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Lizzy, Darcy and Jane
By Joanna Alexandra Norland

Cast of Characters

In order of speaking

JANE AUSTEN (hereinafter, JANE) aged 20 in Act I and 26 in Act II

CHARLES BINGLEY (hereinafter, MR. BINGLEY) aged 25

FITZWILLIAM DARCY (hereinafter, MR. DARCY) aged 27

ELIZABETH BENNET (hereinafter, ELIZABETH) aged 20 in Act I and aged 26 and 20 in Act II

HARRIS BIGG-WITHER (hereinafter, HARRIS) aged 15 in Act I and 21 in Act II

TOM LEFROY (hereinafter, TOM) aged 20

MRS. CASSANDRA AUSTEN (hereinafter, MRS. AUSTEN) aged 40

WILLIAM COLLINS (hereinafter, MR. COLLINS) aged 25

MADAME LEFROY aged 50

LADY CATHERINE DE BOURGH (hereinafter, LADY CATHERINE) aged 50

ALETHEA BIGG (hereinafter, ALETHEA) aged 35

MISS CASSANDRA AUSTEN (hereinafter, CASSANDRA) aged 28

Multiple roles may be played by certain actors to highlight the interconnections between Jane Austen's life and fiction. The following roles may be played by a single actor:

MR. DARCY and TOM LEFROY;

MR. BINGLEY, HARRIS BIGG-WITHER and WILLIAM COLLINS;

MADAME LEFROY, LADY CATHERINE and ALETHEA; and

MRS. AUSTEN and CASSANDRA.

Act I

Scene 1

Evening, January, 1796. The ballroom at the home of the Bigg-Withers, a wealthy landed family. Dance music plays in the background. The actors playing MR. BINGLEY/HARRIS/MR. COLLINS, MR. DARCY/TOM LEFROY and MADAME LEFROY/LADY CATHERINE. sit at a game table, upstage left. Each holds a hand of cards.

(JANE enters)

JANE

Impossible man. Intolerable man. I have walked by Mr. Lefroy's game table three times, and not once did he look up from his hand.

If I do not please him, why did he invite me to dance twice at the Heartleys' ball last week? And if I do please him, why does he insist on playing cards tonight? I wish that men at balls behaved more like men in novels. My Mr. Bingley always chooses dancing over cards. Is that not so, Mr. Bingley?

(louder)

I said, is that not so, Mr. Bingley?

(MR. BINGLEY rises from the game table and approaches JANE)

MR. BINGLEY

Most definitely. Particularly with so many lovely ladies assembled.

JANE

Thank you, Mr. Bingley. You always say the most enchanting things.

MR. BINGLEY

Miss Jane Austen is too kind.

JANE

Your charm should not surprise me. The moment I penned your name, I decided that you should be the most delightful man in the world. And to settle the matter, I gave you an income of five thousand pounds a year.

MR. BINGLEY

Is that my income? I can never recall the exact figure.

JANE

It is in your nature to be affable, not precise.

MR. BINGLEY

It is in my nature to dance. I have been ever so impatient for a ball.

JANE

Shame on me! I promised you a ball to welcome you to your new neighbourhood!

MR. BINGLEY

On page seventeen, you mentioned that there was soon to be a gathering at the Assembly Rooms. Only then—

JANE

— I set my novel aside for days. My excuse was that the Bigg-Withers petitioned me to write a theatrical for new year. But even that remains unfinished while I squandered my time flirting with my Irish friend. I am glad that Mr. Lefroy's leaves for Lincoln's Inn next week—

(mimicking TOM)

“to devote himself to the mysteries of the law”

MR. BINGLEY

He will regret the wasted opportunity to dance when he is forced to burrow in the library.

JANE

(inspired)

I will be avenged yet. That is what novels are for. I will give you a conceited, arrogant friend who always refuses to dance. A failing for which he will be universally derided.

(JANE approaches TOM, takes him by the hand and transforms him into MR. DARCY)

JANE (Cont'd)

You are far too serious to dance, are you not . . . Mr. . . . Mr. Darcy.

MR. DARCY

Dancing does not suit all tastes or moods.

JANE

Mr. Darcy has never cared for dancing.

(to MR. BINGLEY)

Even when you first met . . . at Cambridge.

MR. BINGLEY

In our first year. Michaelmas term.

MR. DARCY

It was I who first acquainted Bingley with the alarming intelligence that our college possessed a library.

MR. BINGLEY

If it wasn't for Darcy, I should never have known that our college even had a library, let alone that I was meant to be a patron. But he is a capital fellow, I assure you.

JANE

I do not think that all of Mr. Darcy's acquaintances would agree.

MR. DARCY

I consider their censure a relief, given the quality of their judgment on other matters.

MR. BINGLEY

Do not pay Darcy any mind. This is always his manner upon a first meeting.

JANE

His manners could not please me more. They accentuate your charm. Jane Bennet will notice the contrast between you when she meets you at the ball.

MR. BINGLEY

(delighted)

Is it certain that the eldest Miss Bennet will attend?

MR. DARCY

I cannot imagine that she has any competing engagements.

JANE

Of course my pretty heroine will be there. Accompanied by her three sisters, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia.

MR. BINGLEY

The entire neighbourhood talks of her beauty.

MR. DARCY

The entire neighbourhood cannot supply many alternative subjects of conversation.

JANE

When you are introduced to Miss Jane Bennet, Mr. Bingley, you will not disagree with the report that she is uncommonly handsome.

(JANE assumes the role of Jane Bennet and curtseys)

MR. BINGLEY

Good evening, Miss Bennet.

JANE

Good evening, Mr. Bingley.

MR. BINGLEY

(to MR. DARCY)

Handsome? Why she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld.

(MR. BINGLEY holds out his hand to JANE in introduction)

Miss Bennet, I am delighted to form your acquaintance.

(MR. BINGLEY and JANE begin to dance)

JANE

We are honored that you attend our assembly this evening, Sir.

MR. BINGLEY

I am ever so fond of dancing.

JANE

(as herself)

To be fond of dancing is a certain step towards falling in love.

MR. BINGLEY

(falling in love with Jane Bennet as he speaks)

What an enchanting evening, Miss Bennet!

(aside to MR. DARCY)

And what an enchanting lady.

JANE

(resuming the role of Jane Bennet)

I hope you will be happy in Hampshire, Sir.

MR. BINGLEY

Are balls in Hampshire always this lively?

MR. DARCY

And are they always this long, and attended by such tiresome company?

JANE

(as herself for the duration of the play)

Tiresome . . . Does Mr. Lefroy also thinks us tiresome?

MR. BINGLEY

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

MR. DARCY

I certainly shall not. At such an assembly as this it would be insupportable.

MR. BINGLEY

You jest!

MR. DARCY

There is not a woman in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with.

JANE

Mr. Lefroy is of the same mind tonight. I suppose that like Mr. Darcy, he prefers the fine ladies of London. Of course he does.

(JANE begins to cry. ELIZABETH BENNET enters)

JANE (Cont'd)

And to make matters worse, young Master Bigg-Wither intercepted me at the punch bowl and insisted that I save him a dance. If only my sister were here. Cassandra would know how to advise me.

ELIZABETH

I hope that she would upbraid you sharply first. Fancy making yourself wretched on account of a man who plants himself at the game table with his graying elders.

JANE

Obviously, he sees little else to tempt him.

ELIZABETH

Are you surprised? A woman weeping into her handkerchief can hardly expect to inspire admiration in the opposite sex – let alone good sense in her own.

JANE

I am utterly ridiculous. Spurned by my would-be partner, I stand here alone and dream up suitors for my heroine. I wish I had never taken up novel writing. There is nothing more ridiculous.

ELIZABETH

That is a rather insulting thing to say to a character from a novel.

JANE

Oh. I beg your pardon.

(pause)

Which character are you? And from which novel?

ELIZABETH

I have not yet made up my mind. For now, kindly cease your sniveling so that we may follow the exchange between these two gentlemen.

JANE

We might as well. I have no competing engagements.

MR. BINGLEY

(rejoining MR. DARCY)

I would not be so fastidious as you for a kingdom, Darcy! Upon my honour, I never met with such pleasant company, or so many agreeable ladies. And accomplished, too.

MR. DARCY

Accomplished?

MR. BINGLEY

It is amazing to me how young ladies have the patience to be so very accomplished as they all are.

MR. DARCY

All ladies accomplished?

MR. BINGLEY

They all seem accomplished to me.

MR. DARCY

I cannot boast of knowing more than half a dozen such women in the whole range of my acquaintance.

ELIZABETH

(the gentlemen do not hear her)

That man must comprehend a great deal in his idea of an accomplished woman. I suppose that a lady must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages to deserve the word.

MR. DARCY

To deserve the word, a lady must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages.

JANE

Does Mr. Lefroy also seek such a woman?

ELIZABETH

If he does, then he deserves to find her, for she is certain to be insufferable.

MR. DARCY

And to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.

ELIZABETH

All these attributes united? In that case, I am no longer surprised at his knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at his knowing any.

JANE

Miss, your turns of phrase are clever. But you would not be so flippant if you were slighted by a gentleman of consequence.

ELIZABETH

Is that so?

JANE

Suppose my Mr. Darcy were to put you to the test.

ELIZABETH

Suppose he were.

MR. BINGLEY

Well, whether the ladies at this ball are accomplished or not, you cannot deny that they are uncommonly pretty.

(indicating ELIZABETH)

Look! Here stands a lady in want of a partner. She is very pretty and, I dare say very agreeable.

JANE

Mr. Darcy, do your worst.

MR. DARCY

Which lady do you mean?

(MR. DARCY turns a critical eye to ELIZABETH)

Oh. She is tolerable.

ELIZABETH

Tolerable?

MR. DARCY

But not handsome enough to tempt me. I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men.

ELIZABETH

Is that so?

JANE

You see. It is not so pleasant to be snubbed.

ELIZABETH

As Mr. Darcy is about to discover.

(ELIZABETH approaches MR. DARCY)

ELIZABETH (Cont'd)

Dear Sir, pray do not admit that I am tolerable. Make no such concession.

JANE

(taken aback by ELIZABETH's boldness)

Oh!

MR. BINGLEY

Oh dear.

ELIZABETH

Were I to believe myself worthy of being tolerated by a Mr. Darcy, the compliment would turn my head. I might even begin to aspire to dancing with the first valet to Mr. Darcy's second footman. And what an insult that would be to the house of . . . the house of . . . ?

JANE

(constructing the story as she speaks)

Pemberley. The house of Pemberley, in Darbyshire. Mr. Darcy is the master of Pemberley, with an income of nine . . . no, ten thousand pounds a year.

ELIZABETH

Perhaps he should invest some of his income in lessons on manners.

MR. DARCY

You expect me to be mortified, and to stammer a retraction. But why should I apologize to you for remarks spoken in confidence to another?

ELIZABETH

Why do you make confidential remarks where you are bound to be overheard?

MR. DARCY

My meaning was that I never dance unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner.

MR. BINGLEY

(attempting to diffuse the situation)

I can vouch for that. I have known Darcy to sit out dozens of dances because no lady of his acquaintance was present.

ELIZABETH

And of course, no one can ever become acquainted at a ball.

MR. DARCY

Acquainted, perhaps, if to be acquainted is to ascertain that we agree that the weather is uncommonly seasonable for this time of year. I cannot consider myself to be properly acquainted with a lady unless we have thoroughly exchanged our views on books—

ELIZABETH

I am sure we never read the same, or not with the same feelings.

MR. DARCY

As well as music—

ELIZABETH

I do not lay claim to any superior technique at my keyboard.

MR. DARCY

And we must also have discussed . . .

ELIZABETH

Yes?

MR. DARCY

The subject matter is not of primary importance. There is a certain sort of lady who will treat every subject as an object of mockery or derision

ELIZABETH

A certain sort of lady?

MR. DARCY

A certain sort of unmarried lady — Unmarried and, I dare say, unmarriageable.

JANE

Oh!

ELIZABETH

Unmarried and, I dare say, determined to remain in that state until she finds a man who warrants her serious attention. In the meantime, she will make no apology for laughing at follies and nonsense whenever she can.

(JANE bursts into applause)

JANE

Bravo! Bravo!

MR. BINGLEY

I so dislike arguments. If you would conclude yours, I shall be very thankful.

ELIZABETH

What you ask is no sacrifice on my side. The moon is full, the music is lively, and the night is short. Miss Austen, if your Mr. Darcy will not dance, I have no further use for him.

MR. BINGLEY

We had better join the game table, Darcy.

(MR. DARCY bows and repairs to the game table with
Mr. BINGLEY. JANE approaches ELIZABETH)

ELIZABETH

Impossible man! Intolerable man!

JANE

But he could not thwart your spirit, while I allowed Mr. Lefroy to reduce me to tears. Bravo to you! From now on, I will make you my model, Miss . . . Miss . . . But who are you? You could be one of my heroine's neighbours. Or one of her sisters. But which? You are too sensible to be Lydia, and you are no peevish Kitty or bookish Mary.

ELIZABETH

Lydia, Kitty, and Mary. Are any of them proper companions for your heroine?

JANE

The Bennet sisters provide comedy, not companionship. They are a rather silly trio.

ELIZABETH

How lonely your heroine must be.

JANE

I had not thought of that. A woman experiencing her first love ought to have a dependable sister to confide in by candlelight as they undress for bed. Do you volunteer for the role?

ELIZABETH

If I am to be a sister, I must be a younger sister. Too much is expected of the eldest.

JANE

Jane Bennet will be your senior by a year. I am delighted to form your acquaintance, Miss—

ELIZABETH

Elizabeth.

JANE

Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

ELIZABETH

You may call me Lizzy.

JANE

And you must call me Jane. So there are five Bennet sisters. . . Five unprovided for Bennet sisters at that. The whole lot of you are doomed to poverty and want unless you find suitable husbands, for your father's estate will be entailed away to a distant cousin upon his death.

ELIZABETH

You might have warned me of my incipient ruin before I agreed to be a Bennet.

JANE

We have that in common, you and I, the threat of a destitute and miserable old age. Never mind. What fun we will have in the meantime. My sweet heroine requires a sister with spirit.

ELIZABETH

I shall enjoy being a heroine's confidante.

JANE

You will not begrudge your sister her leading role?

ELIZABETH

It is such a terrible responsibility to be a heroine, always setting an example. A heroine's sister can make an appearance when a scene wants enlivening. But no one misses her if she disappears on a solitary ramble on a rainy afternoon and returns three chapters later, her petticoats splattered with mud.

JANE

Petticoats splattered with mud . . . I must make a note of that.

(JANE retrieves a notebook from her reticule.
HARRIS approaches)

JANE (Cont'd)

Oh dear.

ELIZABETH

What is it?

JANE

The heir to this fine house. Hide me!

ELIZABETH

Is a lad of fifteen such a menace?

JANE

He is sixteen to be precise, and most determined.

HARRIS

Miss Austen!

JANE

Master Bigg-Wither.

HARRIS

You promised me a dance.

JANE

Well remembered, Sir.

(HARRIS leads JANE to the dance floor. They dance awkwardly during the ensuing interchange)

HARRIS

I shall marry you when I am twenty-one. See if I shan't.

JANE

Sir, you speak with great authority on the subject.

HARRIS

I told my sister that I shall marry you, and she said that it was a very good idea.

JANE

(amused)

Did she?

HARRIS

"I am sure that Parson Austen's daughter never dreamed of becoming the mistress of this house." That is what Alethea said.

JANE

(somewhat dismayed)

Did she?

HARRIS

Then she said, "it would be such a relief to see Miss Jane Austen well settled."

JANE

(with increased dismay)

Did she?

(beat)

It is your turn to lead down the middle.

HARRIS

Oh bother.

(he hastily executes the move)

And I said to Alethea that when you become my wife, you will fetch my slippers for me every night.

JANE

The heir to this fine estate deserves no less. But here, I have a confession to make. I have a dreadful habit of misplacing slippers and that sort of thing.

HARRIS

I will keep my slippers under my bed, and you will always know where to find them.

(The music ends)

Since we are to be married, we must dance the next set.

(TOM rises)

ELIZABETH

Look! Mr. Lefroy! Like Lazarus.

(TOM approaches the others)

JANE

I shall not be the first to speak.

(TOM makes a move to speak to JANE. When she makes herself unapproachable, he changes tack, and addresses HARRIS)

TOM

Master Bigg-Wither, does Miss Austen monopolise your attention, forcing you to neglect your other guests?

HARRIS

No. I—

TOM

I know how difficult it is to tear one's self away from a fine pair of eyes in the face of a pretty woman. And so, to assist you, I volunteer to escort Miss Austen in the next set. That is, if the lady does not object.

JANE

If you insist, Sir. For Master Bigg-Wither's sake.

HARRIS

Miss Austen was to dance with me!

JANE

Be consoled, Harris. I may dance with others, but I shall always recall where you keep your bedroom slippers.

HARRIS

We should never have invited strangers to our ball. I told Alethea as much.

(HARRIS retreats to the card table)

TOM

(with mock seriousness)

Miss Austen, I must inform you that a report of a most serious and alarming nature is circulating. A report with you as its subject.

JANE

(unsure what to make of TOM's manner)

What sort of report, Mr. Lefroy?

TOM

A report so scandalous that I must have it contradicted at once.

JANE

I cannot think—

TOM

I am told that you are writing a theatrical to be performed next week.

JANE

Only a short sketch.

TOM

I could not believe that you would engage in such frivolity—

JANE

A wintertime lark—our custom this time of year.

TOM

I could not believe that you would engage in such unseemly frivolity . . . without offering me a role.

JANE

(brightening)

I should have guessed what you were after!

TOM

Now tell me. Who am I to play?

JANE

Judging by your performance this evening, you will play the rheumatic grandfather hunched over the game table.

TOM

Judging by my plight this evening, I should play the wounded swain who consoles himself with victories at cards for losses on the dance floor. I did not realise that I had a rival in young Master Bigg-Wither.

ELIZABETH

Many things escape a gentleman's attention when he fixes it to the game table.

JANE

Indeed!

TOM

(playfully)

This is not to be endured. I must challenge Master Bigg-Wither to a duel.

JANE

(entering into the game)

The swain would slaughter his rival?

TOM

Does he have a choice?

JANE

Is there no other way to appease his pride?

TOM

None that I can think of . . . unless . . . unless the lady were to tender evidence that the swain is her preferred contender.

JANE

What evidence would suffice?

TOM

Were the swain less of a gentleman, he might suggest such means as would make a lady blush.

JANE

But the swain is a gentleman.

TOM

And as he is a gentleman, the lady would have no reason to deny him—
(TOM and JANE are about to kiss, then break away)
a lock of her hair.

JANE

Oh my.

(MRS. AUSTEN approaches)

MRS. AUSTEN

What a chill there is in the ballroom this evening.

JANE

Is there, Mamma? I had not noticed.

MRS. AUSTEN

With the party thinning out, there is. I had no business going out at all tonight, let alone staying up until all hours. Mr. Landers said so. "With joints like yours," he said, "the only thing to do is to stay at home with a cup of nettle tea."

JANE

How could you think of staying home on a night like this?

MRS. AUSTEN

I think it a very dull party.

JANE

After the next dance, I will sit with you.

MRS. AUSTEN

It is time for us to go.

JANE

But guests are still arriving.

MRS. AUSTEN

Have you no consideration for my joints?

JANE

What will Miss Alethea think?

MRS. AUSTEN

I will make our excuses.

JANE

Mamma!

MRS. AUSTEN

Now, Jane.

JANE

Mamma, I am engaged to Mr. Lefroy!

MRS. AUSTEN

(all attention)
Engaged?

JANE

Engaged to dance with Mr. Lefroy, Mamma!

MRS. AUSTEN

Oh. Engaged to dance yet again with Mr. Lefroy.

ELIZABETH

If invitations to dance are issued, the recipient is not to blame.

JANE

(to ELIZABETH)

Exactly!

MRS. AUSTEN

Everyone talks of how you behaved together at the Heartleys'.

ELIZABETH

Then your mama's coming here to disrupt the dance will confirm their most scandalous conjectures.

JANE

(to ELIZABETH)

If only I dared say that to Mamma!

MRS. AUSTEN

That fellow from Dublin is barely known to the neighbourhood.

JANE

He is Madame Lefroy's nephew. And her guest. What more is required?

MRS. AUSTEN

Only that which you yourself lack.

JANE

Fortune.

(with a touch of melodrama)

Our shared penury facilitates our mutual understanding. And so, I would not exchange my situation for an estate of forty thousand pounds.

MRS. AUSTEN

Some men might consider half that sum a happy alternative to mutual understanding.

JANE

You need not worry about money, Mamma. Mr. Lefroy is the favourite of his relatives. They will see to everything.

MRS. AUSTEN

Provided that he remains their favourite. What do you think Madame Lefroy makes of your friendship?

JANE

Why should she not be pleased? A woman in such easy circumstances as Madame Lefroy must be indifferent to wealth.

MRS. AUSTEN

A woman does not attain such easy circumstances as Madame Lefroy enjoys unless she is highly partial to wealth. Fetch your cloak, Jane.

JANE

Now?

MRS. AUSTEN

Now.

JANE

(to ELIZABETH)

How humiliating, to be ordered home by one's mother.

ELIZABETH

How humiliating to allow yourself to be so ordered.

JANE

What alternative do I have?

ELIZABETH

What alternative have you the spirit to devise?

(MADAME LEFROY rises from the game table and approaches. JANE is inspired)

JANE

Of course! Look, Mamma! Madame Lefroy! Good evening, Madame Lefroy!

(MADAME LEFROY approaches the party)

MADAME LEFROY

Mrs. Austen! Jane!

JANE

Madame Lefroy, tell us! Have you decided to engage the young parson who visited you last week?

MADAME LEFROY

I certainly have. I was entirely delighted with our first interview. What a deferential young clergyman, and so eager to please! He is just the sort of respectful, humble young man that one never encounters anymore.

ELIZABETH

If one is lucky.

MRS. AUSTEN

(pointedly)

There are entirely too many of the other sort about.

JANE

The dance is about to begin, but I know that Mamma will insist on knowing all

MRS. AUSTEN

We dine with you tomorrow. There will be time to discuss your meeting then.

JANE

Impossible! You must relate all the particulars to Mamma tonight, so that she can give me a faithful account on our way home.

MADAME LEFROY

We matrons will find a breezy corner in which to confer while you young people dance. It is far too warm here.

MRS. AUSTEN

Of course.

(to JANE)

Your sister would never behave like this.

(MRS. AUSTEN and MRS LEFROY separate from the others)

TOM

Do not suppose, Miss Austen, that your mother's interruption has distracted the swain from his suit. The lady must tender the required evidence, or else the duel must be fought

JANE

How dreadful . . . Wait a moment.

(to ELIZABETH)

Lizzy, have you a pair of scissors?

ELIZABETH

Perhaps.

JANE

I must have them.

ELIZABETH

Have you so many curls that one may be dispatched?

JANE

It has been summoned to prevent a tragedy. Lizzy, please.

(ELIZABETH retrieves a small pair of scissors that was tucked into her sash, and hands them to JANE)

ELIZABETH

And now that I have assisted you in every possible way, I suppose I am to be dismissed.

JANE

Poor Lizzy, are you feeling deserted?

ELIZABETH

Never mind about me, Miss Austen. Now that I can be of no further use, you may leave me to entertain myself.

JANE

Out of the question . . . I have the very partner for you!

ELIZABETH

You do?

JANE

Oh yes. A young parson, in fact. Mr. . . . Collins. Mr. William Collins.

(JANE transforms HARRIS into MR. COLLINS)

And he is just the sort of respectful, humble young man one never encounters any more.

(JANE moulds MR. COLLINS into shape, modeling a servile posture for him, which he adopts to her satisfaction)

Quite out of the common way.

MR. COLLINS

I always strive to compensate for the arrogance for which others my sex are so justly chastised.

JANE

Is that so, Mr. Collins?

MR. COLLINS

My estimable patroness is unequivocal in her censure of such men.

JANE

And who is your patroness?

MR. COLLINS

Do not insult me by pretending that you have not heard speak of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, widow of the illustrious late Sir Lewis De Bourgh. He was a baronet.

JANE

Lady Catherine . . . A charming lady, I am sure.

ELIZABETH

(sarcastically)

You offer me a most diverting companion.

JANE

He should satisfy your taste for folly and nonsense. Mr. Collins, Miss Elizabeth Bennet. Miss Bennet, Mr. William Collins.

(MR. COLLINS bows. JANE gestures for him to bow lower, and then lower)

ELIZABETH

Mr. Collins will not mind if I retreat to the sofa, for I know that the clergyman of so eminent a patroness would not think it proper to dance.

MR. COLLINS

To the contrary, Miss Bennet, I am by no means of the opinion that a ball of this kind, given by an established family can have any evil tendency; and I am so far from objecting to dancing myself that I shall take this opportunity to solicit your hand. Perhaps you fear that I am accustomed to fine dancing at the home of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and that this humble entertainment will not compare. Set your mind at ease and be assured that this evening, I come prepared to admire all that I see.

JANE

How convenient. Even now, Lizzy confided to me that she is sorely in want of a partner. You must join Mr. Lefroy and me as we require a second couple.

MR. COLLINS

My fair dance partner and I could not think of turning down such a cordial invitation.

(The dance music begins. MR. COLLINS leads ELIZABETH to the dance space. JANE rejoins TOM, and the ensuing dance sequence reflects the dynamics of their flirtation)

TOM

Miss Austen is hiding something.

JANE

(showing TOM the scissors)

You refer, perhaps, to these?

TOM

The scissors! Does this mean that the persuasive evidence is to be offered to the swain?

JANE

If is the swain who shall have to be persuasive to obtain it.

TOM

The swain depends upon generosity, not persuasion. The lady's generosity.

JANE

Or foolishness.

TOM

O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

JANE

What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?

TOM

That which might sustain a Romeo when he is banished from this English Verona.

JANE

Banished, Mr. Lefroy?

TOM

London is a sordid place. How is a man to withstand temptation amid the cock and hen clubs and the stews of Covent Garden? A token from his lady would steel his resolve.

JANE

Can one lock of hair achieve so much?

TOM

One lady can.

JANE

If only the lady could be certain of the swain.

TOM

Does the lady doubt her power to enchant?

JANE

She no longer doubts his power to persuade.

(JANE presents the lock of hair to TOM as the music ends. MR. COLLINS bows to ELIZABETH, steps away, and is transformed into HARRIS)

HARRIS

(to the audience)

Did you see what Miss Austen did?

MRS. AUSTEN

(to the audience)

Did anyone fail to see what my daughter did?

MADAME LEFROY

(to MRS. AUSTEN)

How difficult it must be for a girl without a dowry to find a good husband—particularly a girl as spirited as Jane.

HARRIS

(to the audience)

I would slay that Mr. Lefroy with my pen knife except that he is a guest at our ball.

MADAME LEFROY

Tom, may I speak to you?

(MRS. AUSTEN exits. TOM approaches MADAME LEFROY)

JANE

Oh, Lizzy. What will my sister, Cassandra say?

ELIZABETH

Nothing to any effect, now that the deed is done.

JANE

Do not scold me, Lizzy. You are jealous of my dance partner.

ELIZABETH

I will own that my partner was not as bewitching as yours.

JANE

If you mean to tease me, I know how to distract you.

(calling to MR. DARCY)

Oh, Mr. Darcy! Will you join our party?

(MR. DARCY approaches JANE and ELIZABETH)

MR. DARCY

I must decline. I can imagine but two motives for your conferring like this. My joining you would interfere with either.

JANE

Lizzy, can you understand his meaning?

ELIZABETH

Not at all, but depend upon it, he means to be severe on us.

JANE

Mr. Darcy, I demand an explanation.

MR. DARCY

You either choose this method of passing the evening because you are in each other's confidence, and have secret affairs to discuss, or because you are conscious that you have chosen a position where your figures appear to the greatest advantage. If the first, I should be completely in your way, and if the second, I can admire you much better from here.

JANE

Shocking! How shall we punish Mr. Darcy for such a speech, Lizzy?

ELIZABETH

Tease him. Laugh at him.

JANE

Or worse yet, force him to gaze with interest—no, with admiration—precisely where he is most determined to find fault.

(MR. DARCY looks at ELIZABETH, looks away, looks at her again, and clears his throat)

MR. DARCY

Do you not feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize this opportunity to dance a reel?

(pause)

I said, Miss Bennet—

ELIZABETH

I heard you before. But I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me to say “Yes,” that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste. I have therefore made up my mind to tell you that I do not want to dance a reel at all—and now despise me if you dare.

MR. DARCY

Indeed, I do not dare.

JANE

Oh!

ELIZABETH

Unbearable man!

JANE

But well spoken . . . and rather handsome.

(beat)

Lizzy, do you think that Mr. Lefroy will ask me to dance again? I must make the most of the evening, for you may be sure that Mamma's joints will be insufferable in the morning.

(mimicking MRS. AUSTEN)

Oh, my joints. Mr. Lander's nettle tea might as well be poison for all the good it does.

Scene 2

The following morning. The parlor at the Austen home. The space is furnished with chairs and a writing desk which is equipped with pens, paper and an inkwell. By one of the chairs, there is a pile of mending and a work basket. MRS. AUSTEN enters. Her first line overlaps with the end of JANE's speech in *Scene 1*.

MRS. AUSTEN

Oh, my joints. Mr. Lander's nettle tea might as well be poison for all the good it does.

(JANE moves from the ballroom to the parlor. As she crosses the stage to the writing desk, she removes her shawl and adds it to the mending pile by the work basket. MR. DARCY, MADAME LEFROY and ELIZABETH retreat)

JANE

(composing a letter)

My dear Cassandra, we had an exceedingly good ball last night. You scold me so much in the nice long letter which I have this moment received from you, that I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking.

(setting down her pen)

When Mamma and I visit his aunt for dinner this afternoon, I shall think myself very ill used if Mr. Lefroy is not seated by me. How could Madame Lefroy have set the dinner hour so late? It was done to test my patience.

MRS. AUSTEN

Five o'clock is far too early for dinner. What was Madame Lefroy thinking?

JANE

She usually invites her guests for four.

MRS. AUSTEN

I shall never finish all the mending by then.

JANE

Let me help you, Mamma.

MRS. AUSTEN

I am of half of a mind to write to Madame Lefroy this instant to send our apologies for this afternoon.

JANE

No!

MRS. AUSTEN

How else are we to finish the mending?

JANE

If one always insisted on finishing the mending before going out, one should never be seen from one season to the next.

MRS. AUSTEN

It would be better never to be seen than always to make a spectacle of one's self.
(MRS. AUSTEN proceeds to the writing desk and begins a letter)

Saturday, January the ninth. Dear Madame Lefroy—

JANE

What are you doing?

MRS. AUSTEN

(writing)

It was a pleasure to converse with you last night. Imagine my disappointment, this morning, to find that I am indisposed.

JANE

Mamma! Please!

MRS. AUSTEN

It will therefore be absolutely necessary for us to cancel our visit.

JANE

No!

MRS. AUSTEN

You are too giddy for company.

(ELIZABETH enters)

ELIZABETH

Henceforth only the sober and stoney-faced are to be allowed out of doors.

JANE

Lizzy!

MRS. AUSTEN

You should not be out at all with Cassandra away.

ELIZABETH

I think it would be very hard upon younger sisters to be denied their share of society because the elder visits her friends.

JANE

(to ELIZABETH)

Yes!

(to MRS AUSTEN)

Surely the last born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth as the first.

MRS. AUSTEN

You want your sister to steady you. I am not up to the task.

JANE

Mr. Lefroy leaves for Lincoln's Inn next week. Barely any time remains.

MRS. AUSTEN

(writing)

It will therefore be absolutely necessary for us to cancel our visit. Affectionately yours—

JANE

(to ELIZABETH)

There is no swaying Mamma.

ELIZABETH

So long as her daughter is so easily swayed.

JANE

But Mamma is determined to stay home.

ELIZABETH

Is her daughter not determined to go out?

JANE

Without her? What will Madame Lefroy say if I appear unaccompanied?

ELIZABETH

How will you feel if you do not appear at all?

JANE

Mamma, I am very sorry that your joints plague you this morning. But you must be equally pleased that mine are in good working order.

MRS. AUSTEN

Yes . . .

JANE

And therefore, I am sure you will agree that your decision to break an engagement does not necessitate my doing the same.

MRS. AUSTEN

You can hardly go without me.

JANE

I am familiar with the route.

MRS. AUSTEN

What will Madame Lefroy say if you appear unaccompanied?

ELIZABETH

Just think, Jane! You will be quite the spectacle!

JANE

(to MRS. AUSTEN)

I will be quite the spectacle, standing alone at her threshold, my petticoats splattered with mud—No chaperone to remind me to sidestep the puddles, you see!

ELIZABETH

What an embarrassment for your family!

JANE

(to MRS. AUSTEN)

I admit that such conduct will perhaps not reflect so very well upon my Mamma.

ELIZABETH

Particularly if you should happen to confess to Madame Lefroy . . .

JANE

(to MRS. AUSTEN)

Particularly if I should happen to drop a hint that my mamma rather exaggerated her indisposition because she fancied staying home to do the mending.

(beat. MRS. AUSTEN puts down her pen)

MRS. AUSTEN

If we are to walk to the Lefroys, I must take a draught of nettle tea. I do not know what has come over you Jane.

JANE

I will finish the sewing while you drink your tea.

MRS. AUSTEN

You are not wealthy enough to be so willful.

(MRS. AUSTEN exits)

ELIZABETH

You have a determined spirit, Jane. I hope you have found a gentleman who shares it.

JANE

He certainly was determined to gain his prize last night.

(JANE proceeds to the writing desk. She takes down notes during her ensuing conversation with ELIZABETH)

Now tell me, Lizzy, after the ball, did your sister speak to you of Mr. Bingley? Is my Jane Bennet very much taken with her new admirer?

ELIZABETH

My sister tells me that she has never seen such happy manners in a gentleman.

JANE

That is promising.

ELIZABETH

And she smiles quietly when I observe that he is also handsome, which a young man ought likewise to be, if he possibly can.

JANE

Well said, Lizzy! What a remarkable woman I am making of you. With you as Jane Bennet's confidante, my novel could really be something. Your mother must be boasting to all her neighbours that Mr. Bingley will propose to Jane within a fortnight.

ELIZABETH

Mamma is incapable of fatigue when enumerating the advantages of the match.

JANE

And Kitty and Lydia are already dreaming of the balls to be hosted by Mrs. Jane Bingley.

ELIZABETH

I wish they would hold their tongues, in public at least.

JANE

So all are agreed that Mr. Bingley and your sister will be a perfectly charming couple, and that I was very clever to introduce them.

ELIZABETH

Too clever, perhaps.

JANE

What do you mean?

ELIZABETH

It is evident that Mr. Bingley and my sister will be married by spring. How will you fill three volumes with their story?

JANE

Rest assured. Great obstacles will beset them.

ELIZABETH

Such as?

JANE

Well, first . . .

ELIZABETH

Yes?

JANE

First . . . First . . . Shame on you for making me doubt myself!
(JANE proceeds to the workbasket, and resumes her sewing)

If you are determined to thwart my novel, come and help me finish the mending, for I may soon find myself in a great hurry to sew a nightgown for my wedding night.

ELIZABETH

You are confident, then, of a certain gentleman's feelings?

JANE

How we shall laugh at Mamma's scruples when I am Mrs. Tom Lefroy.

(returning to her writing desk)

I must continue with my story, for I am determined to finish a novel before I marry. I must set down your exchange with Mr. Collins.

(writing)

Elizabeth asked Mr. Collins whether he would think it proper to join in the evening's amusement and was surprised to find that he entertained no scruple. "To the contrary, Miss Elizabeth, I am by no means of the opinion that a ball of this kind, given by an established family can have any evil tendency—"

ELIZABETH

I am glad that my humiliation at the ball affords you such pleasure.

JANE

Lizzy, I am such a selfish, vain creature that I would subject you to all manner of torment for the sake of comedy. I must see a book in print before I marry. And when a thousand copies are sold, I will take a coach to all the best warehouses in London, and fill my wedding chest. And everyone will wonder how Parson Austen's daughter can afford such luxuries.

ELIZABETH

Be careful, or Mr. Lefroy will expect you to supply your own pin money by the same method.

JANE

What ideas you have, Lizzy. When Miss Austen becomes Mrs. Lefroy, she will set aside her pen.

ELIZABETH

Very likely.

JANE

How is Mrs. Lefroy to write novels with a household to manage?

ELIZABETH

How is Mrs. Lefroy to manage a household with novels to write?

JANE

Mr. Lefroy means to be chief justice of Ireland.

ELIZABETH

How long, I wonder, before Mrs. Chief Justice of Ireland creeps downstairs in the dead of night, candle in hand, to unlock her writing desk.

JANE

Is that what you imagine?

ELIZABETH

She will write in a room with a squeaking door to warn her of sudden intruders.

(JANE shakes her head and scoffs)

ELIZABETH (Cont'd)

She will pen her novels into notebooks, or onto tiny slips of paper—

JANE

(sarcastically)

While pretending to attend to her correspondence.

ELIZABETH

A male relation will send her novel to a publisher, and negotiate the sale.

JANE

(drawn into ELIZABETH's fantasy despite herself)

Publication must be anonymous. And if I am to write, I must have critical acclaim as well as popularity.

ELIZABETH

Instant success, of course. Glowing praise in the Quarterly Review.

JANE

And a nation of adoring readers.

ELIZABETH

Everyone speculates as to the identity of the anonymous lady writer.

JANE

But my secret remains protected.

ELIZABETH

For a while perhaps. But sooner or later word inevitably gets out that Jane Austen is an author.

JANE

Jane Austen is an author.

(beat)

Lizzy, you are ridiculous. Why should Mrs. Tom Lefroy wish to write? She will have no need for invention. Her own home will furnish everything she desires.

ELIZABETH

Everything but a writing desk.

JANE

Lizzy, when you decide to marry, you will understand.

ELIZABETH

I challenge my dear author to create a suitable suitor.

JANE

It is not so amusing to create suitable suitors as it is to create the other kind. Where can Mr. Darcy be keeping himself this morning?

ELIZABETH

(protesting)

Jane!

JANE

(calling)

Oh Mr. Darcy!

ELIZABETH

(protesting)

No!

(MR. DARCY strides onstage, all energy. He hands his gloves and hat peremptorily to JANE, who places them out of sight, behind the mending pile)

MR. DARCY

In vain have I struggled. It will not do. I must tell you how ardently I admire and love you.

JANE

What fine words!

MR. DARCY

The depth of my feelings cannot be doubted—

JANE

One could almost forgive him his vanity.

MR. DARCY

— When you consider that they have rooted themselves in my breast despite your connections, despite your relations, despite everything.

JANE

But not quite.

MR. DARCY

I told myself that I could not inflict such an alliance upon my family. I sought to be ruled by my duty. I considered your relations and your situation in life. But your charms have overwhelmed my will and my judgment. And I hope that the strength of my attachment will now be rewarded by your acceptance of my hand.

JANE

Well Lizzy, you cannot be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affections, although his mode of declaring them is somewhat frank.

ELIZABETH

Let frankness be the order of the day. Mr. Darcy, in such cases at this, it is the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. If I could feel gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot. I have never desired your good opinion, and you have bestowed it most unwillingly. The feelings which initially prevented the acknowledgment of your regard can have little difficulty in overcoming it now.

MR. DARCY

And this is your reply! I might perhaps wish to be informed why, with so little endeavour at civility, I am thus rejected. But it is of small importance.

ELIZABETH

I might as well enquire why with so evident a design of offending me, you tell me that you like me against your will?

MR. DARCY

The feelings I related are natural and just.

ELIZABETH

What precisely sets a Bennet so far below the notice of a Darcy? You are a gentleman. I am a gentleman's daughter. So far, we are equal.

MR. DARCY

Consider, Miss Bennet, the vulgarity displayed by your mother and the want of propriety displayed by your younger sisters. Was I to rejoice in the prospect of such connections? And even if these scruples could be overcome, what sort of a wife would Miss Elizabeth Bennet make for the man who governs Pemberley?

ELIZABETH

You are right, Mr. Darcy. We are not equal. I am a gentleman's daughter, while you are no gentleman. And you are the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry. Jane, you will regret this.

(ELIZABETH seizes the manuscript. JANE begins to chase ELIZABETH around the stage. ELIZABETH is initially annoyed, but both women are quickly carried away by the hilarity of the moment. MRS. AUSTEN enters holding a sealed letter. She observes JANE for a moment)

MRS. AUSTEN

Jane?

JANE

Mamma! I was searching for my needle.

MR. DARCY

(to MRS. AUSTEN)

I require my gloves and hat.

JANE

(pretending to find her needle)

Oh, look! Here it is.

MR. DARCY

I said, I require my gloves and hat. The service in the house is intolerable.

JANE

You are addressing my mother, Mr. Darcy, not a servant!

MRS. AUSTEN

A letter has come for you, Jane.

(JANE takes the letter from her mother)

JANE

From Madame Lefroy!

(JANE unseals the letter, and reads it out loud)

“My dear Jane, It was a pleasure to converse with you yesterday. Imagine my disappointment, this morning, to find that I am indisposed. Therefore, I am afraid it will be absolutely necessary to cancel our engagement. Please apologise to your mother on my behalf.”

(pause)

There will be ample time for the mending after all, Mamma.

MRS. AUSTEN

Fancy. Perhaps Madame Lefroy should try Mr. Landers' nettle tea.

(MRS. AUSTEN exits)

ELIZABETH

How vexed you must be.

JANE

There is more to the letter. I would not have read the postscript to Mamma for the world. "Upon further reflection—

ELIZABETH

(reading over JANE's shoulder)

—I believe it would be prudent to postpone any communication between our houses for a week.

JANE

(interjecting)

Mr. Lefroy leaves for London next Saturday!

ELIZABETH

(reading)

"I trust you will not mistake my meaning. Yours sincerely, Madame Lefroy."

JANE

Was this written at Mr. Lefroy's request? Has he reconsidered his feelings?

ELIZABETH

Do you think it likely? Consult your judgment.

JANE

I fear that is precisely what has occurred.

ELIZABETH

There is another possibility.

JANE

I cannot think of one.

ELIZABETH

I can. Will you hear it?

JANE

Gladly.

ELIZABETH

Madame Lefroy sees that her nephew is in love with you and does not approve of his choice.

JANE

But Madame Lefroy has always wished to see me well settled.

(LADY CATHERINE enters)

LADY CATHERINE

There is considerable difference between a girl one wishes to see well settled and a future niece. An aunt cannot be too careful in supervising her nephews' choices. I shall instruct my parson, Mr. Collins, to include a few thoughts on the subject in his next sermon.

JANE

Lady Catherine? Lady Catherine de Bourgh?

LADY CATHERINE

I can see by your curtsy that you have not had the benefit of a proper governess. If I had known your mother, I should have admonished her to engage one. Yes, I can see quite clearly that there are many reasons an aunt would steer her nephew out of your reach.

ELIZABETH

And many more why a nephew would steer himself out of yours.

LADY CATHERINE

Your impertinence does not escape me, young lady. A nephew brought up to respect his aunt will welcome, and even solicit her advice. Why in the case of my Fitzwilliam—

(noticing MR. DARCY)

Fitzwilliam!

MR. DARCY

Good morning, Aunt Catherine.

LADY CATHERINE

I hardly expected to find you in such company. I am not accustomed to surprises.

JANE

So . . . Mr. Darcy is Lady Catherine's nephew.

ELIZABETH

I thought I detected a family resemblance.

LADY CATHERINE

I, myself, only condescended to make a visit because I was passing by with my daughter to take some air. She waits for me outside in our carriage. You will join us.

MR. DARCY

You must excuse me, Aunt Catherine, but I have matters to attend to. And I am waiting for my hat.

LADY CATHERINE

Then you must visit us soon. You will find my daughter more radiant than ever. She grows particularly refined from spending so many hours indoors. Delicacy requires her to keep her distance from other ladies. So says my new parson, Mr. Collins, a most invaluable servant.

(LADY CATHERINE exits)

ELIZABETH

I hardly know which is the more ridiculous of the two, the parson or his patroness.

JANE

She will do well for my novel. But suppose that Madame Lefroy shares her views?

ELIZABETH

I hope that your happiness depends on the views of the nephew and not the aunt.

JANE

Madame Lefroy may believe that in separating us, she does a kindness to her nephew.

(pause)

Who can inflict greater damage than a well meaning relation . . . or friend? . . . Of course . . .

ELIZABETH

What is it, Jane?

JANE

That is the obstacle. The obstacle that will come between Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley. The contrivances of a well intentioned companion.

ELIZABETH

Who would seek to separate Mr. Bingley from my sister?

(JANE nods at MR. DARCY)

ELIZABETH (Cont'd)

Do you fancy Mr. Bingley too fine for Jane, Mr. Darcy?

MR. DARCY

There are many objections to the match.

ELIZABETH

Greater objections still did not prevent you from soliciting my hand, not half an hour ago.

MR. DARCY

Towards my friend I will be kinder than I have been towards myself.

ELIZABETH

Mr. Bingley's attachment is too strong. Your attempts will fail.

MR. DARCY

You may wish to prepare your sister for disappointment. But I have reason to believe that her regret will be superficial, for I have seen that the hearts of the Bennet sisters are not easily touched.

ELIZABETH

Jane, I cannot bear the sight of this man any longer.

(JANE takes MR. DARCY's gloves and hands them to him)

JANE

Mr. Darcy, you were waiting for these.

ELIZABETH

And this.

(ELIZABETH takes MR. DARCY's hat and sets it on his head. He exits)

ELIZABETH (Cont'd)

My poor sister.

JANE

Miss Jane Bennet has nothing to fear. She is the heroine of a novel. All her problems will resolve themselves by the end of volume three.

(pause)

Would that Miss Jane Austen had similar assurance.

(ELIZABETH squeezes JANE hand affectionately)

ELIZABETH

Jane, give Mr. Lefroy the opportunity to prove himself. Now practice your sewing for your night gown.

JANE

When woman must wait, what is there for her to do but sew?

(The doorbell rings)

TOM (Offstage)

I will wait for her in the parlor.

(TOM enters)

Miss Austen!

JANE

Mr. Lefroy!

TOM

The maid said she would fetch you. But here you are.

JANE

Is your aunt recovered?

TOM

Somewhat.

JANE

Madame Lefroy is favored with a robust constitution.

TOM

Nonetheless, for the moment, she remains unable to entertain guests.

JANE

How vexing — That is, poor Madame Lefroy.

TOM

Her timing is particularly unfortunate. For I have been instructed to pack my trunks. My departure to London has been accelerated.

JANE

When do we lose your company, Mr. Lefroy?

TOM

The day after tomorrow

JANE

So soon?

TOM

I must renounce my part in your theatrical, and many other anticipated pleasures besides. My great uncle wishes for me to begin my studies directly.

JANE

You are most attentive to your great uncle's wishes.

TOM

A nephew must be attentive to the wishes of a great uncle who pays for his education. Particularly if the nephew has a mother and sisters to provide for in the years ahead. Unfortunately, the great uncle of an attentive nephew is liable to form wishes on any number of topics.

JANE

(anxiously)

Such as?

TOM

(gravely)

To begin with—

(his tone shifts abruptly to playfulness)

The uncle scrutinizes his nephew's reading lists, and monitors his attendance at lessons.

JANE

(trying to rally her spirits)

I suppose that even the nephew's choice of newspaper is dictated by his elder.

TOM

The nephew must report daily on his diet, his employments, and his mode of exercise.

JANE

Every morning, he must submit the proposed route of his walk for review and approval.

TOM

His appearance is inspected from head to foot before he dares step out of doors.

JANE

Laughter is prohibited between the hours of eight in the morning and seven at night.

TOM

His leisure must be devoted entirely to “improving” activities.

JANE

And, his companions must all be somber, sober fellows.

TOM

Somber, sober fellows every one . . .

(growing serious)

And fellows of great consequence if the nephew is to pay their sisters any mind.

JANE

Is that so, Mr. Lefroy?

TOM

My uncle means well. But he takes the position that the purpose of matrimony is to consolidate wealth.

ELIZABETH

I thought the purpose of wealth was to facilitate matrimony—with the partner of one's choice.

TOM

My aunt appears to share his view.

JANE

And so, this morning, she was disposed to be indisposed.

TOM

What would Miss Austen advise such a nephew?

JANE

Does the nephew lack for advisors?

TOM

To deserve his lady, he must make his way in the world. To make his way in the world, he must desert his lady.

JANE

The nephew has no ally?

TOM

His family is of one mind.

JANE

And quite decided?

TOM

The nephew can only hope that some day, circumstances will permit him to resume his suit.

JANE

(wistfully)

Some day—

ELIZABETH

Some day? For shame!

JANE

Am I to renounce all hope?

ELIZABETH

Would you cling to hope without commitment?

JANE

What commitment is Mr. Lefroy at liberty to give?

ELIZABETH

One that accords with his will.

JANE

Would you have him cross his relations?

ELIZABETH

If needs be. But why should he not win them over? What of the future barrister's vaunted power of persuasion?

TOM

Miss Austen, I can see that you desire my absence.

ELIZABETH

Speak to him, Jane.

JANE

Mr. Lefroy—

TOM

Miss Austen?

JANE

You asked me how I would advise the dutiful nephew of the opinionated uncle.

TOM

You did not answer.

JANE

Tell him this from me. Tell him that upon reflection, I cannot believe that a gentleman of his stamp—

ELIZABETH

— a gentleman who is adept at recommending himself to others—

JANE

—a gentleman with a talent for making friends, should have to choose between his heart and his prospects. There must be some avenue. There must be some solution.

TOM

I have been walking about the laneways for hours, trying to think of one.

JANE

There must be a solution because—

ELIZABETH

—because nothing can be worse than forsaking one's love.

JANE

—because nothing can be worse than forsaking one's love —
(impulsively)
except to return that love, and to be the one who is forsaken.

ELIZABETH

What a remarkable woman I am making of you, Jane.

TOM

Miss Austen, you are a remarkable woman.

JANE

If I am, I cannot help it.

TOM

You would have me, then?

JANE

I would not have another.

TOM

Even under these circumstances?

JANE

Can you doubt it?

TOM

Miss Jane Austen is not to be doubted.

JANE

Mr. Lefroy!

TOM

Miss Austen! Jane! Dear, darling Jane!

JANE

Tom, we are to be the happiest couple in the world.

TOM

I will leave Hampshire with a heart lighter than air.

JANE

Lizzy, did I not tell you that Tom would prove himself? I hope your needle and thread are at the ready. A nightgown is in order, and a good deal of fresh linen besides.

(LADY CATHERINE enters)

LADY CATHERINE

Linen? Nightgowns? You talk as though you were about to married.

ELIZABETH

Lady Catherine, it may please you to learn that Miss Austen is engaged.

LADY CATHERINE

She is no such thing.

ELIZABETH

I assure you, she is. Mr. Lefroy has asked for her hand.

LADY CATHERINE

Oh. Is that all?

JANE

All?

LADY CATHERINE

A woman is engaged when her older relations—and his—have authorized the union.

JANE

They will. Once we have a chance to tell them.

LADY CATHERINE

So, your parents have not even been informed of your little scheme.

JANE

It has only just transpired.

LADY CATHERINE

And you believe yourself to be engaged.

ELIZABETH

Jane will tell them now.

JANE

Now? Lizzy!

ELIZABETH

She will gain their blessing. You will see.

JANE

Surely, it would be better to wait until the right moment arises?

ELIZABETH

What do you fear?

JANE

Tom, I will fetch my mamma and papa.

TOM
What for?

JANE
Why, so that you may tell them!

TOM
Tell them what?

JANE
About our engagement, of course.

TOM
You are not serious.

JANE
Should we win over your uncle first? You must depart today to secure his blessing.

TOM
Jane, we cannot tell him yet.

JANE
Why not?

TOM
Did you not hear me? All my prospects depend upon my uncle's good will.

(pause)

JANE
So, you propose a secret engagement?

ELIZABETH
Oh

TOM
Not forever, of course.

JANE
For how long?

TOM
Until my position is established.

ELIZABETH

Until then, he would subject his heart's object to the utmost uncertainty, himself to indefinite delay, and everyone to deceit?

TOM

It cannot be any other way.

ELIZABETH

There is always another way.

JANE

Yes. There is always another way.

TOM

I am utterly dependent.

JANE

But not without resources.

TOM

What resources?

(MRS. AUSTEN enters, initially unseen by the others)

JANE

Have you so little confidence in your hold on your relations' affections?

TOM

You really think they could be convinced?

JANE

Did you not convince me?

TOM

I suppose I did . . .

JANE

Now claim me if you dare!

MRS. AUSTEN

You hesitate, Mr. Lefroy. I suspect that unlike my daughter, you are a realist.

JANE

Mamma!

TOM

Mrs. Austen!

ELIZABETH

How dare your mother eavesdrop on your private conversation?

LADY CATHERINE

In this age, a mother must use every means at her disposal.

TOM

I hardly know what to say.

ELIZABETH

Is the future barrister at a loss for words?

JANE

I am not. Give me courage, Lizzy. Mamma, we are to be married.

MRS. AUSTEN

Are you?

JANE

Yes we are.

MRS. AUSTEN

Have you lost your head?

JANE

I have lost my heart. We both have. Neither of us can love another, and therefore, we must wed. You must give us your blessing, and all of our relations must drink a toast at our wedding breakfast.

ELIZABETH

(clapping her hands)

Bravo! And again, bravo!

(pause. TOM claps his hands with assumed bravado)

TOM

Bravo, Miss Austen! Mrs. Austen, you interrupted us at an opportune moment. We were rehearsing a scene from your daughter's new theatrical. How could she resist delivering an impromptu performance? Is she not a convincing actress? Bravo, and again bravo!

MRS. AUSTEN

My daughter will see you to the door, Mr. Lefroy. Please tell your aunt that we hope she recovers soon. I know what it is to be troubled by one's health.

(JANE and TOM separate from MRS. AUSTEN)

JANE

Tom?

TOM

Miss Austen, are you determined to ruin us both?

JANE

What else could I do?

TOM

There is only one thing for me to do. I know that now. On Saturday, I will leave for London to begin my studies. I have a mother and sisters to think of. They are too easily forgotten when I am in the company of a certain lady. And now, Miss Austen must excuse me. My aunt reminded me three times, this morning, to be punctual for dinner.

JANE

Ever the dutiful nephew, Mr. Lefroy.

TOM

One more thing. I should return this token, which you so obligingly bestowed on me.

(TOM hands JANE the lock of hair)

Dear Jane, why did you not hold your tongue? We might yet have been husband and wife. Why could you not show some patience, some attention to the demands of the world? My aunt was right. "Even if Miss Austen were an heiress, what sort of wife would she make for a man who plans to become chief justice?" Good day, Miss Austen.

(TOM bows to JANE and leaves. ELIZABETH approaches JANE, but the latter turns away abruptly. JANE tries to rip the lock of hair. When her attempt proves unsuccessful, she throws it across the room)

MRS. AUSTEN

Is our family so grand that we can afford to waste good ribbon at nine shillings and six pence a yard?

(MRS. AUSTEN exits)

LADY CATHERINE

I always advise young ladies of modest means that waste is the most impermissible of all indulgences.

JANE

Yes, Lady Catherine. Henceforth, I will practice exemplary economy.

(MR. COLLINS enters)

MR. COLLINS

I humbly applaud your resolve, Miss Austen.

ELIZABETH

Not him!

MR. COLLINS

The Christian virtue of making a small income go a good way cannot be overly prized.

LADY CATHERINE

That has ever been my position. Mr. Collins, you must make domestic economy the theme of your next sermon.

MR. COLLINS

Certainly, your ladyship.

LADY CATHERINE

If you require Christian counsel on this subject, Miss Austen, I recommend the services of my clergyman.

MR. COLLINS

I, too, venture to hope that in carrying out her resolution, Miss Austen will draw upon such support as the church may humbly offer.

ELIZABETH

A bracing walk in the fresh air would do you more good.

JANE

I have done taking your advice, Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

ELIZABETH

Jane, you were wonderful. You were brave and steadfast.

JANE

And it brought me little joy. From now on, I mean to be cautious and reasonable.

ELIZABETH

I will not allow it.

JANE

To the contrary. I will not allow you lead me astray again. You want restraining.

LADY CATHERINE

This case warrants the most severe restraint of all. Matrimony.

MR. COLLINS

It is a man's most sacred duty to guide his wife with a firm hand.

JANE

(to ELIZABETH)

Yes . . . You want a husband.

(LADY CATHERINE turns to leave. MR. COLLINS
prepares to follow her)

JANE

Stay, Mr. Collins.

MR. COLLINS

(to LADY CATHERINE)

Your Ladyship?

(LADY CATHERINE nods and exits)

JANE

Mr. Collins, I must reconsider your role in my novel.

ELIZABETH

Whatever for?

(JANE tears a sheet from her notebook, crumples it,
and sets it aside. ELIZABETH picks up the crumpled
sheet)

ELIZABETH (Cont'd)

My encounter with Mr. Collins at the ballroom. Jane, what are you doing?

JANE

It does not suit. I am starting afresh.

ELIZABETH

I will not allow you to throw the best of your work away. You take too much pride
in it.

(ELIZABETH tucks the crumpled sheets into her sash)

MR. COLLINS

Pride goeth before the fall. I say this despite the fact, and perhaps even, because there are certain ladies in this room who may not be unjustly rebuked of this vice.

JANE

Mr. Collins, I must ask you to abandon your absurd brand of pompous humility.

MR. COLLINS

But it has taken me ever so long to master.

JANE

It will no longer do.

ELIZABETH

Jane, put down your pen. Mr. Collins is perfect as he was.

JANE

(to MR. COLLINS)

And while you are about it, please straighten your shoulders.

(MR. COLLINS straightens his shoulders a little.
JANE motions for him to straighten himself further.)

JANE (Cont'd)

You must be tired of stooping.

MR. COLLINS

Lady Catherine prefers her servants to stand lower than herself.

JANE

Have no fear. Your position with Lady Catherine is secure.

MR. COLLINS

How can you be certain?

JANE

I will arrange it. I mean to see Elizabeth comfortably settled. Domesticated, but not destitute.

MR. COLLINS

(straightening his shoulders to an upright posture)

Ah.

ELIZABETH

What are you doing?

JANE

This morning, you challenged me to present you with a suitable suitor.

ELIZABETH

Mr. Collins is no suitor.

JANE

Mr. Collins, Lizzy, shall I leave the two of you together? Perhaps there is something Mr. Collins wishes to tell Lizzy?

ELIZABETH

Mr. Collins must excuse me. He can have nothing to say to me.

JANE

Lizzy, I insist upon your staying and hearing Mr. Collins.

(JANE returns to the writing desk, takes up her pen, and writes rapidly as the scene between ELIZABETH and MR. COLLINS proceeds. MR. COLLINS now plays his role with a measure of chilly dignity)

MR. COLLINS

Miss Elizabeth, you can hardly doubt my purpose in approaching you. I think it a right thing for a clergyman to take a wife, and I believe that you are of an age when a woman seeks a husband.

ELIZABETH

Jane, put down your pen. You are not yourself.

JANE

This is the self that I now intend to be. Proceed, Mr. Collins.

MR. COLLINS

The establishment that I can offer you is desirable, and I am prepared to perform the offices of a husband conscientiously.

ELIZABETH

Jane, what are you doing?

MR. COLLINS

Therefore, I respectfully request your hand in marriage.

JANE

(writing)

Elizabeth weighed Mr. Collins' words carefully and made her decision—

ELIZABETH

—to refuse him as courteously as possible.

JANE

No.

ELIZABETH

Jane, you cannot mean for me to accept Mr. Collins.

JANE

You cannot intend to resist such a sensible course.

ELIZABETH

Jane, I cannot marry Mr. Collins.

JANE

You might show some gratitude, Lizzy. I have refashioned him, and have sacrificed a good deal of comedy to provide you with a thoroughly unobjectionable husband.

ELIZABETH

Think of my sister. She wants me at home to be her confidante.

JANE

Upon further reflection, I do not think that you are a proper sort of confidante for my Jane Bennet. She would be better off keeping Miss Elizabeth at a safe distance. My novel can proceed perfectly well without you.

ELIZABETH

With me, your novel could be something. You said so yourself.

JANE

You cause too much trouble, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

Jane, I do not love Mr. Collins.

JANE

And so Elizabeth—

ELIZABETH

Jane, you cannot marry us.

JANE

And so Elizabeth and Mr. Collins—

ELIZABETH

This is not sound. You know it is not sound. Would you ever act in this way yourself?

JANE

I can only hope that some day, I will have the opportunity to accept a man as settled in life as Mr. Collins. You must show me how it is done. And so Elizabeth and Mr. Collins were—

ELIZABETH

Jane, if you compel this match, what confidence can ever subsist between us again?

MR. COLLINS

My hand is not unworthy of my cousin's acceptance. And, in view of her circumstances, not to mention a certain something about her nature, it is by no means certain that she will ever receive another offer of marriage.

JANE

And so Elizabeth and Mr. Collins were married. The bells rang and everybody smiled. Well, Mr. Collins, are you ready to escort your wife to her new home?

MR. COLLINS

We must be on our way my dear. I have a sermon to prepare.

ELIZABETH

I believe that domestic economy is to be the subject.

JANE

Congratulations, Lizzy. What a successful day this has been for you.

ELIZABETH

I look forward to congratulating you, Miss Austen, when you attain similar success.

(MR. COLLINS offers his arm to ELIZABETH.
Blackout.)

Act II

Scene 1

Evening, December, 1802. The drawing room at the home of the Bigg Withers. ALETHEA, CASSANDRA, and HARRIS sit at a card table, centre stage. Upstage right is a decanter with Madeira and glasses. Two chairs and a side table are positioned downstage left. JANE sits on one of the chairs and sews, her workbasket at her feet. She wears her hair pinned up. Downstage right is an outdoor space, currently in darkness. As the scene opens, JANE cuts the threads and places her scissors on the table.

ALETHEA

I bid two chips for your queen of spades.

CASSANDRA

Very well.

ALETHEA

You accept, Cassandra?

CASSANDRA

Yes, Alethea.

ALETHEA

For two chips? Harris it is impossible to play speculation with the Austen sisters. Cassandra lacks the avarice to drive a proper bargain, and Jane always refuses to play.

HARRIS

(turning over a card from his hand)

Ace of hearts.

CASSANDRA

(turning over a card from her hand)

Eight of diamonds.

ALETHEA

(turning over a card from her hand)

Ace of spades.

CASSANDRA

The game is yours.

HARRIS

My sister always wins.

ALETHEA

I was lucky.

CASSANDRA

It is my sister and I who are lucky to be with such friends at Christmastime.

ALETHEA

Shall we play again? Jane, will you join us?

(pause)

CASSANDRA

Jane!

JANE

My apologies. I was looking at the moon. There is a full moon tonight.

ALETHEA

Tomorrow we must go sleighing after dinner.

CASSANDRA

We have not been sleighing since we left Hampshire.

ALETHEA

Something must be done to restore the colour to your cheeks.

ALETHEA

Neither of you look entirely well. The air in Bath cannot agree with you, and I have never had much faith in the water. You are both creatures of Hampshire. And Hampshire is not the same without you.

HARRIS

I never thought it right for anyone but your father to be our parson.

ALETHEA

Are you happy in Bath?

CASSANDRA

We are settled there now.

ALETHEA

But are you happy?

CASSANDRA

What a question.

ALETHEA

Are you?

CASSANDRA

In a city, there is always something to occupy one's time.

JANE

Sometimes one must go out and visit, and sometimes one must stay home and be visited.

CASSANDRA

Of course, we miss the countryside. Your invitation to spend Christmas here was so very welcome. And who but you, Alethea would have offered to send a carriage for us?

ALETHEA

How else were you to make the journey?

JANE

We might have walked.

CASSANDRA

(embarrassed)

Jane!

JANE

What a spectacle we would have made at your threshold, our petticoats splattered with mud.

ALETHEA

The ideas that pop into Jane's head.

CASSANDRA

Jane is joking, of course.

JANE

Of course I am. Pay me no mind.

ALETHEA

Well, now that you are here, we shall have Christmas like in the old days, with sleighing and visits to friends and—

HARRIS

—and one of Jane's theatricals in the parlor!

JANE

What is the trump suit, Cassandra?

CASSANDRA

(turning over the top card on the deck)

Hearts.

ALETHEA

Harris's lucky suit.

HARRIS

Be quiet, Alethea.

ALETHEA

If we put on a play, will you consent to be my pageboy as before, Harris?

HARRIS

If Jane writes the part for me, with not too many speeches to learn.

ALETHEA

Come hither, page. I have an errand for you. A dispute between the butcher and the miller requires my most urgent intervention. First, take this bottle of distilled newt and bring it to—

JANE

Stop, please.

ALETHEA

You were always rallying for us to perform your plays.

JANE

That was so long ago.

HARRIS

Then it is time you wrote us a new one.

JANE

I cannot write a sketch. I do not write at all anymore.

ALETHEA

That must be a weight off your mother's mind. How she would complain to Mamma: "Whenever there is work to be done, Jane hides herself away with a

notebook.”

CASSANDRA

My sister has not quite lost the habit of hiding herself away.

JANE

But no longer with a notebook.

HARRIS

Will anyone bid for my ten of hearts?

CASSANDRA

I pass.

ALETHEA

Jane, you cannot leave my brother's hearts on the table!

HARRIS

(protesting)

Alethea!

JANE

I will not bid this turn.

ALETHEA

I begin to tire of cards. Cassandra, did I tell you that I have completed a new design for a pocketbook?

CASSANDRA

(trying to muster interest)

Have you?

ALETHEA

I must show it to you. My vanity craves your admiration.

CASSANDRA

Very well.

ALETHEA

Harris will not mind keeping Jane amused while we older sisters occupy ourselves as older sisters do.

JANE

I was about to retire to bed. It is nearly midnight.

ALETHEA

Nonsense. I know what late hours you city dwellers keep. Harris will entertain you while we matrons confer.

HARRIS

Perhaps we had all better retire.

ALETHEA

Not now, Harris. Cassandra will not rest until she has put me to shame with a dozen improvements to my design. And I am sure that Jane is determined to conquer all the hearts in the deck.

JANE

But Harris is tired—

ALETHEA

If we retire now, you will think us very dull hosts.

(ALETHEA and CASSANDRA withdraw from HARRIS and JANE but do not exit)

JANE

We had best continue playing, for Alethea's sake.

(JANE draws a card from the deck and turns it over)

Three of hearts.

HARRIS

I bid one chip for it.

JANE

For a three?

HARRIS

Two chips, then.

JANE

For such a low card?

HARRIS

I mean, I do not bid at all—Or else, I bid all my chips, to have done with the game—I mean—I hardly know what I mean.

JANE

Shall we set the cards aside?

HARRIS

Not if it amuses you to play.

JANE

I am always amused in this house.

HARRIS

You have been happy here?

JANE

Our friends are endlessly kind to us.

HARRIS

You have been our friend for a long time.

JANE

With my twenty-seventh birthday a fortnight away, I have been doing most things for a long time.

HARRIS

You have lived in Bath for a long time.

JANE

It certainly feels that way.

HARRIS

Alethea said that your parents moved to Bath so that you and Cassandra would find husbands.

JANE

If that was their hope, the experiment has provided little in the way of satisfaction.

HARRIS

“Why should Miss Austen go to Bath to find a husband?” I said to Alethea.

JANE

And for that matter, why should Miss Austen find a husband in Bath?

(beat)

It is late. We really ought to set the cards aside.

HARRIS

You are angry with me. I have said the wrong thing.

JANE

Of course not.

HARRIS

That is a habit with me—saying the wrong thing. Other men come ready with all the right words. And all the right gestures. Like that tall fellow, Lefroy.

(mimicking TOM)

“I know how difficult it is to tear one's self away from a fine pair of eyes in the face of a pretty woman. And so, to assist you, I volunteer to escort Miss Austen in the next set.”

(beat)

Oh bother!

JANE

Never mind, Harris. Mr. Lefroy hardly proved to be a formidable rival in the end. Though the papers say that he is a fierce adversary in the courtroom.

HARRIS

He is recently married.

JANE

Is he? Of course he is.

(pause)

We are not so different, you and I. I never seem to behave quite as I should, myself.

HARRIS

Exactly! That is what I always said. That is why I said that we should marry.

JANE

Because Miss Austen is ill behaved?

HARRIS

I said it on the night of our ball.

JANE

You are fortunate that gentlemen of twenty-one are not held to the declarations they make at sixteen.

HARRIS

You and I are exactly alike.

JANE

Are we?

HARRIS

You just said so yourself. Making people laugh when we don't mean to be funny.

JANE

For what do we live but to make sport for our neighbours?

HARRIS

If we were married, we should not care if they laughed. We should not care what other people thought.

JANE

How Alethea would scold you for teasing a spinster like this.

HARRIS

You would not be a spinster if we were married. And we would all be so comfortable by the fire.

JANE

With you in your slippers.

HARRIS

You remember about my slippers!

JANE

Of course, I do. Dear boy, you were so earnest.

HARRIS

And I'll warrant you even remember where I keep them.

JANE

Under your bed.

HARRIS

Yes! You remember! You remember because you care for me. You do! I knew it!

ALETHEA

What is it, Harris? Have you something to tell us?

HARRIS

(alarmed)

Nothing, Alethea.

ALETHEA

I am such a fool. Ignore me. Pretend I am not in the room.

JANE

Of course I care for you. You are Alethea's brother.

HARRIS

And you would be her sister if . . . you know . . . if—

JANE

Do you really think that I would make you a proper sort of wife?

HARRIS

Is that your worry? If that is your only worry, that is no worry at all. We shall be married. We shall. Alethea! Cassandra! Jane and I are to be married!

ALETHEA

Oh, Jane!

HARRIS

We shall be married in the new year.

ALETHEA

We have been waiting for so long to wish you joy.

JANE

Then . . . you must wait no longer.

ALETHEA

What a wonderful Christmas we will have!

CASSANDRA

Congratulations, Jane.

ALETHEA

You have made us all so happy. How I laughed to see Harris stumble and blush all evening, as if he half expected Jane to turn him down.

HARRIS

It was only that I did not know how to begin. Then suddenly we were in the middle of it all, and a moment later everything was settled.

ALETHEA

We shall be just as dear to one another as if we had been born sisters. We must celebrate! Harris, come help me fetch the Madeira.

(ALETHEA and HARRIS fetch the decanter and glasses from the side table)

JANE

Cassandra, you will come live with us of course.

CASSANDRA

Steady! It is a bit early to begin filling your husband's house with lodgers!

JANE

You will have a carriage and a horse, and you must take air in the carriage every day. And you will have a chair of your own by the hearth. And you will be under orders to sit by the hearth and do absolutely nothing at least once a day. Please tell me that you are happy.

CASSANDRA

We must send word to Mamma.

JANE

Perhaps she will leave off fretting about what is to become of us.

(ALETHEA and HARRIS distribute the filled glasses.
ELIZABETH enters)

ALETHEA

To Jane and Harris.

CASSANDRA

To Jane and Harris.

(ELIZABETH snatches the glass of Madeira from
JANE's hands)

ELIZABETH

To Jane and Harris. May the bride look as happy on her wedding day as she does tonight.

(ELIZABETH drains the glass and hands it back to
JANE)

JANE

Lizzy?

(beat)

What are you doing here?

ELIZABETH

Fine words of welcome!

HARRIS

We must marry in January!

JANE

So soon?

ALETHEA

I detest long engagements.

HARRIS

We shall announce it at our Christmas party—right after Jane's theatrical.

JANE

I told you, I cannot write a theatrical.

ELIZABETH

Shall we ask Miss Austen the reason for this?

JANE

I no longer write.

ELIZABETH

Shall we ask Miss Austen why she no longer writes?

JANE

Because . . . I suppose, because there is nothing to write about.

ELIZABETH

No suitable subject presents itself to a woman of intelligence and experience?

JANE

Bath is too full of business and bustle to allow for writing.

ELIZABETH

And no woman has ever turned her back on business and bustle to spend half an hour at her writing desk?

JANE

What does it matter to you whether I write or not?

ELIZABETH

The evenings are long at this time of year. A woman often wishes for a volume of sense and wit penned by one of her own sex. Or, if none is to be had, a few pages of folly and nonsense would do.

JANE

Not everyone takes your view. I tried to publish Jane Bennet's story, but it came to nothing. Mr. Cadell's reply came quickly enough. "Declined by return of post".

ELIZABETH

And there are no other publishers in England?

ALETHEA

You sent a novel to a publisher, Jane?

JANE

I am sorry, Alethea. I hardly realised that I was speaking out loud.

ALETHEA

You have since abandoned such ideas?

CASSANDRA

Jane meant to publish anonymously, of course.

ALETHEA

Even so. Word always gets out.

JANE

You must be pleased with yourself, Elizabeth Bennet. Barely do you make an entrance, and all is confusion. Even after all these years.

ELIZABETH

Elizabeth Bennet? Must I remind you that for the past seven years I have been “Elizabeth Collins”?

(ELIZABETH reaches into the workbasket and retrieves a notebook, which she hands to JANE)

For the particulars concerning my nuptials, consult page forty-two of your manuscript — declined by return of post.

ALETHEA

What would you think, Harris, if your sister set about publishing novels?

HARRIS

Do you write novels, Alethea?

ALETHEA

With a home to look after, and a brother to care for? I should think not.

(JANE resumes her place at the card table)

ALETHEA (Cont'd)

We must send to London for the wedding cake.

CASSANDRA

I am sure that between us, Mamma and I can contrive to bake a cake.

ALETHEA

We will order the cake from Gunters, first thing in the morning.

HARRIS

And I will ride into town. Directly after breakfast.

ALETHEA

How like a man to escape at the first mention of wedding plans. What do you think of this brother of mine, Jane, dashing off and leaving his bride behind?

HARRIS

(to JANE)

I will ride into town to set a lock of your hair into a ring.

JANE

What a notion.

HARRIS

That is the sort of thing people do when they are engaged to be married. Setting locks of hair into rings and that sort of thing.

ALETHEA

Harris! I never knew you were a romantic.

HARRIS

You must give me a lock of your hair.

JANE

Of course . . . Of course.

HARRIS

Straight away. The scissors—

(HARRIS proceeds to the side table. As he reaches for the scissors, ELIZABETH confiscates them)

ELIZABETH

Pardon. This pair belongs to me.

JANE

They came from my workbasket.

ELIZABETH

I once loaned them to you at ball. Have you forgotten?

JANE

How very like you to choose this moment to remind me.

HARRIS

I was sure there was a pair of scissors on the table.

JANE

We can look for them in the morning. My hair is all pinned up.

HARRIS

The scissors must be in your workbasket.

(HARRIS begins rummaging in the work basket for the scissors)

JANE

Lizzy, the scissors!

ELIZABETH

I am going out to cut some Christmas greens to bring back to the parsonage. Mr. Collins is very fond of greenery.

JANE

(to HARRIS)

Perhaps I left the scissors in the garden when I was gathering Christmas greens.

ELIZABETH

Goodnight!

(ELIZABETH proceeds to the outdoor space)

JANE

Lizzy!

(Holding the manuscript, JANE follows ELIZABETH. The other actors onstage create the outdoor space, which should have a small garden table)

JANE (Cont'd)

Give me back the scissors, Lizzy. My future husband has requested a lock of my hair and he must have one.

(ELIZABETH snips a few pieces of greenery with the scissors)

JANE (Cont'd)

Stop teasing. I must return to my friends, and I mean to return with the scissors.

ELIZABETH

Find another pair.

JANE

You are jealous.

ELIZABETH

Who would not envy you? Only think of the fine clothes and fine carriages you will have. You who once aspired merely to a husband as settled in life as Mr. Collins.

JANE

My good fortune comes at a high price.

ELIZABETH

Does it?

JANE

I gave you up.

ELIZABETH

Judging by how pleased you are to see me, my absence has been no sacrifice.

JANE

No sacrifice? My novel was to ring with your laughter and instead, I was left with the murmurs of a dutiful Jane Bennet. And if my novel suffered for want of laughter, I have suffered still more. Lizzy, I have been so lonely.

ELIZABETH

No longer, my dear. You shall have a husband.

JANE

Why do you insist on taunting me?

ELIZABETH

I am off. Your friends are waiting for you and I must be on my way.

JANE

Do not leave me, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

I must get back to the parsonage to prepare the chickens' feed. I have lately discovered that adding a little milk to their mash has a most salutary effect on their plumage.

JANE

Promise me that you will come back. Promise me that you will come back every day.

ELIZABETH

(archly)

Is that all?

JANE

Or rather, every night. Just as you once said. After Mrs. Harris Bigg-Wither fetches her husband's slippers and sends him off to bed, she will creep downstairs, candle in hand, to confer with you. Oh, Lizzy! What novels we will write.

ELIZABETH

Your own home will furnish everything you desire.

JANE

How could I ever have thought that when I married, I would not need to write? It is married women who must write. If married women are to behave as they must, they must have some reprieve.

(beat)

Lizzy, you will be more than my reprieve. You will be my reward.

(beat)

I had to send you away because you were too dangerous a companion. But now that I am engaged to be married, you are no longer a threat.

ELIZABETH

Is that meant in the spirit of a compliment?

JANE

If you are no longer a danger, I can write about you again. And that is why I must be married. So that once again, I can write about my very own unruly, impertinent Lizzy. What fun we will have!

ELIZABETH

Jane, you forget something. For the past seven years, unruly, impertinent Lizzy has been good Mrs. Collins, the parson's wife.

JANE

What can seven years mean to a character in a novel?

ELIZABETH

Seven years of marriage can mean a great deal. I have worked hard to fulfill my new role. In consequence, you may find me a rather dull subject for your pen.

JANE

You?

ELIZABETH

Will you document my little discovery about the salutary effect of adding milk to the chickens' mash? Will you record that every Saturday, my husband dictates a lengthy sermon which I take down in a meticulous hand, and that on Sunday, I listen attentively to his delivery as I sit in my pew with folded hands and downcast eyes? Or will you describe the visits bestowed upon me by my esteemed patroness, Lady Catherine De Bourgh?

(LADY CATHERINE enters. ELIZABETH's manner toward her is demure and restrained)

ELIZABETH

Good evening, Lady Catherine.

LADY CATHERINE

I have come from the parsonage, Mrs. Collins.

ELIZABETH

Your Ladyship is too kind in her attentions to us.

LADY CATHERINE

I had expected to find you there.

ELIZABETH

Allow me to apologise, Lady Catherine. I have been calling on an old acquaintance. Of course, I would have postponed my trip instantly, had I known that I was to be favoured with a visit from you.

LADY CATHERINE

Your maid informed me that you were out visiting. She also informed me that you traveled unaccompanied.

ELIZABETH

Miss Austen has just received an offer of marriage. I came to congratulate her on her engagement.

LADY CATHERINE

I presume that once again, Miss Austen, you have neglected to inform your parents of your plans.

ELIZABETH

Our visit draws to a close, and I am about to return home.

LADY CATHERINE

Again, unaccompanied?

ELIZABETH

I mean no offence, your Ladyship.

JANE

Lizzy, why do you demean yourself like this?

ELIZABETH

(to JANE)

You must realise that the Collins's fortunes depend entirely upon Lady Catherine's favour.

LADY CATHERINE

I will send for my man servant to see you home.

ELIZABETH

I should hate to put you to such trouble, Lady Catherine. Perhaps someone else could be found—

(MR. DARCY enters)

ELIZABETH (Cont'd)

—to escort me.

MR. DARCY

If you would allow me, Aunt Catherine, I should be most happy to accompany Mrs. Collins.

LADY CATHERINE

Fitzwilliam!

MR. DARCY

The parsonage lies on my intended route.

JANE

What is Mr. Darcy doing here?

ELIZABETH

(to JANE)

Oh, I neglected to tell you. It is a habit with Mr. Darcy to call at the parsonage when he visits his aunt.

JANE

How odd that he should visit the marriage home of the woman who rejected his proposal.

ELIZABETH

At first, I supposed that his object was to make me feel what I had lost in refusing him. But I have since changed my view.

JANE

What a trial his visits must be for you.

ELIZABETH

In fact, Mr. Darcy rather improves upon acquaintance.

JANE

The man who tried to separate Mr. Bingley from your sister?

MR. DARCY

I have since conceded that I was in error on that point.

ELIZABETH

You wrote his apology yourself, on page two hundred and thirty-six, though you did not do justice to the strength of his feelings.

JANE

I suppose he visits Lady Catherine to pay his respects to her daughter, the very eligible Miss de Bourgh.

ELIZABETH

Lady Catherine certainly seems to think so.

LADY CATHERINE

Mrs. Collins, I stopped by the parsonage to inform you that we can dispense with your company tomorrow evening. My nephew has surprised us with a visit, and my daughter and I will be greatly occupied in consequence.

MR. DARCY

Please do not cancel the Collins's invitation on my account, Aunt.

LADY CATHERINE

I am sure that you and my daughter will wish to converse on subjects best suited to an intimate family gathering. Speaking of family, Mrs. Collins, do you continue to take Mr. Nelson's snail water?

ELIZABETH

Yes, Lady Catherine.

LADY CATHERINE

Every evening?

ELIZABETH

Directly before retiring to bed.

LADY CATHERINE

It is essential that the preparation be taken last thing at night. I always insist on that point.

ELIZABETH

I thank you for your concern.

LADY CATHERINE

The parsonage must have children, and the more the better. There is no greater proponent of large families than me. My daughter and I are both fervent spokeswomen on this point.

(beat)

Is it true, Miss Austen, that you have accepted a proposal of marriage?

JANE

Yes I have, your Ladyship.

LADY CATHERINE

I will instruct Mr. Nelson to send you a bottle of snail water directly.

JANE

Thank you, Lady Catherine.

LADY CATHERINE

Fitzwilliam, I will expect you for supper. The hours in our house are prompt.

MR. DARCY

So you have reminded me, Aunt Catherine. Three times.

(LADY CATHERINE exits)

ELIZABETH

I am indebted to you, Mr. Darcy, for delivering me from the good offices of your aunt.

MR. DARCY

My Aunt Catherine means well, though I must apologise for her mode of expression.

ELIZABETH

Lady Catherine does love to be of use.

MR. DARCY

Her assistance has been invaluable if it has procured me your company for an hour.

ELIZABETH

Or even two, depending on our route.

MR. DARCY

The view from the top of the hillock is rather stirring.

ELIZABETH

How long will you remain in the neighbourhood this time, Mr. Darcy?

MR. DARCY

My aunt will not countenance a visit of less than a month.

ELIZABETH

Neither would Mr. Collins or his wife.

JANE

Elizabeth? Mr. Darcy? This is most peculiar.

ELIZABETH

Peculiar friendships are the offspring of peculiar marriages, Jane.

JANE

This cannot be! I know it to be impossible. He is the man who tried to separate your sister from Mr. Bingley.

MR. DARCY

I have since conceded that I was in error on that point.

ELIZABETH

You transcribed his apology yourself, on page two hundred and seven. Though you failed to do justice to the depth of his feelings.

JANE

Do you love him, Lizzy?

ELIZABETH

My marriage would be unendurable, but for his visits. And occasionally, in company, I feel myself to be something of the woman I once was.

(teasingly)

How very trying for you, Mr. Darcy, that you should bring out in me the very qualities that rendered me so unfit to be the wife of the man who governs Pemberley.

MR. DARCY

Do not remind me of my words on that day. I have often had cause to regret them. If I had known then how to value your spirit as I do now, if my proposal had acknowledged more of your worth, and less of my pride, perhaps I would have spoken to better effect.

And even now the halls of Pemberley might be ringing with your laughter.

(pause)

JANE

What a woman might you have been, Lizzy, had I allowed you such a marriage?

ELIZABETH

No more, both of you.

JANE

What have I done to you? What have I done in marrying you to Mr. Collins?

ELIZABETH

There is little use in brooding over it now.

JANE

(to ELIZABETH)

Supposing that your marriage could be . . . ended.

ELIZABETH

A likely turn of events.

JANE

Do you never dream that some chance occurrence might set you free?

ELIZABETH

What do you think?

(LADY CATHERINE enters)

LADY CATHERINE

Unthinkable! Impudent girl!

(In the ensuing exchange, ELIZABETH gradually
regains her former vigour)

ELIZABETH

Lady Catherine!

MR. DARCY

Now, Aunt Catherine—

LADY CATHERINE

I am shocked and astonished at what I have overheard, Mrs. Collins. Do you, Mrs. Elizabeth Collins, actually dare to imagine yourself married to my nephew, my own nephew, Mr. Darcy? Is this your gratitude for my attentions to you?

ELIZABETH

I was only—

LADY CATHERINE

You must know that Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter.

MR. DARCY

Engaged? Aunt Catherine, what do you mean?

LADY CATHERINE

You have always been intended for one another. Your mother and I planned your union while you were in your cradles.

MR. DARCY

You cannot bring about a marriage by planning it, Aunt Catherine.

LADY CATHERINE

Fitzwilliam, this woman's allurements have made you forget your duty. She must relinquish her hold upon you at once. Promise me, Mrs. Collins, that you will never consort with my nephew again.

(pause)

ELIZABETH

I will make no promise of the kind.

LADY CATHERINE

Obstinate, headstrong girl! I shall not go away 'til you have given me the assurance I require.

ELIZABETH

And I certainly never shall give it.

LADY CATHERINE

Allow me to remind you that the livelihood of your family is in my command.

ELIZABETH

Your Ladyship wants Mr. Darcy to marry your daughter, but would my giving you the promise you demand make their marriage more probable? Would my refusing to speak to Mr. Darcy prompt him to propose to his cousin?

LADY CATHERINE

I had hoped that your marriage would cure you of your youthful insolence. Miss Austen, you must compel Mrs. Collins to do as I command.

JANE

I am done with compelling Lizzy.

LADY CATHERINE

Then beware the consequences. If Mrs. Collins unites herself with Mr. Darcy, will you be satisfied with Mr. Bigg-Wither? How will you bring yourself to proceed with your marriage?

HARRIS (Offstage)

Jane!

JANE

Worse yet, if I proceed with my marriage, how will I bring myself to write about theirs?

HARRIS (Offstage)

Jane!

JANE

The contrast with my own situation would be intolerable.

(HARRIS enters)

HARRIS (Cont'd)

Here you are! You have been outside for hours.

JANE
I lost track of the time.

HARRIS
Doing what?

JANE
Oh . . . admiring the garden in the moonlight. It is a lovely garden.

(Pause. HARRIS tries to kiss JANE. She moves away.)

HARRIS (Cont'd)
You left us to fetch the scissors.

JANE
I was just collecting my thoughts.

HARRIS
Well? Did you find them?

JANE
My thoughts?

HARRIS
The scissors.

JANE
Not yet.

HARRIS
Never mind. I have my pen knife with me. It will do.

JANE
Harris, I do not think—

HARRIS
Just a small lock—

(HARRIS advances with the knife)

JANE
No!

(ELIZABETH intercedes between JANE and HARRIS,
brandishing the scissors to fend off the latter)

ELIZABETH

Keep your distance, sir!

JANE

Harris put your knife down.

HARRIS

I do not understand you.

JANE

(to HARRIS)

I cannot give you a lock of my hair, Harris. I cannot give you a lock of my hair
because—

HARRIS

Because your hair is pinned up.

JANE

No, because—

HARRIS

Because it is all so sudden?

JANE

It is because—

HARRIS

I was only asking for what you gave so easily to another.

JANE

Harris, I cannot give you a lock of my hair because I cannot marry you.

LADY CATHERINE

So this is your final resolve. I am most seriously displeased.

(LADY CATHERINE exits)

HARRIS

You said that we were to be married. Alethea and Cassandra were in the room,
and we all drank Madeira to celebrate.

JANE

My behaviour has been abominable.

HARRIS

You are unwell.

JANE

I am perfectly well.

HARRIS

You have taken a chill. You are not your self.

JANE

This is the only self that I can be. Please hear me as a rational creature.

HARRIS

Rational? When I offer you everything and you refuse it all?

JANE

Dear, dear Harris. If we were to marry, I would come to despise myself, and bring out the worst in you.

HARRIS

Do you not wish for marriage?

JANE

So much so that I must refuse your offer.

HARRIS

You are waiting for a better one?

JANE

I think it unlikely. Particularly if I insist on hiding myself away with a notebook dreaming up marriages for my heroines.

HARRIS

You said that you no longer write.

JANE

I have left my pen idle for far too long.

HARRIS

You will be spinsters all your lives, you and Cassandra both. You will share drafty rooms in Bath with your parents, when you might have been mistress of this house. You will be ridiculous.

(HARRIS runs offstage. JANE watches him leave and turns to ELIZABETH)

JANE

What a lot of trouble you cause, Lizzy.

ELIZABETH

Is that your way of thanking me?

(ELIZABETH and JANE look at one another and laugh)

JANE

I must do better than thank you.

(taking the manuscript from her reticule)

I must undo your marriage.

ELIZABETH

Is it possible?

JANE

Everything is possible in a novel. We must go back to the manuscript. Mr. Collins must be restored to what he was when you first encountered him, and you must refuse him. Now, how to recreate Mr. Collins?

“Miss Elizabeth,” he said, “I am no opponent of dance”—no that was not it—“I hope Miss Elizabeth will think me no stranger to respectable balls”—No! How could I have thrown my best work away?

ELIZABETH

(retrieving the manuscript fragment from her sash)

I believe that Mr. Collins' exact words were, “to the contrary, Miss Elizabeth, I am by no means of the opinion that—”

JANE

The ballroom scene with Mr. Collins! You kept it for me all these years!

(JANE seizes the page and reads from it)

“To the contrary, Miss Elizabeth, I am by no means of the opinion that a ball of this kind, given by an established family can have any evil tendency—”

(MR. COLLINS enters)

MR. COLLINS

And I am so far from objecting to dancing myself that I shall take this opportunity of soliciting your hand.

JANE

Welcome back, Mr. Collins.

(MR. COLLINS bows to JANE, who coaches him back into his former manners and posture)

JANE (Cont'd)

I believe that it is not for the dance alone that you wish to solicit the hand of Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

ELIZABETH

(joyfully)

Am I to be Miss Elizabeth Bennet once more?

JANE

You are. The scissors.

(JANE takes the scissors from LIZZY, scores out a few pages from the manuscript and holds them up)

Your marriage to Mr. Collins.

(JANE tears up the excised pages and throws them on the ground)

Once again, you are the unmarried daughter of a country gentleman.

ELIZABETH

(curtseys)

My papa's education rather exceeds his income.

JANE

You are the sworn enemy of proud Mr. Darcy, who snubbed you at a dance—though you will admit that a man of his distinction has a right to be proud.

ELIZABETH

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

JANE

And, what is more, you are about to receive a proposal.

ELIZABETH

Am I?

JANE

From a most singular gentleman.

ELIZABETH

Not Mr.—

JANE

Is that not so, Mr. Collins?

MR. COLLINS

I see no reason for delay. A prompt marriage is the particular recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. And almost as soon as I was introduced to Miss Bennet, I singled her out as the companion of my future life.

(turning his attention to ELIZABETH)

And so, to settle the matter, nothing remains but for me to assure you, Miss Elizabeth, of the violence of my affection, and for you to name the day that will make me the happiest of men.

ELIZABETH

You are too hasty, Sir. I am sensible of the honour of your proposals, but I cannot do otherwise than decline them.

MR. COLLINS

I am not now to learn, Miss Elizabeth, that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or even a third time.

ELIZABETH

Sir, I am perfectly serious in my refusal.

MR. COLLINS

You are trying to increase my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females.

ELIZABETH

Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but please hear me as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart.

MR. COLLINS

You are uniformly charming!

ELIZABETH

Mr. Collins, you could not make me happy, and I am the last woman in the world who would make you so. Were your friend Lady Catherine to know me, she would find me wanting in every respect.

MR. COLLINS

Were it certain that Lady Catherine would think so, I should have to reconsider.

JANE

I should have warned you, Mr. Collins. Lizzy can be a very headstrong, foolish girl.

MR. COLLINS

Oh. If she is really headstrong and foolish, I do not know whether she would altogether be a very desirable wife.

(thoughtfully)

Especially when compared to some of the other young ladies in the neighborhood.

Miss Austen must excuse me.

(MR. COLLINS exits purposefully)

JANE

How quickly men in novels recover their spirits. It will not be so easy for poor Harris.

MR. DARCY

A man of sense will ultimately value honest words from a clear-thinking woman.

JANE

I do not think that many would judge my conduct tonight as clear-thinking.

MR. DARCY

Then you must be your own judge. And perhaps this once, you may judge yourself charitably.

JANE

Thank you, Mr. Darcy.

ELIZABETH

What is he doing here?

JANE

Patience, Lizzy. The day will come when you receive his company with joy.

ELIZABETH

With scorn, I should think.

JANE

And not only his company, but his proposal as well.

ELIZABETH

If there is joy to be had in refusing a proposal.

JANE

Yes, I believe you will refuse his proposal, or should I say his first proposal. But he is as determined as he is proud. And he will prove himself worthy of your hand.

ELIZABETH

Is he to rescue me from some terrible crisis?

JANE

With so many of your sisters at the age of unreason, I am sure I can produce at least one credible calamity to test my hero's mettle.

ELIZABETH

So proud Mr. Darcy is to replace charming Mr. Bingley as your hero?

JANE AUSTEN

What is more, I must warn you, you are in grave danger of replacing pretty Jane Bennet as my heroine.

ELIZABETH

I told you that I would never do for a heroine. At least do not make me a model heroine.

JANE AUSTEN

You will still be permitted to disappear on solitary rambles in the rain, and to splatter your petticoats with mud.

(CASSANDRA enters)

CASSANDRA

Jane!

JANE

Cassandra, dear Cassandra. Have you heard the news?

CASSANDRA

I was about to climb the stairs when Harris stormed into the drawing room. What he told me—Is it true? Did you really break off your engagement?

(JANE nods)

CASSANDRA (Cont'd)

We cannot stay here any longer.

(JANE nods)

CASSANDRA (Cont'd)

We must beg our friends' forgiveness, and ask for their carriage to take us home.

JANE

How will we explain things to Mamma and Papa?

CASSANDRA

Alethea may never speak to us again.

JANE

What will become of us, Cassandra, when we no longer have Papa's income to sustain us?

CASSANDRA

You must not speak of that.

JANE

But you and Mamma do.

CASSANDRA

Jane, I have never felt so . . . so. . . Oh!

(CASSANDRA's mood shifts abruptly to jubilation.

She seizes JANE's arms and dances wildly)

You refused him! You refused him! Thank god you refused him!

JANE

But this house was to be our home. This garden was to be ours.

CASSANDRA

Jane, if you were determined to be mistress of all of this, how could I ever advise you to do otherwise? But I would have you do anything rather than marry without affection.

JANE

Cassandra, I had no idea!

ELIZABETH

I suppose that I should thank you, Mr. Darcy, for your kind words to Miss Austen. There are moments in a woman's life when she urgently requires the support of her friends, and therefore, let me thank you in her name.

MR. DARCY

If you will thank me, let it be for yourself alone. In acting, I thought only of you.

ELIZABETH

Why, Mr. Darcy!

Cassandra? JANE

Yes? CASSANDRA

JANE
Do you remember my failed novel about Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley?

CASSANDRA
Your novel was not a failure. It was only—

JANE
—promptly rejected. Do you remember Jane's sister, Elizabeth?

CASSANDRA
The one who married the clergyman?

JANE
Suppose that I were to revise my novel. Suppose that instead of marrying the clergyman, Elizabeth is pursued by Mr. Darcy.

CASSANDRA
That brooding, tall fellow with the estate in Darbyshire?

(JANE nods)

CASSANDRA (Cont'd)
Well, we all know Mr. Darcy to be an unpleasant sort of man. But what of it, if Elizabeth really liked him.

JANE
Perhaps Mr. Darcy is not quite so unpleasant as we thought. Or at least, perhaps he is capable of reform. And how he speaks. Listen.

(JANE AUSTEN nods towards ELIZABETH and MR. DARCY. For the first time, CASSANDRA is able to see and hear the fictional characters)

MR. DARCY
Miss Bennet, I have been a selfish creature all my life. As a child, I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. You have shown me how insufficient all my pretensions were to please a woman worthy of being pleased. By you, I have been properly humbled. My affections and wishes

remain unchanged. I cannot but hope that your own may perhaps be moved. But one word from you will silence me on this subject forever.

ELIZABETH

Do you not feel a great inclination, Mr. Darcy, to seize this opportunity to dance a reel?

MR. DARCY

Dearest, loveliest Elizabeth.

(Music. MR. DARCY offers ELIZABETH his hand.
They begin to dance)

JANE

You see, Mr. Darcy will—

CASSANDRA

You must tell me all about it when we are on our way.

JANE

We must pack our trunks.

CASSANDRA

You know, Jane, Mr. Cadell is not the only publisher in England.

JANE

Indeed.

CASSANDRA

Perhaps one could yet be found who would look with favour on your Elizabeth Bennet and her Mr. Darcy.

JANE

Can there be anything more ridiculous than an aging spinster publishing novels that teach the admiring multitude what love really is? Jane Austen will be ridiculous. Jane Austen will be utterly ridiculous. Jane Austen will be utterly, absurdly, laughably unashamedly, joyfully, ridiculously ridiculous.

CASSANDRA

Jane Austen will be an author.

(The end.)

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the Lizzy, Darcy and Jane information page (click on your browser's Back button, or visit <http://www.singlelane.com/proplay/lizzydarcyjane.html>)