

AUSTEN JANE, MACKAYE STEELE

**PRIDE AND
PREJUDICE, A
PLAY FOUNDED ON
JANE AUSTEN'S
NOVEL**

Джейн Остин

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founded on Jane Austen's novel**

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Mary Keith , Medbery Mackaye

Pride and Prejudice, a play

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PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MR. DARCY – (of Pemberley, Derbyshire). *"Possessed of a fine tall person, handsome features, noble mien, and ... ten thousand a year ... clever ... haughty, reserved and fastidious; his manners, though well-bred, were not inviting. 'Some people call him proud,' said Mrs. Reynolds, the housekeeper at Pemberley, 'but I am sure I never saw anything of it... He is the best landlord and the best master that ever lived."*

MR. BINGLEY – (of Netherfield, Hertfordshire, Darcy's Friend). *"Just what a young man ought to be; sensible and good-humoured, lively ... such happy manners! So much ease, with such perfect good breeding... Also handsome, which a young man ought likewise to be if he possibly can."*

COLONEL FITZWILLIAM – (Cousin to Darcy). *"About thirty, not handsome, but in person and address most truly the gentleman."*

MR. BENNET – (of Longbourn). *"An odd mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve and caprice. He was fond of the country and of books, and from these tastes had arisen his principal enjoyments."*

MR. COLLINS – (a Cousin of Mr. Bennet, and Next in the Entail of Longbourn Estate.) *"A tall, heavy-looking young man of five-and-twenty. His air was grave and stately, and his manners very formal. His veneration for his patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourg, mingling with a very good opinion of himself and of his authority as a clergyman ... made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility."*

SIR WILLIAM LUCAS – (an Intimate Friend and Neighbour of the Bennets). *"Formerly in trade in Meryton ... he had risen to the honour of knighthood by an address to the King during his mayoralty. The distinction had ... given him a disgust to his business, and, ... quitting it, he had removed ... to Lucas Lodge, where he could think with pleasure of his own importance, and ... occupy himself solely in being civil to all the world."*

COLONEL FORSTER – (the Colonel of the Regiment Stationed at Meryton).

MR. WICKHAM – (an Officer in the Regiment). *"Endowed with all the best parts of beauty – a fine countenance, a good figure, and a very pleasing address. As false and deceitful as he is insinuating."*

MR. DENNY – (Another Officer in the Regiment).

HARRIS – (the Butler at Longbourn).

MRS. BENNET – (the Wife of Mr. Bennet). *"A woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news."*

JANE – (Eldest Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet). *"She united with great strength of feeling a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner."*

Her mild and steady candour always pleaded allowances, and urged the possibility of mistakes."

ELIZABETH – (Their Second Daughter). "*Although not so handsome as Jane, her face was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. She had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous, with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister. There was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody."*

LYDIA – (Their Youngest Daughter). "*A stout, well-grown girl of fifteen, with a fine complexion and a good-humoured countenance – a favourite with her mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early age."*

LADY LUCAS – (the Wife of Sir William). "*Not too clever to be a valuable neighbour to Mrs. Bennet."*

CHARLOTTE LUCAS – (Daughter of Sir William and Lady Lucas). "*A sensible, intelligent young woman, about twenty-seven, ... Elizabeth's intimate friend."*

MISS BINGLEY – (Sister of Mr. Bingley). "*A very fine lady ... but proud and conceited."*

LADY CATHERINE DE BOURG – (Aunt of Darcy and Patroness of Mr. Collins). "*A tall, large woman, with strongly marked features, which might once have been handsome. Her air was not conciliating... Whatever she said, was spoken in so authoritative a tone as marked her self-importance."*

HILL – (the Housekeeper at Longbourn).

MARTHA – (the Maid at Mr. Collins's Parsonage).

"In the novels of the last hundred years there are vast numbers of young ladies with whom it might be a pleasure to fall in love, – but to live with and to marry, I do not know that any of them can come into competition with Elizabeth Bennet." – George Saintsbury. Preface to the Peacock Edition of "Pride and Prejudice."

ACT I

The drawing-room at Longbourn. At the back, wide glass doors open upon a terrace which overlooks an English landscape. It is winter, and coals are burning in the fireplace. On each side of the glass doors are rounded recesses with windows. On one side of the room a door opens into the library. On the other side is a door to the hall – the chief entrance of the house. The room is handsomely furnished in eighteenth century style. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are discovered sitting on either side of the table. Mrs. Bennet is knitting —Mr. Bennet reading.

Mrs. Bennet

[After a slight pause and laying down her knitting.]

My dear Mr. Bennet, did not you hear me? Did you know that Netherfield Park is let at last?

Mr. Bennet

[Continues reading and does not answer.]

Mrs. Bennet

[Impatiently.] Do not you want to know who has taken it?

Mr. Bennet

[Ceases reading and looks up at her with an amused smile.] You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.

Mrs. Bennet

[With animation.] Why, my dear, you must know Lady Lucas says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the North of England. His name is Bingley, and he is *single*, my dear. Think of that, Mr. Bennet! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand pounds a year. What a fine thing for our girls!

Mr. Bennet

How so? How can it affect them?

Mrs. Bennet

My dear Mr. Bennet, how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.

Mr. Bennet

Is that his design in settling here?

Mrs. Bennet

Design! – Nonsense! How can you talk so? But it is very likely that he will fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as you can. Consider your daughters, Mr. Bennet! Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them! Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go merely on that account. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if *you* do not.

Mr. Bennet

[*Who has risen during this last speech and now stands with his back to the fire, facing Mrs. Bennet.*] You are overscrupulous, surely. I dare say Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you, and I will send a few lines to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls – though I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy.

Mrs. Bennet

[*Sharply.*] I desire you will do no such thing! Lizzy is not a bit better than the others. She is not half as handsome as Jane, nor as good-humoured as Lydia. But you are always giving her the preference.

Mr. Bennet

Not unless she deserves it, my dear. But in this particular instance my poor little Lizzy is the only one who is unprovided for. Lydia and the others belong in the schoolroom, and you tell me that Mr. Collins has already spoken for Jane.

Mrs. Bennet

Oh, that odious Mr. Collins! I wish he had never come here. I wish I might never hear his name again!

Mr. Bennet

Mr. Collins odious! You surprise me! I thought that he had won your full approval.

Mrs. Bennet

[*Fretfully.*] Oh, well, since he had to be your cousin, and since you *will* not do anything about the entail, I suppose it will be a mercy if he does marry Jane. [*Half crying.*] But I do think, Mr. Bennet, it is the hardest thing in the world that we have no son of our own, so that your property has to be entailed away from your own wife and children, so if you should die, we may all be turned out of

the house whenever this Mr. Collins pleases. [*In bewailing tone.*] He certainly does seem to have all the luck in the world. Here he has just got this good living from that grand Lady Catherine de Bourg.

Mr. Bennet

But, my dear, that will soon be *your* luck, as well. You forget that your daughter is to profit by it.

Mrs. Bennet

Well, perhaps. I don't know about *that*, but, [*With renewed excitement.*] I *do* know that it is too monstrous that after you are gone I shall be forced to make way for this man and live to see him master in this house!

Mr. Bennet

My dear, do not give way to such gloomy thoughts. Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that I may be the survivor.

Mrs. Bennet

[*This is not very consoling to Mrs. Bennet; and therefore, instead of making answer, she goes on as before.*] If it was not for the entail I should not mind it.

Mr. Bennet

What should not you mind?

Mrs. Bennet

I should not mind anything at all.

Mr. Bennet

Let us be thankful that you are preserved from a state of such insensibility. But it certainly is a most iniquitous affair, and nothing can clear Mr. Collins from the guilt of inheriting Longbourn. However, you know he is doing his best to mend matters. He has not only handsomely apologised for his fault, but he has now assured us of his readiness to make every possible amends by marrying one of the girls. Surely, my dear, you must acknowledge that this plan is excessively generous on his part.

Mrs. Bennet

[*Dolefully.*] Well, I suppose it might be worse.

Mr. Bennet

[*Cheerfully.*] Decidedly worse. With Jane so well settled, and a single man like Mr. Bingley in prospect, I think you should be quite cheerful.

Mrs. Bennet

[*Excited once more.*] Mr. Bingley! We shall never know Mr. Bingley. Oh, Mr. Bennet, you take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.

Mr. Bennet

You mistake, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least.

Mrs. Bennet

Ah! You do not know what I suffer.

Lydia

[*Bursting into the room, followed by Jane.*] Oh, that horrid practice! [*Looking back at Jane.*] Jane does so keep me at it. [*Throwing herself into a chair.*] La, I'm tired to death.

Jane

[*Who sees that her mother is half crying, goes and stands behind her chair, puts her hand affectionately on her shoulder, and bends over her.*] Does your head ache, mamma?

Mrs. Bennet

Of course my head aches. Your father is so teasing. I cannot persuade him to call on Mr. Bingley at Netherfield, so I suppose we shall never know him.

Jane

[*Smiling.*] But you forget, mamma, that we shall meet him at the assemblies, and Lady Lucas has promised to introduce him.

Mrs. Bennet

I do not believe Lady Lucas will do any such thing. She has daughters of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her.

Mr. Bennet

No more have I, and I am glad to find that you do not depend on her serving you.

Mrs. Bennet

I may have to depend on her after all, Mr. Bennet, since you will do nothing to help me. [*Fretfully to Lydia, who has been yawning and coughing.*] Don't keep coughing, Lydia, for Heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves.

[*Lydia pouts and looks unutterable things.*]

Mr. Bennet

Lydia has no discretion in her coughs. She times them ill.

Lydia

I do not cough for my own amusement, papa. Jane, when is your next ball?

Jane

To-morrow fortnight.

Mrs. Bennet

[*Starting excitedly.*] Ay, so it is – and Lady Lucas does not come back till the day before. So you see it will be impossible for her to introduce Mr. Bingley, for she will not know him herself.

Mr. Bennet

Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of your friend, and *you* can introduce Mr. Bingley to *her*.

Mrs. Bennet

Impossible, Mr. Bennet, when I am not acquainted with him myself. How can you be so teasing?

Mr. Bennet

I honour your circumspection. A fortnight's acquaintance is certainly very little. But if *we* do not venture, somebody else will, and if *you* decline the office *I* will take it upon myself.

Mrs. Bennet

[*As the two girls stare at their father.*] Oh, nonsense – nonsense! I am sick of Mr. Bingley!

Mr. Bennet

I am sorry to hear that; but why did not you tell me so before? If I had known as much a week ago, I certainly should not have called upon him.

Mrs. Bennet

[Springing from her chair and throwing her arms about Mr. Bennet's neck.] What! You have really called upon him? Oh, how good in you, my dear Mr. Bennet!

Mr. Bennet

It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit – and as he will very likely return it at any time, and bring his friend, Mr. Darcy, with him – we cannot now avoid the acquaintance of Mr. Bingley and his party.

Mrs. Bennet

Oh, my dear Mr. Bennet, I was sure you loved your girls too well to neglect such an acquaintance. *[Mr. Bennet deftly takes her hands from his shoulders. She stands looking fondly at him.]* Well, how pleased I am! And it was such a good joke that you should have already paid Mr. Bingley a visit and never said a word about it.

Mr. Bennet

Yes. Yes. Well, I must go to the library. *[He goes to the door, but stops for a moment.]* Now, Lydia, you can cough as much as you choose. *[He goes out.]*

Mrs. Bennet

[Looking after Mr. Bennet.] What an excellent father you have, girls! *[Turns to the girls.]* I do not know how you will ever make him amends for his kindness, or me either, for that matter. At our time of life it is not so pleasant to be making new acquaintances every day. But for your sakes we would do anything. *[Looking about her.]* Where is Lizzy? Lydia, my love, where is your sister?

Lydia

Oh, she is out walking with Charlotte Lucas and that dismal Mr. Collins.

Mrs. Bennet

Lizzy – out walking with Mr. Collins? Why didn't *you* go, Jane?

Jane

I had to practise with Lydia.

Lydia

I'm sure I would have excused you. But what is Mr. Collins here for, mamma? I am sure I caught Mr. Wickham and Colonel Forster laughing at him the day we went to Meryton. Why does papa have a cousin like that?

Mrs. Bennet

He really cannot help it. It is the entail, my love – [*Mysteriously.*] But I hope that all you girls will be very civil to him, Jane especially.

Jane

I – mamma?

Mrs. Bennet

[*Embarrassed.*] Yes – my love. – You see —
[*She is interrupted by the sound of laughter outside, and Elizabeth's voice.*]

Elizabeth

Very well, Mr. Collins.

[*Mrs. Bennet makes a sudden awed gesture of silence to the girls, who fail to understand. Elizabeth enters by the glass doors. She is dressed in winter walking costume: a large hat, – fur-trimmed pelerine, and a large muff. She stops in the doorway and looks at Mrs. Bennet, half puzzled and smiling.*]

Elizabeth

Well, what is it, mamma? What is the matter?

Mrs. Bennet

Nothing. Hush! What have you done with Mr. Collins?

Elizabeth

[*Laughing.*] Oh, Mr. Collins is safe! He has gone round to the library.

Mrs. Bennet

[*With a sigh of relief.*] How providential!

Elizabeth

[*Looking back.*] But I have brought someone else with me.
[Mr. Wickham and Charlotte Lucas come in gaily.]

All

[*Exclaiming.*] Oh, Mr. Wickham!

Wickham

[*To Mrs. Bennet.*] How do you do, Mrs. Bennet? This is indeed a pleasure. [*Going over to Jane.*] Miss Bennet, I am *so* glad to see you. [*Reproachfully.*] You were not with our party! [*To Lydia.*] Why do you never come to Meryton, Miss Lydia? Mr. Denny is quite downcast.

Lydia

[*Pouting.*] La, Mr. Denny!

Wickham

And many others beside him, Miss Lydia.
[*Lydia giggles. Wickham returns to Mrs. Bennet.*]

Mrs. Bennet

Well, 'tis an age since we saw you, Mr. Wickham. What *have* you been doing?

Wickham

Colonel Forster keeps me so busy that I have no time for enjoyment.

Elizabeth

Yes, Mr. Wickham bears all the marks of an harassed and overworked man.

Wickham

[*Bowing to Elizabeth.*] Thank you, Miss Elizabeth. You have given me the very terms I needed.
[*To Mrs. Bennet.*] You see before you, Mrs. Bennet, an harassed and overworked man. Miss Elizabeth

will bear witness that I was on my way to a business appointment when I yielded to temptation and went off for a walk with her and Miss Lucas and their irreproachable escort.

Elizabeth

And Miss Elizabeth will also testify that you yielded with the celerity and ease of long practice.

Wickham

[*Laughing; to Elizabeth.*] But in this case who was the tempter?

Elizabeth

Oh, I will admit that Mr. Collins was partially responsible.
[*All laugh.*]

Mrs. Bennet

Come, Lizzy, you have been talking to Mr. Wickham all the morning. Now, let some of the rest of us have a chance. [*Turning to Wickham.*] You must stay to dinner, Mr. Wickham.

Wickham

I wish I might. That is indeed a temptation. But you know Miss Elizabeth has just reminded me of my duty.

Mrs. Bennet

Oh, nobody ever minds Lizzy!

Wickham

Truly, I cannot to-day, Mrs. Bennet. It is too bad, but I am to meet Colonel Forster [*Smiling at Elizabeth*] on important *business* at the Drake Farm.

Mrs. Bennet

Well, I am very sorry.

Wickham

[*Hesitatingly.*] I might perhaps bring Colonel Forster in for a few moments on the way back – that is, if we return this way.

All

Oh, yes, do.

Mrs. Bennet

Yes, indeed. Tell Colonel Forster we should be delighted to see him.

Wickham

Thank you, I will. But now I really must be gone. [*Bowing brightly to Jane and Lydia.*] Good morning.

[*To Charlotte Lucas.*] Good morning, Miss Lucas. You must let me hear more about those clever plans of yours. I am vastly interested in them. [*To Elizabeth.*] Good morning, Miss Elizabeth. [*Laughing.*] You must try to temper your justice with mercy the next time I join you in a walk. [*Pausing, he looks at Mrs. Bennet, who is standing between her daughters.*] Do you know, Mrs. Bennet, that you always remind me of one of my old schoolboy phrases. *Filiæ pulchræ! – Mater pulchrior!* Good-bye.

[*He runs off laughing. He has only gone a few steps when Lydia, who has been standing close to the door, runs out and calls to him.*]

Lydia

Oh, Mr. Wickham!

[*Wickham turns and Lydia runs up to him and whispers something in his ear. Wickham laughs, then shakes his finger at her, still laughing, and goes off. Lydia stops outside and watches him.*]

Jane

Really, mamma, I think you should speak to Lydia. She is too forward.

Mrs. Bennet

Nonsense! You are jealous.

Jane

Jealous! Of Lydia?

Mrs. Bennet

Well, she is no more forward than any of you. All you girls are crazy about Mr. Wickham. [*Indulgently.*] But I can't wonder at it. He certainly is a most engaging young man. What were those French words he said to me as he went out, Lizzy?

Elizabeth

They were Latin, dear. He paid a very charming compliment to our pretty mamma. He said – The daughters are lovely, but the mother is lovelier. You know papa always says that you are handsomer than any of us.

Mrs. Bennet

My dear Lizzy, I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I don't pretend to be anything extraordinary now. [Mr. Collins *enters*.] Oh, Mr. Collins, there you are.

Mr. Collins

[*Bowing profoundly*.] I do not find Mr. Bennet in the library, Madam. Do you know where he is?

Mrs. Bennet

Why, really, Mr. Collins, I can't imagine. Did you enjoy your walk?

Mr. Collins

Most assuredly, Madam. The beauties of nature, not only in the landscape, but also [*Bowing to Elizabeth and Charlotte Lucas*.] in the blooming countenances of my fair companions, made our expedition a peculiarly enjoyable one.

Mrs. Bennet

Well, I am very glad of it, I am sure. [*To Jane and Lydia*.] Girls, we haven't told Lizzy and Charlotte the news.

Elizabeth

What news, mamma?

Mrs. Bennet

[*Looking at Charlotte with an ill-concealed triumph*.] Oh, nothing of consequence, Lizzy, only your father has just told us that we may expect a visit at any time from our new neighbour, Mr. Bingley, and that friend of his who is stopping with him.

Elizabeth

Oh, Mr. Bingley! That will be entertaining. [*Suddenly with mischief she turns to Mr. Collins, who all through this latter conversation has been staring at Jane with solemn persistence*.] Do not you think so, Mr. Collins?

Mr. Collins

[*Starting from his absorption.*] Eh? What? [*Pompously again.*] Excuse me, Miss Elizabeth, on what subject did you ask my opinion?

Elizabeth

I asked you if you didn't think it was a very pleasant thing to meet new neighbours.

Mr. Collins

Most assuredly, Miss Elizabeth, if those neighbours are possessed of those qualifications which redound to their own credit, and to the edification of their friends. Otherwise, as a clergyman, I must hesitate in my approval. [*To Mrs. Bennet.*] You realise, I am sure, Madam, the caution which should ever be exercised where my amiable young cousins are concerned.

Elizabeth

Yes, mamma, you really should be cautious.

Mrs. Bennet

Nonsense! Why, my dear Mr. Collins, we have found out all about them. Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy are connected with some of the most respectable families in England.

Mr. Collins

[*In amazement.*] Mr. Darcy? Mr. Fitzgerald Darcy! My dear Madam, can it be possible that you are to be honoured by a visit from him? Respectable indeed! Why, he is the nephew of my noble patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourg. It is true that I have never yet had the honour of meeting him – but he frequently visits his aunt, and she has promised to bring him on some occasion to inspect my humble abode. I am surprised, indeed, by this civility on his part. [*Anxiously.*] I only fear there may be some mistake, for Mr. Darcy has the reputation of possessing a very natural pride of birth; but if your information is indeed to be relied upon, I think Lady Catherine would consent to my approval of this visit, provided my fair cousins will keep in mind the proper attitude of respectful humility which should be assumed toward a person of his superior station.

Elizabeth

We will promise you, Mr. Collins, never for one instant to forget either Mr. Darcy's exalted position or our own insignificance.

Mr. Collins

[*Looking at her with admiration.*] With that assurance, Miss Elizabeth, I think even Lady Catherine would be satisfied. So I need no longer withhold my sanction.

Elizabeth

[*Curtsying.*] We thank you, sir.

Mr. Collins

This is the very attitude of mind I could desire. [*To Mrs. Bennet.*] I think, with your permission, I will now retire again to the library. [*Going over smilingly to Jane.*] There was a volume of Fordyce's sermons that you may remember I was reading to you in this room yesterday. I do not find it in the library. Do you know where it is? [*Looking about him.*]

Jane

I haven't seen it, Mr. Collins. I will try to find it for you. [*She starts as if to go out of the room.*]

Mrs. Bennet

[*Wishing to leave them together.*] No – no, Lydia will find it. Lydia, my love, go see if you can find the sermons for Mr. Collins.

[*Lydia, with a grimace, rises slowly from her chair.*]

Charlotte Lucas

Oh, Mrs. Bennet, I am quite sure that I saw the book in the hall. I will go fetch it.

Mrs. Bennet

[*Sharply.*] On no account, Charlotte. Lydia will find the book. Lizzy, go and get the mud off your shoes.

Mr. Collins

Oh, I will not trouble any of you ladies.

Mrs. Bennet

It is no trouble, Mr. Collins. Charlotte, if you will come with me, I have a parcel I should like to send your mother.

Mr. Collins

But I assure you, Madam —

[*As they go out, Mrs. Bennet —looking daggers at Charlotte —tries to keep Mr. Collins with Jane.*]

Mrs. Bennet

Lydia will find your book, Mr. Collins.

Mr. Collins

On no account, Madam —

[*With awkward gallantry Mr. Collins ushers out the ladies— Lydia rebellious, Charlotte somewhat offended.*]

Elizabeth

[*With an amused smile, having watched the party vanish, turns to Jane and speaks to her in mock-heroic fashion.*] Miss Bennet! Do you realise the honour which is so soon to fall upon our humble home, and our gratefully humble selves?

Jane

[*Smiling.*] Oh, Lizzy!

Elizabeth

Do you really grasp in its full significance the fact that we may soon be honoured by a visit from Mr. Bingley of Netherfield and Mr. Fitzgerald Darcy, nephew of the Lady Catherine de Bourg?

Jane

Oh, Lizzy, Mr. Collins is a little pompous, but he seems a very well-meaning young man — indeed, sometimes quite agreeable.

Elizabeth

[*Looking quizzically, but affectionately, at her sister.*] No one can be anything but agreeable in the mind of our dear Jane. This time, however, I quite agree with you, I am as delighted as papa with Mr. Collins. I can see that his mixture of servility and importance promises well.

Jane

And I think Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy promise well. If the half of what our neighbours say is true, Mr. Bingley will give us all sorts of gaieties. [*Slyly.*] Who knows? We may find him as entertaining as Mr. Wickham.

Elizabeth

As Mr. Wickham? Then, dear Jane, we shall be rich indeed. [*Counting on her fingers.*] For hospitality – Mr. Bingley; for conversation – Mr. Wickham; for grandeur – Mr. Darcy, and the agreeable Mr. Collins!

Jane

Oh, Lizzy! Can not you let the poor man alone?

Elizabeth

With all my heart. I will gladly let him alone. You shall have him all to yourself. [*Mischievously.*] If only Mr. Collins knew your good opinion of him! But he is too modest to find it out for himself.

Jane

[*Playfully pulling Elizabeth's ear.*] You are a tease!

Harris

[*Entering.*] The two gentlemen from Netherfield have just brought their horses into the paddock, Madam.

Jane

Show them in, Harris, and speak to Mrs. Bennet at once.
[*Harris bows and goes out.*]

Jane

They have come soon, Lizzy. Really this is very civil in them.

Elizabeth

Uncommonly civil. Come with me, Jane. I must make myself tidy. Mud and dirty petticoats for Mr. Darcy! – Oh, that would never do.

[*They run off, laughing. There is a short pause. Then Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy enter. The latter is very quiet, with an air of scornful hauteur. Bingley, on the contrary, has a gracious and animated manner. Harris ushers them in, much impressed.*]

Bingley

[*To Harris.*] You will announce us to Mr. Bennet and the ladies.

[Harris *goes out.*]

Do you know, Darcy, I believe that was George Wickham we saw just now, going toward the Drake Farm.

Darcy

[*Quietly.*] I think there is no doubt of it.

Bingley

But what is he doing here?

Darcy

[*With assumed indifference.*] Probably it is his regiment which is stationed at Meryton.

Bingley

[*Excitedly.*] No, Darcy! You don't mean it! Why, confound it, if I had had any notion of that — I ... I ...

Darcy

[*Contemptuously.*] I don't think we need mind Wickham.

Bingley

But I do mind! To think that I should bring you into the neighbourhood of that rascal —

Darcy

He must live somewhere, I suppose.

Bingley

Yes, unfortunately. But, Darcy, you are a puzzle to me. — You are, indeed! How can you speak with any charity of a man who for years abused the patience and generous kindness of your father, and who so lately has attempted against your family the most dastardly action that —

Darcy

[*Interrupting him with hauteur.*] We have already said too much of George Wickham. I prefer not to discuss him further.

[*Bingley turns away hurt and embarrassed. Darcy seeing the effect of his words and manner, goes to him kindly, and speaks to him in a changed voice.*]

Bingley, I entirely understand your indignation. Indeed, I share it so fully that I dare not trust myself to think of the man's villainy. It is better that I say nothing of him, even to you.

BINGLEY

[Moved.] I am sure, I beg your pardon, Darcy.

Darcy

It is rather for me to ask yours.

[There follows an awkward pause, which Bingley at length breaks by speaking in a tone of forced gaiety.]

Bingley

Pretty place, this.

Darcy

[With a shrug.] Very small.

Bingley

What has the size to do with it? I think we are in luck to have such charming neighbours. You know we saw two of the young ladies going through the lane the other day. Why, Darcy, one of them is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld – and the other – the one with the dark eyes – she is uncommonly pretty. Don't you think so?

Darcy

She is tolerable, but fine eyes cannot change family connections.

Bingley

[Quickly.] What do you mean?

Darcy

I think I have heard you say that their uncle is an attorney in Meryton.

Bingley

[Shortly.] Yes.

Darcy

And that they have another in London who lives somewhere near Cheapside.

Bingley

[*With irritation.*] If they had uncles enough to fill all Cheapside, it wouldn't make them one jot less handsome.

Darcy

But it must materially lessen their chances of marrying men of any consideration in the world.

Bingley

Of marrying? You go fast, Darcy.

Darcy

Perhaps. But I am in no humour to give consequence to young ladies. I am here to please you, Bingley – and – [*He smiles meaningly.*] knowing your disposition, I think it is just as well that I came.

[*Bingley is about to reply when the door opens and Mrs. Bennet enters, followed by Jane and Elizabeth. The two young men make ceremonious bows. Mrs. Bennet curtsies and then advances with delighted fussiness.*]

Mrs. Bennet

Good morning, gentlemen. I am so sorry that Mr. Bennet has gone for his walk.

[*As she looks a little puzzled from one to the other, Bingley advances.*]

Bingley

Good morning, Mrs. Bennet. I am Mr. Bingley, your new neighbour at Netherfield. This is my friend, Mr. Darcy, of Pendleton, Derbyshire. [*All bow and curtsy.*] Mr. Bennet has been so kind as to call upon us, and we are most happy to have the honour of waiting upon the ladies of his family.

Mrs. Bennet

We are delighted to see you, I am sure! Mr. Bingley – Mr. Darcy – [*Indicating Jane*] – my eldest daughter, Miss Bennet. [*Indicating Elizabeth*] – Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

[*The girls make low curtsies – the gentlemen bow.*]

Will not you be seated, gentlemen? [*The guests and ladies seat themselves.*] I am sure you must like Netherfield, Mr. Bingley. I do not know a place in the country that is equal to Netherfield. You will not think of quitting it in a hurry, I hope, though you have but a short lease.

Bingley

Whatever I do is done in a hurry, Mrs. Bennet, and therefore if I should resolve to quit Netherfield I should probably be off in five minutes. At present, however, [*looking intently at Jane*] I consider myself as quite fixed here.

Jane

It is very pleasant to have Netherfield open once more, although you must both miss London. There is so much gaiety in London.

Darcy

Yes, in a country neighbourhood you move in a confined and unvarying society. [*Mrs. Bennet looks vexed at this speech.*]

Elizabeth

But people themselves alter so much that there is something new to be observed in them forever. [*Darcy turns and looks at Elizabeth with surprise and interest.*]

Bingley

Then you are a student of character, Miss Elizabeth. It must be an amusing study.

Mrs. Bennet

Yes, Lizzy always likes to watch people. [*Looking at Darcy.*] And there are plenty of people about, even if you do live in the country. The country is a vast deal pleasanter than London, is not it, Mr. Bingley?

Bingley

When I am in the country I never wish to leave it, and when I am in town it is pretty much the same. They have each their advantages and I am equally happy in either.

Mrs. Bennet

Ay – that is because *you* have the right disposition. [*Looking at Darcy.*] But that gentleman seemed to think the country was nothing at all.

Elizabeth

[*Quickly.*] Indeed, mamma, you are mistaken. You quite mistook Mr. Darcy. He only meant that there is not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in town, which you must acknowledge to be true.

Mrs. Bennet

Certainly, my dear, nobody said there was – but as to not meeting with many people in this neighbourhood, I believe there are few neighbourhoods larger. I know we dine with four-and-twenty families.

[*As all become embarrassed at this speech, Bingley comes to the rescue.*]

Bingley

Yes, there are many fine estates hereabout. Can you see Sir William Lucas' place from the garden? I am not quite sure I have placed it.

Mrs. Bennet

Oh, yes, there is a fine view of the chimneys from the terrace. Sir William is our nearest neighbour. Such an agreeable man – so genteel, and so easy – [*Rising, she goes toward the glass doors.*] Come, Jane, we must show Mr. Bingley Sir William's chimneys.

[*Mrs. Bennet, Bingley, and Jane go out upon the terrace.*]

Elizabeth

[*Smiling mischievously.*] Would not you also like to see the chimneys, Mr. Darcy?

Darcy

Thank you. Like yourself, I prefer people to places.

Elizabeth

Did I say that?

Darcy

Not precisely. But I have drawn that conclusion.

Elizabeth

[*Gathering her sewing materials, begins to embroider.*] Well, I can laugh at people better than places, and I dearly love a laugh.

Darcy

Isn't that rather a dangerous trait, Miss Bennet? The wisest and the best of men may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke.

Elizabeth

Certainly. But I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good. Whims and inconsistencies do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can. [*Mischievously.*] But these, I suppose, are precisely what you are without.

Darcy

Perhaps that is not possible for anyone. But it has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule.

Elizabeth

And in your list of weaknesses do you include such faults as vanity and pride, for instance?

Darcy

Yes, vanity is a weakness, indeed, but *pride*, where there is a real superiority of mind – pride will be always under good regulation.

Elizabeth

I am perfectly convinced, Mr. Darcy, that you have no defect.

Darcy

I have made no such pretension, Miss Bennet. I have faults enough. My temper I dare not vouch for. I cannot forget the follies and vices of others against myself. My good opinion once lost is lost forever.

Elizabeth

That is a failing, indeed. Implacable resentment *is* a shade in a character. But you have chosen your fault well. I really cannot laugh at it. You are safe from me.

Darcy

There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil – a natural defect which not even the best education can overcome.

Elizabeth

And your defect is a propensity to hate everybody.

Darcy

[*Smiling.*] And yours to wilfully misunderstand them.

[*Voices are heard outside. Elizabeth applies herself to her embroidery. Bingley, Jane, and Mrs. Bennet return from the terrace.*]

Bingley

The surrounding country is really charming, Mrs. Bennet.

Mrs. Bennet

We think so. But you must give us a ball at Netherfield, Mr. Bingley, and then you will see that some of the people who live here are worth knowing.

Elizabeth

[*Distressed.*] Oh, mamma!

Jane

Mamma!

Bingley

Certainly, Mrs. Bennet. I had already decided upon it. I told Mr. Darcy only yesterday that as soon as my sister, Miss Bingley, arrived, and Nicholas could make white soup enough, I should send out my cards. Did not I, Darcy?

Darcy

[*Very stiffly.*] I believe you did.

Mrs. Bennet

Well, that is vastly good in you, Mr. Bingley; and then, perhaps, your friend may change his mind about the country. [*To Darcy.*] You didn't come to admire Sir William's chimneys, Mr. Darcy.

Darcy

I was admiring your daughter's work, Madam.

Mrs. Bennet

Oh, you should see Jane's work. Lizzy is all for books, like her father. She is a great reader and has no pleasure in anything else. Jane, show your embroidered parrot to Mr. Bingley.

Jane

I do not think Mr. Bingley would be interested, ma'am.

Bingley

[*Eagerly.*] Oh, indeed, I should, Miss Bennet; I am very much interested in parrots. – Pray show it to me.

Mrs. Bennet

Yes, and the new hand-screen. I will find it for you.

[*All three withdraw, leaving Elizabeth and Darcy together.*]

Darcy

And so you are a great reader and take no pleasure in anything else?

Elizabeth

Mamma does not understand. I deserve neither such praise nor such censure. I am *not* a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things.

Darcy

So I should have thought.

Bingley

[*Looking at the screen which he holds in his hand.*]

It is amazing to me how young ladies can have patience to be so very accomplished as they are; to think how you all paint tables and cover screens and net purses. It is quite wonderful.

Elizabeth

Do you agree with your friend, Mr. Darcy?

Darcy

His list of the common extent of accomplishments has too much truth. But I cannot boast of knowing more than half a dozen young ladies in the whole range of my acquaintance that are really accomplished.

Elizabeth

Then you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished woman.

Darcy

Perhaps. To deserve the word, a woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages. She must also possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking – the tone of her voice – her address and expression, and to all this she must yet add something more substantial – [*With a little bow to Elizabeth.*] in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.

Elizabeth

[*Laughing.*] I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women! I rather wonder at your knowing any.

Harris

[*Enters and announces.*] Colonel Forster and Mr. Wickham.
[*The gentlemen enter, smiling.*]

Wickham

Here I am again, Mrs. Bennet. I found that Colonel Forster had a message for the young ladies.

Mrs. Bennet

I am delighted to see you. You are just in time to meet our new neighbours. [*Introducing the gentlemen.*] Colonel Forster, Mr. Wickham – Mr. Bingley, Mr. Darcy.

[*As the gentlemen enter, Mr. Darcy has his back turned to them in conversation with Elizabeth. At the sound of Wickham's voice he starts and turns so that he faces the latter just in time for the introduction. At sight of Darcy, Wickham starts and is*

greatly confused. Darcy stiffens and scarcely nods when Wickham is introduced. The whole situation is so marked that everyone looks on with an astonishment to which

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