

Pride & Prejudice – Act 1

Scene 1: The Meryton Assembly Rooms

Music is heard -- on the piano, the P&P theme. It rises then fades as the curtain opens, Elizabeth Bennet c.s. in spot, stage tableau dancers in shadow surround her.

Elizabeth: It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

Music begins, lights up full on main cast in a lively dance. The dance showcases the Bennet girls, with various partners, Mrs. Bennet gossiping and pointing to her girls from the side, Mr. Bennet casually sipping a drink, ignoring the entertainment. An imposing group enters, greeted by Sir William – it is Bingley, Darcy, Caroline, and the Hursts. They are introduced, as Darcy observes the proceedings with detached indifference. Lady Lucas crosses to Mrs. Bennet with news. The dance ends with the Bennets congregating around Mr. Bennet. They are all terribly excited, especially Mrs. Bennet.)

Mrs. Bennet: Mr. Bennet, Mr. Bennet, wonderful news!

Netherfield Park is let at last. It is taken by a single man of large fortune from the North of England. (*Mr. Bennet is disinterested.*) His name is Bingley, and he has 5,000 a year! What a fine thing for our girls!

Mr. Bennet: (*finally looking up at her, amused*) How so? How can it affect them?

Mrs. Bennet: Oh, Mr. Bennet! How can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.

Lydia and Kitty: (*giggling*) I should laugh if he were to choose me!

Mr. Bennet: (*shaking his head*) So that is his design in settling here. To marry one of our daughters?

Mrs. Bennet: Design? Oh, how can you talk such nonsense! But he may very likely fall in love with one of them. And he has come tonight! So you must introduce us directly.

She points in the direction of the Bingley party.

Elizabeth: Mama, please, he will see you.

Mr. Bennet: (*rising, with irony*) I'll tell you what I will do. I shall tell Mr. Bingley that I have five daughters and he is welcome to any of them. They are silly and ignorant like other girls. But then, he may prefer a stupid wife. There, will that do?

Mrs. Bennet: (*holding him back now*) No, no, I beg you not to go if... (*She realizes he is teasing*) Oh, you take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves!

Mr. Bennet: (*sitting again*) You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They have been my old friends these twenty years at least.

Mrs. Bennet: Now you see, Jane, he will not be prevailed upon, he'll see us all ruined. Oh, if only we'd been able to have sons!

At this point Sir William approaches, leading Bingley and Darcy over to the Bennets.

Mrs. Bennet: Oh, Jane, Lizzy, they're coming over! Smile, girls, smile...

Sir William Lucas: Mrs. Bennet, (*They exchange bows/curtsy*). Mr. Bingley has expressed a wish to become acquainted with you and your daughters.

Mrs. Bennet: Sir, that is very good of you. This is Jane, my eldest, and Elizabeth, and Mary sits over there, and Kitty and Lydia, my youngest. Do you like to dance, sir?

Mr. Bingley: There is nothing I love better, madam. And (*looking at Jane*) if Miss Bennet is not otherwise engaged, may I be so bold as to claim the next two dances?

Jane: I am not engaged, sir.

Mr. Bingley: Good.

Mrs. Bennet: (*to Darcy*) And you, sir, are you fond of dancing, too?

Mr. Bingley: Oh, I beg your pardon. Mrs. Bennet, may I present my friend, Mr. Darcy.

Darcy bows, the women curtsy.

Mrs. Bennet: I hope you have come here eager to dance as your friend has, sir.

Mr. Darcy: Thank you, madam, I rarely dance.

Darcy abruptly turns and leaves.

Mr. Bingley: Oh...well...excuse me.

He goes after Darcy, followed by Sir William.

Mrs. Bennet: Well, did you ever meet such a proud, disagreeable man?

Elizabeth: Mama, he will hear you!

Mrs. Bennet: I do not care if he does! Who is he to think himself so far above his company?

Lady Lucas: He is Mr. Bingley's oldest friend, and he has a mighty fortune and a great estate in Derbyshire. Bingley's wealth is nothing to his. Ten thousand a year at least!

Mrs. Bennet: (*now impressed*) Well! Don't you think he is the handsomest man you've ever seen, girls?

Elizabeth: (*with an edge*) I wonder if he'd be so handsome if he was not so rich.

A new dance begins, Jane dancing with Mr. Bingley, Caroline dancing as well. Darcy stands aloof, watching Elizabeth

dance. At the end, Bingley confronts Darcy. Elizabeth is in range to overhear their conversation.

Mr. Bingley: Come, Darcy, I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about in this stupid manner.

Mr. Darcy: I certainly shall not. At an assembly such as this? It would be insupportable.

Mr. Bingley: Good God, Darcy, I've never met so many pleasant girls in my life. Several of them are uncommonly pretty.

Mr. Darcy: You have been dancing with the only handsome girl in the room.

Mr. Bingley: Darcy, she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! *(Looking around, he spots Elizabeth)* Look, look, there is one of her sisters. She is very pretty, too.

Mr. Darcy: She is tolerable, I suppose. But she is not handsome enough to tempt me. Go back to your partner and enjoy her smiles. You're wasting your time on me.

Bingley notices Elizabeth, makes a small embarrassed bow, and returns to Jane. Elizabeth crosses to chat with Charlotte.

Bingley takes Jane's hand and a new dance begins, Mrs. Bennet gossiping and pointing on the side. Darcy follows Elizabeth's movements closely, till the dance ends.)

Scene 2: Longbourn, the next morning

The curtain opens to reveal the Bennets sitting in the drawing room.

Mrs. Bennet: And Jane was so admired! There was nothing like it.

Kitty: And Lydia and I danced every dance.

Lydia: And Mary none!

Mary: I believe the rewards of observation and reflection to be much greater.

The girls giggle and Mrs. Bennet ignores Mary.

Mrs. Bennet: And Mr. Bingley favoured Jane above every other girl. But the man he brought with him, Mr. Darcy, is not worth our concern, though he may be the richest man in Derbyshire! The proudest, the most disoblising ... He slighted poor Lizzy, you know, and flatly refused to stand up with her.

Mr. Bennet: *(with an amused look at Lizzy)* Slighted my Lizzy, did he? Hmmh.

Elizabeth: I didn't care for him, father, so it's of little matter.

Mrs. Bennet: Another time, Lizzy, I would not dance with him if he should ask you.

Elizabeth: I believe, ma'am, I may safely promise you never to dance with Mr. Darcy.

Mr. Bennet: *(rising and exiting)* Ah, Lizzy! If your sisters only showed your good sense...

Mrs. Bennet and the girls follow him, chattering after Mr. Bennet, leaving Elizabeth and Jane alone on stage.

Elizabeth: If I could love a man who would love me for a mere fifty pounds a year, I should be very well pleased. *(Pause.)* But such a man could hardly be sensible, and you know I could never love a man who was out of his wits.

Jane: *(laughing)* Oh, Lizzy! *(thoughtfully)* But Mr. Bingley, – he is just what a young man ought to be. Sensible, lively and I never saw such happy manners.

Elizabeth: Handsome, too, which a young man ought to be if he possibly can. And he seemed to like you very much, which shows good judgment. Yes, I give you leave to like him. You've liked many a stupider person.

Jane: Lizzy! *(Enter Charlotte.)*

Elizabeth: Oh, look, Charlotte has come. Charlotte!

Charlotte: Lizzy! My father is to give a party at Lucas Lodge and you are all invited.

Elizabeth: You see, Jane? I think you are destined to see your excellent Mr. Bingley once more.

The three exit happily to theme music, lights out.

Scene 3: Lucas Lodge

Lights up on Lucas Lodge. Mary plays the piano, without much flair. Jane sits talking with Mr. Bingley. Sir William busies himself about the room, spots Darcy and Caroline, and the Hursts, and moves towards them. Darcy turns away. Lydia, Kitty and Maria Lucas move centre stage.

Maria: Do you think Mary could play something we could dance to?

Lydia: *(Moving to the piano)* Mary, Mary, let's have no more of that dull stuff, play something jolly, we want to dance.

Mary: Mama! Tell them it isn't fair!

Mrs. Bennet: Oh, for heaven's sake, play a jig, Mary!

A dance begins. Lydia, Kitty and Maria Lucas dance with some soldiers. The dance ends to applause, Kitty and Lydia giggling, etc. Charlotte and Elizabeth rise.

Charlotte: I see that Mr. Bingley continues his attentions to Jane, Lizzy. Do you think he is in love?

Elizabeth: Hmmh ... It's clear that he likes her very much.

Charlotte: Then she should leave him in no doubt of her heart. She should show more affection even than she feels, not less, if she is to secure him.

Sir William and Lady Lucas approach.

Sir William: Miss Eliza, why are you not dancing?

Lady Lucas: *(Bringing Elizabeth over)* Mr. Darcy, allow me to present this young lady to you as a very desirable partner.

Sir William: You cannot refuse to dance, I am sure, when so much beauty is before you.

Elizabeth: Indeed, sir, I have not the least intention of dancing.

Mr. Darcy: I would be very happy if you'd do me the honour of dancing with me, Miss Bennet.

Elizabeth: Thank you, but excuse me ...I am...not inclined to dance. *(She withdraws to Jane.)*

Jane: Father, I have been invited to Netherfield to dine tomorrow evening with Caroline Bingley and Mrs. Hurst.

Mrs. Bennet: Not Mr. Bingley?

Jane: The gentlemen will be on a shooting party. May I have the carriage, father?

Mrs. Bennet: The carriage? No indeed! You must go on horseback, for it looks like rain. Then you will have to stay the night.

Jane: Papa!

Mr. Bennet: Let us leave the matter for tomorrow, shall we? Come Lydia, Kitty, Mary. *(He exits, followed by Lydia, Kitty and Mary.)*

Mrs. Bennet: *(to Jane)* Don't look at me like that! Would you go all the way to Netherfield and back without seeing Mr. Bingley? No indeed. You will go on Nelly. That will do very well, indeed. *(Jane exits, flustered.)* You will see, Lizzy. It will all work out, just as I've planned!

They exit to theme music, lights out.

Scene 16: Hunsford

Elizabeth sits, reading. Enter a servant with Mr. Darcy.

Servant: Mr. Darcy, miss. *(Exit.)*

Elizabeth: Mr. Darcy.

Mr. Darcy: I beg your pardon. I would not wish to intrude upon your privacy. *(An awkward pause. Darcy looks around uneasily)* This seems a very comfortable house. *(Pause.)* And Mr. Collins appears extremely fortunate in his choice of wife.

Elizabeth: Yes, indeed he is.

Mr. Darcy: It must be very agreeable to her to be settled within so easy a distance of her family.

Elizabeth: Easy distance? It is nearly fifty miles! *(Pause.)* But near and far are relative terms. It is possible for a woman to be settled too near her family.

Mr. Darcy: Yes, exactly! You would not wish to be always near Longbourn, I think?

Here a long pause, as Darcy fidgets.

Elizabeth: Mr. Darcy, I...

Mr. Darcy: In vain I have struggled. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and -- love you. *(Pause.)* In declaring myself thus, I am fully aware that I will be going expressly against the wishes of my family, my friends and, I hardly need add, my own better judgment. But it cannot be helped. I beg you most fervently to relieve my sufferings and consent to be my wife.

Elizabeth: *(Pause.)* I have never desired your good opinion and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry to cause pain to anyone, but it was most unconsciously done and, I hope, will be of short duration.

Mr. Darcy: And this is all the reply I am to expect? I might wonder why with so little effort at civility I am rejected.

Elizabeth: And I might wonder why with so evident a desire to offend and insult me you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will! Was this not some excuse for incivility if I was uncivil? Do you think any consideration would tempt me

to accept the man who has been the means of ruining the happiness of a most beloved sister? Can you deny that you have done it?

Mr. Darcy: I have no wish to deny it. I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your sister.

Elizabeth: And long before I discovered that, my dislike of you was decided when I heard Mr. Wickham's story of your dealings with him.

Mr. Darcy: You take an eager interest in that gentleman's concerns!

Elizabeth: Who that knows what his misfortunes have been can help feeling an interest in him?

Mr. Darcy: His misfortunes! Yes, his misfortunes have been great indeed!

Elizabeth: And of your infliction! You have reduced him to his present state of poverty and yet you can treat his misfortunes with contempt and ridicule.

Mr. Darcy: And this is your opinion of me? My faults by this calculation are heavy indeed! But I am not ashamed of the feelings I related -- they were natural and just! Did you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations whose condition in life is so decidedly below my own?

Elizabeth: You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy! The mode of your declaration merely spared me any concern I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner. You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it. From the very beginning your manners impressed me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit and your selfish disdain for the feelings of others! I had not known

you a month before I felt you were the last man in the world whom I could ever marry!

Mr. Darcy: You have said quite enough, madam. I perfectly comprehend your feelings and now have only to be ashamed of what my own have been. Please forgive me for having taken up your time and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness.

He storms out of the room, leaving Elizabeth in shock/

Scene 26: Longbourn, later

The Bennets sit in the drawing room.

Mrs. Bennet: Three days he has been in the neighbourhood, and still he shuns us!

I say it's all your father's fault! He will not call on Mr. Bingley, so you shall die old maids!

Mr. Bennet: You promised last time that he'd marry one of my daughters, but it all came to nothing. I won't be sent on a fool's errand! *(He exits)*

Mrs. Bennet: Oh Mr. Bennet!

Kitty: Mama! Mama, look! I think he's coming!

Mrs. Bennet: Is it really him? I believe it must be! He is come, Jane! Put on your blue gown. No, stay where you are!

Kitty: Who's with him? It looks like that man who used to be with him before. Mr...you know, that tall proud one.

Mrs. Bennet: Mr. Darcy! I believe it is. Well, any friend of Mr. Bingley's will always be welcome here, to be sure. But I must say I hate the sight of him!

Bingley and Darcy enter.

Servant: Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy, ma'am.

Mrs. Bennet: Mr. Bingley, you are very, very welcome.

Mr. Bingley: How do you do, Mrs. Bennet. I...

Mrs. Bennet: It's far too long since you were here, and very kind of you to call. *(stiffly)* And Mr. Darcy, you are welcome, too. *(Back to Bingley)* We began to be afraid you would never come back. People did say, you meant to quit the place entirely, but I hope that is not true.

Mr. Bingley: Well, no, I...

Mrs. Bennet: I expect you've heard Mr. Wickham's gone into the regulars. Thank Heaven he has some friends, though perhaps not as many as he deserves! Do you mean to stay long in the neighbourhood on this visit?

Mr. Bingley: Our plans are not yet settled, but I hope, we shall stay some weeks. At the very least.

Mrs. Bennet: When you've killed your own birds, I beg you would come here and shoot as many as you please on Mr. Bennet's manor. I'm sure he'll be happy to oblige you! *(stiffly, again)* I suppose you may bring your friends, if you will.

Mr. Bingley: Thank you, Mrs. Bennet. *(He and Darcy rise, bow to her, then Jane, before exiting.)* Miss Bennet.

Mrs. Bennet: Oh, Jane! This is such good news! I must tell Aunt Philips!

She exits, as Elizabeth crosses to Jane and takes her by the hand.

Elizabeth: Jane, take care.

Jane: Don't think me to be in any danger now, Lizzy.

Elizabeth: I think you are in very great danger of making him as much in love with you as ever.

Lights dim on centre stage, and up on centre balcony, where Darcy and Bingley enter.

Mr. Bingley: You tell me now that she was in London all those months? And you concealed it from me?

Mr. Darcy: Yes. I can offer no justification. It was an arrogant presumption, based on a failure to recognize your true

feelings and Miss Bennet's. I should never have interfered. It was wrong of me, Bingley, and I apologize.

Mr. Bingley: You admit that you were in the wrong?

Mr. Darcy: Utterly and completely.

Mr. Bingley: Then... I have your blessing?

Mr. Darcy: Do you need my blessing?

Mr. Bingley: No. But I should like to know I have it all the same.

Mr. Darcy: Then go to it.

Darcy exits, and Bingley nervously adjusts his outfit, then follows, as lights dim above and rise centre stage on Jane, Elizabeth, Mary and Kitty. Mrs. Bennet returns.

Mrs. Bennet: Jane! Jane! Oh, my dear Jane! He is come!

Jane: Who is come?

Mrs. Bennet: Mr. Bingley, of course!

Enter a Servant leading Mr. Bingley.

Servant: Mr. Bingley, ma'am.

Mrs. Bennet: Mr. Bingley! It is ever so nice to see you again so soon! Do sit down.

Mr. Bingley: Thank you, Mrs. Bennet. *(He is staring at Jane, and practically misses the chair.*

Mrs. Bennet: So Mr. Darcy is gone to town? *(She winks at Kitty.*

Mr. Bingley: Yes, ma'am.

Kitty: What's the matter, mama? Why do you keep winking at me? What am I to do?

Mrs. Bennet: Wink at you? Why should I wink at you, child? What a notion! But now you ask, I do have something I would speak to you about. Come, come with me. And you, Mary. Come!

They exit, Jane and Bingley sit nervously, and Elizabeth tries to avoid looking at them. A moment later, a voice breaks the silence.

Mrs. Bennet: (*calling offstage*) Lizzy! Lizzy!....I need you upstairs, at once!

Reluctantly, Elizabeth curtsies to Bingley, glances at Jane, and leaves.

Mr. Bingley: First, Miss Bennet, I must confess...I have committed the most unpardonable error in judgment.

Jane: Yes?

Mr. Bingley: That is to say...at least...you must forgive me...

Jane: For what, Mr. Bingley?

Mr. Bingley: For being blinded by folly. From the very first time we met, Miss Bennet, I have been most sincerely in love with you. If I had not been so stupid as to accept some astonishingly poor advice, I should never have left Netherfield last November.

Jane: And yet I came to London...in the faint hope of seeing you there...did not your sister tell you?

Mr. Bingley: I am very sorry to say no. And once I learned of that concealment, I could only speculate on what else had been withheld from me. I had been convinced of your indifference, when I had hoped you felt all along as I did...that you loved me...?

Jane: I did....I do...I am sorry you have been led so astray.

Bingley moves to her swiftly on one knee.

Mr. Bingley: Miss Bennet....would you do me the great honour of becoming my wife?

Jane: I will, sir.

He rises, but before they can embrace, Elizabeth enters the room.

Bingley suddenly breaks away from Jane.

Elizabeth: Oh, I am so sorry.

Mr. Bingley: Excuse me. I must at once to your good father, without delay!

Elizabeth: *(to Jane, as the Bennets spill into the room)* Well?

Jane: Oh, Lizzy! Mama! I'm so happy! Why can't everyone be as happy as I am? He loves me, Lizzy. He loves me!

Elizabeth: Of course he does!

Mrs. Bennet: Oh, Jane! Jane! Did I not tell you it would be so?

Jane: He told me he loved me all the time. He didn't think me in love with him! He is gone to papa already! Oh, Lizzy, could you believe things would end in this happy way?

Elizabeth: Yes, Jane – only because you deserve it so.

Re-enter Bingley with Mr. Bennet.

Mr. Bennet: Come back tomorrow, sir, if you can bear to. Come and shoot with me. There are few men whose society I can tolerate well. I believe you may be one of them.

Mr. Bingley: Thank you, sir. I shall be very happy to.

Mr. Bennet: Very well, very well. Get along with you.

Mr. Bingley: Till tomorrow, then! *(Bingley exits)*

Mr. Bennet: Jane, congratulations. You will be a very happy woman.

Jane: Thank you, father. I believe I shall.

Mrs. Bennet: Oh, my dear, dear Jane! I am so happy! Oh, I knew how it would be! I was sure you could not be so beautiful for nothing. He is the handsomest man that was ever seen!

She exits on the arm of Mr. Bennet, Mary and Kitty following.

Jane: Oh, Lizzy. If there were only such another man for you.

Elizabeth: If you were to give me forty such men....I could never be as happy as you. But perhaps, if I have very good luck, I may in time meet with another Mr. Collins!

They exit, laughing and hugging one another.

Scene 28: Longbourn, a few days later

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth and Jane sit in the parlour. A servant enters, leading in Bingley and Darcy.

Servant: Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy, ma'am.

Mr. Bingley: This is a fine day for a walk. Shall we? *(The four exit.*

Mr. Bennet: I wonder that Mr. Darcy should have returned. What would his aunt think?

He chuckles to himself, and exits, leaving Mrs. Bennet confused and chasing after him

Mrs. Bennet: Whatever do you mean, Mr. Bennet? Mr. Bennet!

Lights dim; up on Jane and Bingley, entering opposite, and followed by Darcy and Elizabeth, who move center stage.

Elizabeth: Mr. Darcy -- I can go no longer without thanking you for your kindness to my poor sister. Ever since I have known of it, I've been most anxious to tell you how grateful I am, for my family and for myself. I know what trouble it must have cost you. Please allow me to thank you, on behalf of all my family, since they don't know to whom they are indebted.

Mr. Darcy: If you will thank me, let it be for yourself alone. Your family owes me nothing. As much as I respect them, I believe I thought only of you. *(Pause.)* You're too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are unchanged, tell me so. My affections and wishes are the same. But one word from you will silence me on this subject forever.

Elizabeth: Oh, my feelings...My feelings are...I am ashamed to remember what I felt then. My feelings are so different. In fact, they are quite the opposite.

Mr. Darcy: *(with great relief)* Lady Catherine told me of her meeting with you. It taught me to hope, when I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before. Had you absolutely decided against me, you would have acknowledged it openly.

Elizabeth: Yes, you know enough of my frankness to believe me capable of that!

Mr. Darcy: What did you say of me that I did not deserve? My behaviour at the time was unpardonable. Your reproof I shall never forget. "Had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner." How those words have tortured me!

Elizabeth: I had no idea of their being taken such a way.

Mr. Darcy: I can easily believe it. You said I could not have addressed you in any way that would have induced you to accept me.

Elizabeth: Do not repeat what I said then!

Mr. Darcy: No, I have been a selfish being all my life. As a child I was given good principles, but was left to follow them in pride and conceit. And such I might still have been -- but for you.

Bingley interrupts as he draws near.

Mr. Bingley: Well, Darcy? How goes it? Shall we return to Netherfield?

Mr. Darcy: With one stop at Longbourn on the way, I should think. Good day, Miss Bennet....Miss Bennet.

He and Bingley exit with bows. Jane comes up to Lizzy.

Jane: Whatever could Mr. Darcy mean, to stop at Longbourn?

Elizabeth: Jane....oh Jane....we are engaged!

Jane: Engaged to Mr. Darcy! No, you are joking. It is impossible!

Elizabeth: This is a wretched beginning! If you don't believe me, I'm sure no one else will. Indeed, I am in earnest. He still loves me, and we are engaged.

Jane: It can't be true. I know how much you dislike him!

Elizabeth: No, it is all forgotten! Perhaps I didn't always love him as well as I do now. But... in such cases as these a good memory is unpardonable.

Jane: Oh, Lizzy!

They exit, laughing, as lights dim to music.

Scene 29: Longbourn, some time later

Darcy exits the stage, nearly bumping into Elizabeth as she enters.

Mr. Bennet sits in his chair, fidgeting.

Elizabeth: Father...?

Mr. Bennet: Are you out of your senses to be accepting this man, Lizzy? Have you not always hated him?

Elizabeth: Papa...

Mr. Bennet: I've given him my consent. He's the kind of man, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse anything. But let me advise you to think the better of it. I know your disposition, Lizzy. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life. He is rich, but will he make you happy?

Elizabeth: Have you any objections apart from your belief in my indifference?

Mr. Bennet: None whatever. We all know him to be a proud, unpleasant sort of man --but this would be nothing, if you really liked him.

Elizabeth: I do. I do like him. I love him. Indeed, he has no improper pride. He is perfectly amiable. If you only knew his generous nature. I didn't always love him, but I love him now so very dearly. He is truly the best man I have ever known.

Mr. Bennet: *(Pause.)* Well, my dear, if this be the case, he deserves you. I could not have parted with you to anyone less worthy. *(He embraces her.)*

Elizabeth: There is one more thing I must tell you, Papa. It was Mr. Darcy, not my uncle Gardiner, who was responsible for rescuing Lydia and saving our family name.

Mr. Bennet: (*startled*) So, Mr. Darcy did everything? So much the better. It will save me a world of trouble. Had it been your uncle's doing, I must and would have paid him; but these violent young lovers carry everything their own way. I shall offer to pay him tomorrow -- he will rant and storm about his love for you, and there will be an end of the matter.

Elizabeth: (*laughing*) Father...if you please...he would not want you to know, so it is just as well kept between us.

Mr. Bennet: Very well, my dear, very well.

Elizabeth rushes back to him for a final hug, then exits, as Mr. Bennet takes up his book in his favourite chair. The curtains close slowly to music, as Darcy and Elizabeth enter on the apron, opposite one another. They slowly close up space during their dialogue.

Elizabeth: Mr. Darcy...!

Mr. Darcy: Miss Bennet.

Elizabeth: I've just come from my father...and I just have to say....have to ask....when did you first begin to love me?

Mr. Darcy: I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words, which laid the foundation. I was in the middle before I knew that I *had* begun.

Elizabeth: My beauty you had early withstood, and as for my manners -- my behaviour to *you* was at least always bordering on the uncivil. Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?

Mr. Darcy: For the liveliness of your mind, I did.

Elizabeth: But what made you so shy of me, when you first called? Why, especially, when you called, did you look as if you did not care about me?

Mr. Darcy: Because you were grave and silent, and gave me no encouragement.

Elizabeth: But I was embarrassed.

Mr. Darcy: And so was I.

Elizabeth: Still -- you might have talked to me more.

Mr. Darcy: A man who felt less, might have.

Elizabeth: *(She draws closer to him, playfully)* What did you come down to Netherfield for? Was it merely to ride to Longbourn and be embarrassed? Or had you intended any more serious consequence?

Mr. Darcy: *(Stepping closer to her.)* My real purpose was to see *you*, and to judge whether I might ever hope to make you love me.

Elizabeth: *(Drawing up close)* And...what have you decided?

Mr. Darcy: *(Holding her head in his hands.)* That as a single man, in possession of a large fortune, all I will ever need, my loveliest Elizabeth -- is you.

They kiss. Lights dim to theme, then up as curtain opens to curtain call.