

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Pride and Prejudice

by Deborah Mulhall

EXTRACT

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CHARACTER BREAKDOWN:

- Mr Bennet: 40+ years. An intelligent man who is somewhat of a recluse. Has retired from all active participation in raising his children.
- Mrs Bennet: 40+ years. A silly woman whose only ambition in life is to see her daughters well-married.
- Lydia Bennet: 16 years. Pretty, foolish and rather self-centered.
- Jane Bennet: Eldest of the three sisters. Beautiful, charming and exceptionally good-natured.
- Elizabeth Bennet: Intelligent, witty and attractive. Second to Jane in appearance.
- Hill: Servant to the Bennet household. As there are only a few lines, it is a good role for the Stage Manager! Male or female.
- Lady Lucas: 40+ years. A merchant's wife recently elevated to the peerage. This role can be doubled with that of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, providing a challenge to the actor.
- Charlotte Lucas: 25+ years. Close friend to Elizabeth. Plain but full of common sense. Also rather witty.
- Charles Bingley: 25 – 35 years. Charming, attractive young man who is very good natured.
- George Wickham: 25 – 35 years. Charming rogue.
- Captain Denny: 2 5 – 40 years. Rather dim, “tally-ho” style of British officer. Can be doubled with Colonel Fitzwilliam to provide a challenge to the actor. Or may be doubled with *Hill*.
- Fitzwilliam Darcy: Late 20's to 40 years. Handsome, reserved, unsmiling. He has a kind, understanding heart which is hidden by his arrogant pride.
- Rev. Collins: 30+ years. Extremely vapid, social-climbing hypocrite who provides much of the comedy.
- Caroline Bingley: of an age to rival Elizabeth. A bitch.
- Lady Catherine de Bourgh: 40+ years. Darcy's aunt. Has all his arrogant pride but none of his redeeming warmth and compassion. Doubled with Lady Lucas.
- Colonel Fitzwilliam: 30 to 45 years. Cousin to Darcy. Sensible army officer with perfect social manners. Doubles with Capt. Denny

SCENE 1

(The drawing room at Longbourn. Mr Bennet is reading. Mrs Bennet enters excitedly)

Mrs Bennet My dear Mr Bennet, have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?

Mr Bennet Really?

Mrs Bennet But it is, for Mrs Long has just been here, and she told me all about it. Do you not want to know who has taken it?

Mr Bennet You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.

Mrs Bennet Well my dear, if you must know, he is a young man of large fortune from the north of England. He came down last week and was so delighted with the place that he took it immediately and is already installed with a retinue of servants.

Mr Bennet What is his name?

Mrs Bennet Bingley.

Mr Bennet Is he married or single?

Mrs Bennet Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!

Mr Bennet How so? How can it affect them?

Mrs Bennet My dear Mr Bennet, how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.

Mr Bennet Is that his design in settling here?

Mrs Bennet Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him.

Mr Bennet I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps may be better, for since you are as handsome as any of them, Mr Bingley may like you better.

Mrs Bennet My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has three grown up daughters to think of, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty.

Mr Bennet In such cases a woman has not often much beauty to think of.

Mrs Bennet You will go and see Mr Bingley at once?

Mr Bennet It is more than I engage for, I assure you.

Mrs Bennet But consider your daughters. It will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not.

- Mr Bennet You are over scrupulous. I daresay Mr Bingley will be very glad to see you. I shall send a few lines to him assuring him of my hearty consent to whichever he chooses of the girls, though I must throw in a good word for my Lizzy.
- Mrs Bennet I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others - she is not half as handsome as Jane or half so good humoured as Lydia, but you always play favourites with her.
- Mr Bennet None of them have much to recommend them, they are all silly and ignorant, but Lizzy is a little more intelligent than her sisters.
- Mrs Bennet Mr Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You have no compassion on my nerves.
- Mr Bennet You mistake me my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least.
- Mrs Bennet You do not know what I suffer.
- Mr Bennet But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come in to the neighbourhood.
- Mrs Bennet It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them.
- Mr Bennet Depend upon it my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all.
- (Jane, Elizabeth and Lydia enter, having just returned from a walk to town. When Lydia speaks, the others pay little attention, and tend to talk over her.)*
- Lydia Mama! They say Colonel Forster and Captain Carter do not go so often to Miss Watson's as they did when they first came; she sees them now in Clarke's library.
- Mr Bennet Ah. The joys of having a regiment stationed in the town. *(Pause)*. What a fetching bonnet Lizzy. I hope Mr Bingley will like it.
- Mrs Bennet We are not to know what Mr Bingley likes since we are not to visit.
- Jane Never mind Mama. We met Mrs Long in town and she has met him and has promised to introduce us at the assemblies.
- Lydia We met that delightful Wickham in town too. He said he would visit this afternoon.
- Mrs Bennet I do not believe Mrs Long will do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman and I have no opinion of her.
- Mr Bennet No more have I. And I am glad you are not relying on her. When is your next ball to be Lizzy?
- Elizabeth It is our own assembly Papa, to-morrow fortnight.
- Mrs Bennet Aye, so it is. She will not have a chance to introduce him to anybody.
- Mr Bennet Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of her, and you may perform the introductions.

Mrs Bennet Impossible Mr Bennet, when I am not acquainted with him.

Mr Bennet Perhaps you are right. A few weeks acquaintance is certainly very little. If you cannot introduce him, then I shall.

Mrs Bennet Nonsense! I am quite sick of Mr Bingley.

Mr Bennet Already? If I had known you would so easily take him in dislike, I certainly would not have called on him last Wednesday when he was down. It is unlucky, but as I have paid the visit we cannot escape the acquaintance now.

(Exclamations of surprise and wonder as they all rush at Mr Bennet)

Mrs Bennet What an excellent father you have girls. We must invite Mr Bingley to dinner immediately. But Mr Bennet, how could you have let me run on so? Why did you not tell me of this earlier?

Mr Bennet *(ironically)* The temptation of listening to your exclamations of delight and wonder, was more than I could resist.

Mrs Bennet You ever did enjoy teasing me, Mr Bennet.

Lydia *(at the French windows)* Who is that riding in the lane? I do not think I know him. He is not very smart, he has no red coat.

(Hill enters)

Hill Lady Lucas and Miss Lucas, ma'm.

Mr Bennet Not the Lucases! The conversation shall be entirely of the absent Mr Bingley. I shall leave you to your exclamations and retire to the library.

(He exits abruptly, acknowledging Lucases as he does so)

Elizabeth Poor Papa. He really has no turn for company.

Lydia How strange. He has turned into the stables. I suppose it is someone to see Papa on business.

(The Lucases enter)

Mrs Bennet My dear Lady Lucas! Sweet Charlotte! I have been pining to see you. Have you heard about our new neighbour?

Lady Lucas Indeed. Sir William introduced us this morning, didn't he my dear?

Charlotte Yes. He is quite charming.

Mrs Bennet Oh? Only this morning. Mr Bennet made his acquaintance on Wednesday.

Charlotte How are you Lizzie?

Elizabeth Very well. It is strange we did not see you in town.

- Charlotte *(Dryly)* Mama has been very busy this morning. Mr Bingley's appearance in the neighbourhood has necessitated many calls.
- Mrs Bennet We are, of course, expecting him to dine with us within the sennight.
- Lady Lucas But when? He informed us this morning he was returning to London on business.
- Mrs Bennet Oh dear. I do hope he is not the sort of young man always flying about from place to place instead of settling down as he ought.
- Elizabeth Surely, Mama, he has a right to go to London if he wishes.
- Charlotte He is to bring his sister Caroline back with him. She is to keep house at Netherfield. I also understand he intends to have some houseguests.
- (The sound of voices outside the room. Mr Bennet enters, accompanied by Mr Bingley.)*
- Bingley But I protest sir, I am not dressed for morning calls on ladies.
- Mr Bennet Nonsense. We do not stand upon such ceremony here. Excuse me. Mrs Bennet, let me present our new neighbour ... Mr Bingley. And my daughters Miss Jane, Miss Elizabeth and Miss Lydia. Oh, and Lady Lucas and Miss Lucas.
- Bingley *(Unable to avoid looking with admiration at Jane)* Lady Lucas and Miss Lucas and I are already acquainted. Mrs Bennet, how are you. Excuse my appearance, but I decided to ride over and return your husband's kind visit of the other day. I had not really hoped to be presented to his so lovely family.
- Mrs Bennet How charming you are Mr Bingley! Jane is the loveliest of the girls, but Lydia has the liveliest temper, I assure you. They would all make lovely wives. I hope we shall see you often this winter. You shall not think of leaving us in a hurry, I hope.
- Bingley Everything I do is done in a hurry. When I fall in love I expect it will be the same. *(Looks at Jane)*.
- Mrs Bennet Sit down, Mr Bingley. Jane! make room for Mr Bingley next to you. Well, I hope you shall be back from London is time for our assembly.
- Mr Bennet *(aside)* You have been busy, Mrs Bennet.
- Bingley I may safely promise that. May I beg your permission to bring my sister and my close friend, Mr Darcy with me.
- Mrs Bennet Is he a bachelor?
- Bingley Why, er, yes.
- Mrs Bennet Then you may certainly bring him.
- Bingley Thank you. I hope to give a ball at Netherfield myself, later in the season. *(Pause)* You have a lovely garden here. I hope I may have the opportunity of viewing it more closely sometime.

Mrs Bennet Jane, take Mr Bingley for a walk around the garden.

Jane (*blushing*) Mama!

Elizabeth I think the air a little damp this morning Mama. Not at all suitable for a walk so early on.

Mrs Bennet I shouldn't have thought so, but you must needs always know best Lizzie. Well. You must dine with us before our ball Mr Bingley.

Bingley I fear that may not be possible. My business takes me to London immediately. However, I assure you I shall not miss your assembly. Until then, I must take a reluctant farewell of you as I have much to attend to. Goodbye. And goodbye Miss Jane. (*He lifts her hand to kiss*)

Jane Goodbye, Mr Bingley.

Bingley May I beg the honour of the first dance?

Jane Of course. I shall look forward to it.

Bingley Thank you.

Lady Lucas Well, we must be going too. Come Charlotte.

Charlotte Yes, Mama. I shall see you soon Lizzie.

Bingley Permit me to escort you as far as the road.

Lady Lucas How kind of you. Goodbye my dears. No doubt we shall see you very soon.

Mrs Bennet We must get together for a comfortable cose, just you and I.

Lady Lucas That is something to look forward to.

(They exit).

Mrs Bennet That scheming woman. She is after him for her Charlotte. Did you see the way she insisted he accompany them home? Practically throwing the poor girl at his head. I should never stoop so low.

Elizabeth Mr Bingley appears to be a young man quite capable of looking after himself, Mama.

Jane Indeed. A most presentable young man.

Mrs Bennet Well. Not that it will do her an ounce of good. He is obviously besotted with Jane.

Elizabeth Mama, he is certainly taken with her, but I should not say he was besotted.

Lydia I'd rather have an officer myself. They are so much more handsome in their uniforms.

Mrs Bennet Yes, my dear, when I was young I had quite a soft spot for a redcoat I can tell you. Well, I wonder if we should have a dinner before the assembly. Do you think Mr Bingley would like that Jane? I wonder what his favourite dish is. I shall instruct Cook to find out from the servants at

Netherfield.

(She exits on the last line)

Lydia I don't care what he likes. I just hope Papa invites lots of officers to the assembly. *(Looking out French windows)*. Oh, I see Mr Wickham and Mr Denny walking towards the Lucases. What a waste on plain old Charlotte. I shall go and bring them in, shall I? That would be fun.

Elizabeth Lydia! That would be most improper.

Lydia Fiddlesticks. As if I care for such stuff.

(Lydia exits)

Jane Oh Lizzie, it would be most improper for Mama to invite Mr Bingley to dinner on the night of the assembly on such short acquaintance.

Elizabeth Don't worry. I'm sure Papa's rule will prevail. He dislikes the idea of the assembly as it is. I doubt he shall consent to a dinner also. And what did you think of Mr Bingley?

Jane He seemed an amiable young man.

Elizabeth Presentable too? He was certainly taken with you! His asking for the first dance indicates that.

Jane I'm sure he was being no more than polite. After all, it is our assembly, and I am the eldest. He was only doing what is proper.

Elizabeth Hmm. As Lydia would say, "fiddlesticks".

(Lydia enters with Wickham and Denny on either side.)

Lydia *(triumphantly)* Look, I've brought them in just for us. It was such fun walking off with them under Charlotte's nose.

Jane Lydia, dear! Hello Mr Wickham. Captain Denny. I hope we see you in good health.

Wickham As ever, Miss Jane, you look in perfect beauty. And Miss Elizabeth in the best of spirits.

Elizabeth *(laughing)* How cruel, yet clever of you Mr Wickham, to avoid talking about my appearance in the presence of my sister.

Wickham It is you who are cruel, accusing me so. I am sure there are not three lovelier roses in England.

Lydia Oh Mr Wickham, you say the nicest things.*(Blowing a kiss at Wickham)* I declare I could kiss you.

Wickham I would happily offer you the opportunity, Miss Lydia.

Jane *(who has been conversing with Capt. Denny)* Are you on your way to town, Captain?

Denny Actually, no. Back to regiment quarters. Actually.