

ACT ONE

MUSIC #0 - OVERTURE

Prologue

Chorus, front of stage.

MUSIC #1 – IT’S A TRUTH UNIVERSAL (PROLOGUE)



Company *It's a fact,
It's well known.
It's a truth universal in life.
That a young man who's single and blessed with a fortune
Is most clearly in need of a wife.*

*It's a fact,
It's well known that a man
Should not live on his own.
His duty is to find a mate with whom he truly shares
All virtues that good breeding does dictate.
His duty is to propagate,
Producing lots of heirs,
To carry on and widen his estate.*

*That is so,
As we know, a rich young man
Sends hearts and tongues aflutter.
It sets the whole town in a whirl.
The gossips may soon be heard to mutter:
"Who'll be the lucky girl?"*

*To each girl, he's a prize, so she tries
Finding favour in his eyes.
She will wait by the gate
In the hopes of a warm tete-a-tete.*

*Each father and mother is hoping he'll favour their daughter,
And so this young man finds he's led like a lamb to the slaughter.*

*A rich man unmarried is not what the good Lord intended,
A man with a fortune needs someone to help him spend it.*

*It's a fact.
It's well known.
It's a truth universal in life
That a young man who's single
and blessed with a fortune,
Is most clearly in need of a wife.
There's no doubt he's in need of a wife.*

Scene One - Mr Bennet's Study

Mr Bennet is reading a book as Mrs Bennet and three of her five daughters - Lydia, Kitty and Mary - burst in, obviously excited. The two other daughters, Jane and Elizabeth, enter afterwards and take a relatively detached part in the proceedings. Mr Bennet appears irritated by the intrusion.

Mrs Bennet Mr Bennet, we must have your attention at once. You'll never guess what's happened.
Mr Bennet My dear, I'm in the middle of a very good book. Can't it wait?
Mrs Bennet No, this is very important. You must act right away.
Mr Bennet Is the barn on fire? If not, I cannot think of anything else...
Mrs Bennet The future of our daughters is at stake. Please listen!

Music #2 - 'See Him Today'

Mrs Bennet *I've heard a rich young man bought Netherfield,
And moved in yesterday.
You must go over there,
And make yourself acquainted right away.*

K, M & L *We've heard it said, he's still unwed.*

Mrs Bennet *He has a fortune that's unrivalled in the county,
So they say*

K, M & L *Go right away, please don't delay.*

Mrs Bennet *They say he's charming,
And he has a handsome countenance as well.*

K, M & L *He is a friend to all the grandest of the gentry,
We've heard tell.*

Mrs Bennet *Oh, what a catch. We must make match!
A man like that would really suit
One of our daughters very well.*

K, M & L *Please don't delay; see him today.*

Mrs Bennet *It's such a fine opportunity, we must act speedily.
No time to waste, time is of essence,
And we may be given priority,
If we make haste.*

K, M & L *We must act with speed,
Or we shan't succeed, so hurry,
For this opportunity
May soon recede.*

Mrs Bennet *I understand he has an income
Of ten thousand pounds a year.*

K, M & L *He'll be pursued by ev'ry woman,
Who is not yet wed, we fear.*

Mrs Bennet *No time to waste.
We must make haste.
So please get ready
And depart for Netherfield at once, my dear.*

K, M & L *Go right away. See him today.*

Mrs Bennet *It is not often one comes across young men
With title to such an estate.
There'll be such fierce competition
That if we don't act now it may be too late.*

K, M & L *It would be a shame if we lost our claim,
If someone should get to him first,
Then we're out of the game!*

Mr Bennet *I do not see why I should be the one to call.
It isn't me he wants to marry after all.
I think it better if you choose
To go and see him in my place as you're so keen,
Besides you have a much more pleasant face.
You go ahead, see him instead.
I'm sure the chances of success
Would be much greater if you call.*

[Teasingly, to Mrs Bennet]

*For all we know
He might consider you the fairest of them all!*

[Mrs Bennet reacts with coy coquettishness]

Mrs Bennet *I cannot go as you well know,
It's not the decent thing to do.
It's not my place to call on him,
the obligation lies with you.*

Women *See him today,
Or we might find,
Our chance has slipped away.*

Mrs Bennet Will you go, my dear?

Mr Bennet Well, I shall give it my most earnest consideration. Now I wish to return to my book.

The girls drift off.

Mrs Bennet This is no time to be burying yourself in books. You are always reading a book.

Mr Bennet I enjoy intelligent company, and there's none finer to be found than in my books.

Mrs Bennet You must think of our daughters. Unless we can get them married - and married well - what will become of them? Jane is almost twenty-three, and still not married. She is as good-looking as I was when I was young, but much too diffident for her own good. If only she would make an effort to catch a husband, she could have anyone of her choosing. And no suitors as yet for the other four. And who will want them? Lydia is too wayward and fickle - and Kitty, too - so giddy and thinking only of her pleasures.

Mr Bennet Kitty and Lydia are young. Of course they are silly.

Mrs Bennet I am sure they are no more silly than I was when I was their age.

Mr Bennet *(Dryly)* No, I wouldn't argue with that.

Mrs Bennet Mary is a more rational girl, of course, but she never lifts her eyes from her books.

Mr Bennet But unfortunately is too stupid to learn from what she reads.

Mrs Bennet And as for Elizabeth, she is far too independent and outspoken. No man will tolerate her impudence.

Mr Bennet I will have nothing said against my Lizzy. She is worth more than all the rest put together.

Mrs Bennet Mr Bennet, you must not say such things. You take a delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves.

Mr Bennet Not true, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them daily for the past twenty years at least.

Mrs Bennet You do not know how I suffer. But what is to become of the girls? When you die, we lose everything to that dreadful Mr Collins - and then where shall we be? Oh, if only we had had a son! Then our estate would have passed on to him and we'd be all right.

Mr Bennet Well, you would insist on having five daughters in a row.

Mrs Bennet I did my best. Providence has just chosen to be improvident in our case.

MUSIC #3 - 'FIVE DAUGHTERS'

***Mrs Bennet** If only the Lord had given us a son.*

*I waited and waited,
For one to come along.
How I tried for one,
Almost died for one,
I thought sooner or later,
A son would come along.
But I was wrong.*

*Five daughters, all in a row.
Five daughters, and nothing to show for it,
Each one still single with no-one in view,
No suitors suitable. What can we do?
Oh, what shall we do?*

*Without a male heir we shall lose the whole estate.
And all we can do is just sit around and wait,
For the time to come,
When we lose our home.
We all hoped that a son would redeem us from this fate,
Now it's too late.*

*Five daughters, all in a row.
Five daughters, and nothing to show for it.
Each one still single with no-one in view,
No suitors suitable. What can we do?
Oh, what shall we do?*

*Five daughters, and all of them unwed.
Oh, what will become of them when we are both dead?
Who'll be there for them?
Who will care for them?
What will happen to them when it's time for us to go?
I just don't know.*

Scene Two

Spotlights come up on different parts of the stage to show various people - mainly the Bennet girls - getting ready for the ball.

MUSIC #4 – 'AT THE BALL TONIGHT'

***Jane** It will be such a grand affair.
Lydia It's such an agony to wait.
Elizabeth I wonder who will all be there?*

Jane *We must make sure we're not too late.*
Kitty *I must make sure I look my best.*
Lydia *I'm not quite sure about this dress.*
Jane *Oh dear, my hair looks such a mess!*
Mary *I'm all a flutter, I confess.*

Sopranos *We're going to the ball.*
Mezzos *Tonight will be the night.*
Sopranos *We'll be there one and all.*
Mezzos *When lovers' hearts take flight.*

Daughters *The band will play,
And we shall dance the night away,
While bathed in candlelight.
And as each dance trips by,
Each girl will try to catch the eye,
In hopes that handsome men are there in good supply.*

*What a grand affair.
The finest people in the land will all be there.
And everyone will be so debonair,
Exuding savoir faire,
As music fills the air,
We shall abandon ev'ry care.*

[A spotlight picks out female servants preparing a table at the ball].

Servant #1 *There's so much to prepare*
Servant #2 *It all takes so much care!*
Servant #3 *These grand occasions wear me out.*
Servant #1 *So much to do ...*
Servant #2 *I'd rather do without!*
Servant #3 *And when the night is done
When all of them have had their fun.
We stay behind to clean up after ev'ryone.*

Servants *Such a great big fuss.
It's just a lot of thankless toil for such as us.
While they're cavorting with such merriment,
Our aching backs are bent,
With ev'ry moment spent,
In endless work with no relent.*

*So they can keep their ball
When we are at their beck and call.
We only want some sleep soon, and that is all.*

[The spotlight moves from the servants back to the girls preparing for the ball].

Lydia *Such expectations fill me ...*
Kitty *Will there be one to thrill me?*
Daughters *I'm so impatient for the ball!*

Sopranos *The time's arrived at last,*
Mezzos *Tonight may be the night.*
Sopranos *Young hearts are beating fast,*

Mezzos *Tonight may be the night.*

All *There's magic in the air,
It seems a night when lovers' dreams may soon take flight.
Who knows tonight may be,
The night I find the one for me,
I just can't wait to see if he'll be there for me.*

*Such a grand affair,
You'll see fine ladies with tiaras in their hair,
And tables decked with finest silverware,
With all the choicest fare,
As music fills the air,
We'll say goodbye to ev'ry care.*

[The music slows down and a spotlight picks out Jane, dressed for the ball, as the others silently disperse].

Jane *Will he be there tonight?
The one who'll be just right for me.
Someone to love me,
And me alone.*

*I hope tonight will be,
The night I find the one for me.
That special someone,
To call my own.*

Scene Three

At the ball. A group are dancing.

MUSIC #5 – ‘ASSEMBLY WALTZ’

All *There's a dance from Vienna,
That's causing a stir.
It's a measure in three-quarter time.*

*While the old find it shocking,
And pause to demur.
All the young find it simply sublime.*

*Viennese Waltz, that's its name.
And its main claim to fame,
Is that couples embrace when they dance.*

*Some exclaim right out loud,
It should not be allowed,
Why, its even been outlawed in France!*

*Some may think it quite daring,
When they chance to see,
Couples sharing a dance-floor embrace.*

*Watch the old people staring,
They claim it to be,
Nothing short of a public disgrace.*

*Who can recall, after all,
Such a scene at a ball,
Where an arm is entwined round a waist!*

*Young folk think its just fun,
But when all's said and done,
It is not something done in good taste!*

*There's no denying,
The charm of its beat.
For it sweeps one along 'cross the floor.*

*It makes one feel giddy,
And light on ones feet,
And it always leaves one wanting more.*

[Instrumental interlude between Bars 84 and 95 as they dance].

All *Yes, it always leaves one wanting more.
Viennese Waltz, that's it's name.
And its main claim to fame,
Is that couples embrace when they dance.
Some exclaim right out loud,
It should not be allowed,
But it fuels the flame of romance.
There's a dance from Vienna,
That's causing a stir.
It's a measure in three-quarter time (it goes one-two-three).
While the old find it shocking,
And pause to demur.
All the young find it simply sublime.
Viennese Waltz, that's its name.
And its main claim to fame,
Is that couples embrace when they dance.
Some exclaim right out loud,
It should not be allowed,
Why, it's even been outlawed in France.
But it is truly a wonderful dance.*

At the end of the dance, the Bennets and their daughters appear and are approached by Mr Bingley, with Darcy and Caroline Bingley in tow.

Bingley Good evening, Mr Bennet. How nice to make your acquaintance once more. This must be your charming family. I have heard much about the charm of your daughters, and I see that I have not been misled. May we be introduced?

Mr Bennet I'm sure my family would be delighted to make your acquaintance. This is my wife. *(To Mrs Bennet)*. My dear, this is Mr Bingley.

Mrs Bennet Mr Bingley, how delighted I am to meet you. I hope you are comfortably settled in Netherfield.

Bingley I like it enormously. Such a pleasant environment, and such pleasant neighbours.

Mrs Bennet These are my daughters ... Lydia ... Kitty ... Mary ... Elizabeth ... and Jane.

Bingley It's a pleasure to meet you all. And now may I introduce my sister Caroline and my good friend Mr Fitzwilliam Darcy.

Darcy and Caroline nod to the assembly and fall into hushed conversation with each other.

Bingley (To Jane) Miss Bennet, may I have the pleasure of the next dance?

MUSIC #5A – ORCHESTRAL REPRISE (UNDERScore PART) OF ‘ASSEMBLY WALTZ’

Jane goes off with Bingley. During the following dialogue, Lydia and Kitty are led away by other dancing companions, while Mary remains standing with her parents and Elizabeth goes to sit down. Darcy retires to a neutral position and watches the proceedings with a bored air.

Mrs Bennet (To Mr Bennet) What a charming man. His friend is very handsome too, though a little distant, I thought.

Mr Bennet Yes, he was much the same when I met him yesterday.

Mrs Bennet But why didn't you tell me you had met Mr Bingley!

Mr Bennet Oh, it must have slipped my mind. I called on him yesterday morning.

Mrs Bennet But why didn't you take us with you?

Mr Bennet I wanted to get the measure of Mr Bingley with no distractions from the presence of overly curious females.

Mrs Bennet And what do you make of him?

Mr Bennet Seems a very pleasant young man ... and obviously quite wealthy too.

Mrs Bennet Oh! What a brilliant opportunity.

Music swells with the dance. As the dance comes to an end, Bingley approaches Darcy.

Bingley Come Darcy, you can't stand alone there all night. I must see you dance.

Darcy You know how I detest dancing, unless it is someone with whom I am properly acquainted. Besides, you are dancing with the only handsome woman in the room.

Bingley Oh, she is the most beautiful creature, I grant you. But look, there is one of her sisters just behind you. Don't you think she is very handsome too?

Darcy She is tolerable, I suppose; but not to my taste. And tell me, why does she sit alone, slighted by other men? It suggests a fault of temperament, perhaps. Or a dull mind. You cannot expect me to dance with someone whom others have spurned. I suggest you return to your partner and enjoy her smiles. You are wasting your time with me. Ah! I see your sister is free. I shall dance with her instead.

Bingley returns to Jane, while Darcy goes over to Caroline Bingley, who beams at his approach. A spotlight falls on Mr and Mrs Bennet. Mr Bennet gazes with disinterest into the distance, stifling a yawn. Mrs Bennet avidly watches Jane and Bingley.

Mrs Bennet Look, Mr Bennet, look how Mister Bingley dotes on our Jane. Isn't it wonderful?

Mr Bennet It's hardly surprising, my dear. Our Jane is certainly one of the most beautiful and charming young ladies in the county, and I say that of course with no concession to prejudice on my part. Mr Bingley would be a sad creature indeed if he was immune to her attractions.

Elizabeth joins them.

Mrs Bennet Oh Elizabeth, your father and I were just observing how well Mr Bingley and Jane are getting along. He's barely taken his eyes off her for a moment. Such a charming young man, don't you think? And such a gentleman!

Elizabeth Pity the same can't be said for his companion.
Mrs Bennet Who? Mr Darcy? He does seem a rather cold fish.
Mr Bennet I'd say he suffers from an excess of pride.
Elizabeth Pride? He certainly has no cause to take pride in his manners.
Mr Bennet Has he upset you, my dear Elizabeth?
Elizabeth It would take more than the conceited ramblings a self-opinionated popinjay to upset me, father.
Mr Bennet Conceited ramblings, you say?
Elizabeth Mr Darcy took pleasure in informing Mr Bingley, within my earshot, that I was not pretty enough to dance with; moreover that there must be something dreadfully wrong with my temperament, or my mind, since nobody else appeared to want to dance with me. He must have known I could hear him ... or could he be so indifferent to the consequence that it did not even occur to him? Either way, it shows a great lack of sensitivity.
Mrs Bennet Well, fortunately his friend Mr Bingley does not seem to be cut of the same cloth.

The focus switches to Bingley and Jane.

MUSIC #6 - 'BEING HERE WITH YOU'

Jane *Isn't this a pleasant way to spend an evening*
Bingley *Taking it from every point of view...*
Jane *What is your view?* [Optional sung-spoken line]
Bingley *I would say that nothing could be more delightful,
 Than being here with you.*

Jane *I don't know what to say except,* [Optional sung-spoken line]
It's very flattering that you should say so.
Bingley *I only say what's true.*
Jane *I think I feel the same way.* [Optional sung-spoken line]
Bingley *For you are without a doubt,
 The most entrancing creature;
 None can compare with you*

Jane *Such exaggeration!* [Optional sung-spoken line]
Bingley *When you appeared tonight,
 My steps were guided straight to you
 Across that crowded floor.*

Jane *I watched you walk towards me.* [Optional sung-spoken line]
Bingley *And when we spoke
 My heart and I decided
 We'd like to see you more.*

Jane *Do you use words like this with ev'ry lady?*
Bingley *No, you are quite unique,
 I thought that you were something rare and very special,
 Since first we chanced to speak.*

Jane *I do not lie when I say I have never,
 Talked like this with anyone before.*
Jane *You say such sweet things to me.* [Optional sung-spoken line]
Bingley *Such feelings started for the first time ever,
 When you walked through the door.*

Jane *I must admit that I would be delighted,
If what you say is true.*

Both *This has turned out to be the most delightful evening,
Just being here with you.*

Scene Four

Longbourn. A number of people are gathered there. Charlotte Lucas and Elizabeth are in conversation.

Charlotte Mr Bingley seems to be paying Jane a lot of attention, I've noticed.

Elizabeth Not jealous, are you?

Charlotte No, of course not. I am delighted for her.

Elizabeth I am sure there are many who do not share your delight - namely every other single young girl in Meryton, who would rather he was paying some attention to them.

Charlotte He is obviously very taken with her.

Elizabeth But then, what man in his right mind would not be?

Charlotte And what are her feelings for him?

Elizabeth I would have thought that was obvious. She likes him very much.

Charlotte I can't help feeling that Jane is being too guarded with Mr Bingley. She should show her feelings more. She should give him more encouragement. She must help him to declare his love.

Elizabeth She does as much as her nature will allow. It is not in Jane's nature to secure a husband by design. She is incapable of being other than she is, of acting by calculation. That is the beauty and the wonder of her character - a rare treasure indeed. If Mr Bingley has not enough sense to perceive that beauty of character, then he does not deserve to have her.

Mr Bennet I think this gathering needs some livening up. Music - that's what we need.

Charlotte Yes indeed. Elizabeth, do sing for us.

Elizabeth Oh Charlotte, you are always wanting me to play and sing. If my vanity had taken a musical turn, I should be grateful to you. But I would really rather not sit down and perform before those who must be used to the very best performances. *(Charlotte and others encourage her)*. Oh, very well then.

Elizabeth goes to the piano and begins to play and sing.

MUSIC #7 - 'A MAN WHO IS PROUD AND VAIN'

Elizabeth *Girls beware; ladies do take care ...
If a man is proud, if he's vain.
If allowed he will look down on all that you do,
With contempt and disdain.*

*If you're wise if you're smart,
You'll refrain from the start,
From affairs of the heart with a man who is proud,
Mark my word, you'd be better apart.*

*One who's vain only brings you pain,
Keep away from him, it is best.
Such a man will invariably cause disappointment,
When put to the test.*

*Keep your wits, keep your head,
Find another instead.,*

*It's a fate one should dread if a proud man you wed,
You will find that you're better off dead.*

*Keep away from him,
Don't delay with him,
If you stay with him you'll rue the day.*

*Don't believe in him,
Take your leave of him,
Turn and run away,
For there's no doubt,
You will grieve of him,
If you should stay.*

*You will find there's no peace of mind,
With a man who's proud, who is vain.
If allowed he will cause you to suffer,
Again and again and again.*

*So please heed this advice,
Or you'll soon pay the price.
It is no sacrifice to reject one who's proud,
And find someone who's modest and nice!*

Elizabeth bows to applause.

Mr Bennet Come, Lizzie, it is time for someone else to show off now.

Mary Oh, father, may I? I am sure it is my turn now.

Mr Bennet Very well, but not for long. And keep it lively.

Mary I have just learnt a new concerto.

Mr Bennet I think not, my dear.

Mary But it's not very long.

Mr Bennet I don't think this is the occasion.

Mary Then I shall sing instead.

She begins to play and sing, rather tunelessly.

Mr Bennet Mary, Mary, my dear ... I do think a lively tune on the pianoforte would be much the best idea. Our guests would like to dance.

Mary begins to play a waltz, and some begin to dance. Bingley and Jane approach Darcy.

Bingley *(to Darcy)* Isn't this a charming way of passing an evening?

Darcy Certainly, if one enjoys primitive pleasures. They say that savages are very fond of dancing.

Elizabeth walks past.

Bingley Elizabeth! I enjoyed your song so much. But why aren't you dancing? *(To Darcy)*. Mr Darcy, you must allow me to present the most desirable of dancing partners.

Darcy Would you care to dance with me, Miss Bennet?

Elizabeth Thank you, no. *(To Bingley)*. I assure you, Mr Bingley, I did not pass this way in order to secure a dancing partner. I have no wish to dance at this moment, and I am sure Mr Darcy doesn't either ... particularly not with someone whom he was overheard to describe as not pretty enough nor elevated enough to grace his presence on the dance floor.

Darcy *(Blushing)* If I said something of the kind, then I apologise for my bad manners and lack of perception.

Elizabeth Don't worry, Mr Darcy, it's of absolutely no consequence to me.

Elizabeth turns away, Caroline Bingley approaches Darcy.

Caroline You look somewhat disconcerted. No doubt you are irritated by the company here tonight; by the insipid entertainment and the noise. Oh the nothingness, and yet the self-importance of these people ... it's all very tiresome. I would love to hear your strictures on them.

Darcy I was not thinking of them.

Caroline What were you thinking of?

Darcy I was thinking of the curious impact a lively tongue and a fine pair of eyes can have on a man.

Caroline *(Thinking he is referring to her)* Mr Darcy, whatever do you mean?

Darcy She is a remarkable lady, Elizabeth Bennet.

Caroline Elizabeth Bennet? I am astonished.

Darcy Astonished? Yes. So am I.

Scene Five

A road in or on the outskirts of Meryton. Soldiers are marching past as Elizabeth and Lydia watch.

Lydia Aren't they a wonderful sight?

Elizabeth It's a sight we'll be getting very used to, it seems. I understand the regiment will be camped in Meryton for some months at least, if not indefinitely. There's talk that Meryton may become a permanent garrison town.

Lydia How delightful. I can't wait to meet the officer.

MUSIC #8 – 'SOLDIER'S SONG'

Soldiers *The threat of war has brought us here,
Our country to defend.
The bold militia knows no fear,
On that you may depend*

*Cannon and smoke may soon be here,
The Frenchmen pressing fast.
But our militias steadfast here,
Well triumph at the last.*

*Yet Boney's far away,
So while were here well try,
To woo the girls of Meryton,
And keep our spirits high.*

[Soldiers repeat the first two verses, a little more softly, as the girls sing the counter-melody].

Girls *Its always such a thrilling sight,
When regiments assemble.
It fills ones heart with sheer delight,
And sets ones pulse a-tremble.*

Soldiers *The threat of war has brought us here,
Our country to defend.
The bold militia knows no fear,
On that you may depend*

Girls Now that the regiment is in town,
Let ev'ry girl rejoice.
With such a lot of soldiers around,
We shall be spoilt for choice.

Soldiers Cannon and smoke may soon be here,
The Frenchmen pressing fast.
But our militias steadfast here,
Well triumph at the last.

When men are far from home,
Their hearts are easy prey.
They're much more prone to fall in love,
At least that's what they say.

Lydia A handsome and dashing Major,
Would be quite the right match for me.
Or maybe perhaps a Colonel,
What a splendid catch that would be.

Girls Now that the regiment is in town,
Let ev'ry girl rejoice.
With such a lot of soldiers around,
We shall be spoilt for choice.

Soldiers The threat of war has brought us here,
Our country to defend.
The bold militia knows no fear,
On that you may depend

Lydia Oh look! There's Isabella - with one of the officers! *(She rushes to meet her friend Isabella, who is in the company of Colonel Foster and Mr Wickham)*. Isabella, my dearest friend! I see you have wasted no time in making yourself acquainted with the officers of the regiment.

Isabella Lydia, this is Colonel Foster, and this is his friend Mr Wickham. Lydia Bennet. And here's Lydia's sister Elizabeth. Elizabeth Bennet ... Colonel Foster and Mr Wickham.

Lydia *(To Isabella)* I was wondering why we haven't seen so much of you lately. Now I know why!

Isabella *(Laughing)* There are some things one does not wish to share with friends. Colonel Foster is one of them. However, do not despair. There are many handsome and single young officers in the regiment ... and their ranks are soon to be swelled by Mr Wickham here.

Wickham Very true. I am about to join the regiment.

Lydia How splendid.

Isabella Yes, my dear Lydia, there are officers enough for you and all your five sisters. Though I believe Jane has already met her match.

Lydia You mean Mr Bingley? Oh yes. He absolutely dotes on her.

Isabella What a splendid catch for her. So handsome and charming.

Lydia And so rich!

Elizabeth I think it's a bit early to consider them a match. There's been no formal proposal as yet.

Lydia I'm sure it's only a matter of time. The problem is, they never have much time to be alone. They have so little opportunity.

Elizabeth I'm sure our dear mother will hatch some plan to ensure they get the opportunity. *(Darcy appears with Caroline Bingley. He doffs his hat to the Bennet girls, then freezes as he sees Wickham. Both he and Wickham look discomfited. They both nod curtly towards one another before Darcy moves swiftly on)*. Are you acquainted with Mr Darcy?

Wickham I have known Mr Darcy since boyhood.

Elizabeth He is your friend?

Wickham No, I am afraid there is little friendship between us. I was very close to his late father, but I must confess I find the younger Mr Darcy a rather disagreeable man.

Elizabeth I think most people see him that way.

Wickham Really? Yourself included?

Elizabeth Very much so.

Lydia Mr Wickham, would you like to come for afternoon tea at Longbourn?

Wickham I should think so, indeed. Thank you very much. *(To Elizabeth)*. Will Mr Darcy be there?

Elizabeth Would it put you off if you knew that he were.

Wickham Oh, I am not afraid of Mr Darcy. No, it would certainly not put me off, particularly if I might have the pleasure of meeting you again. I'm sorry, I hope I'm not being too presumptuous.

Elizabeth Perhaps a little. But I make no objection. After all, we have already established that we have something in common.

Wickham Though let us hope we establish something in common more positive than a mutual dislike of Mr Darcy.

Isabella Well, we must be going. We'll see you at the ball, no doubt ... if not before.

Wickham, Colonel Foster and Isabella exit.

Lydia Well, Elizabeth, you seem to have made a conquest with the dashing Mr Wickham. It's most upsetting. I was rather hoping he'd pay more attention to me.

Scene Six

The Bennet home. Jane and Mrs Bennet are doing needlework. Enter Mr Bennet with two letters.

Mr Bennet *(Giving Jane one of the letters)*. Two letters in one day! One's for you, Jane. I wonder who it might be from.

Mrs Bennet As if we don't know.

Mr Bennet opens the other letter, while Mrs Bennet hovers over Jane as she opens her letter. Jane shields the letter from her mother.

Jane It may be confidential.

Mrs Bennet What confidences can a girl have from her mother? *(To Mr Bennet)*. Who's that one from?

Mr Bennet It's from Mr Collins. He is to pay us a visit, it seems.

Mrs Bennet That vile man! I suppose he wants to inspect the property to see what he will inherit when you die.

Mr Bennet Possibly. But that's not exactly what he says.

Mrs Bennet Well what does he say?

Mr Bennet He says he wants to make peace with our family. He says he very much regrets the animosity between his late father and myself, and wishes to make amends. The man's obviously a fool.

He begins to fold up the letter, but Mrs Bennet snatches it from him and begins to read it.

Mrs Bennet Damned impertinence! I don't want him here.

Mr Bennet I think it would be unwise to turn him away.

Jane I am invited to dine at Netherfield this evening.

Mrs Bennet How splendid. You had better go on horseback.

Jane Can't I go in the coach?

Mrs Bennet Your father needs the horses for the farm.
Mr Bennet *(Looking surprised)* Do I?
Mrs Bennet *(Impatiently)* Yes of course you do. *(To Jane)*. You'll have to go on horseback.
Jane But it looks like it might rain.
Mrs Bennet Well if the weather gets too bad, they'll have to put you up overnight. Where's the harm in that?
Jane But that seems so calculating.
Mrs Bennet What's wrong with a bit of calculation? One has to use stratagems occasionally to make things happen.
Mr Bennet How do you think your mother snared me?
Jane I have no wish to snare Mr Bingley. I want things to happen naturally.