

Bridgerdon Abbey

By Butch Maxwell and Bert Furioli

Characters:

Dame Arabella Thistlewhistle: Dowager matriarch of Bridgerdon Abbey

Lady Penelope Speedstick: Thistlewhistle's spunky, unconventional daughter

Agnes Mooch: Head housekeeper and the abbey's busybody

Lord Albert Hickenbottom: Arrogant, supremely shallow, yet debonair aristocrat

Rupert Dingle: Crude, but clever stableboy

The Time: 1836

The Place: The grand estate home of the late Earl of Duke, Lord Bridgerdon, in the village of Bumford-on-Anon, in the county of Bumsteadfordshire, England. After Lady Bridgerdon died of an unfortunate corset explosion, Lord Bridgerdon insisted on being a pall bearer. While carrying the coffin, he tripped and fell, causing the other pall bearers to drop Lady Bridgerdon's coffin on top of her husband, killing him. The estate was passed on to Bridgerdon's thrice-widowed sister, Dame Arabella Thistlewhistle, whose daughter from her first marriage, Penelope, has been holed-up at the estate property, preferring to spend her days riding horses than socializing with people.

Fun Facts

Dame Arabella Thistlewhistle: Her great-great-grandfather invented the invisible kilt. (At least, that's what he told the judge.)

Lady Penelope Speedstick: She was kicked out of boarding school when she T.P.d the headmistress.

Agnes Mooch: Her first kiss was from a sheepherder and his flock.

Lord Albert Hickenbottom: He almost died when his nanny fed him porridge made from gluten.

Rupert Dingle: He had a near-death experience due to an allergic reaction to water.

Madam Mesmer: She can see the future, but didn't see her arrest for fraud.

Act 1

SFX: Music – “Rondeau” (aka Theme from Masterpiece Theater)

Unknown Female Writer:

[Offstage] “Have you heard the latest scandal among the rich and powerful? And I'm not talking about Brittany's latest breakdown. Here it is: The event of the season – Bridgerdon Abbey's Pretentious Pompous Party-galooza – an exclusive masquerade ball – may be the staging grounds for the announcement of a wedding! And not just any wedding, my faithful readers, but a wedding that may finally merge the two wealthiest families in Bumsteadfordshire! And that, for the moment, is the end of the exposition.”

AGNES enters. She is dressed as a servant. She carries a ball gown in her hands. As she begins to hang it, she stops and drapes it over herself, studying how it looks in a mirror.

Agnes:

[In her natural, lower-class British accent.] Oh, I loves me this dress! *[Swirling around with it and, in a deep voice.]* “Why, Miss Mooch, you look as lovely as a princess!” *[In her own voice.]* “Why, thank you, sir.” *[Batting her eyes and taking a demure pose.]* “Does this dress make my bodice look big?”

PENELOPE enters. She is wearing a horse riding outfit and cap.

Penelope:

Agnes! What **ever** are you doing with my ball gown?

Agnes:

Oh, Lady Speedstick! I was just – airing it out. *[Flapping the dress.]* It’s a bit mothball-y.

Penelope:

Well, stop fiddling with it! If I must attend this ridiculous masquerade ball, I would rather it not be fiddled with.

Agnes:

Yes, ma’am. I was just trying to help.

Penelope:

Trying to help? Then why don’t you get me out of attending this horrid affair?

Agnes:

But, ma’am, this is to be your big coming out!

Penelope:

Coming out? I don’t see what this has to do with my sexual preferences.

Agnes:

No, ma’am. This is about the presentation of debutantes – for marriage!

Penelope:

Agnes, I’m far past being a debutante. *[Darkly.]* I’m 37 years old.

Agnes:

But you don’t look a day over 35!

Penelope:

I don’t want a man in my life. I think a woman should be independent and she should be able to do all of the things that men do! Women should be able to go to university, become professionals and politicians, and relieve themselves while standing up.

Agnes:

Oh, ma'am! That attitude is sure to displease Dame Thistlewhistle. She has her heart set on fixin' you up.

THISTLEWHISTLE enters.

Penelope:

[Her back to the entrance, she does not see Thistlewhistle come in.] My mother: The Great Manipulator! After she inherited Bridgerdon Abbey, all she's done is try to control my life! *[Imitating Thistlewhistle.]* "Penelope, you must find a husband." "Penelope, I am entitled to grandchildren." "Penelope, clean my dentures." Why can't that old bat leave me to my horses, my jewelry, and my fun?"

Thistlewhistle:

[Solemnly.] Because, my dear, the very future of Bridgerdon Abbey depends upon you.

SFX: Music – A dramatic sting.

Penelope:

Mother!

Thistlewhistle:

And need I remind you, my dear, that it is this "old bat" who pays for your horses, your jewelry and your fun? *[Eyeing Penelope's ball gown.]* And how much did I pay for this feed sack?

Penelope:

I didn't mean "old bat" in a bad way!

Agnes:

Yes, ma'am! I'm sure she meant "old" like – **mature** –

Penelope:

Yes, and "bat" as a metaphor for – an elegantly flying – um – rodent?

Agnes:

– But a delightful one!

Thistlewhistle:

Ever since the passing of my dear brother, Lord Bridgerdon, the burden of running this estate has been entirely up to me. And it has not been easy. It turns out that when one spends money freely without generating any revenue, and one becomes – *(with disgust)* **common**. We must get an influx of cash immediately, or we will lose Bridgerdon Abbey.

Agnes:

I've got two pence in my garter, if you'd like to borrow it.

Thistlewhistle produces a small container of snuff. She sniffs in a generous portion and broadly responds.

Penelope:

Mother, I wish you would give up that dreadful habit. It's unhealthful! It's uncouth! It's unsaturated!

Thistlewhistle:

Nonsense, dear. I've outlived three husbands. I've outlived three lovers. I've outlived three mattresses.

Agnes:

Excuse me, ma'am, but do you mean to say that if you can't get some money, you'd have to let some of your staff go? Even me? [*Falling to her knees.*] Please don't fire me! I can't go back to the streets! All the good corners are taken!

Thistlewhistle:

Get up, Agnes. Save that position for your wedding night. Penelope, my dear, if something doesn't happen tonight, we will have to sell Bridgerdon Abbey and we will all be left paupers!

Agnes:

All we will have left is diapers?

Penelope:

But what about my jewelry? My horses! My pearl-handled backscratcher?

Thistlewhistle:

It's all over. Unless – you can snag a rich husband. Which is why I have invited Lord Hickenbottom to the masquerade ball.

Penelope:

Oh, mother! He's old. And he is self-obsessed. And he smells like onions.

Agnes:

But I've heard that he's quite handsome. And rich. And... and... rich!

Thistlewhistle:

Those last two points are what is important. I don't care for Lord Hickenbottom, either. He eats his salad with a feather. Very disturbing. But regardless, Penelope, you must get Lord Hickenbottom to propose to you tonight, or it will be end of this privileged lifestyle for all of us.

Agnes:

And I'll be looking for a new corner!

SFX: Music – “Royals”

Penelope:

[Singing] I've always wanted diamonds on my flesh
I cut my teeth on the silver spoon – I was born with
And I am proud of my address
In a torn-up town, no postcode envy

Agnes:

[Singing] But every song's like –

Penelope, Thistlewhistle and Agnes (continued):

[Singing] Gold teeth, Grey Goose, lounging in the garden
Foxhunts, ball gowns, begging someone's pardon
We don't care
We're drinking cognac in our schemes

Agnes (continued):

[Singing] But every song's like –

Penelope, Thistlewhistle and Agnes (continued):

[Singing] Horserace, fine lace, diamonds on your timepiece
Nobel, mogul, tigers on a gold leash
We don't care

Thistlewhistle (continued):

[Singing] We are caught up in this love affair
And we want to be spoiled

Agnes and Penelope:

[Singing.] Spoiled!

Thistlewhistle:

[Singing] It just runs in our blood
That kind of luxe just is for us
We crave a privileged kind of fuss
Let me be your ruler

Agnes and Penelope:

[Singing.] Ruler!

Thistlewhistle:

[Singing] You can call me queen bee
And baby, I'll rule

Agnes:

[Singing.] I'll rule!

Penelope:

[Singing.] I'll rule!

Agnes and Penelope:

[Singing.] I'll rule!

Thistlewhistle:

[Singing] Let me live that reality.
My friends and I, we've cracked the code
We use our charm, dear, all the way through the party
And everyone who knows us knows
That we're fine with this, because we came from money.

Agnes:

[Singing] But every song's like –

Penelope, Thistlewhistle and Agnes (continued):

[Singing] Gold teeth, Grey Goose, lounging in the garden
Foxhunts, ball gowns, begging someone's pardon
We don't care
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Agnes:

[Singing.] I'll rule!

Penelope:

[Singing.] I'll rule!

Agnes and Penelope:

[Singing.] I'll rule!

Thistlewhistle:

[Singing] Let me live that reality

Agnes and Penelope:

[Singing.] Oh – Oh (oh, oh)
We're bigger than we ever dreamed

Thistlewhistle:

[Singing] And I'm in love with being queen

Agnes and Penelope:

[Singing.] Oh – Oh (oh, oh)
Life is great without a care

Thistlewhistle:

[Singing] We are caught up in this love affair
And we want to be spoiled

Agnes and Penelope:

[Singing.] Spoiled!

Thistlewhistle:

[Singing] It just runs in our blood
That kind of luxe just is for us
We crave a privileged kind of fuss
Let me be your ruler

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Agnes:

[Singing.] I'll rule!

Penelope:

[Singing.] I'll rule!

Agnes and Penelope:

[Singing.] I'll rule!

Thistlewhistle:

[Singing] Let me live that reality

LORD HIKENBOTTOM enters.

Hickenbottom:

What is this ghastly display of vocalizations?

Thistlewhistle:

Oh, Lord Hickenbottom! That was just a sprightly rondelle. *[Going to him.]* I didn't know you had arrived!

Hickenbottom:

Dame Thistlewhistle, don't let me interrupt your musical interlude. *[Bowing, faintly kissing Thistlewhistle's hand.]* Your servant showed me to my accommodations.

Thistlewhistle:

I trust everything is in order? Was there a mint on your pillow?

Agnes:

M'lady, we ran out of mints. I left a Rolo.

Hickenbottom:

Actually, my pillows do not appear to be of a very high quality. I prefer 100% down pillows. Or, in a pinch, 50% down and 50% poly-cotton blend.

Agnes:

Excuse me, your Lordship, but there's chicken feathers in them pillows. We don't raise no down here at Bridgerdon Abbey. *[Batting her eyes.]* Beggin' your pardon about that.

Thistlewhistle:

Agnes, down! *[To Hickenbottom.]* I apologize, Lord Hickenbottom. This is Miss Mooch, my head of housekeeping – *[about to admonish Agnes for speaking out of turn.]*

Agnes:

[Smitten with him, she quickly steps forward and bows awkwardly.] A pleasure to meet you! My, what beautiful eyelashes you have! Is it Maybelline?

Thistlewhistle:

Agnes!

Hickenbottom:

[Dismissively.] Yes, yes, charmed of course. *[He pulls out a mirror and turns his attention to grooming himself.]*

Thistlewhistle:

[Pulling Penelope forward.] And this is my **available** daughter, Penelope!

Penelope:

[Bowing demurely.] Your Lordship. *[To Agnes.]* You're right, Agnes. He has impressive eyelashes.

Hickenbottom:

You are Lady Speedstick? Good heavens, I mistook you for the lusty stableboy.

Penelope:

Forgive my appearance, my Lord, but I was just about to go for a ride. Do you ride horses, m'lord?

Hickenbottom:

I used to ride horses, until I encountered the delightful new invention: The unicycle!

Thistlewhistle:

[Trying to save face.] You will see my lovely daughter in her splendor tonight at the masquerade ball, but of course, she will be hidden behind a mask!

Hickenbottom:

Then perhaps she will look less like a stableboy.

Thistlewhistle is stricken. This is a disaster.

Penelope:

And on that condescending note, I must get to my horse. I look forward to seeing you at the ball, my Lord. I hope in the meanwhile, someone does not kick you in your ascot.
[Exit.]

Hickenbottom:

Charming. In an earthy way. And by earthy, I mean full of worms.

Thistlewhistle:

[Relieved.] Oh? Do you really think she's charming?

Hickenbottom:

Indeed. I am charmed that she left.

Thistlewhistle:

[After a beat.] Agnes, please see to it that Lord Hickenbottom's accommodations are to his utmost satisfaction – including his pillows. And next time, if we run out of mints, use Tic Tacs!

As Hickenbottom and Agnes exit:

Agnes:

Oh, sure. I'll fluff up your pillows, shine your shoes, polish your codpiece. *[Both exit.]*

Thistlewhistle:

[To audience.] I am sure that Lord Hickenbottom will be swept off his feet once Penelope has made herself presentable – and washed off the smell of horses. *[Sigh.]* This matchmaking business is harder than – well, just about anything I do, because after all, I don't do much, do I? *[Exit.]*

Penelope:

[Enter, unflatteringly imitating Hickenbottom to herself.] The nerve of that pompous git! "I mistook you for the lusty stableboy." Huh! "Well, I mistook you for a jack ass!" Why didn't I say that? *[Looking around.]* Speaking of stableboys, where is that moron?

DINGLE enters. He is dressed in filthy work clothes and has dirt on his face. He carries a brightly colored box of rat poison.

Dingle:

Oh, 'ello, mum. I didn't see you pop in. I was off poisoning some rats. Rats love them some poison. Especially the minty kind.

Penelope:

Mr. Dingle, could you please fetch me a horse? I wish to go for a ride before attending that horrid ball tonight.

Dingle:

Certainly, my lady. Which steed will you be mountin' today? The Black Stallion? The White Lightning? Or Fred?

Penelope:

I don't care. As long as it doesn't clash with my lipstick!

Dingle:

I'll be returnin' faster than a sheep on sheerin' day! *[Exit.]*