

JANE

-Lizzy is talking a lot of nonsense, girls. As usual.

LIZZY

Yes, we are only joking.

Mary sulks off to the piano.

LYDIA

(to Lizzy) Why should you pretend love and marriage and all that is a joke? It seems very serious to me.

They begin getting ready for the ball. Lydia and Mary's outfits are hideous.

LIZZY

That's because you are far away from it. When you're closer to the prospect, it becomes much too frightening, and you must laugh so you don't cry. Playing games keeps one sane, when the stakes involved threaten to drive one MAD.

JANE

Stop filling her head with foolishness. It's not a game, Lydia.

LIZZY

Isn't it? There are rules, strategies, wins, losses - and it is, theoretically, done for pleasure.

LYDIA

How do you know if you've found the right match?

LIZZY

Well. I shouldn't tell you, but -

LYDIA

Yes?

LIZZY

You know you've met the right one when -

LYDIA

(breathless with excitement) - yes?

LIZZY

A lightning bolt shoots down from the sky and fries you like an egg! *(she may enact this, vividly)*

You probably decide he's your Perfect Match just after your Mamma has finished counting his rich, sickly relatives and your Pappa has called on his bankers. These things are all arranged above one's head, Lydia.

JANE

It's complicated, dear. But I imagine you know when you have met the right person - well, at first, there is a liking. And then you behave appropriately, of course. But, eventually - there is a perfect understanding between souls. Wordless, and flawless.

LYDIA

Oooh.

LIZZY

NOW who's filling her head with nonsense? What novels have you been reading?

JANE

Well, what do YOU *really* think it is, Elizabeth?

LIZZY

I have no desire to find out! One of you will have to marry to save the family from ruin, for I'll none of it.

JANE

Oh, you don't mean that.

LIZZY

I know myself, Jane. I shall never marry. For (*looking off towards her parents*) the state is fundamentally flawed, as far as I can see. It is all... too much. I would, however, make a *lovely* maiden aunt. So do hurry and make the necessary arrangements with this Mr. Bingley...!

She pokes Jane; they giggle. Mrs. Bennet (wearing an outfit that outdoes all others in hideousness) marches on and lines up the girls as we transition to:

SCENE 3

The Longs' ball. Mrs. Bennet has a cup of punch; Lydia steals sips. Mr. Bennet trails behind, glancing at a folded-up newspaper. Ladies and gentlemen all mingle and ogle each other. It's a meat market. DING. DING. DING.

Please see optional Note at end of play for Mrs. Bennet's chant