the manner of my revelation has offended you—

ELIZABETH. I am influenced by something deeper than your manners, Mr. Darcy. I am thinking more of your fine capacity for cruelty.

DARCY. Cruelty? And when have I demonstrated that capacity?

ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy, have you never willfully injured an innocent person?

DARCY. (*After a moment of thought*) Oh, you are referring again to my treatment of Mr. Wickham? That still preys on you. The fascination inferior men exert over superior women has often been a puzzle to me.

ELIZABETH. Inferior! Do you always apply that word only to other people?

DARCY. I feel justified in using it towards Mr. Wickham—unless indeed the word “cad” might be more descriptive. If the principal evidence against me is based on your faith in the word of a man like him—

ELIZABETH. This is unworthy of you, sir.

DARCY. I know you don't choose to believe me, but let me most earnestly warn you against him. He is an unprincipled, designing— (*WARN Curtain.*)

ELIZABETH. (*Turns head*) I refuse to listen to you any further, but it is not only what you have done to Mr. Wickham, although that would be quite enough— (*Faces Darcy*) Even if I cared for you, and I never could—nothing would induce me to marry the man who has ruined my sister's life. (*Her voice breaks*) The sweetest soul ever born! How could you do it? How could you have hurt her—

having once known her? ! (DARCY is silent.) Can you deny that you came between Jane and Charles Bingley?

DARCY. I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your sister. (*Quietly.* ELIZABETH rises.) Towards him I have been wiser than towards myself.

ELIZABETH. You talk to me of love— They love each other, she and Charles— Jane is of those who only love once. It will kill her, I know it will. (*Pause*) You have trodden on a heart.

DARCY. (*After a silence*) You wish to think badly of me.

ELIZABETH. (*Turns away from him*) I have no choice.

DARCY. I have made the mistake of being honest with you.

ELIZABETH. (*Turns to him*) Honesty is a very overrated virtue. Tact and taste are more agreeable ones.

DARCY. My scruples with regard to your family— were natural.

ELIZABETH. And should have been kept to yourself. Let us end this distasteful subject— (*Turns to DARCY*) You could not have made your offer in any way that would have tempted me to accept it. Mr. Darcy, you are the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry!

DARCY. (*He is humiliated, shocked and astounded*) Forgive me for having taken up your time. (*He bows; crosses to door L.*) I wish you every happiness. (*Her face is slightly panicked as he begins to go.*)

end CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE I

SCENE: *The drawing room-living room at Longbourn. Same as Act I. A week later. After-noon.*

L. of R.C. doors closed in this scene. R. open. Serving table R. of the door.

AT RISE: MRS. LAKE and ELIZABETH enter through conservatory. ELIZABETH sighs.

Mrs. LAKE. Don't you worry about Miss Jane, Miss.

ELIZABETH. I'm all right; I'm just tired, Mrs. Lake.

Mrs. LAKE. You can't believe how glad I was to see you last night, Miss Elizabeth. The responsibility was too much for me.

ELIZABETH. I came home as soon as I got Papa's message. Jane seems happier out there where she can see the flowers, doesn't she, Mrs. Lake? (ELIZABETH crosses slowly to front of table C.)

Mrs. LAKE. (*At chair R. of table C.*) Aye, the apothecary was right, Miss Bennet. (ELIZABETH crosses to sofa and sits.) And it's no trouble for Hill and me to carry her downstairs every morning. (*Takes a step toward ELIZABETH.*) If I might take the liberty, Miss—couldn't we hint to the young gentleman—