

“Pride and Prejudice”

by

Jane Austen

Adapted by

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PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

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PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

CHARACTERS

Mr Bennet

Mrs Bennet

Elizabeth Bennet

Jane Bennet

Lydia Bennet

Charlotte Lucas

Mr William Collins

Mr Fitzwilliam Darcy

Mr Charles Bingley

Caroline Bingley

Mr George Wickham

Lady Catherine de Bourgh

(First performed at the Jane Austen-House-Museum (Chawton) in September 2013)

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Act 1 - Scene 1

(The play opens in Longbourne the home of the Bennet family.

Mr Bennet is sitting in his chair reading. Mrs Bennet (his wife) is working at her sampler.

Elizabeth is writing a letter at the writing desk.

The time is the afternoon after luncheon and the lights are full up.

The house is the home of gentleman, furnishings are rich but worn.

Lydia has been out and enters the room excitedly, as she enters she throws her bonnet onto a chair.

Her father looks up and shakes his head and settles further into his chair. Mrs Bennet stops her working and looks up)

Lydia Mama, you will never guess so I will tell you. I have the most talked about, never to be forgotten, best news.....

Mrs B Lydia please calm down

Lydia But Mama?

Mrs B Lydia, where have you been, we have not seen you since Luncheon

Elizabeth (Looking up) You really should have been home Lydia, it has been some time.

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Lydia (Shrugging) but mama it has to be the most exciting news ever. Lizzie you will hear it won't you?

Elizabeth What news could you be bringing home and from where?

Mrs B Do be quiet Elizabeth, write your letter or something.... let us here from Lydia?

Now my dear daughter, what has made you so excited?

Lydia Well, I am trying to tell you. (glaring at Elizabeth). I have been walking as you know when I came upon our cousin Charlotte – truly Charlotte is the oddest oddity in all the world ...

Mrs B Please Lydia, you can be most trying (pulling out a handkerchief and mopping her brow) get on with it girl, oh, Mr Bennet, cannot our girls be most wearisome?

(to Lydia) I so wish you would spend more time with your embroidery, have you no respect for my nerves?

Mr B (Looking up) you must endeavour not to be so readily upset my dearest.

Mrs B Did you speak Mr Bennet?

Mr B I am aware Mrs Bennet, that the subject of your nerves has supplied us with ample conversation for nearly a quarter of a century and is therefore not to be dismissed, but I express the hope that you will not be too distressed much longer. (He returns to his reading. Elizabeth smiles to herself as her letter, she continues writing Lydia is becoming more excitable).

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Lydia (With a huge sigh) mama, papa Lizzie... Netherfield Park has been let to a Mr Bingley and theres more..his friend Mr Darcy is staying with him and there's more the Militia are stationed in Meryton (breathless)..... now what do you think of that? (Self satisfied, watching for the reaction before she carried on....)

Lydia Oh Mama, there is more.....Mr Bingley is a man of large fortune; well do you want to know how much..Papa (she looks to Mr Bennet)

Mr B Lydia, if you want to tell us please then just tell us, I have no objection to hearing it.

Lydia Mr Bingley is said to have four to five thousand a year and Mr Darcy is even richer.

Mrs B (Rising), Netherfield Park, the Militia (pause) let? Oh Mr Bennet, girls, I'm all of a dither! Mr Bingley...rich...and his very good friend even more...I feel quite faint with the joy.

Mr B How so Mrs Bennet, How can it affect our girls? (glancing at Elizabeth)

Mrs B (ignoring the comment) my dear Lydia, where did you hear such news?

Lydia Well, Aunt Lucas heard it from Mrs Long

Mrs B Am I the last to hear news as exciting as this,

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- Lydia** Mr Bingley visited Aunt Lucas, there is to be a ball. Oh Mama, men, soldiers in uniform....
- Mrs B** Oh, (feigning a weakness, grasping for the sofa). Mr Bingley, visiting Aunt Lucas and us not even knowing.
- Mr B** It occurs to me, Mrs Bennet, that the officers who also visit her aunt may not be unconnected with walks after luncheon and her restlessness. Her desire for exercise coincided almost exactly with the arrival of the militia, if I remember rightly.
- Mrs B** (brightening) You think so? Oh I do hope so. Think of it Mr Bennet, The militia stationed in Meryton and then a charming young man in Mr Bingley taking Netherfield Park. He is rich and has other rich friends. It seems that providence is with us after all. (highly delighted).
- Mr B** Providence with us Mrs Bennet, how so?
- Mrs B** (coyly) Why Mr Bennet, our girls, I am thinking of them marrying and very well indeed.
- Lydia** (She is now very excited, imparting news that only she had) Mr Bingley is a single man from the North of England, I must tell Jane and Mary the news. Oh Mama it is all too exciting... huh (breathing in) ...the Militia... all those officers.
- (Lydia exits)

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(Mr and Mrs Bennet are left with differing thoughts about the news from Lydia, Mrs Bennet already making plans and Mr Bennet just wanting to slip away to the solace of his office. Lizzie is bemused.)

Mrs B (to Mr Bennet) Mr Bennet, is this not good news, you must with visit him, (she crosses to Lizzie) Elizabeth, please tell your father he must visit Mr Bingley, this is an opportunity not to be missed.

Elizabeth (Rising amused, she glances at her father) I have finished my letter to Aunt Gardiner, she invites us to London whenever we wish. (she exits)

Mrs B Really, Lizzie shows no interest in marrying at all, of course, Jane is the prettier, but that is no reason why she should not want to marry. She runs around the hills, jumps styles, takes long walks along the paths, admires and collects flowers, writes letters, she leaves me breathless.

Mr B My Lizzy, she has more of a quickness of mind than her sisters, she has a little more about her

Mrs B You are always showing a preference for Lizzy. Tush, she is not half as handsome as Jane or as good humoured as Lydia, you take delight in vexing me. Mr Bennet, are you to visit Mr Bingley? (Swooning on to the sofa) You have no compassion for my nerves.

Mr B To the contrary my dear, you and your nerves are my old friends. Now I must away to my library (rising as the girls enter)

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(Jane and Lizzie enter)

Mrs B You have said nothing about visiting Mr Bingley. Say you will visit him soon, Aunt Lucas has already met him and of course there is Charlotte. (Sitting on the sofa vexed) Jane, Lizzie, your father refuses to visit with Mr Bingley.

Mr B Tell me my dear? (enjoying himself) Has Mr Bingley moved to Netherfield solely to marry one of our girls?

Mrs B (to Mr B) How can you say so? How can you say such things?

Jane Lizzie has just told me about the new tenant of Netherfield Hall - a Mr Bingley.
We are bound to meet him at the Assembly rooms, there are many other girls who will want to be introduced to him, Mrs Long has two daughters.

Elizabeth (said with humour) Aunt Lucas has Charlotte (she glances at her father smiling)

Mr B Then I am sure, Mr Bingley will not be short of company.

Mrs B Oh, (handkerchief to brow) I am having one of headaches (she swoons back on the settee)
Girls, we will not be introduced to Mr Bingley, we will not make advances to Mr Bingley, I wish Mr Bingley had taken somewhere else to live.

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Elizabeth Why so Mama?

Mrs B Your father will neither write nor visit Netherfield. Oh dear, Aunt Lucas has already met Mr Bingley and Charlotte introduced to him, I wish I had never heard of Mr Bingley.

Mr B Well Mrs Bennet, then I wish I had not taken the time to visit Netherfield earlier this morning and invited him to visit us this afternoon, I was also introduced to Mr Darcy, who seems to be a trifle arrogant, but Mr Bingley was more than affable.

Mrs B (rising, headache mysteriously gone) Oh Mr Bennet (to Lizzie and Jane) is not your father the best father. What a fine thing for our girls.

(Lizzie and Jane exit giggling)

Mr B We must not be mercenary my dear

Mrs B I think you tease me

Mr B No dearest never.

Mrs B Mr Bennet, when you are dead, your daughters and I will be penniless, you must know it is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy and one richer than the other, oh how wonderful life is. Our girls married?

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Mr B Well, it is pleasant to know that you have something to look forward to; you are in such a merry mood Mrs Bennet. Now, I must away to my library, we have visitors this afternoon.

Mrs B That wretched clergyman?

Mr B Hopefully not as yet my dear, we are to expect Mr Bingley, Miss Bingley and Mr Darcy.

Mrs B Here, this afternoon, did you not invite them to dinner. Oh Mr Bennet, we are not ready to receive them,

Mr B We are invited to the ball at Netherfield, he cannot agree to dinner, but he wanted to bring the invitations himself, he thought he might like to see Longbourne.
Another situation for your nerves my dear.

Mrs B Mr Bennet, You may not believe I have feelings for you, but I do.

Mr B Yes, quite so. We must now wait for the arrival of my dear nephew; you can be rest assured that he will arrive promptly.

Mrs B A beastly little cleric inheriting what is rightfully ours.

Mr B Come my dear I did not make the law of entail, the fault must be with you

Mrs B With me, how so Mr Bennet?

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Mr B You presented me with daughters instead of sons; I did my part well enough.

The law of entail must have been forgotten.

Mrs B Really Mr Bennet, you are somewhat late in speaking of your displeasure, are you dissatisfied? No man ever owned such a fine family. Girls instead of boys and so our estate must pass to that miserable cleric and to add insult to injury he is invited as a guest.

Mr B No my dear, after my letter, he invited himself. The law has it that he is to inherit Longbourne in the absence of a son. Mr Collin's has hinted in his letter that he may be able to resolve the problem of the entail, he states that he wishes to make every possible amends, so we must listen to him when he arrives.

I am sure he will be punctual.

(Mr Bennet rises to take himself off to his library, the arrival of Mr Collins stops him. Mr Collins enters. He is a formal young man, insensitive, pompous and smug).

Collins (Bowing low) I must say Mrs Bennet that I am in admiration of your house and grounds, very well cared for, not over grand of course, no, but comfortable yes, I have taken the opportunity of moving from room to room in observation you understand given the entail although I have no wish of injuring your daughters, I can assure you I am here to make amends, I trust my intrusion is not....

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Mr B An intrusion mmmm, on the dot my dear Nephew, my wife and I (indicating to Mrs Bennet) were just speaking of your arrival and presence in the house, were we not my dear. Pray seat yourself.

(Mr Bennet also returns to his seat, Mr Collins also sits)

Mrs B Well Mr Collins, I shall not be the person to discourage you, in your letter, you spoke of making amends, what way do you mean to make the atonement you think is due?

Collins Ah! Thank you – yes most kind.

Mrs B (warming to him) You will take tea Mr Collins? I trust you found your room to your liking?

Collins Thank you, I took the liberty of taking tea in my room, I was writing a letter to my Patroness, the Lady Catherine de Burgh. Mr Bennet, upon my word, since I lost my poor father (said crossing himself and hands together in prayerfulness) and hoping to heal the breach that has fallen between us, since my ordination at Easter and most fortunate patronage of The Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Burgh, widow of Sir Lewis de Burgh, it is my earnest endeavour as a clergyman and I felt it my most ardent duty to call upon you to establish the blessing of peace upon your family, in fact all families, of course I flatter myself that my overtures of good intention will be deemed commendable. I thank you for receiving me into your house, I am sure you will be deeply saddened by the fact that I can only stay until

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Saturday, I must return to my humble parsonage at Hunsford which I may say hosts a path directly to Rosings, the home of the Lady Catherine de Burgh, my patroness, widow to Sir Lewis de Bourgh.

Mr B (said with humour)Widow to Sir Lewis de Burgh... yes we know. We will grieve your leaving greatly Nephew as you return to your patroness.

Collins My dear Mr Bennet, I feel your grief naturally, I understand your anxiety of course, you wish to settle your daughters and I am here to hold my hand out to you, to offer you the ‘Olive Branch’, I flatter myself that I am in the position, due to my patroness, to look favourably upon your daughters, my cousins to whom I hold in high regard.

Mrs B What is he talking about? I fear an attack upon my poor nerves.

Mr B I should mention Mr Collins that in addition to nerves, Mrs Bennet suffers from curiosity, the first compliments the second, but always brings on a painful attack of the other.

Collins Mrs Bennet, Lady Catherine, For I have been given permission, and the honour to call her Lady Catherine (said in reverence)....has always spoken to me as any other gentleman, I have never seen anything but affability in her.....

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Mrs B Mr Collins.....I am sure you must be a very proud man to have such an association, but I, we (looking at Mr Bennet), are anxious to know about (dithering)...the Olive branch ... or something....

Collins I will be making my point I can assure you my good lady, you must know that when I visit Rosings I listen to every word of advice offered to me by Lady Catherine whilst dining in her company. Mr Collins she said, Mr Collins, Mrs Bennet has a fine family of daughters all of marriageable age, as you are to inherit Longbourne, it may affect their opportunities to marry, which brings me to the reason for my visit.

Mrs B Marriage, to one of our girls? Oh Mr Collins, my poor girls, it is a grievous affair you must confess.

Collins I am sensible madam to the hardship of my fair cousins and I come to admire them, to become better acquainted with each of them. I have rank, a fair and fine living, And of course sound advice, whom ever I choose will not want I can assure you.

Collins I will continue if you are not bored by my ramblings and overtures.

Mr B (Rising) What a thought! Well, I have duties around the house, please forgive me. You will find Mrs Bennet a very willing listener.

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(Mr Bennet leaves as Jane enters)

Jane Papa, where are you going in such haste?

Mr B Out my dear, duty calls, I leave Mr Collins entertaining with Mother.

Collins My dear Miss Bennet, you are indeed beautiful. (he kisses her hand)

Jane (Withdrawing her hand she is perplexed), pray be seated sir. (to her mother) I thought Elizabeth was here?

Mrs B She left a few moments ago; she was writing a letter to your Aunt Gardner, I believe she left the house with it.

Jane I wished to speak with her (exiting and acknowledging Mr Collins).

Mrs B Pray sit with us Jane I entreat you.

Collins Please Miss Bennet, I have arranged a cushion for you.

Mrs B Mr Collins was complimenting me greatly Jane as to the beauty of my daughters and how favourably he looked upon you all with regard to his marrying.

Jane Indeed, of course Mr Collins is aware of the entailment and the position to which it puts us, his cousins.

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- Collins** My letter to your dear father suggested that in some way, I may make amends, I trust you understand.
- Jane** Mama, Lydia is growing up but is very young, Lizzie shows no inclination towards marriage...
- Collins** Miss Jane, I think you have your Mother to thank for your beauty; it is quite obvious from whence it comes.
- Mrs B** You flatter me Mr Collins.
- Collins** To look at you Mrs Bennet, to observe you, not merely strange, but unbelievable. I will find myself flattered when I dance with your daughters at the ball, one by one, but none more than your daughter Jane (takes Jane's hand again and goes to kiss it)
- Mrs B** Oh, Mr Collins, Jane will not have any dances on her card, they will be completely taken up by Mr Bingley.
- Collins** Oh, Mr Bingley has declared himself?
- Mrs B** He said as much when he visited us this afternoon, showing a great deal of interest in our eldest daughter. He looked at her and be sure he will declare his interest.
- Jane** Please Mama, this cannot interest Mr Collins.
- (Enter Elizabeth and Charlotte Lucas; she stands wondering what has happened).

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Elizabeth Mama, Mr Collins, I have brought Charlotte with me

Collins Miss Elizabeth, Miss Lucas.

Mrs B Lizzie, I am just assuring Mr Collins that Jane is spoken for and Mr Bingley is the most excessively handsome man and quite delightful, but his friend however seems excessively disagreeable, hardly spoke a word as he looked around Longbourne, Miss Bingley on the other hand, so refined, Jane should do very nicely, very nicely indeed.

Elizabeth All very proper I am sure eh Charlotte.

Mrs B Charlotte my dear, you will not be acquainted with Mr Collins.

Charlotte Indeed I am, (Mr Collins bow to her) we met in Meryton when he was on his way to Longbourne. I was standing looking in the window of the bookshop waiting for my father.

Collins Miss Lucas and I had the most interesting discussion on books as I stopped off to buy the book on Fordyce's Sermons. So few young ladies nowadays prefer serious reading to frivolities. How is Sir William Miss Lucas?

Charlotte (To Mrs Bennet) My father is well thank you. But my Mother is unwell again, she asked me to bring you this note.

Mrs B (opening the note) it seems that she is indisposed and unable to attend the ball and asks if Charlotte would like to attend with us. Of course Charlotte I will answer the note.

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Charlotte Thanks you Mrs Bennet, I will take my leave goodbye
Lizzie, Mr Collins, Marm.

(Charlotte exits).

Mrs B We look forward to the ball, there has not been a ball around here in ages. Mr Darcy will be in attendance no doubt with his highhanded attitude.

Collins Mr Darcy, high and conceited? In fairness, he is the nephew of my patroness; I refer of course to the Lady Catherine de Bourge. I have never in my life witnessed haughty or proud behaviour in such a person of rank. She has condescended to advise me to marry as soon as possible provided of course I choose with discretion. I have dined twice at Rosings, and she has actually been once inside my humble abode – there.

Elizabeth Mr Darcy cannot possibly be conceited or high in opinion can he? (sarcastic)

Mrs B It is a pity that great ladies in general are not more like her. Lizzie, where is Lydia, I have not seen her for some time

Elizabeth She was outside in the garden Mama

Collins Miss Elizabeth, I would very much like to put to you a proposition, perhaps we could find time to discuss this at sometime today?

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Elizabeth (dismissing the request) Mama, I have just discovered that Lydia's ball gown was torn at the assemblies and is not yet mended.

Mrs B Mr Collins who would have daughters? Well, I will not mend it for her. Mr Collins, never have daughters if you are a woman

Collins Quite. (smiles) I would like to work on my sermon, may I request some writing paper?

Mr Collins Exits, lights down. Mrs Bennet picks up her sampler and sits down.

(End of Scene 1)