

Characters:

Jane Bennet

Lizzie Bennet

Mary Bennet

Kitty Bennet

Lydia Bennet

Mr Bennet

Mrs Bennet

Mr Gardiner

Mrs Gardiner

Charles Bingley

Caroline Bingley

Charlotte Lucas

Fitzwilliam Darcy

Mr Collins

George Wickham

Lady Catherine de Bourgh

Lady Anne de Bourgh

Mrs Reynolds

Georgiana Darcy



Doubling is optional. Options include:
Mary/Georgiana, Lady Catherine/Mrs Reynolds,
Kitty/Lady Anne, Mr Collins/Mrs Reynolds.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 – LONGBOURN GARDEN

Lizzie stands at an easel. She gazes at the sky, then paints a broad swathe of blue. She roughs in a lawn and a few trees. The Bennet country estate of Longbourn.

Mr Bennet, on a stroll with a book, stops behind her to admire her work.

Mary, Kitty, Lydia and Jane enter practicing a reel. A serene, idyllic scene of gentrified country life until . . .

Kitty: Wrong way!

Jane: Kitty.

Lydia: You ruined it, Mary! Start over!

Kitty: Lydia and I will look very foolish at the assembly if we can't do the dances!

Lydia: And it will be your fault, Mary!

Lizzie: It will be your own fault, for flirting with the dancing-master and not paying attention to your lesson.

Mary: I have no intention of dancing at the assembly. I would much rather spend my time with a book.

Mary marches away and takes out a book.

Kitty: Father! Make Mary dance with us.

Lydia: Now Kitty, you be the man.

Kitty: No, you be the man. You're tallest.

Mrs Bennet enters.

Mrs Bennet: Mr Bennet! Mr Bennet! Oh Mr Bennet! Such news!

Mr Bennet: What is it, my love?

Mrs Bennet: The neighbouring estate of Netherfield has been let at last! To a single young man, of good fortune . . . four, or five thousand a year!

Mr Bennet: And what is that to me?

Mrs Bennet: You must know that I plan to marry one of the girls to him.

Mr Bennet: For it is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a of good fortune must be in want of a wife.

Lydia: What is his name, mama?

Kitty: Yes, his name! His name!

Mrs Bennet: Mr Bingley.

Kitty: Kitty Bingley.

Lydia: Lydia Bingley!

Lizzie: What nonsense – you haven't even seen him!

Mrs Bennet: You must go and visit him at once, Mr Bennet, to stake a claim for one of our daughters! The Lucases will be desperate to marry their Charlotte to him, though I'm sure he could not admire such a very plain girl –

Lizzie: Mama!

Mrs Bennet: I know she is your particular friend, Lizzie, but you must own that she is very plain. Her own mother agrees with me. Do go at once and visit him, Mr Bennet.

Mr Bennet: I will do no such thing.

Mrs Bennet: But why?

Mr Bennet: I have already met Mr Bingley.

Mrs Bennet: Where did you meet him?

Mr Bennet: At the Lucases. He dined there yesterday.

Mrs Bennet: I knew it! I knew it! It is already too late.

Kitty: What was he like papa?

Mr Bennet: Very agreeable.

Lydia: But what did he look like, papa?

Mr Bennet: He wears a blue coat, and rides a black horse.

Lydia: That is no description at all!

Kitty: I, for one, like a man in a blue coat.

Lydia: I, for one, prefer a red coat.

Kitty: Aunt and Uncle are here!

The Gardiners enter and are greeted by the family.

Mrs Bennet: We feared you might not arrive in time for the ball, brother.

Mr Gardiner: And miss an opportunity to dance with our five beautiful nieces at the Meryton Assembly? Preposterous.

Mrs Bennet: All night long I was in a nervous fever about the silk roses for the girls' dancing slippers.

Mrs Gardiner: Oh, poor dear! Well, you may sleep soundly tonight, I have them right here. And a few other little things . . .

Kitty & Lydia: Prezzies!

Mrs Gardiner doles out elegant accessories for the ball, which the girls try on. Jane and Lizzie join them.

Mrs Gardiner: Jane, Eliza! How well you both look. Don't you think so, dear?

Mr Gardiner: Ready to break some hearts at the ball, I think.

Mrs Gardiner: I hope our Eliza has been taking many good, long, thoughtful walks.

Lizzie: I have.

Mr Gardiner: Jane, you remind me so much of your mother when she was your age.

Mrs Bennet: Dear brother, what nonsense, you flatter me. Jane is the most beautiful of my girls, this is not in dispute, and after her, Kitty. But Lydia has the best nature, I'm sure. Elizabeth has – a rustic quality. Which in certain settings is not unattractive.

Mrs Gardiner: And Mary? Where is Mary?

Mrs Bennet: Oh, yes, Mary – I always forget her. Mary! Mary! Come at once! You must practise your dances with your sisters!

Mrs Gardiner: Yes, come along, Mary! Join us! I know it is a hardship, but you must learn to pretend to enjoy yourself, dear.

Mary: Every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason. But I will forebear to dance if I must. Society has claims on us all.

Mrs Bennet: Oh, but wait, I have such news!

With the Gardiners, the girls run to dance while Mr and Mrs Bennet look on.

Mrs Bennet: Oh Mr Bennet, if I can but see one of my daughters happily married to Mr Bingley

and settled at Netherfield – and all the others equally well married – I shall have nothing to wish for.

Mr Bennet: I shall assure Mr Bingley of my hearty consent to his marrying which ever he chooses of the girls; though I must throw in a good word for my Lizzie.

Mrs Bennet: You are always giving her the preference. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others. You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.

Mr Bennet: I have a high respect for your nerves, my dear. They have been my old friends these three and twenty years.

SCENE 2 – MERYTON ASSEMBLY

As the girls practise their dance, other couples join them to make up two lines. Paper lanterns light an evening country assembly. As the dance ends, Mrs Bennet and her five daughters crowd around Mr Bingley, a handsome, easygoing young gentleman.

Mrs Bennet: Mr Bingley! Mr Bingley! May I introduce my daughters: Lydia, my youngest, Kitty, Mary, Elizabeth, and Jane, the eldest.

Each girl curtsies as she is introduced. Bingley is especially taken with Jane.

Bingley: May I invite Miss Jane Bennet to dance the next two, Mrs Bennet?

Mrs Bennet: Oh, yes, Mr Bingley! You may.

Bingley takes Jane's hand and they head up the dance. Charlotte Lucas waves to Mrs Bennet and Lizzie, then comes over.

Mrs Bennet: Oh, here comes Charlotte Lucas! Hoping to steal Mr Bingley away, no doubt. Too late, my dear, too late!

Lizzie: Mother.

Charlotte: Eliza!

Lizzie: What a lovely flush you have to your cheeks, Charlotte. I believe you have been dancing!

Charlotte: Would you believe I danced the first two with Mr Bingley?

Lizzie: Well, la! Did you hear, Mama? Charlotte danced the first two with Mr Bingley.

Mrs Bennet: Hm? Well of course, we had not yet arrived, and he would have to dance the first two with someone.

Lizzie: What is he like?

Charlotte: Very handsome and very agreeable.

Lizzie: And with a good fortune too, do not forget.

Charlotte: But I see he's found a new partner.

Lizzie: No matter, for he is not our type.

*Bingley leads Jane to the top of the set.
Couples, including Mary, Kitty, and Lydia,
take their place opposite each other for a dance.
One especially beautiful and elegant woman in
a gorgeous gown dances – Caroline Bingley.
A young gentleman – Darcy – is revealed
standing apart from the crowd.*

Lizzie: Who is that gentleman over there?

Charlotte: A friend of Mr Bingley's. He danced the first with Mr Bingley's sister, Caroline, the one in the beautiful (*insert colour*) gown – but he's above being pleased with our country manners.

*The dance ends; Bingley takes Jane to be
introduced to Darcy and Caroline Bingley.*

Bingley: Please allow me to introduce Miss Jane Bennet. Miss Bennet, this is my sister, Caroline Bingley. And this is my friend, Mr Darcy.

*While Jane and Caroline talk, Bingley draws
Darcy away, close enough to Charlotte and
Elizabeth that they can be overheard.*

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

Darcy: You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. Your sister is engaged in conversation, and there is no other woman present with whom it would not be a punishment to dance.

Bingley: Upon my honour, I never met with so many pleasant girls in my life – several of them are uncommonly pretty.

Darcy: You are dancing with the only handsome girl here.

Bingley: She is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld. But there is one of her sisters there, behind you, Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

He nods to Lizzie, Darcy looks over his shoulder, then turns back to Bingley.

Darcy: She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me. Now go back to your partner and enjoy her smiles, you are wasting your time with me.

Charlotte and Elizabeth then turn to each other, agape.

Caroline Bingley sidles up to Darcy and whispers to him.

Lizzie: Ha!

Charlotte: Pity poor Eliza! Not handsome enough to dance with!

Lizzie: Now, now Charlotte, he did own that I was tolerable!

Charlotte: Tolerable! You are better off without such a disagreeable partner.

Caroline: What a pity that dancing is popular in such unpolished society. Don't you agree, Mr Darcy?

Darcy: Any savage can dance, Miss Bingley.

Caroline: I can guess what you are thinking.

Darcy: Can you indeed.

Caroline: And I am in complete agreement. I was never more annoyed. The insipidity and yet the noise, the nothingness, and yet the self-importance of all these people. How insufferable it would be to spend much time in such society!

Darcy: I'm afraid you are mistaken. I was thinking what pleasure a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.

Caroline: And what lady has inspired such a reflection?

Darcy: That one.

Caroline: Which?

Darcy: Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

Darcy looks across the room to Lizzie – noticed by Charlotte.

Charlotte: He's looking! Shocking!

Lizzie: No doubt he has found an additional defect in me to criticize.

Caroline: Oh Darcy, you do make me laugh – I thought for a moment you were serious! Tell me then, when am I to wish you joy?

Caroline takes Darcy's arm, they exit.

Lizzie: What a vain and disagreeable man!

Charlotte: My mother heard that he has ten thousand a year and one of the grandest estates in the country . . . so he has a right to be proud.

Lizzie: I could easily forgive his pride if he had not mortified mine.

While dancing, Lydia and Kitty call over to Lizzie and Charlotte.

Lydia: Lizzie! Lizzie! Oh, hello Charlotte!

Kitty: We've danced every dance since we arrived!

Lydia: Mr Bingley says he will give a private ball at Netherfield!

Kitty: As soon as he is settled!

Lydia: And the regiment is coming to the village any day!

Kitty: So there will be plenty of partners for everyone!

Lydia: Even for you, Charlotte!

Lizzie: Lydia! I'll have you know Charlotte was Mr Bingley's first choice!

Lydia: It looks as though he prefers his second!

SCENE 3 – WALKING HOME

The assembly disperses as the people of Meryton walk home in pairs and small groups.

Jane and Lizzie stroll slowly, arm in arm, Mary & Charlotte close behind them. Mrs Bennet and the two younger girls gossip together.

Jane: I was very flattered that he asked me to dance a second time.

Lizzie: He could not help seeing that you were five times as pretty as every other woman in the room.

Jane: Dear Lizzie!

Lizzie: Well, I permit you to like him. You have liked many a stupider person. But you never see a fault in anybody – I've never heard you speak ill of another human being.

Jane: I always speak what I think!

Lizzie: And that, dear Jane, is the wonder. With your good sense, to be blind to the follies and nonsense of others. I suppose you like his sister, Miss Bingley?

Jane: She is beautiful, don't you think? And very charming when you converse with her.

Lizzie: Really Jane, charming? She seemed to me very conceited and proud.

Jane: You must not judge people so hastily, Lizzie.

Lizzie: Well, Mr Darcy judged me rather harshly this evening.

Mary: If I may interject, you may find it useful to remember this: Judge not lest ye be judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.

Lizzie: Yes, thank you, Mary.

Mrs Bennet: You began the evening well, Charlotte. You were Mr Bingley's first choice.

Charlotte: But only because someone had not yet arrived.

Mrs Bennet, eavesdropping, calls back to them.

Mrs Bennet: Oh! you mean Jane, because he danced with her twice. To be sure that did seem as if he admired her – indeed I rather believe he did. And his sister did invite Jane to dine at

Netherfield tomorrow. But, however, it may all come to nothing, you know.

Charlotte: It might come to something, if you will help him on a bit, Jane.

Jane: What do you mean?

Charlotte: Few men have heart enough to really fall in love without encouragement.

Lizzie: But she does help him on, as much as her nature will allow.

Charlotte: Jane, you are too good at concealing your feelings. Once you have secured him, there will be time to fall in love as much as you like.

Lizzie: You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and you would never act in this way yourself.

Charlotte: I would like to believe I would not. But remember – I'm twenty-seven. I am a burden to my family.

Lizzie: What nonsense.

Jane: You are a great comfort to your parents, Charlotte.

Charlotte: Well, if you were married to Mr Bingley to-morrow, I should think you had as good a chance of happiness as anyone. It is best to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life.

Mrs Bennet: I think it is going to rain. Jane! I have such a good idea. You must go to visit the Bingleys tomorrow on horseback, because it is likely to rain, and then they will insist that you stay all night at Netherfield, and how could they send you home in the rain, when you might catch your death of cold!

Lizzie: If you don't catch it on your way there.

Jane: I had much rather go in the coach.

A thunderclap. Rain begins to fall. The more it rains, the happier Mrs Bennet is.

Mrs Bennet: Oh! What a stroke of luck.

SCENE 4 – RAINSTORM AND NETHERFIELD ARRIVAL

All the people of the village dash about for cover. As they disperse, Jane, soaked through, arrives at the door of Netherfield and is greeted by Bingley and Caroline. Jane sneezes as they invite her inside.

SCENE 5 – NETHERFIELD INTERIOR

The sitting room at Netherfield – a much grander estate than Longbourn. Jane is sleeping on a chaise, bundled in blankets. Caroline Bingley is expertly arranging flowers in an elegant vase. Darcy is writing a letter at a standing desk. Bingley enters with a slightly muddy Lizzie.

Caroline: Jane Bennet is a sweet girl, but her illness is most inconvenient. If I were to be invited to visit you at Pemberley, Darcy, I would be more considerate.

Bingley: Well, see who I found.

Caroline: Charles, sh! Miss Eliza Bennet. What a surprise. We did not hear your carriage on the path.

Lizzie: It is only a short walk – I’m happy for the exercise.

Caroline: You walked? I am all astonishment. Mr Darcy, don’t you think that is astonishing? So very out-of-doorsy. Will you take some refreshment?

Lizzie: Thank you, but I’ve only come to enquire after my sister.

They show her Jane sleeping.

Bingley: Miss Jane was very feverish last night and could not sleep. I was on my way to fetch you –

Lizzie: Poor thing! Jane, it's Lizzie.

Jane wakes and tries to get up.

Jane: Oh, Lizzie, I'm so glad you have come! What a terrible guest I have been! Mr Bingley has been so kind. I tried to come down for breakfast . . .

Lizzie: I'll take you home.

Caroline: Shall we call for the carriage?

Bingley: Nonsense. Miss Jane must remain here until she is quite well. Please tell me you will join us for dinner.

Lizzie: Thank you, Mr Bingley. Jane, we should get you to bed. Could you show me the way?

Lizzie helps Jane up.

Bingley: Of course. Oh – here, to brighten the sickroom?

Bingley grabs a handful of flowers from Caroline's meticulous arrangement.

Caroline: Charles!

Bingley, Lizzie, and Jane exit.

Caroline: What can Miss Eliza Bennet mean by scampering about the country, three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is! And alone! And her petticoat; I hope you saw her petticoat,

six inches deep in mud. I could hardly keep my countenance. You observed it, Mr. Darcy, I am sure. It seems clear that Miss Eliza has neither beauty, nor accomplishments, nor charm . . .

Lizzie enters as Caroline continues.

Caroline: She has nothing, in short, to recommend her, but being an excellent walker. Oh! There you are Miss Bennet. You're such a churchmouse.

Bingley: Please, make yourself at home, Miss Elizabeth.

Caroline: Oh yes, come sit here by me. Only do take care. The upholstery on the chaise is new and it would be a shame –

Bingley: Caroline! Miss Bennet, Would you like some tea?

Caroline: Or can I fetch you a book? You do have a bookish air about you. Or shall we play cards? I am wild for vingt un.

Lizzie: A book would be fine.

Caroline: I see. Miss Eliza Bennet despises cards. She is a great reader, and has no pleasure in anything else.

Elizabeth: I deserve neither such praise nor such censure. I am not a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things.

Bingley: Darcy here is always buying books. He has magnificent library at Pemberley, don't you, Darcy!

Darcy: It ought to be good – it has been the work of many generations.

Caroline: I long to visit with you, Darcy, I cannot wait to see you in your natural setting! You must visit Pemberley estate, Miss Bennet. In summer when Darcy is away from home, it is open to public viewing, just enquire with the housekeeper. She loves to show the tourists about.

Bingley: Have you spent any time in Derbyshire, Miss Bennet? It's lovely country.

Caroline: And I hear there are so many excellent long walks, for we all know how fond you are of walking.

Bingley: And it's only what, Darcy? Three days journey?

Darcy: Hm.

Lizzie: I have not been that far north. Though my Aunt lived for a time in Lambton.

Caroline: And where does she live now?

Lizzie: London. Cheapside. My Uncle is in trade.

Caroline: Cheapside?