Pride and Prejudice

By Jane Austen

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Chapter 1

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in

possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be

on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well

fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is

considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their

daughters.

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” said his lady to him one day, “have you

heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?”

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

“But it is,” returned she; “for Mrs. Long has just been here, and

she told me all about it.”

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

“Do not you want to know who has taken it?” cried his wife

impatiently.

“\_You\_ want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.”

This was invitation enough.

“Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is

taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England;

that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the

place, and was so much delighted with it that he agreed with Mr.

Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before

Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by

the end of next week.”

“What is his name?”

“Bingley.”

“Is he married or single?”

“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!”

“How so? how can it affect them?”

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” replied his wife, “how can you be so

tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of

them.”

“Is that his design in settling here?”

“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 as soon as he comes.”

“I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may

send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for

as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you

the best of the party.”

“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 five grown-up daughters, she ought to give over

thinking of her own beauty.”

“In such cases, a woman has not often much beauty to think of.”

“But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he

comes into the neighbourhood.”

“It is more than I engage for, I assure you.”

“But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it

would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are

determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you

know, they visit no newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be

impossible for \_us\_ to visit him, if you do not.”

“You are over scrupulous, surely. I dare say Mr. Bingley will be

very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to

assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he

chooses of the girls; though I must throw in a good word for my

little Lizzy.”

“I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better

than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as

Jane, nor half so good-humoured as Lydia. But you are always

giving \_her\_ the preference.”

“They have none of them much to recommend them,” replied he;

“they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has

something more of quickness than her sisters.”

“Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way?

You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor

nerves.”

“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.”

“Ah, you do not know what I suffer.”

“But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men

of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood.”

“It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you

will not visit them.”

“Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will

visit them all.”

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour,

reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty

years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his

character. \_Her\_ mind was less difficult to develop. She was a

woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain

temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous.

The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its

solace was visiting and news.

Chapter 2

Mr. Bennet was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr.

Bingley. He had always intended to visit him, though to the last

always assuring his wife that he should not go; and till the

evening after the visit was paid she had no knowledge of it. It

was then disclosed in the following manner. Observing his second

daughter employed in trimming a hat, he suddenly addressed her

with,

“I hope Mr. Bingley will like it, Lizzy.”

“We are not in a way to know \_what\_ Mr. Bingley likes,” said her

mother resentfully, “since we are not to visit.”

“But you forget, mamma,” said Elizabeth, “that we shall meet him

at the assemblies, and that Mrs. Long has promised to introduce him.”

“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.”

“No more have I,” said Mr. Bennet; “and I am glad to find that

you do not depend on her serving you.”

Mrs. Bennet deigned not to make any reply; but, unable to contain

herself, began scolding one of her daughters.

“Don’t keep coughing so, Kitty, for heaven’s sake! Have a little

compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces.”

“Kitty has no discretion in her coughs,” said her father; “she

times them ill.”

“I do not cough for my own amusement,” replied Kitty fretfully.

“When is your next ball to be, Lizzy?”

“To-morrow fortnight.”

“Aye, so it is,” cried her mother, “and Mrs. Long does not come

back till the day before; so, it will be impossible for her to

introduce him, for she will not know him herself.”

“Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of your friend, and

introduce Mr. Bingley to \_her\_.”

“Impossible, Mr. Bennet, impossible, when I am not acquainted

with him myself; how can you be so teasing?”

“I honour your circumspection. A fortnight’s acquaintance is

certainly very little. One cannot know what a man really is by

the end of a fortnight. But if \_we\_ do not venture somebody else

will; and after all, Mrs. Long and her nieces must stand their

chance; and, therefore, as she will think it an act of kindness,

if you decline the office, I will take it on myself.”

The girls stared at their father. Mrs. Bennet said only,

“Nonsense, nonsense!”

“What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?” cried he.

“Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that

is laid on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you

\_there\_. What say you, Mary? for you are a young lady of deep

reflection, I know, and read great books and make extracts.”

Mary wished to say something very sensible, but knew not how.

“While Mary is adjusting her ideas,” he continued, “let us return

to Mr. Bingley.”

“I am sick of Mr. Bingley,” cried his wife.

“I am sorry to hear \_that\_; but why did not you tell me so

before? If I had known as much this morning, I certainly would not

have called on him. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually

paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now.”

The astonishment of the ladies was just what he wished; that of

Mrs. Bennet perhaps surpassing the rest; though when the first

tumult of joy was over, she began to declare that it was what she

had expected all the while.

“How good it was in you, my dear Mr. Bennet! But I knew I should

persuade you at last. I was sure you loved your girls too well to

neglect such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! and it is

such a good joke, too, that you should have gone this morning, and

never said a word about it till now.”

“Now, Kitty, you may cough as much as you choose,” said Mr.

Bennet; and, as he spoke, he left the room, fatigued with the

raptures of his wife.

“What an excellent father you have, girls,” said she, when the

door was shut. “I do not know how you will ever make him amends

for his kindness; or me either, for that matter. At our time of

life, it is not so pleasant, I can tell you, to be making new

acquaintance every day; but for your sakes, we would do

anything. Lydia, my love, though you \_are\_ the youngest, I dare

say Mr. Bingley will dance with you at the next ball.”

“Oh!” said Lydia stoutly, “I am not afraid; for though I \_am\_ the

youngest, I’m the tallest.”

The rest of the evening was spent in conjecturing how soon he

would return Mr. Bennet’s visit, and determining when they should

ask him to dinner.

Chapter 3

Not all that Mrs. Bennet, however, with the assistance of her

five daughters, could ask on the subject, was sufficient to draw

from her husband any satisfactory description of Mr. Bingley.

They attacked him in various ways; with barefaced questions,

ingenious suppositions, and distant surmises; but he eluded the

skill of them all; and they were at last obliged to accept the

second-hand intelligence of their neighbour, Lady Lucas. Her

report was highly favourable. Sir William had been delighted with

him. He was quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely

agreeable, and, to crown the whole, he meant to be at the next

assembly with a large party. Nothing could be more delightful! To

be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love;

and very lively hopes of Mr. Bingley’s heart were entertained.

“If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at

Netherfield,” said Mrs. Bennet to her husband, “and all the

others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for.”

In a few days Mr. Bingley returned Mr. Bennet’s visit, and sat

about ten minutes with him in his library. He had entertained

hopes of being admitted to a sight of the young ladies, of whose

beauty he had heard much; but he saw only the father. The ladies

were somewhat more fortunate, for they had the advantage of

ascertaining from an upper window, that he wore a blue coat and

rode a black horse.

An invitation to dinner was soon afterwards dispatched; and

already had Mrs. Bennet planned the courses that were to do

credit to her housekeeping, when an answer arrived which deferred

it all. Mr. Bingley was obliged to be in town the following day,

and consequently unable to accept the honour of their

invitation, etc. Mrs. Bennet was quite disconcerted. She could

not imagine what business he could have in town so soon after his

arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear that he might be

always flying about from one place to another, and never settled

at Netherfield as he ought to be. Lady Lucas quieted her fears a

little by starting the idea of his being gone to London only to

get a large party for the ball; and a report soon followed that

Mr. Bingley was to bring twelve ladies and seven gentlemen with

him to the assembly. The girls grieved over such a number of

ladies; but were comforted the day before the ball by hearing,

that instead of twelve, he had brought only six with him from

London, his five sisters and a cousin. And when the party entered

the assembly room it consisted of only five altogether; Mr.

Bingley, his two sisters, the husband of the eldest, and another

young man.

Mr. Bingley was good-looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant

countenance, and easy, unaffected manners. His sisters were fine

women, with an air of decided fashion. His brother-in-law, Mr.

Hurst, merely looked the gentleman; but his friend Mr. Darcy soon

drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome

features, noble mien, and the report which was in general

circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having

ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine

figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than

Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about

half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned

the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to

be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his

large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most

forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be

compared with his friend.

Mr. Bingley had soon made himself acquainted with all the

principal people in the room; he was lively and unreserved,

danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and

talked of giving one himself at Netherfield. Such amiable

qualities must speak for themselves. What a contrast between him

and his friend! Mr. Darcy danced only once with Mrs. Hurst and

once with Miss Bingley, declined being introduced to any other

lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the

room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. His

character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man

in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there

again. Amongst the most violent against him was Mrs. Bennet,

whose dislike of his general behaviour was sharpened into

particular resentment by his having slighted one of her

daughters.

Elizabeth Bennet had been obliged, by the scarcity of gentlemen,

to sit down for two dances; and during part of that time, Mr.

Darcy had been standing near enough for her to overhear a

conversation between him and Mr. Bingley, who came from the dance

for a few minutes, to press his friend to join it.

“Come, Darcy,” said he, “I must have you dance. I hate to see you

standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much

better dance.”

“I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am

particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly as

this, it would be insupportable. Your sisters are engaged, and

there is not another woman in the room whom it would not be a

punishment to me to stand up with.”

“I would not be so fastidious as you are,” cried Bingley,

“for a kingdom! Upon my honour, I never met with so many pleasant

girls in my life as I have this evening; and there are several of

them you see uncommonly pretty.”

“\_You\_ are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room,” said

Mr. Darcy, looking at the eldest Miss Bennet.

“Oh! she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But there

is one of her sisters sitting down just behind you, who is very

pretty, and I dare say very agreeable. Do let me ask my partner

to introduce you.”

“Which do you mean?” and turning round, he looked for a moment at

Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly

said, “She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt \_me\_; and I

am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies

who are slighted by other men. You had better return to your

partner and enjoy her smiles, for you are wasting your time with

me.”

Mr. Bingley followed his advice. Mr. Darcy walked off; and

Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings towards him. She

told the story, however, with great spirit among her friends; for

she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in

anything ridiculous.

The evening altogether passed off pleasantly to the whole family.

Mrs. Bennet had seen her eldest daughter much admired by the

Netherfield party. Mr. Bingley had danced with her twice, and she

had been distinguished by his sisters. Jane was as much gratified

by this as her mother could be, though in a quieter way.

Elizabeth felt Jane’s pleasure. Mary had heard herself mentioned

to Miss Bingley as the most accomplished girl in the

neighbourhood; and Catherine and Lydia had been fortunate enough

to be never without partners, which was all that they had yet

learnt to care for at a ball. They returned, therefore, in good

spirits to Longbourn, the village where they lived, and of which

they were the principal inhabitants. They found Mr. Bennet still

up. With a book he was regardless of time; and on the present

occasion he had a good deal of curiosity as to the event of an

evening which had raised such splendid expectations. He had

rather hoped that all his wife’s views on the stranger would be

disappointed; but he soon found that he had a very different story

to hear.

“Oh, my dear Mr. Bennet,” as she entered the room, “we have had a

most delightful evening, a most excellent ball. I wish you had

been there. Jane was so admired, nothing could be like it.

Everybody said how well she looked; and Mr. Bingley thought her

quite beautiful, and danced with her twice. Only think of \_that\_,

my dear; he actually danced with her twice; and she was the only

creature in the room that he asked a second time. First of all,

he asked Miss Lucas. I was so vexed to see him stand up with her;

but, however, he did not admire her at all; indeed, nobody can,

you know; and he seemed quite struck with Jane as she was going

down the dance. So he enquired who she was, and got introduced,

and asked her for the two next. Then, the two third he danced with

Miss King, and the two fourth with Maria Lucas, and the two fifth

with Jane again, and the two sixth with Lizzy, and the

\_Boulanger\_—”

“If he had had any compassion for \_me\_,” cried her husband

impatiently, “he would not have danced half so much! For God’s

sake, say no more of his partners. Oh that he had sprained his

ankle in the first dance!”

“Oh! my dear,” continued Mrs. Bennet, “I am quite delighted with him. He is so excessively

handsome! and his sisters are charming women. I never in my life

saw anything more elegant than their dresses. I dare say the lace

upon Mrs. Hurst’s gown—”

Here she was interrupted again. Mr. Bennet protested against any

description of finery. She was therefore obliged to seek another

branch of the subject, and related, with much bitterness of

spirit and some exaggeration, the shocking rudeness of Mr. Darcy.

“But I can assure you,” she added, “that Lizzy does not lose much

by not suiting \_his\_ fancy; for he is a most disagreeable, horrid

man, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that

there was no enduring him! He walked here, and he walked there,

fancying himself so very great! Not handsome enough to dance

with! I wish you had been there, my dear, to have given him one

of your set-downs. I quite detest the man.”

Chapter 4

When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, the former, who had been

cautious in her praise of Mr. Bingley before, expressed to her

sister how very much she admired him.

“He is just what a young man ought to be,” said she, “sensible,

good-humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners!—so

much ease, with such perfect good breeding!”

“He is also handsome,” replied Elizabeth, “which a young man

ought likewise to be, if he possibly can. His character is

thereby complete.”

“I was very much flattered by his asking me to dance a second

time. I did not expect such a compliment.”

“Did not you? \_I\_ did for you. But that is one great difference

between us. Compliments always take \_you\_ by surprise, and \_me\_

never. What could be more natural than his asking you again? He

could not help seeing that you were about five times as pretty as

every other woman in the room. No thanks to his gallantry for

that. Well, he certainly is very agreeable, and I give you leave

to like him. You have liked many a stupider person.”

“Dear Lizzy!”

“Oh! you are a great deal too apt, you know, to like people in

general. You never see a fault in anybody. All the world are good

and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a

human being in my life.”

“I would wish not to be hasty in censuring any one; but I always

speak what I think.”

“I know you do; and it is \_that\_ which makes the wonder. With

\_your\_ good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and

nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough;—one

meets with it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or

design—to take the good of everybody’s character and make it

still better, and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone.

And so, you like this man’s sisters, too, do you? Their manners

are not equal to his.”

“Certainly not; at first. But they are very pleasing women when

you converse with them. Miss Bingley is to live with her brother,

and keep his house; and I am much mistaken if we shall not find a

very charming neighbour in her.”

Elizabeth listened in silence, but was not convinced; their

behaviour at the assembly had not been calculated to please in

general; and with more quickness of observation and less pliancy

of temper than her sister, and with a judgment too unassailed by

any attention to herself, she was very little disposed to approve

them. They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good

humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of

being agreeable where they chose it; but proud and conceited.

They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first

private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand

pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and

of associating with people of rank; and were therefore in every

respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of

others. They were of a respectable family in the north of

England; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories

than that their brother’s fortune and their own had been acquired

by trade.

Mr. Bingley inherited property to the amount of nearly a hundred

thousand pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an

estate, but did not live to do it. Mr. Bingley intended it

likewise, and sometimes made choice of his county; but as he was

now provided with a good house and the liberty of a manor, it was

doubtful to many of those who best knew the easiness of his

temper, whether he might not spend the remainder of his days at

Netherfield, and leave the next generation to purchase.

His sisters were very anxious for his having an estate of his own;

but though he was now established only as a tenant, Miss Bingley

was by no means unwilling to preside at his table, nor was Mrs.

Hurst, who had married a man of more fashion than fortune, less

disposed to consider his house as her home when it suited her.

Mr. Bingley had not been of age two years, when he was tempted by

an accidental recommendation to look at Netherfield House. He did

look at it, and into it for half an hour, was pleased with the

situation and the principal rooms, satisfied with what the owner

said in its praise, and took it immediately.

Between him and Darcy there was a very steady friendship, in

spite of great opposition of character. Bingley was endeared to

Darcy by the easiness, openness, and ductility of his temper,

though no disposition could offer a greater contrast to his own,

and though with his own he never appeared dissatisfied. On the

strength of Darcy’s regard Bingley had the firmest reliance, and

of his judgment the highest opinion. In understanding, Darcy was

the superior. Bingley was by no means deficient, but Darcy was

clever. He was at the same time haughty, reserved, and

fastidious, and his manners, though well bred, were not inviting.

In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was

sure of being liked wherever he appeared, Darcy was continually

giving offence.

The manner in which they spoke of the Meryton assembly was

sufficiently characteristic. Bingley had never met with

pleasanter people or prettier girls in his life; everybody had been

most kind and attentive to him; there had been no formality, no

stiffness; he had soon felt acquainted with all the room; and as

to Miss Bennet, he could not conceive an angel more beautiful.

Darcy, on the contrary, had seen a collection of people in whom

there was little beauty and no fashion, for none of whom he had

felt the smallest interest, and from none received either

attention or pleasure. Miss Bennet he acknowledged to be pretty,

but she smiled too much.

Mrs. Hurst and her sister allowed it to be so—but still they

admired her and liked her, and pronounced her to be a sweet girl,

and one whom they should not object to know more of. Miss Bennet

was therefore established as a sweet girl, and their brother felt

authorised by such commendation to think of her as he chose.

Chapter 5

Within a short walk of Longbourn lived a family with whom the

Bennets were particularly intimate. Sir William Lucas had been

formerly in trade in Meryton, where he had made a tolerable

fortune, and risen to the honour of knighthood by an address to

the king during his mayoralty. The distinction had perhaps been

felt too strongly. It had given him a disgust to his business

and to his residence in a small market town; and, quitting

them both, he had removed with his family to a house about a mile

from Meryton, denominated from that period Lucas Lodge, where he

could think with pleasure of his own importance, and, unshackled

by business, occupy himself solely in being civil to all the

world. For, though elated by his rank, it did not render him

supercilious; on the contrary, he was all attention to everybody.

By nature inoffensive, friendly, and obliging, his presentation

at St. James’s had made him courteous.

Lady Lucas was a very good kind of woman, not too clever to be a

valuable neighbour to Mrs. Bennet. They had several children. The

eldest of them, a sensible, intelligent young woman, about

twenty-seven, was Elizabeth’s intimate friend.

That the Miss Lucases and the Miss Bennets should meet to talk

over a ball was absolutely necessary; and the morning after the

assembly brought the former to Longbourn to hear and to

communicate.

“\_You\_ began the evening well, Charlotte,” said Mrs. Bennet with

civil self-command to Miss Lucas. “\_You\_ were Mr. Bingley’s first

choice.”

“Yes; but he seemed to like his second better.”

“Oh! you mean Jane, I suppose, because he danced with her twice.

To be sure that \_did\_ seem as if he admired her—indeed I rather

believe he \_did\_—I heard something about it—but I hardly know

what—something about Mr. Robinson.”

“Perhaps you mean what I overheard between him and Mr. Robinson;

did not I mention it to you? Mr. Robinson’s asking him how he

liked our Meryton assemblies, and whether he did not think there

were a great many pretty women in the room, and \_which\_ he

thought the prettiest? and his answering immediately to the last

question—‘Oh! the eldest Miss Bennet, beyond a doubt, there

cannot be two opinions on that point.’”

“Upon my word! Well, that was very decided indeed—that does seem

as if—but, however, it may all come to nothing, you know.”

“\_My\_ overhearings were more to the purpose than \_yours\_, Eliza,”

said Charlotte. “Mr. Darcy is not so well worth listening to as

his friend, is he?—Poor Eliza!—to be only just \_tolerable\_.”

“I beg you would not put it into Lizzy’s head to be vexed by his

ill-treatment, for he is such a disagreeable man that it would

be quite a misfortune to be liked by him. Mrs. Long told me last

night that he sat close to her for half an hour without once

opening his lips.”

“Are you quite sure, ma’am?—is not there a little mistake?” said

Jane. “I certainly saw Mr. Darcy speaking to her.”

“Aye—because she asked him at last how he liked Netherfield, and

he could not help answering her; but she said he seemed very

angry at being spoke to.”

“Miss Bingley told me,” said Jane, “that he never speaks much

unless among his intimate acquaintance. With \_them\_ he is

remarkably agreeable.”

“I do not believe a word of it, my dear. If he had been so very

agreeable, he would have talked to Mrs. Long. But I can guess how

it was; everybody says that he is eat up with pride, and I dare

say he had heard somehow that Mrs. Long does not keep a carriage,

and had come to the ball in a hack chaise.”

“I do not mind his not talking to Mrs. Long,” said Miss Lucas,

“but I wish he had danced with Eliza.”

“Another time, Lizzy,” said her mother, “I would not dance with

\_him\_, if I were you.”

“I believe, ma’am, I may safely promise you \_never\_ to dance with

him.”

“His pride,” said Miss Lucas, “does not offend \_me\_ so much as

pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot

wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune,

everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I

may so express it, he has a \_right\_ to be proud.”

“That is very true,” replied Elizabeth, “and I could easily

forgive \_his\_ pride, if he had not mortified \_mine\_.”

“Pride,” observed Mary, who piqued herself upon the solidity of

her reflections, “is a very common failing, I believe. By all

that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common

indeed; that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that

there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of

self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or

imaginary. Vanity and pride are different things, though the

words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without

being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves,

vanity to what we would have others think of us.”

“If I were as rich as Mr. Darcy,” cried a young Lucas, who came

with his sisters, “I should not care how proud I was. I would

keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine every day.”

“Then you would drink a great deal more than you ought,” said

Mrs. Bennet; “and if I were to see you at it, I should take away

your bottle directly.”

The boy protested that she should not; she continued to declare

that she would, and the argument ended only with the visit.

Chapter 6

The ladies of Longbourn soon waited on those of Netherfield. The

visit was returned in due form. Miss Bennet’s pleasing

manners grew on the goodwill of Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and

though the mother was found to be intolerable, and the younger

sisters not worth speaking to, a wish of being better acquainted

with \_them\_ was expressed towards the two eldest. By Jane this

attention was received with the greatest pleasure; but Elizabeth

still saw superciliousness in their treatment of everybody,

hardly excepting even her sister, and could not like them; though

their kindness to Jane, such as it was, had a value as arising in

all probability from the influence of their brother’s admiration.

It was generally evident whenever they met, that he \_did\_ admire

her; and to \_her\_ it was equally evident that Jane was yielding to

the preference which she had begun to entertain for him from the

first, and was in a way to be very much in love; but she

considered with pleasure that it was not likely to be discovered

by the world in general, since Jane united with great strength

of feeling, a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of

manner which would guard her from the suspicions of the

impertinent. She mentioned this to her friend Miss Lucas.

“It may perhaps be pleasant,” replied Charlotte, “to be able to

impose on the public in such a case; but it is sometimes a

disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her

affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose

the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor

consolation to believe the world equally in the dark. There is so

much of gratitude or vanity in almost every attachment, that it

is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all \_begin\_ freely—a

slight preference is natural enough; but there are very few of us

who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement.

In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better show \_more\_ affection

than she feels. Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may

never do more than like her, if she does not help him on.”

“But she does help him on, as much as her nature will allow. If

\_I\_ can perceive her regard for him, he must be a simpleton

indeed not to discover it too.”

“Remember, Eliza, that he does not know Jane’s disposition as you

do.”

“But if a woman is partial to a man, and does not endeavour to

conceal it, he must find it out.”

“Perhaps he must, if he sees enough of her. But though Bingley

and Jane meet tolerably often, it is never for many hours

together; and as they always see each other in large mixed

parties, it is impossible that every moment should be employed in

conversing together. Jane should therefore make the most of every

half-hour in which she can command his attention. When she is

secure of him, there will be leisure for falling in love as

much as she chooses.”

“Your plan is a good one,” replied Elizabeth, “where nothing is

in question but the desire of being well married; and if I were

determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I

should adopt it. But these are not Jane’s feelings; she is not

acting by design. As yet, she cannot even be certain of the

degree of her own regard, nor of its reasonableness. She has known

him only a fortnight. She danced four dances with him at Meryton;

she saw him one morning at his own house, and has since dined

in company with him four times. This is not quite enough to make

her understand his character.”

“Not as you represent it. Had she merely \_dined\_ with him, she

might only have discovered whether he had a good appetite; but

you must remember that four evenings have been also spent

together—and four evenings may do a great deal.”

“Yes; these four evenings have enabled them to ascertain that

they both like Vingt-un better than Commerce; but with respect to

any other leading characteristic, I do not imagine that much has

been unfolded.”

“Well,” said Charlotte, “I wish Jane success with all my heart;

and if she were married to him to-morrow, I should think she had

as good a chance of happiness as if she were to be studying his

character for a twelvemonth. Happiness in marriage is entirely a

matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so

well known to each other, or ever so similar beforehand, it does

not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to

grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of

vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the

defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life.”

“You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound. You know it

is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself.”

Occupied in observing Mr. Bingley’s attentions to her sister,

Elizabeth was far from suspecting that she was herself becoming

an object of some interest in the eyes of his friend. Mr. Darcy

had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty; he had looked at

her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, he

looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it

clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good

feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered

uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark

eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying.

Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure

of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her

figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting

that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was

caught by their easy playfulness. Of this she was perfectly

unaware;—to her he was only the man who made himself agreeable

nowhere, and who had not thought her handsome enough to dance

with.

He began to wish to know more of her, and as a step towards

conversing with her himself, attended to her conversation with

others. His doing so drew her notice. It was at Sir William

Lucas’s, where a large party were assembled.

“What does Mr. Darcy mean,” said she to Charlotte, “by listening

to my conversation with Colonel Forster?”

“That is a question which Mr. Darcy only can answer.”

“But if he does it any more I shall certainly let him know that I

see what he is about. He has a very satirical eye, and if I do

not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid

of him.”

On his approaching them soon afterwards, though without seeming

to have any intention of speaking, Miss Lucas defied her friend

to mention such a subject to him, which immediately provoking

Elizabeth to do it, she turned to him and said,

“Did not you think, Mr. Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly

well just now, when I was teasing Colonel Forster to give us a

ball at Meryton?”

“With great energy; but it is a subject which always makes a lady

energetic.”

“You are severe on us.”

“It will be \_her\_ turn soon to be teased,” said Miss Lucas. “I am

going to open the instrument, Eliza, and you know what follows.”

“You are a very strange creature by way of a friend!—always

wanting me to play and sing before anybody and everybody! If my

vanity had taken a musical turn, you would have been invaluable;

but as it is, I would really rather not sit down before those who

must be in the habit of hearing the very best performers.” On

Miss Lucas’s persevering, however, she added, “Very well; if it

must be so, it must.” And gravely glancing at Mr. Darcy, “There

is a fine old saying, which everybody here is of course familiar

with—‘Keep your breath to cool your porridge,’—and I shall keep

mine to swell my song.”

Her performance was pleasing, though by no means capital. After a

song or two, and before she could reply to the entreaties of

several that she would sing again, she was eagerly succeeded at

the instrument by her sister Mary, who having, in consequence of

being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge

and accomplishments, was always impatient for display.

Mary had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given

her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and

conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of

excellence than she had reached. Elizabeth, easy and unaffected,

had been listened to with much more pleasure, though not playing

half so well; and Mary, at the end of a long concerto, was glad

to purchase praise and gratitude by Scotch and Irish airs, at the

request of her younger sisters, who with some of the Lucases,

and two or three officers, joined eagerly in dancing at one end

of the room.

Mr. Darcy stood near them in silent indignation at such a mode of

passing the evening, to the exclusion of all conversation, and

was too much engrossed by his own thoughts to perceive that Sir

William Lucas was his neighbour, till Sir William thus began.

“What a charming amusement for young people this is, Mr. Darcy!

There is nothing like dancing after all. I consider it as one of

the first refinements of polished societies.”

“Certainly, sir; and it has the advantage also of being in vogue

amongst the less polished societies of the world.—Every savage

can dance.”

Sir William only smiled. “Your friend performs delightfully,” he

continued after a pause, on seeing Bingley join the group; “and I

doubt not that you are an adept in the science yourself, Mr.

Darcy.”

“You saw me dance at Meryton, I believe, sir.”

“Yes, indeed, and received no inconsiderable pleasure from the

sight. Do you often dance at St. James’s?”

“Never, sir.”

“Do you not think it would be a proper compliment to the place?”

“It is a compliment which I never pay to any place if I can avoid

it.”

“You have a house in town, I conclude?”

Mr. Darcy bowed.

“I had once some thoughts of fixing in town myself—for I am

fond of superior society; but I did not feel quite certain that

the air of London would agree with Lady Lucas.”

He paused in hopes of an answer; but his companion was not

disposed to make any; and Elizabeth at that instant moving

towards them, he was struck with the notion of doing a very

gallant thing, and called out to her,

“My dear Miss Eliza, why are not you dancing? Mr. Darcy, you must

allow me to present this young lady to you as a very desirable

partner. You cannot refuse to dance, I am sure, when so much

beauty is before you.” And, taking her hand, he would have given

it to Mr. Darcy, who, though extremely surprised, was not

unwilling to receive it, when she instantly drew back, and said

with some discomposure to Sir William,

“Indeed, sir, I have not the least intention of dancing. I

entreat you not to suppose that I moved this way in order to beg

for a partner.”

Mr. Darcy, with grave propriety, requested to be allowed the

honour of her hand, but in vain. Elizabeth was determined; nor

did Sir William at all shake her purpose by his attempt at

persuasion.

“You excel so much in the dance, Miss Eliza, that it is cruel to

deny me the happiness of seeing you; and though this gentleman

dislikes the amusement in general, he can have no objection, I am

sure, to oblige us for one half-hour.”

“Mr. Darcy is all politeness,” said Elizabeth, smiling.

“He is, indeed—but, considering the inducement, my dear Miss

Eliza, we cannot wonder at his complaisance; for who would object

to such a partner?”

Elizabeth looked archly, and turned away. Her resistance had not

injured her with the gentleman, and he was thinking of her with

some complacency, when thus accosted by Miss Bingley,

“I can guess the subject of your reverie.”

“I should imagine not.”

“You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many

evenings in this manner—in such society; and indeed I am quite of

your opinion. I was never more annoyed! The insipidity, and yet

the noise; the nothingness, and yet the self-importance of all

these people! What would I give to hear your strictures on them!”

“Your conjecture is totally wrong, I assure you. My mind was more

agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great

pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman

can bestow.”

Miss Bingley immediately fixed her eyes on his face, and desired

he would tell her what lady had the credit of inspiring such

reflections. Mr. Darcy replied with great intrepidity,

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet.”

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet!” repeated Miss Bingley. “I am all

astonishment. How long has she been such a favourite?—and pray

when am I to wish you joy?”

“That is exactly the question which I expected you to ask. A

lady’s imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to

love, from love to matrimony, in a moment. I knew you would be

wishing me joy.”

“Nay, if you are so serious about it, I shall consider the matter as

absolutely settled. You will have a charming mother-in-law,

indeed, and of course she will be always at Pemberley with

you.”

He listened to her with perfect indifference, while she chose to

entertain herself in this manner; and as his composure convinced

her that all was safe, her wit flowed long.

Chapter 7

Mr. Bennet’s property consisted almost entirely in an estate of

two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his daughters, was

entailed, in default of heirs male, on a distant relation; and

their mother’s fortune, though ample for her situation in life,

could but ill supply the deficiency of his. Her father had been

an attorney in Meryton, and had left her four thousand pounds.

She had a sister married to a Mr. Phillips, who had been a clerk

to their father, and succeeded him in the business, and a brother

settled in London in a respectable line of trade.

The village of Longbourn was only one mile from Meryton; a most

convenient distance for the young ladies, who were usually

tempted thither three or four times a week, to pay their duty to

their aunt and to a milliner’s shop just over the way. The two

youngest of the family, Catherine and Lydia, were particularly

frequent in these attentions; their minds were more vacant than

their sisters’, and when nothing better offered, a walk to

Meryton was necessary to amuse their morning hours and furnish

conversation for the evening; and however bare of news the

country in general might be, they always contrived to learn some

from their aunt. At present, indeed, they were well supplied both

with news and happiness by the recent arrival of a militia

regiment in the neighbourhood; it was to remain the whole winter,

and Meryton was the headquarters.

Their visits to Mrs. Philips were now productive of the most

interesting intelligence. Every day added something to their

knowledge of the officers’ names and connections. Their lodgings

were not long a secret, and at length they began to know the

officers themselves. Mr. Philips visited them all, and this

opened to his nieces a source of felicity unknown before. They

could talk of nothing but officers; and Mr. Bingley’s large

fortune, the mention of which gave animation to their mother, was

worthless in their eyes when opposed to the regimentals of an

ensign.

After listening one morning to their effusions on this subject,

Mr. Bennet coolly observed,

“From all that I can collect by your manner of talking, you must

be two of the silliest girls in the country. I have suspected it

some time, but I am now convinced.”

Catherine was disconcerted, and made no answer; but Lydia, with

perfect indifference, continued to express her admiration of

Captain Carter, and her hope of seeing him in the course of the

day, as he was going the next morning to London.

“I am astonished, my dear,” said Mrs. Bennet, “that you should be

so ready to think your own children silly. If I wished to think

slightingly of anybody’s children, it should not be of my own,

however.”

“If my children are silly, I must hope to be always sensible of

it.”

“Yes—but as it happens, they are all of them very clever.”

“This is the only point, I flatter myself, on which we do not

agree. I had hoped that our sentiments coincided in every

particular, but I must so far differ from you as to think our two

youngest daughters uncommonly foolish.”

“My dear Mr. Bennet, you must not expect such girls to have the

sense of their father and mother. When they get to our age, I

dare say they will not think about officers any more than we do.

I remember the time when I liked a red coat myself very well—and,

indeed, so I do still at my heart; and if a smart young colonel,

with five or six thousand a year, should want one of my girls, I

shall not say nay to him; and I thought Colonel Forster looked

very becoming the other night at Sir William’s in his

regimentals.”

“Mamma,” cried Lydia, “my aunt says that 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 very often standing in

Clarke’s library.”

Mrs. Bennet was prevented replying by the entrance of the footman

with a note for Miss Bennet; it came from Netherfield, and the

servant waited for an answer. Mrs. Bennet’s eyes sparkled with

pleasure, and she was eagerly calling out, while her daughter

read,

“Well, Jane, who is it from? What is it about? What does he say?

Well, Jane, make haste and tell us; make haste, my love.”

“It is from Miss Bingley,” said Jane, and then read it aloud.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—

“If you are not so compassionate as to dine to-day with Louisa

and me, we shall be in danger of hating each other for the rest

of our lives, for a whole day’s \_tête-à-tête\_ between two women

can never end without a quarrel. Come as soon as you can on the

receipt of this. My brother and the gentlemen are to dine with

the officers.—Yours ever,

“CAROLINE BINGLEY”

“With the officers!” cried Lydia. “I wonder my aunt did not tell

us of \_that\_.”

“Dining out,” said Mrs. Bennet, “that is very unlucky.”

“Can I have the carriage?” said Jane.

“No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it seems

likely to rain; and then you must stay all night.”

“That would be a good scheme,” said Elizabeth, “if you were sure

that they would not offer to send her home.”

“Oh! but the gentlemen will have Mr. Bingley’s chaise to go to

Meryton; and the Hursts have no horses to theirs.”

“I had much rather go in the coach.”

“But, my dear, your father cannot spare the horses, I am sure.

They are wanted in the farm, Mr. Bennet, are not they?”

“They are wanted in the farm much oftener than I can get them.”

“But if you have got them to-day,” said Elizabeth, “my mother’s

purpose will be answered.”

She did at last extort from her father an acknowledgment that the

horses were engaged. Jane was therefore obliged to go on

horseback, and her mother attended her to the door with many

cheerful prognostics of a bad day. Her hopes were answered; Jane

had not been gone long before it rained hard. Her sisters were

uneasy for her, but her mother was delighted. The rain continued

the whole evening without intermission; Jane certainly could not

come back.

“This was a lucky idea of mine, indeed!” said Mrs. Bennet, more

than once, as if the credit of making it rain were all her own.

Till the next morning, however, she was not aware of all the

felicity of her contrivance. Breakfast was scarcely over when a

servant from Netherfield brought the following note for

Elizabeth:

“MY DEAREST LIZZY,—

“I find myself very unwell this morning, which, I suppose, is to

be imputed to my getting wet through yesterday. My kind friends

will not hear of my returning home till I am better. They insist also

on my seeing Mr. Jones—therefore do not be alarmed if you should

hear of his having been to me—and, excepting a sore throat and

headache, there is not much the matter with me.—Yours, &c.”

“Well, my dear,” said Mr. Bennet, when Elizabeth had read the

note aloud, “if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of

illness—if she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it

was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders.”

“Oh! I am not at all afraid of her dying. People do not die of little

trifling colds. She will be taken good care of. As long as she

stays there, it is all very well. I would go and see her if I

could have the carriage.”

Elizabeth, feeling really anxious, was determined to go to her,

though the carriage was not to be had; and as she was no

horsewoman, walking was her only alternative. She declared her

resolution.

“How can you be so silly,” cried her mother, “as to think of such

a thing, in all this dirt! You will not be fit to be seen when

you get there.”

“I shall be very fit to see Jane—which is all I want.”

“Is this a hint to me, Lizzy,” said her father, “to send for the

horses?”

“No, indeed. I do not wish to avoid the walk. The distance is

nothing, when one has a motive; only three miles. I shall be back

by dinner.”

“I admire the activity of your benevolence,” observed Mary, “but

every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason; and, in my

opinion, exertion should always be in proportion to what is

required.”

“We will go as far as Meryton with you,” said Catherine and

Lydia. Elizabeth accepted their company, and the three young

ladies set off together.

“If we make haste,” said Lydia, as they walked along, “perhaps we

may see something of Captain Carter before he goes.”

In Meryton they parted; the two youngest repaired to the lodgings

of one of the officers’ wives, and Elizabeth continued her walk

alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over

stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and

finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary

ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of

exercise.

She was shown into the breakfast-parlour, where all but Jane were

assembled, and where her appearance created a great deal of

surprise. That she should have walked three miles so early in the

day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible

to Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and Elizabeth was convinced that

they held her in contempt for it. She was received, however, very

politely by them; and in their brother’s manners there was

something better than politeness; there was good humour and

kindness. Mr. Darcy said very little, and Mr. Hurst nothing at

all. The former was divided between admiration of the brilliancy

which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the

occasion’s justifying her coming so far alone. The latter was

thinking only of his breakfast.

Her enquiries after her sister were not very favourably answered.

Miss Bennet had slept ill, and though up, was very feverish, and

not well enough to leave her room. Elizabeth was glad to be taken

to her immediately; and Jane, who had only been withheld by the

fear of giving alarm or inconvenience, from expressing in her note

how much she longed for such a visit, was delighted at her

entrance. She was not equal, however, to much conversation, and

when Miss Bingley left them together, could attempt little

beside expressions of gratitude for the extraordinary kindness

she was treated with. Elizabeth silently attended her.

When breakfast was over, they were joined by the sisters; and

Elizabeth began to like them herself, when she saw how much

affection and solicitude they showed for Jane. The apothecary

came, and having examined his patient, said, as might be

supposed, that she had caught a violent cold, and that they must

endeavour to get the better of it; advised her to return to bed,

and promised her some draughts. The advice was followed readily,

for the feverish symptoms increased, and her head ached acutely.

Elizabeth did not quit her room for a moment, nor were the other

ladies often absent; the gentlemen being out, they had in fact

nothing to do elsewhere.

When the clock struck three, Elizabeth felt that she must go, and

very unwillingly said so. Miss Bingley offered her the carriage,

and she only wanted a little pressing to accept it, when Jane

testified such concern in parting with her, that Miss Bingley was

obliged to convert the offer of the chaise to an invitation to

remain at Netherfield for the present. Elizabeth most thankfully

consented, and a servant was dispatched to Longbourn to acquaint

the family with her stay, and bring back a supply of clothes.

Chapter 8

At five o’clock the two ladies retired to dress, and at half-past

six Elizabeth was summoned to dinner. To the civil enquiries

which then poured in, and amongst which she had the pleasure of

distinguishing the much superior solicitude of Mr. Bingley’s, she

could not make a very favourable answer. Jane was by no means

better. The sisters, on hearing this, repeated three or four

times how much they were grieved, how shocking it was to have a

bad cold, and how excessively they disliked being ill themselves;

and then thought no more of the matter: and their indifference

towards Jane when not immediately before them, restored Elizabeth

to the enjoyment of all her original dislike.

Their brother, indeed, was the only one of the party whom she

could regard with any complacency. His anxiety for Jane was

evident, and his attentions to herself most pleasing, and they

prevented her feeling herself so much an intruder as she believed

she was considered by the others. She had very little notice from

any but him. Miss Bingley was engrossed by Mr. Darcy, her sister

scarcely less so; and as for Mr. Hurst, by whom Elizabeth sat, he

was an indolent man, who lived only to eat, drink, and play at

cards; who, when he found her prefer a plain dish to a ragout,

had nothing to say to her.

When dinner was over, she returned directly to Jane, and Miss

Bingley began abusing her as soon as she was out of the room. Her

manners were pronounced to be very bad indeed, a mixture of pride

and impertinence; she had no conversation, no style, no taste, no beauty.

Mrs. Hurst thought the same, and added,

“She has nothing, in short, to recommend her, but being an

excellent walker. I shall never forget her appearance this

morning. She really looked almost wild.”

“She did, indeed, Louisa. I could hardly keep my countenance.

Very nonsensical to come at all! Why must \_she\_ be scampering

about the country, because her sister had a cold? Her hair so

untidy, so blowsy!”

“Yes, and her petticoat; I hope you saw her petticoat, six inches

deep in mud, I am absolutely certain; and the gown which had been

let down to hide it not doing its office.”

“Your picture may be very exact, Louisa,” said Bingley; “but this

was all lost upon me. I thought Miss Elizabeth Bennet looked

remarkably well when she came into the room this morning. Her

dirty petticoat quite escaped my notice.”

“\_You\_ observed it, Mr. Darcy, I am sure,” said Miss Bingley;

“and I am inclined to think that you would not wish to see \_your

sister\_ make such an exhibition.”

“Certainly not.”

“To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever

it is, above her ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! what

could she mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort

of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to

decorum.”

“It shows an affection for her sister that is very pleasing,”

said Bingley.

“I am afraid, Mr. Darcy,” observed Miss Bingley, in a half

whisper, “that this adventure has rather affected your admiration

of her fine eyes.”

“Not at all,” he replied; “they were brightened by the exercise.”

A short pause followed this speech, and Mrs. Hurst began again.

“I have an excessive regard for Miss Jane Bennet, she is really a

very sweet girl, and I wish with all my heart she were well

settled. But with such a father and mother, and such low

connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it.”

“I think I have heard you say that their uncle is an attorney in

Meryton.”

“Yes; and they have another, who lives somewhere near Cheapside.”

“That is capital,” added her sister, and they both laughed

heartily.

“If they had uncles enough to fill \_all\_ Cheapside,” cried

Bingley, “it would not make them one jot less agreeable.”

“But it must very materially lessen their chance of marrying men

of any consideration in the world,” replied Darcy.

To this speech Bingley made no answer; but his sisters gave it

their hearty assent, and indulged their mirth for some time at

the expense of their dear friend’s vulgar relations.

With a renewal of tenderness, however, they repaired to her room

on leaving the dining-parlour, and sat with her till summoned to

coffee. She was still very poorly, and Elizabeth would not quit

her at all, till late in the evening, when she had the comfort of

seeing her asleep, and when it appeared to her rather right than

pleasant that she should go downstairs herself. On entering the

drawing-room she found the whole party at loo, and was

immediately invited to join them; but suspecting them to be

playing high she declined it, and making her sister the excuse,

said she would amuse herself for the short time she could stay

below, with a book. Mr. Hurst looked at her with astonishment.

“Do you prefer reading to cards?” said he; “that is rather

singular.”

“Miss Eliza Bennet,” said Miss Bingley, “despises cards. She is a

great reader, and has no pleasure in anything else.”

“I deserve neither such praise nor such censure,” cried

Elizabeth; “I am \_not\_ a great reader, and I have pleasure in

many things.”

“In nursing your sister I am sure you have pleasure,” said

Bingley; “and I hope it will soon be increased by seeing her

quite well.”

Elizabeth thanked him from her heart, and then walked towards a

table where a few books were lying. He immediately offered to

fetch her others; all that his library afforded.

“And I wish my collection were larger for your benefit and my own

credit; but I am an idle fellow, and though I have not many, I

have more than I ever looked into.”

Elizabeth assured him that she could suit herself perfectly with

those in the room.

“I am astonished,” said Miss Bingley, “that my father should have

left so small a collection of books. What a delightful library

you have at Pemberley, Mr. Darcy!”

“It ought to be good,” he replied, “it has been the work of many

generations.”

“And then you have added so much to it yourself, you are always

buying books.”

“I cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such days

as these.”

“Neglect! I am sure you neglect nothing that can add to the

beauties of that noble place. Charles, when you build \_your\_

house, I wish it may be half as delightful as Pemberley.”

“I wish it may.”

“But I would really advise you to make your purchase in that

neighbourhood, and take Pemberley for a kind of model. There is

not a finer county in England than Derbyshire.”

“With all my heart; I will buy Pemberley itself if Darcy will

sell it.”

“I am talking of possibilities, Charles.”

“Upon my word, Caroline, I should think it more possible to get

Pemberley by purchase than by imitation.”

Elizabeth was so much caught by what passed, as to leave her

very little attention for her book; and soon laying it wholly

aside, she drew near the card-table, and stationed herself

between Mr. Bingley and his eldest sister, to observe the game.

“Is Miss Darcy much grown since the spring?” said Miss Bingley;

“will she be as tall as I am?”

“I think she will. She is now about Miss Elizabeth Bennet’s

height, or rather taller.”

“How I long to see her again! I never met with anybody who

delighted me so much. Such a countenance, such manners!—and so

extremely accomplished for her age! Her performance on the

pianoforte is exquisite.”

“It is amazing to me,” said Bingley, “how young ladies can have

patience to be so very accomplished as they all are.”

“All young ladies accomplished! My dear Charles, what do you

mean?”

“Yes, all of them, I think. They all paint tables, cover screens,

and net purses. I scarcely know any one who cannot do all this,

and I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first

time, without being informed that she was very accomplished.”

“Your list of the common extent of accomplishments,” said Darcy,

“has too much truth. The word is applied to many a woman who

deserves it no otherwise than by netting a purse or covering a

screen. But I am very far from agreeing with you in your

estimation of ladies in general. I cannot boast of knowing more

than half a dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that

are really accomplished.”

“Nor I, I am sure,” said Miss Bingley.

“Then,” observed Elizabeth, “you must comprehend a great deal in

your idea of an accomplished woman.”

“Yes; I do comprehend a great deal in it.”

“Oh! certainly,” cried his faithful assistant, “no one can be

really esteemed accomplished who does not greatly surpass what is

usually met with. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of

music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to

deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a

certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of

her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but

half deserved.”

“All this she must possess,” added Darcy, “and to all this she

must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of

her mind by extensive reading.”

“I am no longer surprised at your knowing \_only\_ six accomplished

women. I rather wonder now at your knowing \_any\_.”

“Are you so severe upon your own sex as to doubt the possibility

of all this?”

“\_I\_ never saw such a woman. \_I\_ never saw such capacity, and

taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe, united.”

Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley both cried out against the injustice

of her implied doubt, and were both protesting that they knew

many women who answered this description, when Mr. Hurst called

them to order, with bitter complaints of their inattention to

what was going forward. As all conversation was thereby at an

end, Elizabeth soon afterwards left the room.

“Eliza Bennet,” said Miss Bingley, when the door was closed

on her, “is one of those young ladies who seek to recommend

themselves to the other sex by undervaluing their own; and with

many men, I dare say, it succeeds. But, in my opinion, it is a

paltry device, a very mean art.”

“Undoubtedly,” replied Darcy, to whom this remark was chiefly

addressed, “there is meanness in \_all\_ the arts which ladies

sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears

affinity to cunning is despicable.”

Miss Bingley was not so entirely satisfied with this reply as to

continue the subject.

Elizabeth joined them again only to say that her sister was

worse, and that she could not leave her. Bingley urged Mr. Jones’s

being sent for immediately; while his sisters, convinced that no

country advice could be of any service, recommended an express to

town for one of the most eminent physicians. This she would not

hear of; but she was not so unwilling to comply with their

brother’s proposal; and it was settled that Mr. Jones should be

sent for early in the morning, if Miss Bennet were not decidedly

better. Bingley was quite uncomfortable; his sisters declared

that they were miserable. They solaced their wretchedness,

however, by duets after supper, while he could find no better

relief to his feelings than by giving his housekeeper directions

that every possible attention might be paid to the sick lady and her

sister.

Chapter 9

Elizabeth passed the chief of the night in her sister’s room, and

in the morning had the pleasure of being able to send a tolerable

answer to the enquiries which she very early received from Mr.

Bingley by a housemaid, and some time afterwards from the two

elegant ladies who waited on his sisters. In spite of this

amendment, however, she requested to have a note sent to

Longbourn, desiring her mother to visit Jane, and form her own

judgment of her situation. The note was immediately dispatched,

and its contents as quickly complied with. Mrs. Bennet,

accompanied by her two youngest girls, reached Netherfield soon

after the family breakfast.

Had she found Jane in any apparent danger, Mrs. Bennet would have

been very miserable; but being satisfied on seeing her that her

illness was not alarming, she had no wish of her recovering

immediately, as her restoration to health would probably remove

her from Netherfield. She would not listen, therefore, to her

daughter’s proposal of being carried home; neither did the

apothecary, who arrived about the same time, think it at all

advisable. After sitting a little while with Jane, on Miss

Bingley’s appearance and invitation, the mother and three

daughters all attended her into the breakfast parlour. Bingley

met them with hopes that Mrs. Bennet had not found Miss Bennet

worse than she expected.

“Indeed I have, sir,” was her answer. “She is a great deal too

ill to be moved. Mr. Jones says we must not think of moving her.

We must trespass a little longer on your kindness.”

“Removed!” cried Bingley. “It must not be thought of. My sister,

I am sure, will not hear of her removal.”

“You may depend upon it, Madam,” said Miss Bingley, with cold

civility, “that Miss Bennet shall receive every possible attention

while she remains with us.”

Mrs. Bennet was profuse in her acknowledgments.

“I am sure,” she added, “if it was not for such good friends I do

not know what would become of her, for she is very ill indeed,

and suffers a vast deal, though with the greatest patience in the

world, which is always the way with her, for she has, without

exception, the sweetest temper I ever met with. I often tell

my other girls they are nothing to \_her\_. You have a sweet room

here, Mr. Bingley, and a charming prospect over that gravel walk.

I do not know a place in the country that is equal to

Netherfield. You will not think of quitting it in a hurry, I

hope, though you have but a short lease.”

“Whatever I do is done in a hurry,” replied he; “and therefore if

I should resolve to quit Netherfield, I should probably be off in

five minutes. At present, however, I consider myself as quite

fixed here.”

“That is exactly what I should have supposed of you,” said

Elizabeth.

“You begin to comprehend me, do you?” cried he, turning towards

her.

“Oh! yes—I understand you perfectly.”

“I wish I might take this for a compliment; but to be so easily

seen through I am afraid is pitiful.”

“That is as it happens. It does not necessarily follow that a deep, intricate

character is more or less estimable than such a one as yours.”

“Lizzy,” cried her mother, “remember where you are, and do not

run on in the wild manner that you are suffered to do at home.”

“I did not know before,” continued Bingley immediately, “that you

were a studier of character. It must be an amusing study.”

“Yes; but intricate characters are the \_most\_ amusing. They have

at least that advantage.”

“The country,” said Darcy, “can in general supply but few

subjects for such a study. In a country neighbourhood you move in

a very confined and unvarying society.”

“But people themselves alter so much, that there is something new

to be observed in them for ever.”

“Yes, indeed,” cried Mrs. Bennet, offended by his manner of

mentioning a country neighbourhood. “I assure you there is quite

as much of \_that\_ going on in the country as in town.”

Everybody was surprised; and Darcy, after looking at her for a

moment, turned silently away. Mrs. Bennet, who fancied she had

gained a complete victory over him, continued her triumph.

“I cannot see that London has any great advantage over the

country, for my part, except the shops and public places. The

country is a vast deal pleasanter, is not it, Mr. Bingley?”

“When I am in the country,” he replied, “I never wish to leave

it; and when I am in town it is pretty much the same. They have

each their advantages, and I can be equally happy in either.”

“Aye—that is because you have the right disposition. But that

gentleman,” looking at Darcy, “seemed to think the country was

nothing at all.”

“Indeed, Mama, you are mistaken,” said Elizabeth, blushing for

her mother. “You quite mistook Mr. Darcy. He only meant that

there was not such a variety of people to be met with in the

country as in town, which you must acknowledge to be true.”

“Certainly, my dear, nobody said there were; but as to not

meeting with many people in this neighbourhood, I believe there

are few neighbourhoods larger. I know we dine with

four-and-twenty families.”

Nothing but concern for Elizabeth could enable Bingley to keep

his countenance. His sister was less delicate, and directed her

eye towards Mr. Darcy with a very expressive smile. Elizabeth,

for the sake of saying something that might turn her mother’s

thoughts, now asked her if Charlotte Lucas had been at Longbourn

since \_her\_ coming away.

“Yes, she called yesterday with her father. What an agreeable man

Sir William is, Mr. Bingley—is not he? so much the man of

fashion! So genteel and so easy! He has always something to say to

everybody. \_That\_ is my idea of good breeding; and those persons

who fancy themselves very important and never open their mouths,

quite mistake the matter.”

“Did Charlotte dine with you?”

“No, she would go home. I fancy she was wanted about the

mince-pies. For my part, Mr. Bingley, \_I\_ always keep servants

that can do their own work; \_my\_ daughters are brought up

differently. But everybody is to judge for themselves, and the

Lucases are a very good sort of girls, I assure you. It is a pity

they are not handsome! Not that \_I\_ think Charlotte so \_very\_

plain—but then she is our particular friend.”

“She seems a very pleasant young woman,” said Bingley.

“Oh! dear, yes; but you must own she is very plain. Lady Lucas

herself has often said so, and envied me Jane’s beauty. I do not

like to boast of my own child, but to be sure, Jane—one does not

often see anybody better looking. It is what everybody says. I do

not trust my own partiality. When she was only fifteen, there was

a gentleman at my brother Gardiner’s in town so much in love with her,

that my sister-in-law was sure he would make her an offer before

we came away. But, however, he did not. Perhaps he thought her

too young. However, he wrote some verses on her, and very pretty

they were.”

“And so ended his affection,” said Elizabeth impatiently. “There

has been many a one, I fancy, overcome in the same way. I wonder

who first discovered the efficacy of poetry in driving away

love!”

“I have been used to consider poetry as the \_food\_ of love,” said

Darcy.

“Of a fine, stout, healthy love it may. Everything nourishes what

is strong already. But if it be only a slight, thin sort of

inclination, I am convinced that one good sonnet will starve it

entirely away.”

Darcy only smiled; and the general pause which ensued made

Elizabeth tremble lest her mother should be exposing herself

again. She longed to speak, but could think of nothing to say;

and after a short silence Mrs. Bennet began repeating her thanks

to Mr. Bingley for his kindness to Jane, with an apology for

troubling him also with Lizzy. Mr. Bingley was unaffectedly civil

in his answer, and forced his younger sister to be civil also,

and say what the occasion required. She performed her part indeed

without much graciousness, but Mrs. Bennet was satisfied, and

soon afterwards ordered her carriage. Upon this signal, the

youngest of her daughters put herself forward. The two girls had

been whispering to each other during the whole visit, and the

result of it was, that the youngest should tax Mr. Bingley with

having promised on his first coming into the country to give a

ball at Netherfield.

Lydia was a stout, well-grown girl of fifteen, with a fine

complexion and good-humoured countenance; a favourite with her

mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early

age. She had high animal spirits, and a sort of natural

self-consequence, which the attentions of the officers, to whom

her uncle’s good dinners and her own easy manners recommended

her, had increased into assurance. She was very equal, therefore,

to address Mr. Bingley on the subject of the ball, and abruptly

reminded him of his promise; adding, that it would be the most

shameful thing in the world if he did not keep it. His answer to

this sudden attack was delightful to their mother’s ear.

“I am perfectly ready, I assure you, to keep my engagement; and

when your sister is recovered, you shall, if you please, name the

very day of the ball. But you would not wish to be dancing while

she is ill.”

Lydia declared herself satisfied. “Oh! yes—it would be much

better to wait till Jane was well, and by that time most likely

Captain Carter would be at Meryton again. And when you have given

\_your\_ ball,” she added, “I shall insist on their giving one

also. I shall tell Colonel Forster it will be quite a shame if he

does not.”

Mrs. Bennet and her daughters then departed, and Elizabeth

returned instantly to Jane, leaving her own and her relations’

behaviour to the remarks of the two ladies and Mr. Darcy; the

latter of whom, however, could not be prevailed on to join in

their censure of \_her\_, in spite of all Miss Bingley’s witticisms

on \_fine eyes\_.

Chapter 10

The day passed much as the day before had done. Mrs. Hurst and

Miss Bingley had spent some hours of the morning with the

invalid, who continued, though slowly, to mend; and in the

evening Elizabeth joined their party in the drawing-room. The

loo table, however, did not appear. Mr. Darcy was writing, and

Miss Bingley, seated near him, was watching the progress of his

letter, and repeatedly calling off his attention by messages to

his sister. Mr. Hurst and Mr. Bingley were at piquet, and Mrs.

Hurst was observing their game.

Elizabeth took up some needlework, and was sufficiently amused in

attending to what passed between Darcy and his companion. The

perpetual commendations of the lady either on his handwriting,

or on the evenness of his lines, or on the length of his letter,

with the perfect unconcern with which her praises were received,

formed a curious dialogue, and was exactly in unison with her

opinion of each.

“How delighted Miss Darcy will be to receive such a letter!”

He made no answer.

“You write uncommonly fast.”

“You are mistaken. I write rather slowly.”

“How many letters you must have occasion to write in the course

of a year! Letters of business, too! How odious I should think

them!”

“It is fortunate, then, that they fall to my lot instead of to

yours.”

“Pray tell your sister that I long to see her.”

“I have already told her so once, by your desire.”

“I am afraid you do not like your pen. Let me mend it for you. I

mend pens remarkably well.”

“Thank you—but I always mend my own.”

“How can you contrive to write so even?”

He was silent.

“Tell your sister I am delighted to hear of her improvement on

the harp, and pray let her know that I am quite in raptures with

her beautiful little design for a table, and I think it

infinitely superior to Miss Grantley’s.”

“Will you give me leave to defer your raptures till I write

again? At present I have not room to do them justice.”

“Oh! it is of no consequence. I shall see her in January. But do

you always write such charming long letters to her, Mr. Darcy?”

“They are generally long; but whether always charming, it is not

for me to determine.”

“It is a rule with me, that a person who can write a long letter

with ease, cannot write ill.”

“That will not do for a compliment to Darcy, Caroline,” cried her

brother, “because he does \_not\_ write with ease. He studies too

much for words of four syllables. Do not you, Darcy?”

“My style of writing is very different from yours.”

“Oh!” cried Miss Bingley, “Charles writes in the most careless

way imaginable. He leaves out half his words, and blots the

rest.”

“My ideas flow so rapidly that I have not time to express them—by

which means my letters sometimes convey no ideas at all to my

correspondents.”

“Your humility, Mr. Bingley,” said Elizabeth, “must disarm

reproof.”

“Nothing is more deceitful,” said Darcy, “than the appearance of

humility. It is often only carelessness of opinion, and sometimes

an indirect boast.”

“And which of the two do you call \_my\_ little recent piece of

modesty?”

“The indirect boast; for you are really proud of your defects in

writing, because you consider them as proceeding from a rapidity

of thought and carelessness of execution, which, if not

estimable, you think at least highly interesting. The power of

doing anything with quickness is always much prized by the

possessor, and often without any attention to the imperfection of

the performance. When you told Mrs. Bennet this morning that if

you ever resolved on quitting Netherfield you should be gone in

five minutes, you meant it to be a sort of panegyric, of

compliment to yourself—and yet what is there so very laudable in

a precipitance which must leave very necessary business undone,

and can be of no real advantage to yourself or any one else?”

“Nay,” cried Bingley, “this is too much, to remember at night all

the foolish things that were said in the morning. And yet, upon

my honour, I believed what I said of myself to be true, and I

believe it at this moment. At least, therefore, I did not assume

the character of needless precipitance merely to show off before

the ladies.”

“I dare say you believed it; but I am by no means convinced that

you would be gone with such celerity. Your conduct would be quite

as dependent on chance as that of any man I know; and if, as you

were mounting your horse, a friend were to say, ‘Bingley, you had

better stay till next week,’ you would probably do it, you would

probably not go—and, at another word, might stay a month.”

“You have only proved by this,” cried Elizabeth, “that Mr.

Bingley did not do justice to his own disposition. You have shown

him off now much more than he did himself.”

“I am exceedingly gratified,” said Bingley, “by your converting

what my friend says into a compliment on the sweetness of my

temper. But I am afraid you are giving it a turn which that

gentleman did by no means intend; for he would certainly think

the better of me, if under such a circumstance I were to give a flat

denial, and ride off as fast as I could.”

“Would Mr. Darcy then consider the rashness of your original

intention as atoned for by your obstinacy in adhering to it?”

“Upon my word, I cannot exactly explain the matter, Darcy must

speak for himself.”

“You expect me to account for opinions which you choose to call

mine, but which I have never acknowledged. Allowing the case,

however, to stand according to your representation, you must

remember, Miss Bennet, that the friend who is supposed to desire

his return to the house, and the delay of his plan, has merely

desired it, asked it without offering one argument in favour of

its propriety.”

“To yield readily—easily—to the \_persuasion\_ of a friend is no

merit with you.”

“To yield without conviction is no compliment to the

understanding of either.”

“You appear to me, Mr. Darcy, to allow nothing for the influence

of friendship and affection. A regard for the requester would

often make one readily yield to a request, without waiting for

arguments to reason one into it. I am not particularly speaking

of such a case as you have supposed about Mr. Bingley. We may as

well wait, perhaps, till the circumstance occurs, before we

discuss the discretion of his behaviour thereupon. But in general

and ordinary cases between friend and friend, where one of them

is desired by the other to change a resolution of no very great

moment, should you think ill of that person for complying with

the desire, without waiting to be argued into it?”

“Will it not be advisable, before we proceed on this subject, to

arrange with rather more precision the degree of importance which

is to appertain to this request, as well as the degree of

intimacy subsisting between the parties?”

“By all means,” cried Bingley; “let us hear all the particulars,

not forgetting their comparative height and size; for that will

have more weight in the argument, Miss Bennet, than you may be

aware of. I assure you that if Darcy were not such a great tall

fellow, in comparison with myself, I should not pay him half so

much deference. I declare I do not know a more awful object than

Darcy, on particular occasions, and in particular places; at his

own house especially, and of a Sunday evening, when he has

nothing to do.”

Mr. Darcy smiled; but Elizabeth thought she could perceive that

he was rather offended, and therefore checked her laugh. Miss

Bingley warmly resented the indignity he had received, in an

expostulation with her brother for talking such nonsense.

“I see your design, Bingley,” said his friend. “You dislike an

argument, and want to silence this.”

“Perhaps I do. Arguments are too much like disputes. If you and

Miss Bennet will defer yours till I am out of the room, I shall

be very thankful; and then you may say whatever you like of me.”

“What you ask,” said Elizabeth, “is no sacrifice on my side; and

Mr. Darcy had much better finish his letter.”

Mr. Darcy took her advice, and did finish his letter.

When that business was over, he applied to Miss Bingley and

Elizabeth for the indulgence of some music. Miss Bingley moved

with alacrity to the pianoforte, and after a polite request

that Elizabeth would lead the way, which the other as politely and

more earnestly negatived, she seated herself.

Mrs. Hurst sang with her sister, and while they were thus

employed, Elizabeth could not help observing, as she turned over

some music-books that lay on the instrument, how frequently Mr.

Darcy’s eyes were fixed on her. She hardly knew how to suppose

that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and

yet that he should look at her because he disliked her, was still

more strange. She could only imagine, however, at last, that she

drew his notice because there was a something about her more wrong and

reprehensible, according to his ideas of right, than in any other

person present. The supposition did not pain her. She liked him

too little to care for his approbation.

After playing some Italian songs, Miss Bingley varied the charm

by a lively Scotch air; and soon afterwards Mr. Darcy, drawing

near Elizabeth, said to her—

“Do not you feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize such

an opportunity of dancing a reel?”

She smiled, but made no answer. He repeated the question, with

some surprise at her silence.

“Oh!” said she, “I heard you before; but I could not immediately

determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say

‘Yes,’ that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste;

but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and

cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. 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.”

“Indeed I do not dare.”

Elizabeth, having rather expected to affront him, was amazed at

his gallantry; but there was a mixture of sweetness and archness

in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody;

and Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by

her. He really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of

her connections, he should be in some danger.

Miss Bingley saw, or suspected enough to be jealous; and her

great anxiety for the recovery of her dear friend Jane received

some assistance from her desire of getting rid of Elizabeth.

She often tried to provoke Darcy into disliking her guest, by

talking of their supposed marriage, and planning his happiness in

such an alliance.

“I hope,” said she, as they were walking together in the

shrubbery the next day, “you will give your mother-in-law a few

hints, when this desirable event takes place, as to the advantage

of holding her tongue; and if you can compass it, do cure the

younger girls of running after the officers. And, if I may mention so

delicate a subject, endeavour to check that little something,

bordering on conceit and impertinence, which your lady

possesses.”

“Have you anything else to propose for my domestic felicity?”

“Oh! yes. Do let the portraits of your uncle and aunt Philips be

placed in the gallery at Pemberley. Put them next to your

great uncle the judge. They are in the same profession, you know,

only in different lines. As for your Elizabeth’s picture, you

must not attempt to have it taken, for what painter could do justice to

those beautiful eyes?”

“It would not be easy, indeed, to catch their expression, but

their colour and shape, and the eyelashes, so remarkably fine,

might be copied.”

At that moment they were met from another walk by Mrs. Hurst and

Elizabeth herself.

“I did not know that you intended to walk,” said Miss Bingley, in

some confusion, lest they had been overheard.

“You used us abominably ill,” answered Mrs. Hurst, “running away

without telling us that you were coming out.”

Then taking the disengaged arm of Mr. Darcy, she left Elizabeth

to walk by herself. The path just admitted three. Mr. Darcy felt

their rudeness, and immediately said,—

“This walk is not wide enough for our party. We had better go

into the avenue.”

But Elizabeth, who had not the least inclination to remain with

them, laughingly answered,

“No, no; stay where you are. You are charmingly grouped, and

appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by

admitting a fourth. Good-bye.”

She then ran gaily off, rejoicing as she rambled about, in the

hope of being at home again in a day or two. Jane was already so

much recovered as to intend leaving her room for a couple of

hours that evening.

Chapter 11

When the ladies removed after dinner, Elizabeth ran up to her

sister, and seeing her well guarded from cold, attended her into

the drawing-room, where she was welcomed by her two friends with

many professions of pleasure; and Elizabeth had never seen them

so agreeable as they were during the hour which passed before the

gentlemen appeared. Their powers of conversation were

considerable. They could describe an entertainment with accuracy,

relate an anecdote with humour, and laugh at their acquaintance

with spirit.

But when the gentlemen entered, Jane was no longer the first

object; Miss Bingley’s eyes were instantly turned toward Darcy,

and she had something to say to him before he had advanced many

steps. He addressed himself to Miss Bennet, with a polite

congratulation; Mr. Hurst also made her a slight bow, and said he

was “very glad;” but diffuseness and warmth remained for

Bingley’s salutation. He was full of joy and attention. The first

half-hour was spent in piling up the fire, lest she should suffer

from the change of room; and she removed at his desire to the

other side of the fireplace, that she might be further from the

door. He then sat down by her, and talked scarcely to anyone

else. Elizabeth, at work in the opposite corner, saw it all with

great delight.

When tea was over, Mr. Hurst reminded his sister-in-law of the

card-table—but in vain. She had obtained private intelligence

that Mr. Darcy did not wish for cards; and Mr. Hurst soon found

even his open petition rejected. She assured him that no one

intended to play, and the silence of the whole party on the

subject seemed to justify her. Mr. Hurst had therefore nothing to

do, but to stretch himself on one of the sofas and go to sleep.

Darcy took up a book; Miss Bingley did the same; and Mrs. Hurst,

principally occupied in playing with her bracelets and rings,

joined now and then in her brother’s conversation with Miss

Bennet.

Miss Bingley’s attention was quite as much engaged in watching

Mr. Darcy’s progress through \_his\_ book, as in reading her own;

and she was perpetually either making some enquiry, or looking at

his page. She could not win him, however, to any conversation; he

merely answered her question, and read on. At length, quite

exhausted by the attempt to be amused with her own book, which

she had only chosen because it was the second volume of his, she

gave a great yawn and said, “How pleasant it is to spend an

evening in this way! I declare after all there is no enjoyment

like reading! How much sooner one tires of anything than of a

book! When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I

have not an excellent library.”

No one made any reply. She then yawned again, threw aside her

book, and cast her eyes round the room in quest for some

amusement; when hearing her brother mentioning a ball to Miss

Bennet, she turned suddenly towards him and said:

“By the bye, Charles, are you really serious in meditating a

dance at Netherfield? I would advise you, before you determine on

it, to consult the wishes of the present party; I am much

mistaken if there are not some among us to whom a ball would be

rather a punishment than a pleasure.”

“If you mean Darcy,” cried her brother, “he may go to bed, if he

chooses, before it begins—but as for the ball, it is quite a

settled thing; and as soon as Nicholls has made white soup

enough, I shall send round my cards.”

“I should like balls infinitely better,” she replied, “if they

were carried on in a different manner; but there is something

insufferably tedious in the usual process of such a meeting. It

would surely be much more rational if conversation instead of

dancing were made the order of the day.”

“Much more rational, my dear Caroline, I dare say, but it would

not be near so much like a ball.”

Miss Bingley made no answer, and soon afterwards she got up and

walked about the room. Her figure was elegant, and she walked

well; but Darcy, at whom it was all aimed, was still inflexibly

studious. In the desperation of her feelings, she resolved on one

effort more, and, turning to Elizabeth, said:

“Miss Eliza Bennet, let me persuade you to follow my example, and

take a turn about the room. I assure you it is very refreshing

after sitting so long in one attitude.”

Elizabeth was surprised, but agreed to it immediately. Miss

Bingley succeeded no less in the real object of her civility; Mr.

Darcy looked up. He was as much awake to the novelty of attention

in that quarter as Elizabeth herself could be, and unconsciously

closed his book. He was directly invited to join their party, but

he declined it, observing that he could imagine but two motives

for their choosing to walk up and down the room together, with

either of which motives his joining them would interfere. “What

could he mean? She was dying to know what could be his

meaning?”—and asked Elizabeth whether she could at all understand

him?

“Not at all,” was her answer; “but depend upon it, he means to be

severe on us, and our surest way of disappointing him will be to

ask nothing about it.”

Miss Bingley, however, was incapable of disappointing Mr. Darcy

in anything, and persevered therefore in requiring an explanation

of his two motives.

“I have not the smallest objection to explaining them,” said he,

as soon as she allowed him to speak. “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 your figures appear to the greatest advantage

in walking; if the first, I would be completely in your way, and

if the second, I can admire you much better as I sit by the

fire.”

“Oh! shocking!” cried Miss Bingley. “I never heard anything so

abominable. How shall we punish him for such a speech?”

“Nothing so easy, if you have but the inclination,” said

Elizabeth. “We can all plague and punish one another. Tease

him—laugh at him. Intimate as you are, you must know how it is to

be done.”

“But upon my honour, I do \_not\_. I do assure you that my intimacy

has not yet taught me \_that\_. Tease calmness of manner and

presence of mind! No, no; I feel he may defy us there. And as to

laughter, we will not expose ourselves, if you please, by

attempting to laugh without a subject. Mr. Darcy may hug

himself.”

“Mr. Darcy is not to be laughed at!” cried Elizabeth. “That is an

uncommon advantage, and uncommon I hope it will continue, for it

would be a great loss to \_me\_ to have many such acquaintances. I

dearly love a laugh.”

“Miss Bingley,” said he, “has given me more credit than can be.

The wisest and the best of men—nay, the wisest and best of their

actions—may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object

in life is a joke.”

“Certainly,” replied Elizabeth—“there are such people, but I hope

I am not one of \_them\_. I hope I never ridicule what is wise and

good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, \_do\_

divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can. But these,

I suppose, are precisely what you are without.”

“Perhaps that is not possible for anyone. But it has been the

study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a

strong understanding to ridicule.”

“Such as vanity and pride.”

“Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride—where there is a

real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good

regulation.”

Elizabeth turned away to hide a smile.

“Your examination of Mr. Darcy is over, I presume,” said Miss

Bingley; “and pray what is the result?”

“I am perfectly convinced by it that Mr. Darcy has no defect. He

owns it himself without disguise.”

“No,” said Darcy, “I have made no such pretension. I have faults

enough, but they are not, I hope, of understanding. My temper I

dare not vouch for. It is, I believe, too little

yielding—certainly too little for the convenience of the world. I

cannot forget the follies and vices of others so soon as I ought,

nor their offenses against myself. My feelings are not puffed

about with every attempt to move them. My temper would perhaps be

called resentful. My good opinion once lost, is lost forever.”

“\_That\_ is a failing indeed!” cried Elizabeth. “Implacable

resentment \_is\_ a shade in a character. But you have chosen your

fault well. I really cannot \_laugh\_ at it. You are safe from me.”

“There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some

particular evil—a natural defect, which not even the best

education can overcome.”

“And \_your\_ defect is to hate everybody.”

“And yours,” he replied with a smile, “is willfully to

misunderstand them.”

“Do let us have a little music,” cried Miss Bingley, tired of a

conversation in which she had no share. “Louisa, you will not

mind my waking Mr. Hurst?”

Her sister had not the smallest objection, and the pianoforte was

opened; and Darcy, after a few moments’ recollection, was not

sorry for it. He began to feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too

much attention.

Chapter 12

In consequence of an agreement between the sisters, Elizabeth

wrote the next morning to their mother, to beg that the carriage

might be sent for them in the course of the day. But Mrs. Bennet,

who had calculated on her daughters remaining at Netherfield till

the following Tuesday, which would exactly finish Jane’s week,

could not bring herself to receive them with pleasure before. Her

answer, therefore, was not propitious, at least not to

Elizabeth’s wishes, for she was impatient to get home. Mrs.

Bennet sent them word that they could not possibly have the

carriage before Tuesday; and in her postscript it was added, that

if Mr. Bingley and his sister pressed them to stay longer, she

could spare them very well. Against staying longer, however,

Elizabeth was positively resolved—nor did she much expect it

would be asked; and fearful, on the contrary, as being considered

as intruding themselves needlessly long, she urged Jane to borrow

Mr. Bingley’s carriage immediately, and at length it was settled

that their original design of leaving Netherfield that morning

should be mentioned, and the request made.

The communication excited many professions of concern; and enough

was said of wishing them to stay at least till the following day

to work on Jane; and till the morrow their going was deferred.

Miss Bingley was then sorry that she had proposed the delay, for

her jealousy and dislike of one sister much exceeded her

affection for the other.

The master of the house heard with real sorrow that they were to

go so soon, and repeatedly tried to persuade Miss Bennet that it

would not be safe for her—that she was not enough recovered; but

Jane was firm where she felt herself to be right.

To Mr. Darcy it was welcome intelligence—Elizabeth had been at

Netherfield long enough. She attracted him more than he liked—and

Miss Bingley was uncivil to \_her\_, and more teasing than usual to

himself. He wisely resolved to be particularly careful that no

sign of admiration should \_now\_ escape him, nothing that could

elevate her with the hope of influencing his felicity; sensible

that if such an idea had been suggested, his behaviour during the

last day must have material weight in confirming or crushing it.

Steady to his purpose, he scarcely spoke ten words to her through

the whole of Saturday, and though they were at one time left by

themselves for half-an-hour, he adhered most conscientiously to

his book, and would not even look at her.

On Sunday, after morning service, the separation, so agreeable to

almost all, took place. Miss Bingley’s civility to Elizabeth

increased at last very rapidly, as well as her affection for

Jane; and when they parted, after assuring the latter of the

pleasure it would always give her to see her either at Longbourn

or Netherfield, and embracing her most tenderly, she even shook

hands with the former. Elizabeth took leave of the whole party in

the liveliest of spirits.

They were not welcomed home very cordially by their mother. Mrs.

Bennet wondered at their coming, and thought them very wrong to

give so much trouble, and was sure Jane would have caught cold

again. But their father, though very laconic in his expressions

of pleasure, was really glad to see them; he had felt their

importance in the family circle. The evening conversation, when

they were all assembled, had lost much of its animation, and

almost all its sense by the absence of Jane and Elizabeth.

They found Mary, as usual, deep in the study of thorough-bass and

human nature; and had some extracts to admire, and some new

observations of threadbare morality to listen to. Catherine and

Lydia had information for them of a different sort. Much had been

done and much had been said in the regiment since the preceding

Wednesday; several of the officers had dined lately with their

uncle, a private had been flogged, and it had actually been

hinted that Colonel Forster was going to be married.

Chapter 13

“I hope, my dear,” said Mr. Bennet to his wife, as they were at

breakfast the next morning, “that you have ordered a good dinner

to-day, because I have reason to expect an addition to our family

party.”

“Who do you mean, my dear? I know of nobody that is coming, I am

sure, unless Charlotte Lucas should happen to call in—and I hope

\_my\_ dinners are good enough for her. I do not believe she often

sees such at home.”

“The person of whom I speak is a gentleman, and a stranger.”

Mrs. Bennet’s eyes sparkled. “A gentleman and a stranger! It is

Mr. Bingley, I am sure! Well, I am sure I shall be extremely glad

to see Mr. Bingley. But—good Lord! how unlucky! There is not a

bit of fish to be got to-day. Lydia, my love, ring the bell—I

must speak to Hill this moment.”

“It is \_not\_ Mr. Bingley,” said her husband; “it is a person whom

I never saw in the whole course of my life.”

This roused a general astonishment; and he had the pleasure of

being eagerly questioned by his wife and his five daughters at

once.

After amusing himself some time with their curiosity, he thus

explained:

“About a month ago I received this letter; and about a fortnight

ago I answered it, for I thought it a case of some delicacy, and

requiring early attention. It is from my cousin, Mr. Collins,

who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of this house as soon

as he pleases.”

“Oh! my dear,” cried his wife, “I cannot bear to hear that

mentioned. Pray do not talk of that odious man. I do think it is

the hardest thing in the world, that your estate should be

entailed away from your own children; and I am sure, if I had

been you, I should have tried long ago to do something or other

about it.”

Jane and Elizabeth tried to explain to her the nature of an

entail. They had often attempted to do it before, but it was a

subject on which Mrs. Bennet was beyond the reach of reason, and

she continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an

estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man

whom nobody cared anything about.

“It certainly is a most iniquitous affair,” said Mr. Bennet, “and

nothing can clear Mr. Collins from the guilt of inheriting

Longbourn. But if you will listen to his letter, you may perhaps

be a little softened by his manner of expressing himself.”

“No, that I am sure I shall not; and I think it is very

impertinent of him to write to you at all, and very hypocritical.

I hate such false friends. Why could he not keep on quarreling

with you, as his father did before him?”

“Why, indeed; he does seem to have had some filial scruples on

that head, as you will hear.”

“Hunsford, near Westerham, Kent, 15\_th October\_.

“Dear Sir,—

“The disagreement subsisting between yourself and my late

honoured father always gave me much uneasiness, and since I have

had the misfortune to lose him, I have frequently wished to heal

the breach; but for some time I was kept back by my own doubts,

fearing lest it might seem disrespectful to his memory for me to

be on good terms with anyone with whom it had always pleased him

to be at variance.—‘There, Mrs. Bennet.’—My mind, however, is now

made up on the subject, for having received ordination at Easter,

I have been so fortunate as to be distinguished by the patronage

of the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh, widow of Sir

Lewis de Bourgh, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to

the valuable rectory of this parish, where it shall be my earnest

endeavour to demean myself with grateful respect towards her

ladyship, and be ever ready to perform those rites and ceremonies

which are instituted by the Church of England. As a clergyman,

moreover, I feel it my duty to promote and establish the blessing

of peace in all families within the reach of my influence; and on

these grounds I flatter myself that my present overtures are

highly commendable, and that the circumstance of my being next in

the entail of Longbourn estate will be kindly overlooked on your

side, and not lead you to reject the offered olive-branch. I

cannot be otherwise than concerned at being the means of injuring

your amiable daughters, and beg leave to apologise for it, as

well as to assure you of my readiness to make them every possible

amends—but of this hereafter. If you should have no objection to

receive me into your house, I propose myself the satisfaction of

waiting on you and your family, Monday, November 18th, by four

o’clock, and shall probably trespass on your hospitality till the

Saturday se’ennight following, which I can do without any

inconvenience, as Lady Catherine is far from objecting to my

occasional absence on a Sunday, provided that some other

clergyman is engaged to do the duty of the day.—I remain, dear

sir, with respectful compliments to your lady and daughters, your

well-wisher and friend,

“WILLIAM COLLINS”

“At four o’clock, therefore, we may expect this peace-making

gentleman,” said Mr. Bennet, as he folded up the letter. “He

seems to be a most conscientious and polite young man, upon my

word, and I doubt not will prove a valuable acquaintance,

especially if Lady Catherine should be so indulgent as to let him

come to us again.”

“There is some sense in what he says about the girls, however,

and if he is disposed to make them any amends, I shall not be the

person to discourage him.”

“Though it is difficult,” said Jane, “to guess in what way he can

mean to make us the atonement he thinks our due, the wish is

certainly to his credit.”

Elizabeth was chiefly struck by his extraordinary deference for

Lady Catherine, and his kind intention of christening, marrying,

and burying his parishioners whenever it were required.

“He must be an oddity, I think,” said she. “I cannot make him

out.—There is something very pompous in his style.—And what can

he mean by apologising for being next in the entail?—We cannot

suppose he would help it if he could.—Could he be a sensible man,

sir?”

“No, my dear, I think not. I have great hopes of finding him

quite the reverse. There is a mixture of servility and

self-importance in his letter, which promises well. I am

impatient to see him.”

“In point of composition,” said Mary, “the letter does not seem

defective. The idea of the olive-branch perhaps is not wholly

new, yet I think it is well expressed.”

To Catherine and Lydia, neither the letter nor its writer were in

any degree interesting. It was next to impossible that their

cousin should come in a scarlet coat, and it was now some weeks

since they had received pleasure from the society of a man in any

other colour. As for their mother, Mr. Collins’s letter had done

away much of her ill-will, and she was preparing to see him with

a degree of composure which astonished her husband and daughters.

Mr. Collins was punctual to his time, and was received with great

politeness by the whole family. Mr. Bennet indeed said little;

but the ladies were ready enough to talk, and Mr. Collins seemed

neither in need of encouragement, nor inclined to be silent

himself. He was a tall, heavy-looking young man of

five-and-twenty. His air was grave and stately, and his manners

were very formal. He had not been long seated before he

complimented Mrs. Bennet on having so fine a family of daughters;

said he had heard much of their beauty, but that in this instance

fame had fallen short of the truth; and added, that he did not

doubt her seeing them all in due time disposed of in marriage.

This gallantry was not much to the taste of some of his hearers;

but Mrs. Bennet, who quarreled with no compliments, answered most

readily.

“You are very kind, I am sure; and I wish with all my heart it

may prove so, for else they will be destitute enough. Things are

settled so oddly.”

“You allude, perhaps, to the entail of this estate.”

“Ah! sir, I do indeed. It is a grievous affair to my poor girls,

you must confess. Not that I mean to find fault with \_you\_, for

such things I know are all chance in this world. There is no

knowing how estates will go when once they come to be entailed.”

“I am very sensible, madam, of the hardship to my fair cousins,

and could say much on the subject, but that I am cautious of

appearing forward and precipitate. But I can assure the young

ladies that I come prepared to admire them. At present I will not

say more; but, perhaps, when we are better acquainted—”

He was interrupted by a summons to dinner; and the girls smiled

on each other. They were not the only objects of Mr. Collins’s

admiration. The hall, the dining-room, and all its furniture,

were examined and praised; and his commendation of everything

would have touched Mrs. Bennet’s heart, but for the mortifying

supposition of his viewing it all as his own future property. The

dinner too in its turn was highly admired; and he begged to know

to which of his fair cousins the excellency of its cooking was

owing. But he was set right there by Mrs. Bennet, who assured him

with some asperity that they were very well able to keep a good

cook, and that her daughters had nothing to do in the kitchen. He

begged pardon for having displeased her. In a softened tone she

declared herself not at all offended; but he continued to

apologise for about a quarter of an hour.

Chapter 14

During dinner, Mr. Bennet scarcely spoke at all; but when the

servants were withdrawn, he thought it time to have some

conversation with his guest, and therefore started a subject in

which he expected him to shine, by observing that he seemed very

fortunate in his patroness. Lady Catherine de Bourgh’s attention

to his wishes, and consideration for his comfort, appeared very

remarkable. Mr. Bennet could not have chosen better. Mr. Collins

was eloquent in her praise. The subject elevated him to more than

usual solemnity of manner, and with a most important aspect he

protested that “he had never in his life witnessed such behaviour

in a person of rank—such affability and condescension, as he had

himself experienced from Lady Catherine. She had been graciously

pleased to approve of both of the discourses which he had already

had the honour of preaching before her. She had also asked him

twice to dine at Rosings, and had sent for him only the Saturday

before, to make up her pool of quadrille in the evening. Lady

Catherine was reckoned proud by many people he knew, but \_he\_ had

never seen anything but affability in her. She had always spoken

to him as she would to any other gentleman; she made not the

smallest objection to his joining in the society of the

neighbourhood nor to his leaving the parish occasionally for a

week or two, to visit his relations. She had even condescended to

advise him to marry as soon as he could, provided he chose with

discretion; and had once paid him a visit in his humble

parsonage, where she had perfectly approved all the alterations

he had been making, and had even vouchsafed to suggest some

herself—some shelves in the closet up stairs.”

“That is all very proper and civil, I am sure,” said Mrs. Bennet,

“and I dare say she is a very agreeable woman. It is a pity that

great ladies in general are not more like her. Does she live near

you, sir?”

“The garden in which stands my humble abode is separated only by

a lane from Rosings Park, her ladyship’s residence.”

“I think you said she was a widow, sir? Has she any family?”

“She has only one daughter, the heiress of Rosings, and of very

extensive property.”

“Ah!” said Mrs. Bennet, shaking her head, “then she is better off

than many girls. And what sort of young lady is she? Is she

handsome?”

“She is a most charming young lady indeed. Lady Catherine herself

says that, in point of true beauty, Miss de Bourgh is far

superior to the handsomest of her sex, because there is that in

her features which marks the young lady of distinguished birth.

She is unfortunately of a sickly constitution, which has

prevented her from making that progress in many accomplishments

which she could not have otherwise failed of, as I am informed by

the lady who superintended her education, and who still resides

with them. But she is perfectly amiable, and often condescends to

drive by my humble abode in her little phaeton and ponies.”

“Has she been presented? I do not remember her name among the

ladies at court.”

“Her indifferent state of health unhappily prevents her being in

town; and by that means, as I told Lady Catherine one day, has

deprived the British court of its brightest ornament. Her

ladyship seemed pleased with the idea; and you may imagine that I

am happy on every occasion to offer those little delicate

compliments which are always acceptable to ladies. I have more

than once observed to Lady Catherine, that her charming daughter

seemed born to be a duchess, and that the most elevated rank,

instead of giving her consequence, would be adorned by her. These

are the kind of little things which please her ladyship, and it

is a sort of attention which I conceive myself peculiarly bound

to pay.”

“You judge very properly,” said Mr. Bennet, “and it is happy for

you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy. May

I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse

of the moment, or are the result of previous study?”

“They arise chiefly from what is passing at the time, and though

I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such

little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary

occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as

possible.”

Mr. Bennet’s expectations were fully answered. His cousin was as

absurd as he had hoped, and he listened to him with the keenest

enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute

composure of countenance, and, except in an occasional glance at

Elizabeth, requiring no partner in his pleasure.

By tea-time, however, the dose had been enough, and Mr. Bennet

was glad to take his guest into the drawing-room again, and, when

tea was over, glad to invite him to read aloud to the ladies. Mr.

Collins readily assented, and a book was produced; but, on

beholding it (for everything announced it to be from a

circulating library), he started back, and begging pardon,

protested that he never read novels. Kitty stared at him, and

Lydia exclaimed. Other books were produced, and after some

deliberation he chose Fordyce’s Sermons. Lydia gaped as he opened

the volume, and before he had, with very monotonous solemnity,

read three pages, she interrupted him with:

“Do you know, mamma, that my uncle Phillips talks of turning away

Richard; and if he does, Colonel Forster will hire him. My aunt

told me so herself on Saturday. I shall walk to Meryton to-morrow

to hear more about it, and to ask when Mr. Denny comes back from

town.”

Lydia was bid by her two eldest sisters to hold her tongue; but

Mr. Collins, much offended, laid aside his book, and said:

“I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by

books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their

benefit. It amazes me, I confess; for, certainly, there can be

nothing so advantageous to them as instruction. But I will no

longer importune my young cousin.”

Then turning to Mr. Bennet, he offered himself as his antagonist

at backgammon. Mr. Bennet accepted the challenge, observing that

he acted very wisely in leaving the girls to their own trifling

amusements. Mrs. Bennet and her daughters apologised most civilly

for Lydia’s interruption, and promised that it should not occur

again, if he would resume his book; but Mr. Collins, after

assuring them that he bore his young cousin no ill-will, and

should never resent her behaviour as any affront, seated himself

at another table with Mr. Bennet, and prepared for backgammon.

Chapter 15

Mr. Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature

had been but little assisted by education or society; the

greatest part of his life having been spent under the guidance of

an illiterate and miserly father; and though he belonged to one

of the universities, he had merely kept the necessary terms,

without forming at it any useful acquaintance. The subjection in

which his father had brought him up had given him originally

great humility of manner; but it was now a good deal counteracted

by the self-conceit of a weak head, living in retirement, and the

consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity. A

fortunate chance had recommended him to Lady Catherine de Bourgh

when the living of Hunsford was vacant; and the respect which he

felt for her high rank, and his veneration for her as his

patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his

authority as a clergyman, and his right as a rector, made him

altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance

and humility.

Having now a good house and a very sufficient income, he intended

to marry; and in seeking a reconciliation with the Longbourn

family he had a wife in view, as he meant to choose one of the

daughters, if he found them as handsome and amiable as they were

represented by common report. This was his plan of amends—of

atonement—for inheriting their father’s estate; and he thought it

an excellent one, full of eligibility and suitableness, and

excessively generous and disinterested on his own part.

His plan did not vary on seeing them. Miss Bennet’s lovely face

confirmed his views, and established all his strictest notions of

what was due to seniority; and for the first evening \_she\_ was

his settled choice. The next morning, however, made an

alteration; for in a quarter of an hour’s \_tête-à-tête\_ with Mrs.

Bennet before breakfast, a conversation beginning with his

parsonage-house, and leading naturally to the avowal of his

hopes, that a mistress might be found for it at Longbourn,

produced from her, amid very complaisant smiles and general

encouragement, a caution against the very Jane he had fixed on.

“As to her \_younger\_ daughters, she could not take upon her to

say—she could not positively answer—but she did not \_know\_ of any

prepossession; her \_eldest\_ daughter, she must just mention—she

felt it incumbent on her to hint, was likely to be very soon

engaged.”

Mr. Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth—and it was

soon done—done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire.

Elizabeth, equally next to Jane in birth and beauty, succeeded

her of course.

Mrs. Bennet treasured up the hint, and trusted that she might

soon have two daughters married; and the man whom she could not

bear to speak of the day before was now high in her good graces.

Lydia’s intention of walking to Meryton was not forgotten; every

sister except Mary agreed to go with her; and Mr. Collins was to

attend them, at the request of Mr. Bennet, who was most anxious

to get rid of him, and have his library to himself; for thither

Mr. Collins had followed him after breakfast; and there he would

continue, nominally engaged with one of the largest folios in the

collection, but really talking to Mr. Bennet, with little

cessation, of his house and garden at Hunsford. Such doings

discomposed Mr. Bennet exceedingly. In his library he had been

always sure of leisure and tranquillity; and though prepared, as

he told Elizabeth, to meet with folly and conceit in every other

room of the house, he was used to be free from them there; his

civility, therefore, was most prompt in inviting Mr. Collins to

join his daughters in their walk; and Mr. Collins, being in fact

much better fitted for a walker than a reader, was extremely

pleased to close his large book, and go.

In pompous nothings on his side, and civil assents on that of his

cousins, their time passed till they entered Meryton. The

attention of the younger ones was then no longer to be gained by

\_him\_. Their eyes were immediately wandering up in the street in

quest of the officers, and nothing less than a very smart bonnet

indeed, or a really new muslin in a shop window, could recall

them.

But the attention of every lady was soon caught by a young man,

whom they had never seen before, of most gentlemanlike

appearance, walking with another officer on the other side of the

way. The officer was the very Mr. Denny concerning whose return

from London Lydia came to enquire, and he bowed as they passed.

All were struck with the stranger’s air, all wondered who he

could be; and Kitty and Lydia, determined if possible to find

out, led the way across the street, under pretense of wanting

something in an opposite shop, and fortunately had just gained

the pavement when the two gentlemen, turning back, had reached

the same spot. Mr. Denny addressed them directly, and entreated

permission to introduce his friend, Mr. Wickham, who had returned

with him the day before from town, and he was happy to say had

accepted a commission in their corps. This was exactly as it

should be; for the young man wanted only regimentals to make him

completely charming. His appearance was greatly in his favour; he

had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good

figure, and very pleasing address. The introduction was followed

up on his side by a happy readiness of conversation—a readiness

at the same time perfectly correct and unassuming; and the whole

party were still standing and talking together very agreeably,

when the sound of horses drew their notice, and Darcy and Bingley

were seen riding down the street. On distinguishing the ladies of

the group, the two gentlemen came directly towards them, and

began the usual civilities. Bingley was the principal spokesman,

and Miss Bennet the principal object. He was then, he said, on

his way to Longbourn on purpose to enquire after her. Mr. Darcy

corroborated it with a bow, and was beginning to determine not to

fix his eyes on Elizabeth, when they were suddenly arrested by

the sight of the stranger, and Elizabeth happening to see the

countenance of both as they looked at each other, was all

astonishment at the effect of the meeting. Both changed colour,

one looked white, the other red. Mr. Wickham, after a few

moments, touched his hat—a salutation which Mr. Darcy just

deigned to return. What could be the meaning of it? It was

impossible to imagine; it was impossible not to long to know.

In another minute, Mr. Bingley, but without seeming to have

noticed what passed, took leave and rode on with his friend.

Mr. Denny and Mr. Wickham walked with the young ladies to the

door of Mr. Phillip’s house, and then made their bows, in spite

of Miss Lydia’s pressing entreaties that they should come in, and

even in spite of Mrs. Phillips’s throwing up the parlour window

and loudly seconding the invitation.

Mrs. Phillips was always glad to see her nieces; and the two

eldest, from their recent absence, were particularly welcome, and

she was eagerly expressing her surprise at their sudden return

home, which, as their own carriage had not fetched them, she

should have known nothing about, if she had not happened to see

Mr. Jones’s shop-boy in the street, who had told her that they

were not to send any more draughts to Netherfield because the

Miss Bennets were come away, when her civility was claimed

towards Mr. Collins by Jane’s introduction of him. She received

him with her very best politeness, which he returned with as much

more, apologising for his intrusion, without any previous

acquaintance with her, which he could not help flattering

himself, however, might be justified by his relationship to the

young ladies who introduced him to her notice. Mrs. Phillips was

quite awed by such an excess of good breeding; but her

contemplation of one stranger was soon put to an end by

exclamations and enquiries about the other; of whom, however, she

could only tell her nieces what they already knew, that Mr. Denny

had brought him from London, and that he was to have a

lieutenant’s commission in the ——shire. She had been watching him

the last hour, she said, as he walked up and down the street, and

had Mr. Wickham appeared, Kitty and Lydia would certainly have

continued the occupation, but unluckily no one passed windows now

except a few of the officers, who, in comparison with the

stranger, were become “stupid, disagreeable fellows.” Some of

them were to dine with the Phillipses the next day, and their

aunt promised to make her husband call on Mr. Wickham, and give

him an invitation also, if the family from Longbourn would come

in the evening. This was agreed to, and Mrs. Phillips protested

that they would have a nice comfortable noisy game of lottery

tickets, and a little bit of hot supper afterwards. The prospect

of such delights was very cheering, and they parted in mutual

good spirits. Mr. Collins repeated his apologies in quitting the

room, and was assured with unwearying civility that they were

perfectly needless.

As they walked home, Elizabeth related to Jane what she had seen

pass between the two gentlemen; but though Jane would have

defended either or both, had they appeared to be in the wrong,

she could no more explain such behaviour than her sister.

Mr. Collins on his return highly gratified Mrs. Bennet by

admiring Mrs. Phillips’s manners and politeness. He protested

that, except Lady Catherine and her daughter, he had never seen a

more elegant woman; for she had not only received him with the

utmost civility, but even pointedly included him in her

invitation for the next evening, although utterly unknown to her

before. Something, he supposed, might be attributed to his

connection with them, but yet he had never met with so much

attention in the whole course of his life.

Chapter 16

As no objection was made to the young people’s engagement with

their aunt, and all Mr. Collins’s scruples of leaving Mr. and

Mrs. Bennet for a single evening during his visit were most

steadily resisted, the coach conveyed him and his five cousins at

a suitable hour to Meryton; and the girls had the pleasure of

hearing, as they entered the drawing-room, that Mr. Wickham had

accepted their uncle’s invitation, and was then in the house.

When this information was given, and they had all taken their

seats, Mr. Collins was at leisure to look around him and admire,

and he was so much struck with the size and furniture of the

apartment, that he declared he might almost have supposed himself

in the small summer breakfast parlour at Rosings; a comparison

that did not at first convey much gratification; but when Mrs.

Phillips understood from him what Rosings was, and who was its

proprietor—when she had listened to the description of only one

of Lady Catherine’s drawing-rooms, and found that the

chimney-piece alone had cost eight hundred pounds, she felt all

the force of the compliment, and would hardly have resented a

comparison with the housekeeper’s room.

In describing to her all the grandeur of Lady Catherine and her

mansion, with occasional digressions in praise of his own humble

abode, and the improvements it was receiving, he was happily

employed until the gentlemen joined them; and he found in Mrs.

Phillips a very attentive listener, whose opinion of his

consequence increased with what she heard, and who was resolving

to retail it all among her neighbours as soon as she could. To

the girls, who could not listen to their cousin, and who had

nothing to do but to wish for an instrument, and examine their

own indifferent imitations of china on the mantelpiece, the

interval of waiting appeared very long. It was over at last,

however. The gentlemen did approach, and when Mr. Wickham walked

into the room, Elizabeth felt that she had neither been seeing

him before, nor thinking of him since, with the smallest degree

of unreasonable admiration. The officers of the ——shire were in

general a very creditable, gentlemanlike set, and the best of

them were of the present party; but Mr. Wickham was as far beyond

them all in person, countenance, air, and walk, as \_they\_ were

superior to the broad-faced, stuffy uncle Phillips, breathing

port wine, who followed them into the room.

Mr. Wickham was the happy man towards whom almost every female

eye was turned, and Elizabeth was the happy woman by whom he

finally seated himself; and the agreeable manner in which he

immediately fell into conversation, though it was only on its

being a wet night, made her feel that the commonest, dullest,

most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill

of the speaker.

With such rivals for the notice of the fair as Mr. Wickham and

the officers, Mr. Collins seemed to sink into insignificance; to

the young ladies he certainly was nothing; but he had still at

intervals a kind listener in Mrs. Phillips, and was by her

watchfulness, most abundantly supplied with coffee and muffin.

When the card-tables were placed, he had the opportunity of

obliging her in turn, by sitting down to whist.

“I know little of the game at present,” said he, “but I shall be

glad to improve myself, for in my situation in life—” Mrs.

Phillips was very glad for his compliance, but could not wait for

his reason.

Mr. Wickham did not play at whist, and with ready delight was he

received at the other table between Elizabeth and Lydia. At first

there seemed danger of Lydia’s engrossing him entirely, for she

was a most determined talker; but being likewise extremely fond

of lottery tickets, she soon grew too much interested in the

game, too eager in making bets and exclaiming after prizes to

have attention for anyone in particular. Allowing for the common

demands of the game, Mr. Wickham was therefore at leisure to talk

to Elizabeth, and she was very willing to hear him, though what

she chiefly wished to hear she could not hope to be told—the

history of his acquaintance with Mr. Darcy. She dared not even

mention that gentleman. Her curiosity, however, was unexpectedly

relieved. Mr. Wickham began the subject himself. He enquired how

far Netherfield was from Meryton; and, after receiving her

answer, asked in a hesitating manner how long Mr. Darcy had been

staying there.

“About a month,” said Elizabeth; and then, unwilling to let the

subject drop, added, “He is a man of very large property in

Derbyshire, I understand.”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Wickham; “his estate there is a noble one. A

clear ten thousand per annum. You could not have met with a

person more capable of giving you certain information on that

head than myself, for I have been connected with his family in a

particular manner from my infancy.”

Elizabeth could not but look surprised.

“You may well be surprised, Miss Bennet, at such an assertion,

after seeing, as you probably might, the very cold manner of our

meeting yesterday. Are you much acquainted with Mr. Darcy?”

“As much as I ever wish to be,” cried Elizabeth very warmly. “I

have spent four days in the same house with him, and I think him

very disagreeable.”

“I have no right to give \_my\_ opinion,” said Wickham, “as to his

being agreeable or otherwise. I am not qualified to form one. I

have known him too long and too well to be a fair judge. It is

impossible for \_me\_ to be impartial. But I believe your opinion

of him would in general astonish—and perhaps you would not

express it quite so strongly anywhere else. Here you are in your

own family.”

“Upon my word, I say no more \_here\_ than I might say in any house

in the neighbourhood, except Netherfield. He is not at all liked

in Hertfordshire. Everybody is disgusted with his pride. You will

not find him more favourably spoken of by anyone.”

“I cannot pretend to be sorry,” said Wickham, after a short

interruption, “that he or that any man should not be estimated

beyond their deserts; but with \_him\_ I believe it does not often

happen. The world is blinded by his fortune and consequence, or

frightened by his high and imposing manners, and sees him only as

he chooses to be seen.”

“I should take him, even on \_my\_ slight acquaintance, to be an

ill-tempered man.” Wickham only shook his head.

“I wonder,” said he, at the next opportunity of speaking,

“whether he is likely to be in this country much longer.”

“I do not at all know; but I \_heard\_ nothing of his going away

when I was at Netherfield. I hope your plans in favour of the

——shire will not be affected by his being in the neighbourhood.”

“Oh! no—it is not for \_me\_ to be driven away by Mr. Darcy. If

\_he\_ wishes to avoid seeing \_me\_, he must go. We are not on

friendly terms, and it always gives me pain to meet him, but I

have no reason for avoiding \_him\_ but what I might proclaim

before all the world, a sense of very great ill-usage, and most

painful regrets at his being what he is. His father, Miss Bennet,

the late Mr. Darcy, was one of the best men that ever breathed,

and the truest friend I ever had; and I can never be in company

with this Mr. Darcy without being grieved to the soul by a

thousand tender recollections. His behaviour to myself has been

scandalous; but I verily believe I could forgive him anything and

everything, rather than his disappointing the hopes and

disgracing the memory of his father.”

Elizabeth found the interest of the subject increase, and

listened with all her heart; but the delicacy of it prevented

further enquiry.

Mr. Wickham began to speak on more general topics, Meryton, the

neighbourhood, the society, appearing highly pleased with all

that he had yet seen, and speaking of the latter with gentle but

very intelligible gallantry.

“It was the prospect of constant society, and good society,” he

added, “which was my chief inducement to enter the ——shire. I

knew it to be a most respectable, agreeable corps, and my friend

Denny tempted me further by his account of their present

quarters, and the very great attentions and excellent

acquaintances Meryton had procured them. Society, I own, is

necessary to me. I have been a disappointed man, and my spirits

will not bear solitude. I \_must\_ have employment and society. A

military life is not what I was intended for, but circumstances

have now made it eligible. The church \_ought\_ to have been my

profession—I was brought up for the church, and I should at this

time have been in possession of a most valuable living, had it

pleased the gentleman we were speaking of just now.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes—the late Mr. Darcy bequeathed me the next presentation of

the best living in his gift. He was my godfather, and excessively

attached to me. I cannot do justice to his kindness. He meant to

provide for me amply, and thought he had done it; but when the

living fell, it was given elsewhere.”

“Good heavens!” cried Elizabeth; “but how could \_that\_ be? How

could his will be disregarded? Why did you not seek legal

redress?”

“There was just such an informality in the terms of the bequest

as to give me no hope from law. A man of honour could not have

doubted the intention, but Mr. Darcy chose to doubt it—or to

treat it as a merely conditional recommendation, and to assert

that I had forfeited all claim to it by extravagance,

imprudence—in short anything or nothing. Certain it is, that the

living became vacant two years ago, exactly as I was of an age to

hold it, and that it was given to another man; and no less

certain is it, that I cannot accuse myself of having really done

anything to deserve to lose it. I have a warm, unguarded temper,

and I may have spoken my opinion \_of\_ him, and \_to\_ him, too

freely. I can recall nothing worse. But the fact is, that we are

very different sort of men, and that he hates me.”

“This is quite shocking! He deserves to be publicly disgraced.”

“Some time or other he \_will\_ be—but it shall not be by \_me\_.

Till I can forget his father, I can never defy or expose \_him\_.”

Elizabeth honoured him for such feelings, and thought him

handsomer than ever as he expressed them.

“But what,” said she, after a pause, “can have been his motive?

What can have induced him to behave so cruelly?”

“A thorough, determined dislike of me—a dislike which I cannot

but attribute in some measure to jealousy. Had the late Mr. Darcy

liked me less, his son might have borne with me better; but his

father’s uncommon attachment to me irritated him, I believe, very

early in life. He had not a temper to bear the sort of

competition in which we stood—the sort of preference which was

often given me.”

“I had not thought Mr. Darcy so bad as this—though I have never

liked him. I had not thought so very ill of him. I had supposed

him to be despising his fellow-creatures in general, but did not

suspect him of descending to such malicious revenge, such

injustice, such inhumanity as this.”

After a few minutes’ reflection, however, she continued, “I \_do\_

remember his boasting one day, at Netherfield, of the

implacability of his resentments, of his having an unforgiving

temper. His disposition must be dreadful.”

“I will not trust myself on the subject,” replied Wickham; “\_I\_

can hardly be just to him.”

Elizabeth was again deep in thought, and after a time exclaimed,

“To treat in such a manner the godson, the friend, the favourite

of his father!” She could have added, “A young man, too, like

\_you\_, whose very countenance may vouch for your being

amiable”—but she contented herself with, “and one, too, who had

probably been his companion from childhood, connected together,

as I think you said, in the closest manner!”

“We were born in the same parish, within the same park; the

greatest part of our youth was passed together; inmates of the

same house, sharing the same amusements, objects of the same

parental care. \_My\_ father began life in the profession which

your uncle, Mr. Phillips, appears to do so much credit to—but he

gave up everything to be of use to the late Mr. Darcy and devoted

all his time to the care of the Pemberley property. He was most

highly esteemed by Mr. Darcy, a most intimate, confidential

friend. Mr. Darcy often acknowledged himself to be under the

greatest obligations to my father’s active superintendence, and

when, immediately before my father’s death, Mr. Darcy gave him a

voluntary promise of providing for me, I am convinced that he

felt it to be as much a debt of gratitude to \_him\_, as of his

affection to myself.”

“How strange!” cried Elizabeth. “How abominable! I wonder that

the very pride of this Mr. Darcy has not made him just to you! If

from no better motive, that he should not have been too proud to

be dishonest—for dishonesty I must call it.”

“It \_is\_ wonderful,” replied Wickham, “for almost all his actions

may be traced to pride; and pride had often been his best friend.

It has connected him nearer with virtue than with any other

feeling. But we are none of us consistent, and in his behaviour

to me there were stronger impulses even than pride.”

“Can such abominable pride as his have ever done him good?”

“Yes. It has often led him to be liberal and generous, to give

his money freely, to display hospitality, to assist his tenants,

and relieve the poor. Family pride, and \_filial\_ pride—for he is

very proud of what his father was—have done this. Not to appear

to disgrace his family, to degenerate from the popular qualities,

or lose the influence of the Pemberley House, is a powerful

motive. He has also \_brotherly\_ pride, which, with \_some\_

brotherly affection, makes him a very kind and careful guardian

of his sister, and you will hear him generally cried up as the

most attentive and best of brothers.”

“What sort of girl is Miss Darcy?”

He shook his head. “I wish I could call her amiable. It gives me

pain to speak ill of a Darcy. But she is too much like her

brother—very, very proud. As a child, she was affectionate and

pleasing, and extremely fond of me; and I have devoted hours and

hours to her amusement. But she is nothing to me now. She is a

handsome girl, about fifteen or sixteen, and, I understand,

highly accomplished. Since her father’s death, her home has been

London, where a lady lives with her, and superintends her

education.”

After many pauses and many trials of other subjects, Elizabeth

could not help reverting once more to the first, and saying:

“I am astonished at his intimacy with Mr. Bingley! How can Mr.

Bingley, who seems good humour itself, and is, I really believe,

truly amiable, be in friendship with such a man? How can they

suit each other? Do you know Mr. Bingley?”

“Not at all.”

“He is a sweet-tempered, amiable, charming man. He cannot know

what Mr. Darcy is.”

“Probably not; but Mr. Darcy can please where he chooses. He does

not want abilities. He can be a conversible companion if he

thinks it worth his while. Among those who are at all his equals

in consequence, he is a very different man from what he is to the

less prosperous. His pride never deserts him; but with the rich

he is liberal-minded, just, sincere, rational, honourable, and

perhaps agreeable—allowing something for fortune and figure.”

The whist party soon afterwards breaking up, the players gathered

round the other table and Mr. Collins took his station between

his cousin Elizabeth and Mrs. Phillips. The usual enquiries as to

his success were made by the latter. It had not been very great;

he had lost every point; but when Mrs. Phillips began to express

her concern thereupon, he assured her with much earnest gravity

that it was not of the least importance, that he considered the

money as a mere trifle, and begged that she would not make

herself uneasy.

“I know very well, madam,” said he, “that when persons sit down

to a card-table, they must take their chances of these things,

and happily I am not in such circumstances as to make five

shillings any object. There are undoubtedly many who could not

say the same, but thanks to Lady Catherine de Bourgh, I am

removed far beyond the necessity of regarding little matters.”

Mr. Wickham’s attention was caught; and after observing Mr.

Collins for a few moments, he asked Elizabeth in a low voice

whether her relation was very intimately acquainted with the

family of de Bourgh.

“Lady Catherine de Bourgh,” she replied, “has very lately given

him a living. I hardly know how Mr. Collins was first introduced

to her notice, but he certainly has not known her long.”

“You know of course that Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Lady Anne

Darcy were sisters; consequently that she is aunt to the present

Mr. Darcy.”

“No, indeed, I did not. I knew nothing at all of Lady Catherine’s

connections. I never heard of her existence till the day before

yesterday.”

“Her daughter, Miss de Bourgh, will have a very large fortune,

and it is believed that she and her cousin will unite the two

estates.”

This information made Elizabeth smile, as she thought of poor

Miss Bingley. Vain indeed must be all her attentions, vain and

useless her affection for his sister and her praise of himself,

if he were already self-destined for another.

“Mr. Collins,” said she, “speaks highly both of Lady Catherine

and her daughter; but from some particulars that he has related

of her ladyship, I suspect his gratitude misleads him, and that

in spite of her being his patroness, she is an arrogant,

conceited woman.”

“I believe her to be both in a great degree,” replied Wickham; “I

have not seen her for many years, but I very well remember that I

never liked her, and that her manners were dictatorial and

insolent. She has the reputation of being remarkably sensible and

clever; but I rather believe she derives part of her abilities

from her rank and fortune, part from her authoritative manner,

and the rest from the pride of her nephew, who chooses that

everyone connected with him should have an understanding of the

first class.”

Elizabeth allowed that he had given a very rational account of

it, and they continued talking together, with mutual satisfaction

till supper put an end to cards, and gave the rest of the ladies

their share of Mr. Wickham’s attentions. There could be no

conversation in the noise of Mrs. Phillips’s supper party, but

his manners recommended him to everybody. Whatever he said, was

said well; and whatever he did, done gracefully. Elizabeth went

away with her head full of him. She could think of nothing but of

Mr. Wickham, and of what he had told her, all the way home; but

there was not time for her even to mention his name as they went,

for neither Lydia nor Mr. Collins were once silent. Lydia talked

incessantly of lottery tickets, of the fish she had lost and the

fish she had won; and Mr. Collins in describing the civility of

Mr. and Mrs. Phillips, protesting that he did not in the least

regard his losses at whist, enumerating all the dishes at supper,

and repeatedly fearing that he crowded his cousins, had more to

say than he could well manage before the carriage stopped at

Longbourn House.

Chapter 17

Elizabeth related to Jane the next day what had passed between

Mr. Wickham and herself. Jane listened with astonishment and

concern; she knew not how to believe that Mr. Darcy could be so

unworthy of Mr. Bingley’s regard; and yet, it was not in her

nature to question the veracity of a young man of such amiable

appearance as Wickham. The possibility of his having endured such

unkindness, was enough to interest all her tender feelings; and

nothing remained therefore to be done, but to think well of them

both, to defend the conduct of each, and throw into the account

of accident or mistake whatever could not be otherwise explained.

“They have both,” said she, “been deceived, I dare say, in some

way or other, of which we can form no idea. Interested people

have perhaps misrepresented each to the other. It is, in short,

impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which

may have alienated them, without actual blame on either side.”

“Very true, indeed; and now, my dear Jane, what have you got to

say on behalf of the interested people who have probably been

concerned in the business? Do clear \_them\_ too, or we shall be

obliged to think ill of somebody.”

“Laugh as much as you choose, but you will not laugh me out of my

opinion. My dearest Lizzy, do but consider in what a disgraceful

light it places Mr. Darcy, to be treating his father’s favourite

in such a manner, one whom his father had promised to provide

for. It is impossible. No man of common humanity, no man who had

any value for his character, could be capable of it. Can his most

intimate friends be so excessively deceived in him? Oh! no.”

“I can much more easily believe Mr. Bingley’s being imposed on,

than that Mr. Wickham should invent such a history of himself as

he gave me last night; names, facts, everything mentioned without

ceremony. If it be not so, let Mr. Darcy contradict it. Besides,

there was truth in his looks.”

“It is difficult indeed—it is distressing. One does not know what

to think.”

“I beg your pardon; one knows exactly what to think.”

But Jane could think with certainty on only one point—that Mr.

Bingley, if he \_had been\_ imposed on, would have much to suffer

when the affair became public.

The two young ladies were summoned from the shrubbery, where this

conversation passed, by the arrival of the very persons of whom

they had been speaking; Mr. Bingley and his sisters came to give

their personal invitation for the long-expected ball at

Netherfield, which was fixed for the following Tuesday. The two

ladies were delighted to see their dear friend again, called it

an age since they had met, and repeatedly asked what she had been

doing with herself since their separation. To the rest of the

family they paid little attention; avoiding Mrs. Bennet as much

as possible, saying not much to Elizabeth, and nothing at all to

the others. They were soon gone again, rising from their seats

with an activity which took their brother by surprise, and

hurrying off as if eager to escape from Mrs. Bennet’s civilities.

The prospect of the Netherfield ball was extremely agreeable to

every female of the family. Mrs. Bennet chose to consider it as

given in compliment to her eldest daughter, and was particularly

flattered by receiving the invitation from Mr. Bingley himself,

instead of a ceremonious card. Jane pictured to herself a happy

evening in the society of her two friends, and the attentions of

their brother; and Elizabeth thought with pleasure of dancing a

great deal with Mr. Wickham, and of seeing a confirmation of

everything in Mr. Darcy’s look and behaviour. The happiness

anticipated by Catherine and Lydia depended less on any single

event, or any particular person, for though they each, like

Elizabeth, meant to dance half the evening with Mr. Wickham, he

was by no means the only partner who could satisfy them, and a

ball was, at any rate, a ball. And even Mary could assure her

family that she had no disinclination for it.

“While I can have my mornings to myself,” said she, “it is

enough—I think it is no sacrifice to join occasionally in evening

engagements. Society has claims on us all; and I profess myself

one of those who consider intervals of recreation and amusement

as desirable for everybody.”

Elizabeth’s spirits were so high on this occasion, that though

she did not often speak unnecessarily to Mr. Collins, she could

not help asking him whether he intended to accept Mr. Bingley’s

invitation, and if he did, whether he would think it proper to

join in the evening’s amusement; and she was rather surprised to

find that he entertained no scruple whatever on that head, and

was very far from dreading a rebuke either from the Archbishop,

or Lady Catherine de Bourgh, by venturing to dance.

“I am by no means of the opinion, I assure you,” said he, “that a

ball of this kind, given by a young man of character, to

respectable people, can have any evil tendency; and I am so far

from objecting to dancing myself, that I shall hope to be

honoured with the hands of all my fair cousins in the course of

the evening; and I take this opportunity of soliciting yours,

Miss Elizabeth, for the two first dances especially, a preference

which I trust my cousin Jane will attribute to the right cause,

and not to any disrespect for her.”

Elizabeth felt herself completely taken in. She had fully

proposed being engaged by Mr. Wickham for those very dances; and

to have Mr. Collins instead! her liveliness had never been worse

timed. There was no help for it, however. Mr. Wickham’s happiness

and her own were perforce delayed a little longer, and Mr.

Collins’s proposal accepted with as good a grace as she could.

She was not the better pleased with his gallantry from the idea

it suggested of something more. It now first struck her, that

\_she\_ was selected from among her sisters as worthy of being

mistress of Hunsford Parsonage, and of assisting to form a

quadrille table at Rosings, in the absence of more eligible

visitors. The idea soon reached to conviction, as she observed

his increasing civilities toward herself, and heard his frequent

attempt at a compliment on her wit and vivacity; and though more

astonished than gratified herself by this effect of her charms,

it was not long before her mother gave her to understand that the

probability of their marriage was extremely agreeable to \_her\_.

Elizabeth, however, did not choose to take the hint, being well

aware that a serious dispute must be the consequence of any

reply. Mr. Collins might never make the offer, and till he did,

it was useless to quarrel about him.

If there had not been a Netherfield ball to prepare for and talk

of, the younger Miss Bennets would have been in a very pitiable

state at this time, for from the day of the invitation, to the

day of the ball, there was such a succession of rain as prevented

their walking to Meryton once. No aunt, no officers, no news

could be sought after—the very shoe-roses for Netherfield were

got by proxy. Even Elizabeth might have found some trial of her

patience in weather which totally suspended the improvement of

her acquaintance with Mr. Wickham; and nothing less than a dance

on Tuesday, could have made such a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and

Monday endurable to Kitty and Lydia.

Chapter 18

Till Elizabeth entered the drawing-room at Netherfield, and

looked in vain for Mr. Wickham among the cluster of red coats

there assembled, a doubt of his being present had never occurred

to her. The certainty of meeting him had not been checked by any

of those recollections that might not unreasonably have alarmed

her. She had dressed with more than usual care, and prepared in

the highest spirits for the conquest of all that remained

unsubdued of his heart, trusting that it was not more than might

be won in the course of the evening. But in an instant arose the

dreadful suspicion of his being purposely omitted for Mr. Darcy’s

pleasure in the Bingleys’ invitation to the officers; and though

this was not exactly the case, the absolute fact of his absence

was pronounced by his friend Denny, to whom Lydia eagerly

applied, and who told them that Wickham had been obliged to go to

town on business the day before, and was not yet returned;

adding, with a significant smile, “I do not imagine his business

would have called him away just now, if he had not wanted to

avoid a certain gentleman here.”

This part of his intelligence, though unheard by Lydia, was

caught by Elizabeth, and, as it assured her that Darcy was not

less answerable for Wickham’s absence than if her first surmise

had been just, every feeling of displeasure against the former

was so sharpened by immediate disappointment, that she could

hardly reply with tolerable civility to the polite enquiries

which he directly afterwards approached to make. Attendance,

forbearance, patience with Darcy, was injury to Wickham. She was

resolved against any sort of conversation with him, and turned

away with a degree of ill-humour which she could not wholly

surmount even in speaking to Mr. Bingley, whose blind partiality

provoked her.

But Elizabeth was not formed for ill-humour; and though every

prospect of her own was destroyed for the evening, it could not

dwell long on her spirits; and having told all her griefs to

Charlotte Lucas, whom she had not seen for a week, she was soon

able to make a voluntary transition to the oddities of her

cousin, and to point him out to her particular notice. The first

two dances, however, brought a return of distress; they were

dances of mortification. Mr. Collins, awkward and solemn,

apologising instead of attending, and often moving wrong without

being aware of it, gave her all the shame and misery which a

disagreeable partner for a couple of dances can give. The moment

of her release from him was ecstasy.

She danced next with an officer, and had the refreshment of

talking of Wickham, and of hearing that he was universally liked.

When those dances were over, she returned to Charlotte Lucas, and

was in conversation with her, when she found herself suddenly

addressed by Mr. Darcy who took her so much by surprise in his

application for her hand, that, without knowing what she did, she

accepted him. He walked away again immediately, and she was left

to fret over her own want of presence of mind; Charlotte tried to

console her:

“I dare say you will find him very agreeable.”

“Heaven forbid! \_That\_ would be the greatest misfortune of all!

To find a man agreeable whom one is determined to hate! Do not

wish me such an evil.”

When the dancing recommenced, however, and Darcy approached to

claim her hand, Charlotte could not help cautioning her in a

whisper, not to be a simpleton, and allow her fancy for Wickham

to make her appear unpleasant in the eyes of a man ten times his

consequence. Elizabeth made no answer, and took her place in the

set, amazed at the dignity to which she was arrived in being

allowed to stand opposite to Mr. Darcy, and reading in her

neighbours’ looks, their equal amazement in beholding it. They

stood for some time without speaking a word; and she began to

imagine that their silence was to last through the two dances,

and at first was resolved not to break it; till suddenly fancying

that it would be the greater punishment to her partner to oblige

him to talk, she made some slight observation on the dance. He

replied, and was again silent. After a pause of some minutes, she

addressed him a second time with:—“It is \_your\_ turn to say

something now, Mr. Darcy. \_I\_ talked about the dance, and \_you\_

ought to make some sort of remark on the size of the room, or the

number of couples.”

He smiled, and assured her that whatever she wished him to say

should be said.

“Very well. That reply will do for the present. Perhaps by and by

I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public

ones. But \_now\_ we may be silent.”

“Do you talk by rule, then, while you are dancing?”

“Sometimes. One must speak a little, you know. It would look odd

to be entirely silent for half an hour together; and yet for the

advantage of \_some\_, conversation ought to be so arranged, as

that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible.”

“Are you consulting your own feelings in the present case, or do

you imagine that you are gratifying mine?”

“Both,” replied Elizabeth archly; “for I have always seen a great

similarity in the turn of our minds. We are each of an unsocial,

taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say

something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to

posterity with all the \_éclat\_ of a proverb.”

“This is no very striking resemblance of your own character, I am

sure,” said he. “How near it may be to \_mine\_, I cannot pretend

to say. \_You\_ think it a faithful portrait undoubtedly.”

“I must not decide on my own performance.”

He made no answer, and they were again silent till they had gone

down the dance, when he asked her if she and her sisters did not

very often walk to Meryton. She answered in the affirmative, and,

unable to resist the temptation, added, “When you met us there

the other day, we had just been forming a new acquaintance.”

The effect was immediate. A deeper shade of \_hauteur\_ overspread

his features, but he said not a word, and Elizabeth, though

blaming herself for her own weakness, could not go on. At length

Darcy spoke, and in a constrained manner said, “Mr. Wickham is

blessed with such happy manners as may ensure his \_making\_

friends—whether he may be equally capable of \_retaining\_ them, is

less certain.”

“He has been so unlucky as to lose \_your\_ friendship,” replied

Elizabeth with emphasis, “and in a manner which he is likely to

suffer from all his life.”

Darcy made no answer, and seemed desirous of changing the

subject. At that moment, Sir William Lucas appeared close to

them, meaning to pass through the set to the other side of the

room; but on perceiving Mr. Darcy, he stopped with a bow of

superior courtesy to compliment him on his dancing and his

partner.

“I have been most highly gratified indeed, my dear sir. Such very

superior dancing is not often seen. It is evident that you belong

to the first circles. Allow me to say, however, that your fair

partner does not disgrace you, and that I must hope to have this

pleasure often repeated, especially when a certain desirable

event, my dear Eliza (glancing at her sister and Bingley) shall

take place. What congratulations will then flow in! I appeal to

Mr. Darcy:—but let me not interrupt you, sir. You will not thank

me for detaining you from the bewitching converse of that young

lady, whose bright eyes are also upbraiding me.”

The latter part of this address was scarcely heard by Darcy; but

Sir William’s allusion to his friend seemed to strike him

forcibly, and his eyes were directed with a very serious

expression towards Bingley and Jane, who were dancing together.

Recovering himself, however, shortly, he turned to his partner,

and said, “Sir William’s interruption has made me forget what we

were talking of.”

“I do not think we were speaking at all. Sir William could not

have interrupted two people in the room who had less to say for

themselves. We have tried two or three subjects already without

success, and what we are to talk of next I cannot imagine.”

“What think you of books?” said he, smiling.

“Books—oh! no. I am sure we never read the same, or not with the

same feelings.”

“I am sorry you think so; but if that be the case, there can at

least be no want of subject. We may compare our different

opinions.”

“No—I cannot talk of books in a ball-room; my head is always full

of something else.”

“The \_present\_ always occupies you in such scenes—does it?” said

he, with a look of doubt.

“Yes, always,” she replied, without knowing what she said, for

her thoughts had wandered far from the subject, as soon

afterwards appeared by her suddenly exclaiming, “I remember

hearing you once say, Mr. Darcy, that you hardly ever forgave,

that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very

cautious, I suppose, as to its \_being created?\_”

“I am,” said he, with a firm voice.

“And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice?”

“I hope not.”

“It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their

opinion, to be secure of judging properly at first.”

“May I ask to what these questions tend?”

“Merely to the illustration of \_your\_ character,” said she,

endeavouring to shake off her gravity. “I am trying to make it

out.”

“And what is your success?”

She shook her head. “I do not get on at all. I hear such

different accounts of you as puzzle me exceedingly.”

“I can readily believe,” answered he gravely, “that reports may

vary greatly with respect to me; and I could wish, Miss Bennet,

that you were not to sketch my character at the present moment,

as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no

credit on either.”

“But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another

opportunity.”

“I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours,” he coldly

replied. She said no more, and they went down the other dance and

parted in silence; and on each side dissatisfied, though not to

an equal degree, for in Darcy’s breast there was a tolerably

powerful feeling towards her, which soon procured her pardon, and

directed all his anger against another.

They had not long separated, when Miss Bingley came towards her,

and with an expression of civil disdain accosted her:

“So, Miss Eliza, I hear you are quite delighted with George

Wickham! Your sister has been talking to me about him, and asking

me a thousand questions; and I find that the young man quite

forgot to tell you, among his other communication, that he was

the son of old Wickham, the late Mr. Darcy’s steward. Let me

recommend you, however, as a friend, not to give implicit

confidence to all his assertions; for as to Mr. Darcy’s using him

ill, it is perfectly false; for, on the contrary, he has always

been remarkably kind to him, though George Wickham has treated

Mr. Darcy in a most infamous manner. I do not know the

particulars, but I know very well that Mr. Darcy is not in the

least to blame, that he cannot bear to hear George Wickham

mentioned, and that though my brother thought that he could not

well avoid including him in his invitation to the officers, he

was excessively glad to find that he had taken himself out of the

way. His coming into the country at all is a most insolent thing,

indeed, and I wonder how he could presume to do it. I pity you,

Miss Eliza, for this discovery of your favourite’s guilt; but

really, considering his descent, one could not expect much

better.”

“His guilt and his descent appear by your account to be the

same,” said Elizabeth angrily; “for I have heard you accuse him

of nothing worse than of being the son of Mr. Darcy’s steward,

and of \_that\_, I can assure you, he informed me himself.”

“I beg your pardon,” replied Miss Bingley, turning away with a

sneer. “Excuse my interference—it was kindly meant.”

“Insolent girl!” said Elizabeth to herself. “You are much

mistaken if you expect to influence me by such a paltry attack as

this. I see nothing in it but your own wilful ignorance and the

malice of Mr. Darcy.” She then sought her eldest sister, who had

undertaken to make enquiries on the same subject of Bingley. Jane

met her with a smile of such sweet complacency, a glow of such

happy expression, as sufficiently marked how well she was

satisfied with the occurrences of the evening. Elizabeth

instantly read her feelings, and at that moment solicitude for

Wickham, resentment against his enemies, and everything else,

gave way before the hope of Jane’s being in the fairest way for

happiness.

“I want to know,” said she, with a countenance no less smiling

than her sister’s, “what you have learnt about Mr. Wickham. But

perhaps you have been too pleasantly engaged to think of any

third person; in which case you may be sure of my pardon.”

“No,” replied Jane, “I have not forgotten him; but I have nothing

satisfactory to tell you. Mr. Bingley does not know the whole of

his history, and is quite ignorant of the circumstances which

have principally offended Mr. Darcy; but he will vouch for the

good conduct, the probity, and honour of his friend, and is

perfectly convinced that Mr. Wickham has deserved much less

attention from Mr. Darcy than he has received; and I am sorry to

say by his account as well as his sister’s, Mr. Wickham is by no

means a respectable young man. I am afraid he has been very

imprudent, and has deserved to lose Mr. Darcy’s regard.”

“Mr. Bingley does not know Mr. Wickham himself?”

“No; he never saw him till the other morning at Meryton.”

“This account then is what he has received from Mr. Darcy. I am

satisfied. But what does he say of the living?”

“He does not exactly recollect the circumstances, though he has

heard them from Mr. Darcy more than once, but he believes that it

was left to him \_conditionally\_ only.”

“I have not a doubt of Mr. Bingley’s sincerity,” said Elizabeth

warmly; “but you must excuse my not being convinced by assurances

only. Mr. Bingley’s defense of his friend was a very able one, I

dare say; but since he is unacquainted with several parts of the

story, and has learnt the rest from that friend himself, I shall

venture to still think of both gentlemen as I did before.”

She then changed the discourse to one more gratifying to each,

and on which there could be no difference of sentiment. Elizabeth

listened with delight to the happy, though modest hopes which

Jane entertained of Mr. Bingley’s regard, and said all in her

power to heighten her confidence in it. On their being joined by

Mr. Bingley himself, Elizabeth withdrew to Miss Lucas; to whose

enquiry after the pleasantness of her last partner she had

scarcely replied, before Mr. Collins came up to them, and told

her with great exultation that he had just been so fortunate as

to make a most important discovery.

“I have found out,” said he, “by a singular accident, that there

is now in the room a near relation of my patroness. I happened to

overhear the gentleman himself mentioning to the young lady who

does the honours of the house the names of his cousin Miss de

Bourgh, and of her mother Lady Catherine. How wonderfully these

sort of things occur! Who would have thought of my meeting with,

perhaps, a nephew of Lady Catherine de Bourgh in this assembly! I

am most thankful that the discovery is made in time for me to pay

my respects to him, which I am now going to do, and trust he will

excuse my not having done it before. My total ignorance of the

connection must plead my apology.”

“You are not going to introduce yourself to Mr. Darcy!”

“Indeed I am. I shall entreat his pardon for not having done it

earlier. I believe him to be Lady Catherine’s \_nephew\_. It will

be in my power to assure him that her ladyship was quite well

yesterday se’nnight.”

Elizabeth tried hard to dissuade him from such a scheme, assuring

him that Mr. Darcy would consider his addressing him without

introduction as an impertinent freedom, rather than a compliment

to his aunt; that it was not in the least necessary there should

be any notice on either side; and that if it were, it must belong

to Mr. Darcy, the superior in consequence, to begin the

acquaintance. Mr. Collins listened to her with the determined air

of following his own inclination, and, when she ceased speaking,

replied thus:

“My dear Miss Elizabeth, I have the highest opinion in the world

in your excellent judgement in all matters within the scope of

your understanding; but permit me to say, that there must be a

wide difference between the established forms of ceremony amongst

the laity, and those which regulate the clergy; for, give me

leave to observe that I consider the clerical office as equal in

point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom—provided

that a proper humility of behaviour is at the same time

maintained. You must therefore allow me to follow the dictates of

my conscience on this occasion, which leads me to perform what I

look on as a point of duty. Pardon me for neglecting to profit by

your advice, which on every other subject shall be my constant

guide, though in the case before us I consider myself more fitted

by education and habitual study to decide on what is right than a

young lady like yourself.” And with a low bow he left her to

attack Mr. Darcy, whose reception of his advances she eagerly

watched, and whose astonishment at being so addressed was very

evident. Her cousin prefaced his speech with a solemn bow and

though she could not hear a word of it, she felt as if hearing it

all, and saw in the motion of his lips the words “apology,”

“Hunsford,” and “Lady Catherine de Bourgh.” It vexed her to see

him expose himself to such a man. Mr. Darcy was eyeing him with

unrestrained wonder, and when at last Mr. Collins allowed him

time to speak, replied with an air of distant civility. Mr.

Collins, however, was not discouraged from speaking again, and

Mr. Darcy’s contempt seemed abundantly increasing with the length

of his second speech, and at the end of it he only made him a

slight bow, and moved another way. Mr. Collins then returned to

Elizabeth.

“I have no reason, I assure you,” said he, “to be dissatisfied

with my reception. Mr. Darcy seemed much pleased with the

attention. He answered me with the utmost civility, and even paid

me the compliment of saying that he was so well convinced of Lady

Catherine’s discernment as to be certain she could never bestow a

favour unworthily. It was really a very handsome thought. Upon

the whole, I am much pleased with him.”

As Elizabeth had no longer any interest of her own to pursue, she

turned her attention almost entirely on her sister and Mr.

Bingley; and the train of agreeable reflections which her

observations gave birth to, made her perhaps almost as happy as

Jane. She saw her in idea settled in that very house, in all the

felicity which a marriage of true affection could bestow; and she

felt capable, under such circumstances, of endeavouring even to

like Bingley’s two sisters. Her mother’s thoughts she plainly saw

were bent the same way, and she determined not to venture near

her, lest she might hear too much. When they sat down to supper,

therefore, she considered it a most unlucky perverseness which

placed them within one of each other; and deeply was she vexed to

find that her mother was talking to that one person (Lady Lucas)

freely, openly, and of nothing else but her expectation that Jane

would soon be married to Mr. Bingley. It was an animating

subject, and Mrs. Bennet seemed incapable of fatigue while

enumerating the advantages of the match. His being such a

charming young man, and so rich, and living but three miles from

them, were the first points of self-gratulation; and then it was

such a comfort to think how fond the two sisters were of Jane,

and to be certain that they must desire the connection as much as

she could do. It was, moreover, such a promising thing for her

younger daughters, as Jane’s marrying so greatly must throw them

in the way of other rich men; and lastly, it was so pleasant at

her time of life to be able to consign her single daughters to

the care of their sister, that she might not be obliged to go

into company more than she liked. It was necessary to make this

circumstance a matter of pleasure, because on such occasions it

is the etiquette; but no one was less likely than Mrs. Bennet to

find comfort in staying home at any period of her life. She

concluded with many good wishes that Lady Lucas might soon be

equally fortunate, though evidently and triumphantly believing

there was no chance of it.

In vain did Elizabeth endeavour to check the rapidity of her

mother’s words, or persuade her to describe her felicity in a

less audible whisper; for, to her inexpressible vexation, she

could perceive that the chief of it was overheard by Mr. Darcy,

who sat opposite to them. Her mother only scolded her for being

nonsensical.

“What is Mr. Darcy to me, pray, that I should be afraid of him? I

am sure we owe him no such particular civility as to be obliged

to say nothing \_he\_ may not like to hear.”

“For heaven’s sake, madam, speak lower. What advantage can it be

for you to offend Mr. Darcy? You will never recommend yourself to

his friend by so doing!”

Nothing that she could say, however, had any influence. Her

mother would talk of her views in the same intelligible tone.

Elizabeth blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation. She

could not help frequently glancing her eye at Mr. Darcy, though

every glance convinced her of what she dreaded; for though he was

not always looking at her mother, she was convinced that his

attention was invariably fixed by her. The expression of his face

changed gradually from indignant contempt to a composed and

steady gravity.

At length, however, Mrs. Bennet had no more to say; and Lady

Lucas, who had been long yawning at the repetition of delights

which she saw no likelihood of sharing, was left to the comforts

of cold ham and chicken. Elizabeth now began to revive. But not

long was the interval of tranquillity; for, when supper was over,

singing was talked of, and she had the mortification of seeing

Mary, after very little entreaty, preparing to oblige the

company. By many significant looks and silent entreaties, did she

endeavour to prevent such a proof of complaisance, but in vain;

Mary would not understand them; such an opportunity of exhibiting

was delightful to her, and she began her song. Elizabeth’s eyes

were fixed on her with most painful sensations, and she watched

her progress through the several stanzas with an impatience which

was very ill rewarded at their close; for Mary, on receiving,

amongst the thanks of the table, the hint of a hope that she

might be prevailed on to favour them again, after the pause of

half a minute began another. Mary’s powers were by no means

fitted for such a display; her voice was weak, and her manner

affected. Elizabeth was in agonies. She looked at Jane, to see

how she bore it; but Jane was very composedly talking to Bingley.

She looked at his two sisters, and saw them making signs of

derision at each other, and at Darcy, who continued, however,

imperturbably grave. She looked at her father to entreat his

interference, lest Mary should be singing all night. He took the

hint, and when Mary had finished her second song, said aloud,

“That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long

enough. Let the other young ladies have time to exhibit.”

Mary, though pretending not to hear, was somewhat disconcerted;

and Elizabeth, sorry for her, and sorry for her father’s speech,

was afraid her anxiety had done no good. Others of the party were

now applied to.

“If I,” said Mr. Collins, “were so fortunate as to be able to

sing, I should have great pleasure, I am sure, in obliging the

company with an air; for I consider music as a very innocent

diversion, and perfectly compatible with the profession of a

clergyman. I do not mean, however, to assert that we can be

justified in devoting too much of our time to music, for there

are certainly other things to be attended to. The rector of a

parish has much to do. In the first place, he must make such an

agreement for tithes as may be beneficial to himself and not

offensive to his patron. He must write his own sermons; and the

time that remains will not be too much for his parish duties, and

the care and improvement of his dwelling, which he cannot be

excused from making as comfortable as possible. And I do not

think it of light importance that he should have attentive and

conciliatory manners towards everybody, especially towards those

to whom he owes his preferment. I cannot acquit him of that duty;

nor could I think well of the man who should omit an occasion of

testifying his respect towards anybody connected with the

family.” And with a bow to Mr. Darcy, he concluded his speech,

which had been spoken so loud as to be heard by half the room.

Many stared—many smiled; but no one looked more amused than Mr.

Bennet himself, while his wife seriously commended Mr. Collins

for having spoken so sensibly, and observed in a half-whisper to

Lady Lucas, that he was a remarkably clever, good kind of young

man.

To Elizabeth it appeared that, had her family made an agreement

to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it

would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more

spirit or finer success; and happy did she think it for Bingley

and her sister that some of the exhibition had escaped his

notice, and that his feelings were not of a sort to be much

distressed by the folly which he must have witnessed. That his

two sisters and Mr. Darcy, however, should have such an

opportunity of ridiculing her relations, was bad enough, and she

could not determine whether the silent contempt of the gentleman,

or the insolent smiles of the ladies, were more intolerable.

The rest of the evening brought her little amusement. She was

teased by Mr. Collins, who continued most perseveringly by her

side, and though he could not prevail on her to dance with him

again, put it out of her power to dance with others. In vain did

she entreat him to stand up with somebody else, and offer to

introduce him to any young lady in the room. He assured her, that

as to dancing, he was perfectly indifferent to it; that his chief

object was by delicate attentions to recommend himself to her and

that he should therefore make a point of remaining close to her

the whole evening. There was no arguing upon such a project. She

owed her greatest relief to her friend Miss Lucas, who often

joined them, and good-naturedly engaged Mr. Collins’s

conversation to herself.

She was at least free from the offense of Mr. Darcy’s further

notice; though often standing within a very short distance of

her, quite disengaged, he never came near enough to speak. She

felt it to be the probable consequence of her allusions to Mr.

Wickham, and rejoiced in it.

The Longbourn party were the last of all the company to depart,

and, by a manoeuvre of Mrs. Bennet, had to wait for their

carriage a quarter of an hour after everybody else was gone,

which gave them time to see how heartily they were wished away by

some of the family. Mrs. Hurst and her sister scarcely opened

their mouths, except to complain of fatigue, and were evidently

impatient to have the house to themselves. They repulsed every

attempt of Mrs. Bennet at conversation, and by so doing threw a

languor over the whole party, which was very little relieved by

the long speeches of Mr. Collins, who was complimenting Mr.

Bingley and his sisters on the elegance of their entertainment,

and the hospitality and politeness which had marked their

behaviour to their guests. Darcy said nothing at all. Mr. Bennet,

in equal silence, was enjoying the scene. Mr. Bingley and Jane

were standing together, a little detached from the rest, and

talked only to each other. Elizabeth preserved as steady a

silence as either Mrs. Hurst or Miss Bingley; and even Lydia was

too much fatigued to utter more than the occasional exclamation

of “Lord, how tired I am!” accompanied by a violent yawn.

When at length they arose to take leave, Mrs. Bennet was most

pressingly civil in her hope of seeing the whole family soon at

Longbourn, and addressed herself especially to Mr. Bingley, to

assure him how happy he would make them by eating a family dinner

with them at any time, without the ceremony of a formal

invitation. Bingley was all grateful pleasure, and he readily

engaged for taking the earliest opportunity of waiting on her,

after his return from London, whither he was obliged to go the

next day for a short time.

Mrs. Bennet was perfectly satisfied, and quitted the house under

the delightful persuasion that, allowing for the necessary

preparations of settlements, new carriages, and wedding clothes,

she should undoubtedly see her daughter settled at Netherfield in

the course of three or four months. Of having another daughter

married to Mr. Collins, she thought with equal certainty, and

with considerable, though not equal, pleasure. Elizabeth was the

least dear to her of all her children; and though the man and the

match were quite good enough for \_her\_, the worth of each was

eclipsed by Mr. Bingley and Netherfield.

Chapter 19

The next day opened a new scene at Longbourn. Mr. Collins made

his declaration in form. Having resolved to do it without loss of

time, as his leave of absence extended only to the following

Saturday, and having no feelings of diffidence to make it

distressing to himself even at the moment, he set about it in a

very orderly manner, with all the observances, which he supposed

a regular part of the business. On finding Mrs. Bennet,

Elizabeth, and one of the younger girls together, soon after

breakfast, he addressed the mother in these words:

“May I hope, madam, for your interest with your fair daughter

Elizabeth, when I solicit for the honour of a private audience

with her in the course of this morning?”

Before Elizabeth had time for anything but a blush of surprise,

Mrs. Bennet answered instantly, “Oh dear!—yes—certainly. I am

sure Lizzy will be very happy—I am sure she can have no

objection. Come, Kitty, I want you up stairs.” And, gathering her

work together, she was hastening away, when Elizabeth called out:

“Dear madam, do not go. I beg you will not go. Mr. Collins must

excuse me. He can have nothing to say to me that anybody need not

hear. I am going away myself.”

“No, no, nonsense, Lizzy. I desire you to stay where you are.”

And upon Elizabeth’s seeming really, with vexed and embarrassed

looks, about to escape, she added: “Lizzy, I \_insist\_ upon your

staying and hearing Mr. Collins.”

Elizabeth would not oppose such an injunction—and a moment’s

consideration making her also sensible that it would be wisest to

get it over as soon and as quietly as possible, she sat down

again and tried to conceal, by incessant employment the feelings

which were divided between distress and diversion. Mrs. Bennet

and Kitty walked off, and as soon as they were gone, Mr. Collins

began.

“Believe me, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that your modesty, so far

from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your other

perfections. You would have been less amiable in my eyes had

there \_not\_ been this little unwillingness; but allow me to

assure you, that I have your respected mother’s permission for

this address. You can hardly doubt the purport of my discourse,

however your natural delicacy may lead you to dissemble; my

attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as

I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my

future life. But before I am run away with by my feelings on this

subject, perhaps it would be advisable for me to state my reasons

for marrying—and, moreover, for coming into Hertfordshire with

the design of selecting a wife, as I certainly did.”

The idea of Mr. Collins, with all his solemn composure, being run

away with by his feelings, made Elizabeth so near laughing, that

she could not use the short pause he allowed in any attempt to

stop him further, and he continued:

“My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right

thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to

set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am

convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and

thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it

is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble

lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. Twice has she

condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too!) on this

subject; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left

Hunsford—between our pools at quadrille, while Mrs. Jenkinson was

arranging Miss de Bourgh’s footstool, that she said, ‘Mr.

Collins, you must marry. A clergyman like you must marry. Choose

properly, choose a gentlewoman for \_my\_ sake; and for your \_own\_,

let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high,

but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice.

Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and

I will visit her.’ Allow me, by the way, to observe, my fair

cousin, that I do not reckon the notice and kindness of Lady

Catherine de Bourgh as among the least of the advantages in my

power to offer. You will find her manners beyond anything I can

describe; and your wit and vivacity, I think, must be acceptable

to her, especially when tempered with the silence and respect

which her rank will inevitably excite. Thus much for my general

intention in favour of matrimony; it remains to be told why my

views were directed towards Longbourn instead of my own

neighbourhood, where I can assure you there are many amiable

young women. But the fact is, that being, as I am, to inherit

this estate after the death of your honoured father (who,

however, may live many years longer), I could not satisfy myself

without resolving to choose a wife from among his daughters, that

the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the

melancholy event takes place—which, however, as I have already

said, may not be for several years. This has been my motive, my

fair cousin, and I flatter myself it will not sink me in your

esteem. And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the

most animated language of the violence of my affection. To

fortune I am perfectly indifferent, and shall make no demand of

that nature on your father, since I am well aware that it could

not be complied with; and that one thousand pounds in the four

per cents, which will not be yours till after your mother’s

decease, is all that you may ever be entitled to. On that head,

therefore, I shall be uniformly silent; and you may assure

yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when

we are married.”

It was absolutely necessary to interrupt him now.

“You are too hasty, sir,” she cried. “You forget that I have made

no answer. Let me do it without further loss of time. Accept my

thanks for the compliment you are paying me. I am very sensible

of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to

do otherwise than to decline them.”

“I am not now to learn,” replied Mr. Collins, with a formal wave

of the hand, “that it is usual with young ladies to reject the

addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he

first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is

repeated a second, or even a third time. I am therefore by no

means discouraged by what you have just said, and shall hope to

lead you to the altar ere long.”

“Upon my word, sir,” cried Elizabeth, “your hope is a rather

extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am

not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are)

who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of

being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal.

You could not make \_me\_ happy, and I am convinced that I am the

last woman in the world who could make you so. Nay, were your

friend Lady Catherine to know me, I am persuaded she would find

me in every respect ill qualified for the situation.”

“Were it certain that Lady Catherine would think so,” said Mr.

Collins very gravely—“but I cannot imagine that her ladyship

would at all disapprove of you. And you may be certain when I

have the honour of seeing her again, I shall speak in the very

highest terms of your modesty, economy, and other amiable

qualification.”

“Indeed, Mr. Collins, all praise of me will be unnecessary. You

must give me leave to judge for myself, and pay me the compliment

of believing what I say. I wish you very happy and very rich, and

by refusing your hand, do all in my power to prevent your being

otherwise. In making me the offer, you must have satisfied the

delicacy of your feelings with regard to my family, and may take

possession of Longbourn estate whenever it falls, without any

self-reproach. This matter may be considered, therefore, as

finally settled.” And rising as she thus spoke, she would have

quitted the room, had Mr. Collins not thus addressed her:

“When I do myself the honour of speaking to you next on the

subject, I shall hope to receive a more favourable answer than

you have now given me; though I am far from accusing you of

cruelty at present, because I know it to be the established

custom of your sex to reject a man on the first application, and

perhaps you have even now said as much to encourage my suit as

would be consistent with the true delicacy of the female

character.”

“Really, Mr. Collins,” cried Elizabeth with some warmth, “you

puzzle me exceedingly. If what I have hitherto said can appear to

you in the form of encouragement, I know not how to express my

refusal in such a way as to convince you of its being one.”

“You must give me leave to flatter myself, my dear cousin, that

your refusal of my addresses is merely words of course. My

reasons for believing it are briefly these: It does not appear to

me that my hand is unworthy of your acceptance, or that the

establishment I can offer would be any other than highly

desirable. My situation in life, my connections with the family

of de Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances

highly in my favour; and you should take it into further

consideration, that in spite of your manifold attractions, it is

by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be

made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all

likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable

qualifications. As I must therefore conclude that you are not

serious in your rejection of me, I shall choose to attribute it

to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the

usual practice of elegant females.”

“I do assure you, sir, that I have no pretensions whatever to

that kind of elegance which consists in tormenting a respectable

man. I would rather be paid the compliment of being believed

sincere. I thank you again and again for the honour you have done

me in your proposals, but to accept them is absolutely

impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it. Can I speak

plainer? Do not consider me now as an elegant female, intending

to plague you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth

from her heart.”

“You are uniformly charming!” cried he, with an air of awkward

gallantry; “and I am persuaded that when sanctioned by the

express authority of both your excellent parents, my proposals

will not fail of being acceptable.”

To such perseverance in wilful self-deception Elizabeth would

make no reply, and immediately and in silence withdrew;

determined, if he persisted in considering her repeated refusals

as flattering encouragement, to apply to her father, whose

negative might be uttered in such a manner as to be decisive, and

whose behaviour at least could not be mistaken for the

affectation and coquetry of an elegant female.

Chapter 20

Mr. Collins was not left long to the silent contemplation of his

successful love; for Mrs. Bennet, having dawdled about in the

vestibule to watch for the end of the conference, no sooner saw

Elizabeth open the door and with quick step pass her towards the

staircase, than she entered the breakfast-room, and congratulated

both him and herself in warm terms on the happy prospect of their

nearer connection. Mr. Collins received and returned these

felicitations with equal pleasure, and then proceeded to relate

the particulars of their interview, with the result of which he

trusted he had every reason to be satisfied, since the refusal

which his cousin had steadfastly given him would naturally flow

from her bashful modesty and the genuine delicacy of her

character.

This information, however, startled Mrs. Bennet; she would have

been glad to be equally satisfied that her daughter had meant to

encourage him by protesting against his proposals, but she dared

not believe it, and could not help saying so.

“But, depend upon it, Mr. Collins,” she added, “that Lizzy shall

be brought to reason. I will speak to her about it directly. She

is a very headstrong, foolish girl, and does not know her own

interest but I will \_make\_ her know it.”

“Pardon me for interrupting you, madam,” cried Mr. Collins; “but

if she is really headstrong and foolish, I know not whether she

would altogether be a very desirable wife to a man in my

situation, who naturally looks for happiness in the marriage

state. If therefore she actually persists in rejecting my suit,

perhaps it were better not to force her into accepting me,

because if liable to such defects of temper, she could not

contribute much to my felicity.”

“Sir, you quite misunderstand me,” said Mrs. Bennet, alarmed.

“Lizzy is only headstrong in such matters as these. In everything

else she is as good-natured a girl as ever lived. I will go

directly to Mr. Bennet, and we shall very soon settle it with

her, I am sure.”

She would not give him time to reply, but hurrying instantly to

her husband, called out as she entered the library, “Oh! Mr.

Bennet, you are wanted immediately; we are all in an uproar. You

must come and make Lizzy marry Mr. Collins, for she vows she will

not have him, and if you do not make haste he will change his

mind and not have \_her\_.”

Mr. Bennet raised his eyes from his book as she entered, and

fixed them on her face with a calm unconcern which was not in the

least altered by her communication.

“I have not the pleasure of understanding you,” said he, when she

had finished her speech. “Of what are you talking?”

“Of Mr. Collins and Lizzy. Lizzy declares she will not have Mr.

Collins, and Mr. Collins begins to say that he will not have

Lizzy.”

“And what am I to do on the occasion? It seems an hopeless

business.”

“Speak to Lizzy about it yourself. Tell her that you insist upon

her marrying him.”

“Let her be called down. She shall hear my opinion.”

Mrs. Bennet rang the bell, and Miss Elizabeth was summoned to the

library.

“Come here, child,” cried her father as she appeared. “I have

sent for you on an affair of importance. I understand that Mr.

Collins has made you an offer of marriage. Is it true?” Elizabeth

replied that it was. “Very well—and this offer of marriage you

have refused?”

“I have, sir.”

“Very well. We now come to the point. Your mother insists upon

your accepting it. Is it not so, Mrs. Bennet?”

“Yes, or I will never see her again.”

“An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day

you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will

never see you again if you do \_not\_ marry Mr. Collins, and I will

never see you again if you \_do\_.”

Elizabeth could not but smile at such a conclusion of such a

beginning, but Mrs. Bennet, who had persuaded herself that her

husband regarded the affair as she wished, was excessively

disappointed.

“What do you mean, Mr. Bennet, in talking this way? You promised

me to \_insist\_ upon her marrying him.”

“My dear,” replied her husband, “I have two small favours to

request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my

understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room.

I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as may be.”

Not yet, however, in spite of her disappointment in her husband,

did Mrs. Bennet give up the point. She talked to Elizabeth again

and again; coaxed and threatened her by turns. She endeavoured to

secure Jane in her interest; but Jane, with all possible

mildness, declined interfering; and Elizabeth, sometimes with

real earnestness, and sometimes with playful gaiety, replied to

her attacks. Though her manner varied, however, her determination

never did.

Mr. Collins, meanwhile, was meditating in solitude on what had

passed. He thought too well of himself to comprehend on what

motives his cousin could refuse him; and though his pride was

hurt, he suffered in no other way. His regard for her was quite

imaginary; and the possibility of her deserving her mother’s

reproach prevented his feeling any regret.

While the family were in this confusion, Charlotte Lucas came to

spend the day with them. She was met in the vestibule by Lydia,

who, flying to her, cried in a half whisper, “I am glad you are

come, for there is such fun here! What do you think has happened

this morning? Mr. Collins has made an offer to Lizzy, and she

will not have him.”

Charlotte hardly had time to answer, before they were joined by

Kitty, who came to tell the same news; and no sooner had they

entered the breakfast-room, where Mrs. Bennet was alone, than she

likewise began on the subject, calling on Miss Lucas for her

compassion, and entreating her to persuade her friend Lizzy to

comply with the wishes of all her family. “Pray do, my dear Miss

Lucas,” she added in a melancholy tone, “for nobody is on my

side, nobody takes part with me. I am cruelly used, nobody feels

for my poor nerves.”

Charlotte’s reply was spared by the entrance of Jane and

Elizabeth.

“Aye, there she comes,” continued Mrs. Bennet, “looking as

unconcerned as may be, and caring no more for us than if we were

at York, provided she can have her own way. But I tell you, Miss

Lizzy—if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer

of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all—and

I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father

is dead. \_I\_ shall not be able to keep you—and so I warn you. I

have done with you from this very day. I told you in the library,

you know, that I should never speak to you again, and you will

find me as good as my word. I have no pleasure in talking to

undutiful children. Not that I have much pleasure, indeed, in

talking to anybody. People who suffer as I do from nervous

complaints can have no great inclination for talking. Nobody can

tell what I suffer! But it is always so. Those who do not

complain are never pitied.”

Her daughters listened in silence to this effusion, sensible that

any attempt to reason with her or soothe her would only increase

the irritation. She talked on, therefore, without interruption

from any of them, till they were joined by Mr. Collins, who

entered the room with an air more stately than usual, and on

perceiving whom, she said to the girls, “Now, I do insist upon

it, that you, all of you, hold your tongues, and let me and Mr.

Collins have a little conversation together.”

Elizabeth passed quietly out of the room, Jane and Kitty

followed, but Lydia stood her ground, determined to hear all she

could; and Charlotte, detained first by the civility of Mr.

Collins, whose enquiries after herself and all her family were

very minute, and then by a little curiosity, satisfied herself

with walking to the window and pretending not to hear. In a

doleful voice Mrs. Bennet began the projected conversation: “Oh!

Mr. Collins!”

“My dear madam,” replied he, “let us be for ever silent on this

point. Far be it from me,” he presently continued, in a voice

that marked his displeasure, “to resent the behaviour of your

daughter. Resignation to inevitable evils is the duty of us all;

the peculiar duty of a young man who has been so fortunate as I

have been in early preferment; and I trust I am resigned. Perhaps

not the less so from feeling a doubt of my positive happiness had

my fair cousin honoured me with her hand; for I have often

observed that resignation is never so perfect as when the

blessing denied begins to lose somewhat of its value in our

estimation. You will not, I hope, consider me as showing any

disrespect to your family, my dear madam, by thus withdrawing my

pretensions to your daughter’s favour, without having paid

yourself and Mr. Bennet the compliment of requesting you to

interpose your authority in my behalf. My conduct may, I fear, be

objectionable in having accepted my dismission from your

daughter’s lips instead of your own. But we are all liable to

error. I have certainly meant well through the whole affair. My

object has been to secure an amiable companion for myself, with

due consideration for the advantage of all your family, and if my

\_manner\_ has been at all reprehensible, I here beg leave to

apologise.”

Chapter 21

The discussion of Mr. Collins’s offer was now nearly at an end,

and Elizabeth had only to suffer from the uncomfortable feelings

necessarily attending it, and occasionally from some peevish

allusions of her mother. As for the gentleman himself, \_his\_

feelings were chiefly expressed, not by embarrassment or

dejection, or by trying to avoid her, but by stiffness of manner

and resentful silence. He scarcely ever spoke to her, and the

assiduous attentions which he had been so sensible of himself

were transferred for the rest of the day to Miss Lucas, whose

civility in listening to him was a seasonable relief to them all,

and especially to her friend.

The morrow produced no abatement of Mrs. Bennet’s ill-humour or

ill health. Mr. Collins was also in the same state of angry

pride. Elizabeth had hoped that his resentment might shorten his

visit, but his plan did not appear in the least affected by it.

He was always to have gone on Saturday, and to Saturday he meant

to stay.

After breakfast, the girls walked to Meryton to enquire if Mr.

Wickham were returned, and to lament over his absence from the

Netherfield ball. He joined them on their entering the town, and

attended them to their aunt’s where his regret and vexation, and

the concern of everybody, was well talked over. To Elizabeth,

however, he voluntarily acknowledged that the necessity of his

absence \_had\_ been self-imposed.

“I found,” said he, “as the time drew near that I had better not

meet Mr. Darcy; that to be in the same room, the same party with

him for so many hours together, might be more than I could bear,

and that scenes might arise unpleasant to more than myself.”

She highly approved his forbearance, and they had leisure for a

full discussion of it, and for all the commendation which they

civilly bestowed on each other, as Wickham and another officer

walked back with them to Longbourn, and during the walk he

particularly attended to her. His accompanying them was a double

advantage; she felt all the compliment it offered to herself, and

it was most acceptable as an occasion of introducing him to her

father and mother.

Soon after their return, a letter was delivered to Miss Bennet;

it came from Netherfield. The envelope contained a sheet of

elegant, little, hot-pressed paper, well covered with a lady’s

fair, flowing hand; and Elizabeth saw her sister’s countenance

change as she read it, and saw her dwelling intently on some

particular passages. Jane recollected herself soon, and putting

the letter away, tried to join with her usual cheerfulness in the

general conversation; but Elizabeth felt an anxiety on the

subject which drew off her attention even from Wickham; and no

sooner had he and his companion taken leave, than a glance from

Jane invited her to follow her up stairs. When they had gained

their own room, Jane, taking out the letter, said:

“This is from Caroline Bingley; what it contains has surprised me

a good deal. The whole party have left Netherfield by this time,

and are on their way to town—and without any intention of coming

back again. You shall hear what she says.”

She then read the first sentence aloud, which comprised the

information of their having just resolved to follow their brother

to town directly, and of their meaning to dine in Grosvenor

Street, where Mr. Hurst had a house. The next was in these words:

“I do not pretend to regret anything I shall leave in

Hertfordshire, except your society, my dearest friend; but we

will hope, at some future period, to enjoy many returns of that

delightful intercourse we have known, and in the meanwhile may

lessen the pain of separation by a very frequent and most

unreserved correspondence. I depend on you for that.” To these

highflown expressions Elizabeth listened with all the

insensibility of distrust; and though the suddenness of their

removal surprised her, she saw nothing in it really to lament; it

was not to be supposed that their absence from Netherfield would

prevent Mr. Bingley’s being there; and as to the loss of their

society, she was persuaded that Jane must cease to regard it, in

the enjoyment of his.

“It is unlucky,” said she, after a short pause, “that you should

not be able to see your friends before they leave the country.

But may we not hope that the period of future happiness to which

Miss Bingley looks forward may arrive earlier than she is aware,

and that the delightful intercourse you have known as friends

will be renewed with yet greater satisfaction as sisters? Mr.

Bingley will not be detained in London by them.”

“Caroline decidedly says that none of the party will return into

Hertfordshire this winter. I will read it to you:”

“When my brother left us yesterday, he imagined that the business

which took him to London might be concluded in three or four

days; but as we are certain it cannot be so, and at the same time

convinced that when Charles gets to town he will be in no hurry

to leave it again, we have determined on following him thither,

that he may not be obliged to spend his vacant hours in a

comfortless hotel. Many of my acquaintances are already there for

the winter; I wish that I could hear that you, my dearest friend,

had any intention of making one of the crowd—but of that I

despair. I sincerely hope your Christmas in Hertfordshire may

abound in the gaieties which that season generally brings, and

that your beaux will be so numerous as to prevent your feeling

the loss of the three of whom we shall deprive you.”

“It is evident by this,” added Jane, “that he comes back no more

this winter.”

“It is only evident that Miss Bingley does not mean that he

\_should\_.”

“Why will you think so? It must be his own doing. He is his own

master. But you do not know \_all\_. I \_will\_ read you the passage

which particularly hurts me. I will have no reserves from \_you\_.”

“Mr. Darcy is impatient to see his sister; and, to confess the

truth, \_we\_ are scarcely less eager to meet her again. I really

do not think Georgiana Darcy has her equal for beauty, elegance,

and accomplishments; and the affection she inspires in Louisa and

myself is heightened into something still more interesting, from

the hope we dare entertain of her being hereafter our sister. I

do not know whether I ever before mentioned to you my feelings on

this subject; but I will not leave the country without confiding

them, and I trust you will not esteem them unreasonable. My

brother admires her greatly already; he will have frequent

opportunity now of seeing her on the most intimate footing; her

relations all wish the connection as much as his own; and a

sister’s partiality is not misleading me, I think, when I call

Charles most capable of engaging any woman’s heart. With all

these circumstances to favour an attachment, and nothing to

prevent it, am I wrong, my dearest Jane, in indulging the hope of

an event which will secure the happiness of so many?”

“What do you think of \_this\_ sentence, my dear Lizzy?” said Jane

as she finished it. “Is it not clear enough? Does it not

expressly declare that Caroline neither expects nor wishes me to

be her sister; that she is perfectly convinced of her brother’s

indifference; and that if she suspects the nature of my feelings

for him, she means (most kindly!) to put me on my guard? Can

there be any other opinion on the subject?”

“Yes, there can; for mine is totally different. Will you hear

it?”

“Most willingly.”

“You shall have it in a few words. Miss Bingley sees that her

brother is in love with you, and wants him to marry Miss Darcy.

She follows him to town in hope of keeping him there, and tries

to persuade you that he does not care about you.”

Jane shook her head.

“Indeed, Jane, you ought to believe me. No one who has ever seen

you together can doubt his affection. Miss Bingley, I am sure,

cannot. She is not such a simpleton. Could she have seen half as

much love in Mr. Darcy for herself, she would have ordered her

wedding clothes. But the case is this: We are not rich enough or

grand enough for them; and she is the more anxious to get Miss

Darcy for her brother, from the notion that when there has been

\_one\_ intermarriage, she may have less trouble in achieving a

second; in which there is certainly some ingenuity, and I dare

say it would succeed, if Miss de Bourgh were out of the way. But,

my dearest Jane, you cannot seriously imagine that because Miss

Bingley tells you her brother greatly admires Miss Darcy, he is

in the smallest degree less sensible of \_your\_ merit than when he

took leave of you on Tuesday, or that it will be in her power to

persuade him that, instead of being in love with you, he is very

much in love with her friend.”

“If we thought alike of Miss Bingley,” replied Jane, “your

representation of all this might make me quite easy. But I know

the foundation is unjust. Caroline is incapable of wilfully

deceiving anyone; and all that I can hope in this case is that

she is deceiving herself.”

“That is right. You could not have started a more happy idea,

since you will not take comfort in mine. Believe her to be

deceived, by all means. You have now done your duty by her, and

must fret no longer.”

“But, my dear sister, can I be happy, even supposing the best, in

accepting a man whose sisters and friends are all wishing him to

marry elsewhere?”

“You must decide for yourself,” said Elizabeth; “and if, upon

mature deliberation, you find that the misery of disobliging his

two sisters is more than equivalent to the happiness of being his

wife, I advise you by all means to refuse him.”

“How can you talk so?” said Jane, faintly smiling. “You must know

that though I should be exceedingly grieved at their

disapprobation, I could not hesitate.”

“I did not think you would; and that being the case, I cannot

consider your situation with much compassion.”

“But if he returns no more this winter, my choice will never be

required. A thousand things may arise in six months!”

The idea of his returning no more Elizabeth treated with the

utmost contempt. It appeared to her merely the suggestion of

Caroline’s interested wishes, and she could not for a moment

suppose that those wishes, however openly or artfully spoken,

could influence a young man so totally independent of everyone.

She represented to her sister as forcibly as possible what she

felt on the subject, and had soon the pleasure of seeing its

happy effect. Jane’s temper was not desponding, and she was

gradually led to hope, though the diffidence of affection

sometimes overcame the hope, that Bingley would return to

Netherfield and answer every wish of her heart.

They agreed that Mrs. Bennet should only hear of the departure of

the family, without being alarmed on the score of the gentleman’s

conduct; but even this partial communication gave her a great

deal of concern, and she bewailed it as exceedingly unlucky that

the ladies should happen to go away just as they were all getting

so intimate together. After lamenting it, however, at some

length, she had the consolation that Mr. Bingley would be soon

down again and soon dining at Longbourn, and the conclusion of

all was the comfortable declaration, that though he had been

invited only to a family dinner, she would take care to have two

full courses.

Chapter 22

The Bennets were engaged to dine with the Lucases and again

during the chief of the day was Miss Lucas so kind as to listen

to Mr. Collins. Elizabeth took an opportunity of thanking her.

“It keeps him in good humour,” said she, “and I am more obliged

to you than I can express.” Charlotte assured her friend of her

satisfaction in being useful, and that it amply repaid her for

the little sacrifice of her time. This was very amiable, but

Charlotte’s kindness extended farther than Elizabeth had any

conception of; its object was nothing else than to secure her

from any return of Mr. Collins’s addresses, by engaging them

towards herself. Such was Miss Lucas’s scheme; and appearances

were so favourable, that when they parted at night, she would

have felt almost secure of success if he had not been to leave

Hertfordshire so very soon. But here she did injustice to the

fire and independence of his character, for it led him to escape

out of Longbourn House the next morning with admirable slyness,

and hasten to Lucas Lodge to throw himself at her feet. He was

anxious to avoid the notice of his cousins, from a conviction

that if they saw him depart, they could not fail to conjecture

his design, and he was not willing to have the attempt known till

its success might be known likewise; for though feeling almost

secure, and with reason, for Charlotte had been tolerably

encouraging, he was comparatively diffident since the adventure

of Wednesday. His reception, however, was of the most flattering

kind. Miss Lucas perceived him from an upper window as he walked

towards the house, and instantly set out to meet him accidentally

in the lane. But little had she dared to hope that so much love

and eloquence awaited her there.

In as short a time as Mr. Collins’s long speeches would allow,

everything was settled between them to the satisfaction of both;

and as they entered the house he earnestly entreated her to name

the day that was to make him the happiest of men; and though such

a solicitation must be waived for the present, the lady felt no

inclination to trifle with his happiness. The stupidity with

which he was favoured by nature must guard his courtship from any

charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance; and Miss

Lucas, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested

desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment

were gained.

Sir William and Lady Lucas were speedily applied to for their

consent; and it was bestowed with a most joyful alacrity. Mr.

Collins’s present circumstances made it a most eligible match for

their daughter, to whom they could give little fortune; and his

prospects of future wealth were exceedingly fair. Lady Lucas

began directly to calculate, with more interest than the matter

had ever excited before, how many years longer Mr. Bennet was

likely to live; and Sir William gave it as his decided opinion,

that whenever Mr. Collins should be in possession of the

Longbourn estate, it would be highly expedient that both he and

his wife should make their appearance at St. James’s. The whole

family, in short, were properly overjoyed on the occasion. The

younger girls formed hopes of \_coming out\_ a year or two sooner

than they might otherwise have done; and the boys were relieved

from their apprehension of Charlotte’s dying an old maid.

Charlotte herself was tolerably composed. She had gained her

point, and had time to consider of it. Her reflections were in

general satisfactory. Mr. Collins, to be sure, was neither

sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his

attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her

husband. Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony,

marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision

for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however

uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest

preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained;

and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been

handsome, she felt all the good luck of it. The least agreeable

circumstance in the business was the surprise it must occasion to

Elizabeth Bennet, whose friendship she valued beyond that of any

other person. Elizabeth would wonder, and probably would blame

her; and though her resolution was not to be shaken, her feelings

must be hurt by such a disapprobation. She resolved to give her

the information herself, and therefore charged Mr. Collins, when

he returned to Longbourn to dinner, to drop no hint of what had

passed before any of the family. A promise of secrecy was of

course very dutifully given, but it could not be kept without

difficulty; for the curiosity excited by his long absence burst

forth in such very direct questions on his return as required

some ingenuity to evade, and he was at the same time exercising

great self-denial, for he was longing to publish his prosperous

love.

As he was to begin his journey too early on the morrow to see any

of the family, the ceremony of leave-taking was performed when

the ladies moved for the night; and Mrs. Bennet, with great

politeness and cordiality, said how happy they should be to see

him at Longbourn again, whenever his engagements might allow him

to visit them.

“My dear madam,” he replied, “this invitation is particularly

gratifying, because it is what I have been hoping to receive; and

you may be very certain that I shall avail myself of it as soon

as possible.”

They were all astonished; and Mr. Bennet, who could by no means

wish for so speedy a return, immediately said:

“But is there not danger of Lady Catherine’s disapprobation here,

my good sir? You had better neglect your relations than run the

risk of offending your patroness.”

“My dear sir,” replied Mr. Collins, “I am particularly obliged to

you for this friendly caution, and you may depend upon my not

taking so material a step without her ladyship’s concurrence.”

“You cannot be too much upon your guard. Risk anything rather

than her displeasure; and if you find it likely to be raised by

your coming to us again, which I should think exceedingly

probable, stay quietly at home, and be satisfied that \_we\_ shall

take no offence.”

“Believe me, my dear sir, my gratitude is warmly excited by such

affectionate attention; and depend upon it, you will speedily

receive from me a letter of thanks for this, and for every other

mark of your regard during my stay in Hertfordshire. As for my

fair cousins, though my absence may not be long enough to render

it necessary, I shall now take the liberty of wishing them health

and happiness, not excepting my cousin Elizabeth.”

With proper civilities the ladies then withdrew; all of them

equally surprised that he meditated a quick return. Mrs. Bennet

wished to understand by it that he thought of paying his

addresses to one of her younger girls, and Mary might have been

prevailed on to accept him. She rated his abilities much higher

than any of the others; there was a solidity in his reflections

which often struck her, and though by no means so clever as

herself, she thought that if encouraged to read and improve

himself by such an example as hers, he might become a very

agreeable companion. But on the following morning, every hope of

this kind was done away. Miss Lucas called soon after breakfast,

and in a private conference with Elizabeth related the event of

the day before.

The possibility of Mr. Collins’s fancying himself in love with

her friend had once occurred to Elizabeth within the last day or

two; but that Charlotte could encourage him seemed almost as far

from possibility as she could encourage him herself, and her

astonishment was consequently so great as to overcome at first

the bounds of decorum, and she could not help crying out:

“Engaged to Mr. Collins! My dear Charlotte—impossible!”

The steady countenance which Miss Lucas had commanded in telling

her story, gave way to a momentary confusion here on receiving so

direct a reproach; though, as it was no more than she expected,

she soon regained her composure, and calmly replied:

“Why should you be surprised, my dear Eliza? Do you think it

incredible that Mr. Collins should be able to procure any woman’s

good opinion, because he was not so happy as to succeed with

you?”

But Elizabeth had now recollected herself, and making a strong

effort for it, was able to assure with tolerable firmness that

the prospect of their relationship was highly grateful to her,

and that she wished her all imaginable happiness.

“I see what you are feeling,” replied Charlotte. “You must be

surprised, very much surprised—so lately as Mr. Collins was

wishing to marry you. But when you have had time to think it

over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am

not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable

home; and considering Mr. Collins’s character, connection, and

situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness

with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the

marriage state.”

Elizabeth quietly answered “Undoubtedly;” and after an awkward

pause, they returned to the rest of the family. Charlotte did not

stay much longer, and Elizabeth was then left to reflect on what

she had heard. It was a long time before she became at all

reconciled to the idea of so unsuitable a match. The strangeness

of Mr. Collins’s making two offers of marriage within three days

was nothing in comparison of his being now accepted. She had

always felt that Charlotte’s opinion of matrimony was not exactly

like her own, but she had not supposed it to be possible that,

when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better

feeling to worldly advantage. Charlotte the wife of Mr. Collins

was a most humiliating picture! And to the pang of a friend

disgracing herself and sunk in her esteem, was added the

distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to

be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen.

Chapter 23

Elizabeth was sitting with her mother and sisters, reflecting on

what she had heard, and doubting whether she was authorised to

mention it, when Sir William Lucas himself appeared, sent by his

daughter, to announce her engagement to the family. With many

compliments to them, and much self-gratulation on the prospect of

a connection between the houses, he unfolded the matter—to an

audience not merely wondering, but incredulous; for Mrs. Bennet,

with more perseverance than politeness, protested he must be

entirely mistaken; and Lydia, always unguarded and often uncivil,

boisterously exclaimed:

“Good Lord! Sir William, how can you tell such a story? Do not

you know that Mr. Collins wants to marry Lizzy?”

Nothing less than the complaisance of a courtier could have borne

without anger such treatment; but Sir William’s good breeding

carried him through it all; and though he begged leave to be

positive as to the truth of his information, he listened to all

their impertinence with the most forbearing courtesy.

Elizabeth, feeling it incumbent on her to relieve him from so

unpleasant a situation, now put herself forward to confirm his

account, by mentioning her prior knowledge of it from Charlotte

herself; and endeavoured to put a stop to the exclamations of her

mother and sisters by the earnestness of her congratulations to

Sir William, in which she was readily joined by Jane, and by

making a variety of remarks on the happiness that might be

expected from the match, the excellent character of Mr. Collins,

and the convenient distance of Hunsford from London.

Mrs. Bennet was in fact too much overpowered to say a great deal

while Sir William remained; but no sooner had he left them than

her feelings found a rapid vent. In the first place, she

persisted in disbelieving the whole of the matter; secondly, she

was very sure that Mr. Collins had been taken in; thirdly, she

trusted that they would never be happy together; and fourthly,

that the match might be broken off. Two inferences, however, were

plainly deduced from the whole: one, that Elizabeth was the real

cause of the mischief; and the other that she herself had been

barbarously misused by them all; and on these two points she

principally dwelt during the rest of the day. Nothing could

console and nothing could appease her. Nor did that day wear out

her resentment. A week elapsed before she could see Elizabeth

without scolding her, a month passed away before she could speak

to Sir William or Lady Lucas without being rude, and many months

were gone before she could at all forgive their daughter.

Mr. Bennet’s emotions were much more tranquil on the occasion,

and such as he did experience he pronounced to be of a most

agreeable sort; for it gratified him, he said, to discover that

Charlotte Lucas, whom he had been used to think tolerably

sensible, was as foolish as his wife, and more foolish than his

daughter!

Jane confessed herself a little surprised at the match; but she

said less of her astonishment than of her earnest desire for

their happiness; nor could Elizabeth persuade her to consider it

as improbable. Kitty and Lydia were far from envying Miss Lucas,

for Mr. Collins was only a clergyman; and it affected them in no

other way than as a piece of news to spread at Meryton.

Lady Lucas could not be insensible of triumph on being able to

retort on Mrs. Bennet the comfort of having a daughter well

married; and she called at Longbourn rather oftener than usual to

say how happy she was, though Mrs. Bennet’s sour looks and

ill-natured remarks might have been enough to drive happiness

away.

Between Elizabeth and Charlotte there was a restraint which kept

them mutually silent on the subject; and Elizabeth felt persuaded

that no real confidence could ever subsist between them again.

Her disappointment in Charlotte made her turn with fonder regard

to her sister, of whose rectitude and delicacy she was sure her

opinion could never be shaken, and for whose happiness she grew

daily more anxious, as Bingley had now been gone a week and

nothing more was heard of his return.

Jane had sent Caroline an early answer to her letter, and was

counting the days till she might reasonably hope to hear again.

The promised letter of thanks from Mr. Collins arrived on

Tuesday, addressed to their father, and written with all the

solemnity of gratitude which a twelvemonth’s abode in the family

might have prompted. After discharging his conscience on that

head, he proceeded to inform them, with many rapturous

expressions, of his happiness in having obtained the affection of

their amiable neighbour, Miss Lucas, and then explained that it

was merely with the view of enjoying her society that he had been

so ready to close with their kind wish of seeing him again at

Longbourn, whither he hoped to be able to return on Monday

fortnight; for Lady Catherine, he added, so heartily approved his

marriage, that she wished it to take place as soon as possible,

which he trusted would be an unanswerable argument with his

amiable Charlotte to name an early day for making him the

happiest of men.

Mr. Collins’s return into Hertfordshire was no longer a matter of

pleasure to Mrs. Bennet. On the contrary, she was as much

disposed to complain of it as her husband. It was very strange

that he should come to Longbourn instead of to Lucas Lodge; it

was also very inconvenient and exceedingly troublesome. She hated

having visitors in the house while her health was so indifferent,

and lovers were of all people the most disagreeable. Such were

the gentle murmurs of Mrs. Bennet, and they gave way only to the

greater distress of Mr. Bingley’s continued absence.

Neither Jane nor Elizabeth were comfortable on this subject. Day

after day passed away without bringing any other tidings of him

than the report which shortly prevailed in Meryton of his coming

no more to Netherfield the whole winter; a report which highly

incensed Mrs. Bennet, and which she never failed to contradict as

a most scandalous falsehood.

Even Elizabeth began to fear—not that Bingley was indifferent—but

that his sisters would be successful in keeping him away.

Unwilling as she was to admit an idea so destructive of Jane’s

happiness, and so dishonorable to the stability of her lover, she

could not prevent its frequently occurring. The united efforts of

his two unfeeling sisters and of his overpowering friend,

assisted by the attractions of Miss Darcy and the amusements of

London might be too much, she feared, for the strength of his

attachment.

As for Jane, \_her\_ anxiety under this suspense was, of course,

more painful than Elizabeth’s, but whatever she felt she was

desirous of concealing, and between herself and Elizabeth,

therefore, the subject was never alluded to. But as no such

delicacy restrained her mother, an hour seldom passed in which

she did not talk of Bingley, express her impatience for his

arrival, or even require Jane to confess that if he did not come

back she would think herself very ill used. It needed all Jane’s

steady mildness to bear these attacks with tolerable

tranquillity.

Mr. Collins returned most punctually on Monday fortnight, but his

reception at Longbourn was not quite so gracious as it had been

on his first introduction. He was too happy, however, to need

much attention; and luckily for the others, the business of

love-making relieved them from a great deal of his company. The

chief of every day was spent by him at Lucas Lodge, and he

sometimes returned to Longbourn only in time to make an apology

for his absence before the family went to bed.

Mrs. Bennet was really in a most pitiable state. The very mention

of anything concerning the match threw her into an agony of

ill-humour, and wherever she went she was sure of hearing it

talked of. The sight of Miss Lucas was odious to her. As her

successor in that house, she regarded her with jealous

abhorrence. Whenever Charlotte came to see them, she concluded

her to be anticipating the hour of possession; and whenever she

spoke in a low voice to Mr. Collins, was convinced that they were

talking of the Longbourn estate, and resolving to turn herself

and her daughters out of the house, as soon as Mr. Bennet were

dead. She complained bitterly of all this to her husband.

“Indeed, Mr. Bennet,” said she, “it is very hard to think that

Charlotte Lucas should ever be mistress of this house, that \_I\_

should be forced to make way for \_her\_, and live to see her take

her place in it!”

“My dear, do not give way to such gloomy thoughts. Let us hope

for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that \_I\_ may be the

survivor.”

This was not very consoling to Mrs. Bennet, and therefore,

instead of making any answer, she went on as before.

“I cannot bear to think that they should have all this estate. If

it was not for the entail, I should not mind it.”

“What should not you mind?”

“I should not mind anything at all.”

“Let us be thankful that you are preserved from a state of such

insensibility.”

“I never can be thankful, Mr. Bennet, for anything about the

entail. How anyone could have the conscience to entail away an

estate from one’s own daughters, I cannot understand; and all for

the sake of Mr. Collins too! Why should \_he\_ have it more than

anybody else?”

“I leave it to yourself to determine,” said Mr. Bennet.

Chapter 24

Miss Bingley’s letter arrived, and put an end to doubt. The very

first sentence conveyed the assurance of their being all settled

in London for the winter, and concluded with her brother’s regret

at not having had time to pay his respects to his friends in

Hertfordshire before he left the country.

Hope was over, entirely over; and when Jane could attend to the

rest of the letter, she found little, except the professed

affection of the writer, that could give her any comfort. Miss

Darcy’s praise occupied the chief of it. Her many attractions

were again dwelt on, and Caroline boasted joyfully of their

increasing intimacy, and ventured to predict the accomplishment

of the wishes which had been unfolded in her former letter. She

wrote also with great pleasure of her brother’s being an inmate

of Mr. Darcy’s house, and mentioned with raptures some plans of

the latter with regard to new furniture.

Elizabeth, to whom Jane very soon communicated the chief of all

this, heard it in silent indignation. Her heart was divided

between concern for her sister, and resentment against all

others. To Caroline’s assertion of her brother’s being partial to

Miss Darcy she paid no credit. That he was really fond of Jane,

she doubted no more than she had ever done; and much as she had

always been disposed to like him, she could not think without

anger, hardly without contempt, on that easiness of temper, that

want of proper resolution, which now made him the slave of his

designing friends, and led him to sacrifice of his own happiness

to the caprice of their inclination. Had his own happiness,

however, been the only sacrifice, he might have been allowed to

sport with it in whatever manner he thought best, but her

sister’s was involved in it, as she thought he must be sensible

himself. It was a subject, in short, on which reflection would be

long indulged, and must be unavailing. She could think of nothing

else; and yet whether Bingley’s regard had really died away, or

were suppressed by his friends’ interference; whether he had been

aware of Jane’s attachment, or whether it had escaped his

observation; whatever were the case, though her opinion of him

must be materially affected by the difference, her sister’s

situation remained the same, her peace equally wounded.

A day or two passed before Jane had courage to speak of her

feelings to Elizabeth; but at last, on Mrs. Bennet’s leaving them

together, after a longer irritation than usual about Netherfield

and its master, she could not help saying:

“Oh, that my dear mother had more command over herself! She can

have no idea of the pain she gives me by her continual

reflections on him. But I will not repine. It cannot last long.

He will be forgot, and we shall all be as we were before.”

Elizabeth looked at her sister with incredulous solicitude, but

said nothing.

“You doubt me,” cried Jane, slightly colouring; “indeed, you have

no reason. He may live in my memory as the most amiable man of my

acquaintance, but that is all. I have nothing either to hope or

fear, and nothing to reproach him with. Thank God! I have not

\_that\_ pain. A little time, therefore—I shall certainly try to

get the better.”

With a stronger voice she soon added, “I have this comfort

immediately, that it has not been more than an error of fancy on

my side, and that it has done no harm to anyone but myself.”

“My dear Jane!” exclaimed Elizabeth, “you are too good. Your

sweetness and disinterestedness are really angelic; I do not know

what to say to you. I feel as if I had never done you justice, or

loved you as you deserve.”

Miss Bennet eagerly disclaimed all extraordinary merit, and threw

back the praise on her sister’s warm affection.

“Nay,” said Elizabeth, “this is not fair. \_You\_ wish to think all

the world respectable, and are hurt if I speak ill of anybody.

\_I\_ only want to think \_you\_ perfect, and you set yourself

against it. Do not be afraid of my running into any excess, of my

encroaching on your privilege of universal good-will. You need

not. There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of

whom I think well. The more I see of the world, the more am I

dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the

inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little

dependence that can be placed on the appearance of merit or

sense. I have met with two instances lately, one I will not

mention; the other is Charlotte’s marriage. It is unaccountable!

In every view it is unaccountable!”

“My dear Lizzy, do not give way to such feelings as these. They

will ruin your happiness. You do not make allowance enough for

difference of situation and temper. Consider Mr. Collins’s

respectability, and Charlotte’s steady, prudent character.

Remember that she is one of a large family; that as to fortune,

it is a most eligible match; and be ready to believe, for

everybody’s sake, that she may feel something like regard and

esteem for our cousin.”

“To oblige you, I would try to believe almost anything, but no

one else could be benefited by such a belief as this; for were I

persuaded that Charlotte had any regard for him, I should only

think worse of her understanding than I now do of her heart. My

dear Jane, Mr. Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded,

silly man; you know he is, as well as I do; and you must feel, as

well as I do, that the woman who married him cannot have a proper

way of thinking. You shall not defend her, though it is Charlotte

Lucas. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the

meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade

yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility

of danger security for happiness.”

“I must think your language too strong in speaking of both,”

replied Jane; “and I hope you will be convinced of it by seeing

them happy together. But enough of this. You alluded to something

else. You mentioned \_two\_ instances. I cannot misunderstand you,

but I entreat you, dear Lizzy, not to pain me by thinking \_that

person\_ to blame, and saying your opinion of him is sunk. We must

not be so ready to fancy ourselves intentionally injured. We must

not expect a lively young man to be always so guarded and

circumspect. It is very often nothing but our own vanity that

deceives us. Women fancy admiration means more than it does.”

“And men take care that they should.”

“If it is designedly done, they cannot be justified; but I have

no idea of there being so much design in the world as some

persons imagine.”

“I am far from attributing any part of Mr. Bingley’s conduct to

design,” said Elizabeth; “but without scheming to do wrong, or to

make others unhappy, there may be error, and there may be misery.

Thoughtlessness, want of attention to other people’s feelings,

and want of resolution, will do the business.”

“And do you impute it to either of those?”

“Yes; to the last. But if I go on, I shall displease you by

saying what I think of persons you esteem. Stop me whilst you

can.”

“You persist, then, in supposing his sisters influence him?”

“Yes, in conjunction with his friend.”

“I cannot believe it. Why should they try to influence him? They

can only wish his happiness; and if he is attached to me, no

other woman can secure it.”

“Your first position is false. They may wish many things besides

his happiness; they may wish his increase of wealth and

consequence; they may wish him to marry a girl who has all the

importance of money, great connections, and pride.”

“Beyond a doubt, they do wish him to choose Miss Darcy,” replied

Jane; “but this may be from better feelings than you are

supposing. They have known her much longer than they have known

me; no wonder if they love her better. But, whatever may be their

own wishes, it is very unlikely they should have opposed their

brother’s. What sister would think herself at liberty to do it,

unless there were something very objectionable? If they believed

him attached to me, they would not try to part us; if he were so,

they could not succeed. By supposing such an affection, you make

everybody acting unnaturally and wrong, and me most unhappy. Do

not distress me by the idea. I am not ashamed of having been

mistaken—or, at least, it is light, it is nothing in comparison

of what I should feel in thinking ill of him or his sisters. Let

me take it in the best light, in the light in which it may be

understood.”

Elizabeth could not oppose such a wish; and from this time Mr.

Bingley’s name was scarcely ever mentioned between them.

Mrs. Bennet still continued to wonder and repine at his returning

no more, and though a day seldom passed in which Elizabeth did

not account for it clearly, there was little chance of her ever

considering it with less perplexity. Her daughter endeavoured to

convince her of what she did not believe herself, that his

attentions to Jane had been merely the effect of a common and

transient liking, which ceased when he saw her no more; but

though the probability of the statement was admitted at the time,

she had the same story to repeat every day. Mrs. Bennet’s best

comfort was that Mr. Bingley must be down again in the summer.

Mr. Bennet treated the matter differently. “So, Lizzy,” said he

one day, “your sister is crossed in love, I find. I congratulate

her. Next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed a little

in love now and then. It is something to think of, and it gives

her a sort of distinction among her companions. When is your turn

to come? You will hardly bear to be long outdone by Jane. Now is

your time. Here are officers enough in Meryton to disappoint all

the young ladies in the country. Let Wickham be your man. He is a

pleasant fellow, and would jilt you creditably.”

“Thank you, sir, but a less agreeable man would satisfy me. We

must not all expect Jane’s good fortune.”

“True,” said Mr. Bennet, “but it is a comfort to think that

whatever of that kind may befall you, you have an affectionate

mother who will make the most of it.”

Mr. Wickham’s society was of material service in dispelling the

gloom which the late perverse occurrences had thrown on many of

the Longbourn family. They saw him often, and to his other

recommendations was now added that of general unreserve. The

whole of what Elizabeth had already heard, his claims on Mr.

Darcy, and all that he had suffered from him, was now openly

acknowledged and publicly canvassed; and everybody was pleased to

know how much they had always disliked Mr. Darcy before they had

known anything of the matter.

Miss Bennet was the only creature who could suppose there might

be any extenuating circumstances in the case, unknown to the

society of Hertfordshire; her mild and steady candour always

pleaded for allowances, and urged the possibility of mistakes—but

by everybody else Mr. Darcy was condemned as the worst of men.

Chapter 25

After a week spent in professions of love and schemes of

felicity, Mr. Collins was called from his amiable Charlotte by

the arrival of Saturday. The pain of separation, however, might

be alleviated on his side, by preparations for the reception of

his bride; as he had reason to hope, that shortly after his

return into Hertfordshire, the day would be fixed that was to

make him the happiest of men. He took leave of his relations at

Longbourn with as much solemnity as before; wished his fair

cousins health and happiness again, and promised their father

another letter of thanks.

On the following Monday, Mrs. Bennet had the pleasure of

receiving her brother and his wife, who came as usual to spend

the Christmas at Longbourn. Mr. Gardiner was a sensible,

gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister, as well by

nature as education. The Netherfield ladies would have had

difficulty in believing that a man who lived by trade, and within

view of his own warehouses, could have been so well-bred and

agreeable. Mrs. Gardiner, who was several years younger than Mrs.

Bennet and Mrs. Phillips, was an amiable, intelligent, elegant

woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces.

Between the two eldest and herself especially, there subsisted a

particular regard. They had frequently been staying with her in

town.

The first part of Mrs. Gardiner’s business on her arrival was to

distribute her presents and describe the newest fashions. When

this was done she had a less active part to play. It became her

turn to listen. Mrs. Bennet had many grievances to relate, and

much to complain of. They had all been very ill-used since she

last saw her sister. Two of her girls had been upon the point of

marriage, and after all there was nothing in it.

“I do not blame Jane,” she continued, “for Jane would have got

Mr. Bingley if she could. But Lizzy! Oh, sister! It is very hard

to think that she might have been Mr. Collins’s wife by this

time, had it not been for her own perverseness. He made her an

offer in this very room, and she refused him. The consequence of

it is, that Lady Lucas will have a daughter married before I

have, and that the Longbourn estate is just as much entailed as

ever. The Lucases are very artful people indeed, sister. They are

all for what they can get. I am sorry to say it of them, but so

it is. It makes me very nervous and poorly, to be thwarted so in

my own family, and to have neighbours who think of themselves

before anybody else. However, your coming just at this time is

the greatest of comforts, and I am very glad to hear what you

tell us, of long sleeves.”

Mrs. Gardiner, to whom the chief of this news had been given

before, in the course of Jane and Elizabeth’s correspondence with

her, made her sister a slight answer, and, in compassion to her

nieces, turned the conversation.

When alone with Elizabeth afterwards, she spoke more on the

subject. “It seems likely to have been a desirable match for

Jane,” said she. “I am sorry it went off. But these things happen

so often! A young man, such as you describe Mr. Bingley, so

easily falls in love with a pretty girl for a few weeks, and when

accident separates them, so easily forgets her, that these sort

of inconsistencies are very frequent.”

“An excellent consolation in its way,” said Elizabeth, “but it

will not do for \_us\_. We do not suffer by accident. It does not

often happen that the interference of friends will persuade a

young man of independent fortune to think no more of a girl whom

he was violently in love with only a few days before.”

“But that expression of ‘violently in love’ is so hackneyed, so

doubtful, so indefinite, that it gives me very little idea. It is

as often applied to feelings which arise from a half-hour’s

acquaintance, as to a real, strong attachment. Pray, how \_violent

was\_ Mr. Bingley’s love?”

“I never saw a more promising inclination; he was growing quite

inattentive to other people, and wholly engrossed by her. Every

time they met, it was more decided and remarkable. At his own

ball he offended two or three young ladies, by not asking them to

dance; and I spoke to him twice myself, without receiving an

answer. Could there be finer symptoms? Is not general incivility

the very essence of love?”

“Oh, yes!—of that kind of love which I suppose him to have felt.

Poor Jane! I am sorry for her, because, with her disposition, she

may not get over it immediately. It had better have happened to

\_you\_, Lizzy; you would have laughed yourself out of it sooner.

But do you think she would be prevailed upon to go back with us?

Change of scene might be of service—and perhaps a little relief

from home may be as useful as anything.”

Elizabeth was exceedingly pleased with this proposal, and felt

persuaded of her sister’s ready acquiescence.

“I hope,” added Mrs. Gardiner, “that no consideration with regard

to this young man will influence her. We live in so different a

part of town, all our connections are so different, and, as you

well know, we go out so little, that it is very improbable that

they should meet at all, unless he really comes to see her.”

“And \_that\_ is quite impossible; for he is now in the custody of

his friend, and Mr. Darcy would no more suffer him to call on

Jane in such a part of London! My dear aunt, how could you think

of it? Mr. Darcy may perhaps have \_heard\_ of such a place as

Gracechurch Street, but he would hardly think a month’s ablution

enough to cleanse him from its impurities, were he once to enter

it; and depend upon it, Mr. Bingley never stirs without him.”

“So much the better. I hope they will not meet at all. But does

not Jane correspond with his sister? \_She\_ will not be able to

help calling.”

“She will drop the acquaintance entirely.”

But in spite of the certainty in which Elizabeth affected to

place this point, as well as the still more interesting one of

Bingley’s being withheld from seeing Jane, she felt a solicitude

on the subject which convinced her, on examination, that she did

not consider it entirely hopeless. It was possible, and sometimes

she thought it probable, that his affection might be reanimated,

and the influence of his friends successfully combated by the

more natural influence of Jane’s attractions.

Miss Bennet accepted her aunt’s invitation with pleasure; and the

Bingleys were no otherwise in her thoughts at the same time, than

as she hoped by Caroline’s not living in the same house with her

brother, she might occasionally spend a morning with her, without

any danger of seeing him.

The Gardiners stayed a week at Longbourn; and what with the

Phillipses, the Lucases, and the officers, there was not a day

without its engagement. Mrs. Bennet had so carefully provided for

the entertainment of her brother and sister, that they did not

once sit down to a family dinner. When the engagement was for

home, some of the officers always made part of it—of which

officers Mr. Wickham was sure to be one; and on these occasions,

Mrs. Gardiner, rendered suspicious by Elizabeth’s warm

commendation, narrowly observed them both. Without supposing

them, from what she saw, to be very seriously in love, their

preference of each other was plain enough to make her a little

uneasy; and she resolved to speak to Elizabeth on the subject

before she left Hertfordshire, and represent to her the

imprudence of encouraging such an attachment.

To Mrs. Gardiner, Wickham had one means of affording pleasure,

unconnected with his general powers. About ten or a dozen years

ago, before her marriage, she had spent a considerable time in

that very part of Derbyshire to which he belonged. They had,

therefore, many acquaintances in common; and though Wickham had

been little there since the death of Darcy’s father, it was yet

in his power to give her fresher intelligence of her former

friends than she had been in the way of procuring.

Mrs. Gardiner had seen Pemberley, and known the late Mr. Darcy by

character perfectly well. Here consequently was an inexhaustible

subject of discourse. In comparing her recollection of Pemberley

with the minute description which Wickham could give, and in

bestowing her tribute of praise on the character of its late

possessor, she was delighting both him and herself. On being made

acquainted with the present Mr. Darcy’s treatment of him, she

tried to remember some of that gentleman’s reputed disposition

when quite a lad which might agree with it, and was confident at

last that she recollected having heard Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy

formerly spoken of as a very proud, ill-natured boy.

Chapter 26

Mrs. Gardiner’s caution to Elizabeth was punctually and kindly

given on the first favourable opportunity of speaking to her

alone; after honestly telling her what she thought, she thus went

on:

“You are too sensible a girl, Lizzy, to fall in love merely

because you are warned against it; and, therefore, I am not

afraid of speaking openly. Seriously, I would have you be on your

guard. Do not involve yourself or endeavour to involve him in an

affection which the want of fortune would make so very imprudent.

I have nothing to say against \_him\_; he is a most interesting

young man; and if he had the fortune he ought to have, I should

think you could not do better. But as it is, you must not let

your fancy run away with you. You have sense, and we all expect

you to use it. Your father would depend on \_your\_ resolution and

good conduct, I am sure. You must not disappoint your father.”

“My dear aunt, this is being serious indeed.”

“Yes, and I hope to engage you to be serious likewise.”

“Well, then, you need not be under any alarm. I will take care of

myself, and of Mr. Wickham too. He shall not be in love with me,

if I can prevent it.”

“Elizabeth, you are not serious now.”

“I beg your pardon, I will try again. At present I am not in love

with Mr. Wickham; no, I certainly am not. But he is, beyond all

comparison, the most agreeable man I ever saw—and if he becomes

really attached to me—I believe it will be better that he should

not. I see the imprudence of it. Oh! \_that\_ abominable Mr. Darcy!

My father’s opinion of me does me the greatest honour, and I

should be miserable to forfeit it. My father, however, is partial

to Mr. Wickham. In short, my dear aunt, I should be very sorry to

be the means of making any of you unhappy; but since we see every

day that where there is affection, young people are seldom

withheld by immediate want of fortune from entering into

engagements with each other, how can I promise to be wiser than

so many of my fellow-creatures if I am tempted, or how am I even

to know that it would be wisdom to resist? All that I can promise

you, therefore, is not to be in a hurry. I will not be in a hurry

to believe myself his first object. When I am in company with

him, I will not be wishing. In short, I will do my best.”

“Perhaps it will be as well if you discourage his coming here so

very often. At least, you should not \_remind\_ your mother of

inviting him.”

“As I did the other day,” said Elizabeth with a conscious smile:

“very true, it will be wise in me to refrain from \_that\_. But do

not imagine that he is always here so often. It is on your

account that he has been so frequently invited this week. You

know my mother’s ideas as to the necessity of constant company

for her friends. But really, and upon my honour, I will try to do

what I think to be the wisest; and now I hope you are satisfied.”

Her aunt assured her that she was, and Elizabeth having thanked

her for the kindness of her hints, they parted; a wonderful

instance of advice being given on such a point, without being

resented.

Mr. Collins returned into Hertfordshire soon after it had been

quitted by the Gardiners and Jane; but as he took up his abode

with the Lucases, his arrival was no great inconvenience to Mrs.

Bennet. His marriage was now fast approaching, and she was at

length so far resigned as to think it inevitable, and even

repeatedly to say, in an ill-natured tone, that she “\_wished\_

they might be happy.” Thursday was to be the wedding day, and on

Wednesday Miss Lucas paid her farewell visit; and when she rose

to take leave, Elizabeth, ashamed of her mother’s ungracious and

reluctant good wishes, and sincerely affected herself,

accompanied her out of the room. As they went downstairs

together, Charlotte said:

“I shall depend on hearing from you very often, Eliza.”

“\_That\_ you certainly shall.”

“And I have another favour to ask you. Will you come and see me?”

“We shall often meet, I hope, in Hertfordshire.”

“I am not likely to leave Kent for some time. Promise me,

therefore, to come to Hunsford.”

Elizabeth could not refuse, though she foresaw little pleasure in

the visit.

“My father and Maria are coming to me in March,” added Charlotte,

“and I hope you will consent to be of the party. Indeed, Eliza,

you will be as welcome as either of them.”

The wedding took place; the bride and bridegroom set off for Kent

from the church door, and everybody had as much to say, or to

hear, on the subject as usual. Elizabeth soon heard from her

friend; and their correspondence was as regular and frequent as

it had ever been; that it should be equally unreserved was

impossible. Elizabeth could never address her without feeling

that all the comfort of intimacy was over, and though determined

not to slacken as a correspondent, it was for the sake of what

had been, rather than what was. Charlotte’s first letters were

received with a good deal of eagerness; there could not but be

curiosity to know how she would speak of her new home, how she

would like Lady Catherine, and how happy she would dare pronounce

herself to be; though, when the letters were read, Elizabeth felt

that Charlotte expressed herself on every point exactly as she

might have foreseen. She wrote cheerfully, seemed surrounded with

comforts, and mentioned nothing which she could not praise. The

house, furniture, neighbourhood, and roads, were all to her

taste, and Lady Catherine’s behaviour was most friendly and

obliging. It was Mr. Collins’s picture of Hunsford and Rosings

rationally softened; and Elizabeth perceived that she must wait

for her own visit there to know the rest.

Jane had already written a few lines to her sister to announce

their safe arrival in London; and when she wrote again, Elizabeth

hoped it would be in her power to say something of the Bingleys.

Her impatience for this second letter was as well rewarded as

impatience generally is. Jane had been a week in town without

either seeing or hearing from Caroline. She accounted for it,

however, by supposing that her last letter to her friend from

Longbourn had by some accident been lost.

“My aunt,” she continued, “is going to-morrow into that part of

the town, and I shall take the opportunity of calling in

Grosvenor Street.”

She wrote again when the visit was paid, and she had seen Miss

Bingley. “I did not think Caroline in spirits,” were her words,

“but she was very glad to see me, and reproached me for giving

her no notice of my coming to London. I was right, therefore, my

last letter had never reached her. I enquired after their

brother, of course. He was well, but so much engaged with Mr.

Darcy that they scarcely ever saw him. I found that Miss Darcy

was expected to dinner. I wish I could see her. My visit was not

long, as Caroline and Mrs. Hurst were going out. I dare say I

shall see them soon here.”

Elizabeth shook her head over this letter. It convinced her that

accident only could discover to Mr. Bingley her sister’s being in

town.

Four weeks passed away, and Jane saw nothing of him. She

endeavoured to persuade herself that she did not regret it; but

she could no longer be blind to Miss Bingley’s inattention. After

waiting at home every morning for a fortnight, and inventing

every evening a fresh excuse for her, the visitor did at last

appear; but the shortness of her stay, and yet more, the

alteration of her manner would allow Jane to deceive herself no

longer. The letter which she wrote on this occasion to her sister

will prove what she felt.

“My dearest Lizzy will, I am sure, be incapable of triumphing in

her better judgement, at my expense, when I confess myself to

have been entirely deceived in Miss Bingley’s regard for me. But,

my dear sister, though the event has proved you right, do not

think me obstinate if I still assert that, considering what her

behaviour was, my confidence was as natural as your suspicion. I

do not at all comprehend her reason for wishing to be intimate

with me; but if the same circumstances were to happen again, I am

sure I should be deceived again. Caroline did not return my visit

till yesterday; and not a note, not a line, did I receive in the

meantime. When she did come, it was very evident that she had no

pleasure in it; she made a slight, formal apology, for not

calling before, said not a word of wishing to see me again, and

was in every respect so altered a creature, that when she went

away I was perfectly resolved to continue the acquaintance no

longer. I pity, though I cannot help blaming her. She was very

wrong in singling me out as she did; I can safely say that every

advance to intimacy began on her side. But I pity her, because

she must feel that she has been acting wrong, and because I am

very sure that anxiety for her brother is the cause of it. I need

not explain myself farther; and though \_we\_ know this anxiety to

be quite needless, yet if she feels it, it will easily account

for her behaviour to me; and so deservedly dear as he is to his

sister, whatever anxiety she must feel on his behalf is natural

and amiable. I cannot but wonder, however, at her having any such

fears now, because, if he had at all cared about me, we must have

met, long ago. He knows of my being in town, I am certain, from

something she said herself; and yet it would seem, by her manner

of talking, as if she wanted to persuade herself that he is

really partial to Miss Darcy. I cannot understand it. If I were

not afraid of judging harshly, I should be almost tempted to say

that there is a strong appearance of duplicity in all this. But I

will endeavour to banish every painful thought, and think only of

what will make me happy—your affection, and the invariable

kindness of my dear uncle and aunt. Let me hear from you very

soon. Miss Bingley said something of his never returning to

Netherfield again, of giving up the house, but not with any

certainty. We had better not mention it. I am extremely glad that

you have such pleasant accounts from our friends at Hunsford.

Pray go to see them, with Sir William and Maria. I am sure you

will be very comfortable there.—Yours, etc.”

This letter gave Elizabeth some pain; but her spirits returned as

she considered that Jane would no longer be duped, by the sister

at least. All expectation from the brother was now absolutely

over. She would not even wish for a renewal of his attentions.

His character sunk on every review of it; and as a punishment for

him, as well as a possible advantage to Jane, she seriously hoped

he might really soon marry Mr. Darcy’s sister, as by Wickham’s

account, she would make him abundantly regret what he had thrown

away.

Mrs. Gardiner about this time reminded Elizabeth of her promise

concerning that gentleman, and required information; and

Elizabeth had such to send as might rather give contentment to

her aunt than to herself. His apparent partiality had subsided,

his attentions were over, he was the admirer of some one else.

Elizabeth was watchful enough to see it all, but she could see it

and write of it without material pain. Her heart had been but

slightly touched, and her vanity was satisfied with believing

that \_she\_ would have been his only choice, had fortune permitted

it. The sudden acquisition of ten thousand pounds was the most

remarkable charm of the young lady to whom he was now rendering

himself agreeable; but Elizabeth, less clear-sighted perhaps in

this case than in Charlotte’s, did not quarrel with him for his

wish of independence. Nothing, on the contrary, could be more

natural; and while able to suppose that it cost him a few

struggles to relinquish her, she was ready to allow it a wise and

desirable measure for both, and could very sincerely wish him

happy.

All this was acknowledged to Mrs. Gardiner; and after relating

the circumstances, she thus went on: “I am now convinced, my dear

aunt, that I have never been much in love; for had I really

experienced that pure and elevating passion, I should at present

detest his very name, and wish him all manner of evil. But my

feelings are not only cordial towards \_him\_; they are even

impartial towards Miss King. I cannot find out that I hate her at

all, or that I am in the least unwilling to think her a very good

sort of girl. There can be no love in all this. My watchfulness

has been effectual; and though I certainly should be a more

interesting object to all my acquaintances were I distractedly in

love with him, I cannot say that I regret my comparative

insignificance. Importance may sometimes be purchased too dearly.

Kitty and Lydia take his defection much more to heart than I do.

They are young in the ways of the world, and not yet open to the

mortifying conviction that handsome young men must have something

to live on as well as the plain.”

Chapter 27

With no greater events than these in the Longbourn family, and

otherwise diversified by little beyond the walks to Meryton,

sometimes dirty and sometimes cold, did January and February pass

away. March was to take Elizabeth to Hunsford. She had not at

first thought very seriously of going thither; but Charlotte, she

soon found, was depending on the plan and she gradually learned

to consider it herself with greater pleasure as well as greater

certainty. Absence had increased her desire of seeing Charlotte

again, and weakened her disgust of Mr. Collins. There was novelty

in the scheme, and as, with such a mother and such

uncompanionable sisters, home could not be faultless, a little

change was not unwelcome for its own sake. The journey would

moreover give her a peep at Jane; and, in short, as the time drew

near, she would have been very sorry for any delay. Everything,

however, went on smoothly, and was finally settled according to

Charlotte’s first sketch. She was to accompany Sir William and

his second daughter. The improvement of spending a night in

London was added in time, and the plan became perfect as plan

could be.

The only pain was in leaving her father, who would certainly miss

her, and who, when it came to the point, so little liked her

going, that he told her to write to him, and almost promised to

answer her letter.

The farewell between herself and Mr. Wickham was perfectly

friendly; on his side even more. His present pursuit could not

make him forget that Elizabeth had been the first to excite and

to deserve his attention, the first to listen and to pity, the

first to be admired; and in his manner of bidding her adieu,

wishing her every enjoyment, reminding her of what she was to

expect in Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and trusting their opinion of

her—their opinion of everybody—would always coincide, there was a

solicitude, an interest which she felt must ever attach her to

him with a most sincere regard; and she parted from him convinced

that, whether married or single, he must always be her model of

the amiable and pleasing.

Her fellow-travellers the next day were not of a kind to make her

think him less agreeable. Sir William Lucas, and his daughter

Maria, a good-humoured girl, but as empty-headed as himself, had

nothing to say that could be worth hearing, and were listened to

with about as much delight as the rattle of the chaise. Elizabeth

loved absurdities, but she had known Sir William’s too long. He

could tell her nothing new of the wonders of his presentation and

knighthood; and his civilities were worn out, like his

information.

It was a journey of only twenty-four miles, and they began it so

early as to be in Gracechurch Street by noon. As they drove to

Mr. Gardiner’s door, Jane was at a drawing-room window watching

their arrival; when they entered the passage she was there to

welcome them, and Elizabeth, looking earnestly in her face, was

pleased to see it healthful and lovely as ever. On the stairs

were a troop of little boys and girls, whose eagerness for their

cousin’s appearance would not allow them to wait in the

drawing-room, and whose shyness, as they had not seen her for a

twelvemonth, prevented their coming lower. All was joy and

kindness. The day passed most pleasantly away; the morning in

bustle and shopping, and the evening at one of the theatres.

Elizabeth then contrived to sit by her aunt. Their first object

was her sister; and she was more grieved than astonished to hear,

in reply to her minute enquiries, that though Jane always

struggled to support her spirits, there were periods of

dejection. It was reasonable, however, to hope that they would

not continue long. Mrs. Gardiner gave her the particulars also of

Miss Bingley’s visit in Gracechurch Street, and repeated

conversations occurring at different times between Jane and

herself, which proved that the former had, from her heart, given

up the acquaintance.

Mrs. Gardiner then rallied her niece on Wickham’s desertion, and

complimented her on bearing it so well.

“But my dear Elizabeth,” she added, “what sort of girl is Miss

King? I should be sorry to think our friend mercenary.”

“Pray, my dear aunt, what is the difference in matrimonial

affairs, between the mercenary and the prudent motive? Where does

discretion end, and avarice begin? Last Christmas you were afraid

of his marrying me, because it would be imprudent; and now,

because he is trying to get a girl with only ten thousand pounds,

you want to find out that he is mercenary.”

“If you will only tell me what sort of girl Miss King is, I shall

know what to think.”

“She is a very good kind of girl, I believe. I know no harm of

her.”

“But he paid her not the smallest attention till her

grandfather’s death made her mistress of this fortune.”

“No—why should he? If it were not allowable for him to gain \_my\_

affections because I had no money, what occasion could there be

for making love to a girl whom he did not care about, and who was

equally poor?”

“But there seems an indelicacy in directing his attentions

towards her so soon after this event.”

“A man in distressed circumstances has not time for all those

elegant decorums which other people may observe. If \_she\_ does

not object to it, why should \_we\_?”

“\_Her\_ not objecting does not justify \_him\_. It only shows her

being deficient in something herself—sense or feeling.”

“Well,” cried Elizabeth, “have it as you choose. \_He\_ shall be

mercenary, and \_she\_ shall be foolish.”

“No, Lizzy, that is what I do \_not\_ choose. I should be sorry,

you know, to think ill of a young man who has lived so long in

Derbyshire.”

“Oh! if that is all, I have a very poor opinion of young men who

live in Derbyshire; and their intimate friends who live in

Hertfordshire are not much better. I am sick of them all. Thank

Heaven! I am going to-morrow where I shall find a man who has not

one agreeable quality, who has neither manner nor sense to

recommend him. Stupid men are the only ones worth knowing, after

all.”

“Take care, Lizzy; that speech savours strongly of

disappointment.”

Before they were separated by the conclusion of the play, she had

the unexpected happiness of an invitation to accompany her uncle

and aunt in a tour of pleasure which they proposed taking in the

summer.

“We have not determined how far it shall carry us,” said Mrs.

Gardiner, “but, perhaps, to the Lakes.”

No scheme could have been more agreeable to Elizabeth, and her

acceptance of the invitation was most ready and grateful. “Oh, my

dear, dear aunt,” she rapturously cried, “what delight! what

felicity! You give me fresh life and vigour. Adieu to

disappointment and spleen. What are young men to rocks and

mountains? Oh! what hours of transport we shall spend! And when

we \_do\_ return, it shall not be like other travellers, without

being able to give one accurate idea of anything. We \_will\_ know

where we have gone—we \_will\_ recollect what we have seen. Lakes,

mountains, and rivers shall not be jumbled together in our

imaginations; nor when we attempt to describe any particular

scene, will we begin quarreling about its relative situation. Let

\_our\_ first effusions be less insupportable than those of the

generality of travellers.”

Chapter 28

Every object in the next day’s journey was new and interesting to

Elizabeth; and her spirits were in a state of enjoyment; for she

had seen her sister looking so well as to banish all fear for her

health, and the prospect of her northern tour was a constant

source of delight.

When they left the high road for the lane to Hunsford, every eye

was in search of the Parsonage, and every turning expected to

bring it in view. The palings of Rosings Park was their boundary

on one side. Elizabeth smiled at the recollection of all that she

had heard of its inhabitants.

At length the Parsonage was discernible. The garden sloping to

the road, the house standing in it, the green pales, and the

laurel hedge, everything declared they were arriving. Mr. Collins

and Charlotte appeared at the door, and the carriage stopped at

the small gate which led by a short gravel walk to the house,

amidst the nods and smiles of the whole party. In a moment they

were all out of the chaise, rejoicing at the sight of each other.

Mrs. Collins welcomed her friend with the liveliest pleasure, and

Elizabeth was more and more satisfied with coming when she found

herself so affectionately received. She saw instantly that her

cousin’s manners were not altered by his marriage; his formal

civility was just what it had been, and he detained her some

minutes at the gate to hear and satisfy his enquiries after all

her family. They were then, with no other delay than his pointing

out the neatness of the entrance, taken into the house; and as

soon as they were in the parlour, he welcomed them a second time,

with ostentatious formality to his humble abode, and punctually

repeated all his wife’s offers of refreshment.

Elizabeth was prepared to see him in his glory; and she could not

help in fancying that in displaying the good proportion of the

room, its aspect and its furniture, he addressed himself

particularly to her, as if wishing to make her feel what she had

lost in refusing him. But though everything seemed neat and

comfortable, she was not able to gratify him by any sigh of

repentance, and rather looked with wonder at her friend that she

could have so cheerful an air with such a companion. When Mr.

Collins said anything of which his wife might reasonably be

ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, she involuntarily

turned her eye on Charlotte. Once or twice she could discern a

faint blush; but in general Charlotte wisely did not hear. After

sitting long enough to admire every article of furniture in the

room, from the sideboard to the fender, to give an account of

their journey, and of all that had happened in London, Mr.

Collins invited them to take a stroll in the garden, which was

large and well laid out, and to the cultivation of which he

attended himself. To work in this garden was one of his most

respectable pleasures; and Elizabeth admired the command of

countenance with which Charlotte talked of the healthfulness of

the exercise, and owned she encouraged it as much as possible.

Here, leading the way through every walk and cross walk, and

scarcely allowing them an interval to utter the praises he asked

for, every view was pointed out with a minuteness which left

beauty entirely behind. He could number the fields in every

direction, and could tell how many trees there were in the most

distant clump. But of all the views which his garden, or which

the country or kingdom could boast, none were to be compared with

the prospect of Rosings, afforded by an opening in the trees that

bordered the park nearly opposite the front of his house. It was

a handsome modern building, well situated on rising ground.

From his garden, Mr. Collins would have led them round his two

meadows; but the ladies, not having shoes to encounter the

remains of a white frost, turned back; and while Sir William

accompanied him, Charlotte took her sister and friend over the

house, extremely well pleased, probably, to have the opportunity

of showing it without her husband’s help. It was rather small,

but well built and convenient; and everything was fitted up and

arranged with a neatness and consistency of which Elizabeth gave

Charlotte all the credit. When Mr. Collins could be forgotten,

there was really an air of great comfort throughout, and by

Charlotte’s evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must

be often forgotten.

She had already learnt that Lady Catherine was still in the

country. It was spoken of again while they were at dinner, when

Mr. Collins joining in, observed:

“Yes, Miss Elizabeth, you will have the honour of seeing Lady

Catherine de Bourgh on the ensuing Sunday at church, and I need

not say you will be delighted with her. She is all affability and

condescension, and I doubt not but you will be honoured with some

portion of her notice when service is over. I have scarcely any

hesitation in saying she will include you and my sister Maria in

every invitation with which she honours us during your stay here.

Her behaviour to my dear Charlotte is charming. We dine at

Rosings twice every week, and are never allowed to walk home. Her

ladyship’s carriage is regularly ordered for us. I \_should\_ say,

one of her ladyship’s carriages, for she has several.”

“Lady Catherine is a very respectable, sensible woman indeed,”

added Charlotte, “and a most attentive neighbour.”

“Very true, my dear, that is exactly what I say. She is the sort

of woman whom one cannot regard with too much deference.”

The evening was spent chiefly in talking over Hertfordshire news,

and telling again what had already been written; and when it

closed, Elizabeth, in the solitude of her chamber, had to

meditate upon Charlotte’s degree of contentment, to understand

her address in guiding, and composure in bearing with, her

husband, and to acknowledge that it was all done very well. She

had also to anticipate how her visit would pass, the quiet tenor

of their usual employments, the vexatious interruptions of Mr.

Collins, and the gaieties of their intercourse with Rosings. A

lively imagination soon settled it all.

About the middle of the next day, as she was in her room getting

ready for a walk, a sudden noise below seemed to speak the whole

house in confusion; and, after listening a moment, she heard

somebody running up stairs in a violent hurry, and calling loudly

after her. She opened the door and met Maria in the landing

place, who, breathless with agitation, cried out—

“Oh, my dear Eliza! pray make haste and come into the

dining-room, for there is such a sight to be seen! I will not

tell you what it is. Make haste, and come down this moment.”

Elizabeth asked questions in vain; Maria would tell her nothing

more, and down they ran into the dining-room, which fronted the

lane, in quest of this wonder; It was two ladies stopping in a

low phaeton at the garden gate.

“And is this all?” cried Elizabeth. “I expected at least that the

pigs were got into the garden, and here is nothing but Lady

Catherine and her daughter.”

“La! my dear,” said Maria, quite shocked at the mistake, “it is

not Lady Catherine. The old lady is Mrs. Jenkinson, who lives

with them; the other is Miss de Bourgh. Only look at her. She is

quite a little creature. Who would have thought that she could be

so thin and small?”

“She is abominably rude to keep Charlotte out of doors in all

this wind. Why does she not come in?”

“Oh, Charlotte says she hardly ever does. It is the greatest of

favours when Miss de Bourgh comes in.”

“I like her appearance,” said Elizabeth, struck with other ideas.

“She looks sickly and cross. Yes, she will do for him very well.

She will make him a very proper wife.”

Mr. Collins and Charlotte were both standing at the gate in

conversation with the ladies; and Sir William, to Elizabeth’s

high diversion, was stationed in the doorway, in earnest

contemplation of the greatness before him, and constantly bowing

whenever Miss de Bourgh looked that way.

At length there was nothing more to be said; the ladies drove on,

and the others returned into the house. Mr. Collins no sooner saw

the two girls than he began to congratulate them on their good

fortune, which Charlotte explained by letting them know that the

whole party was asked to dine at Rosings the next day.

Chapter 29

Mr. Collins’s triumph, in consequence of this invitation, was

complete. The power of displaying the grandeur of his patroness

to his wondering visitors, and of letting them see her civility

towards himself and his wife, was exactly what he had wished for;

and that an opportunity of doing it should be given so soon, was

such an instance of Lady Catherine’s condescension, as he knew

not how to admire enough.

“I confess,” said he, “that I should not have been at all

surprised by her ladyship’s asking us on Sunday to drink tea and

spend the evening at Rosings. I rather expected, from my

knowledge of her affability, that it would happen. But who could

have foreseen such an attention as this? Who could have imagined

that we should receive an invitation to dine there (an

invitation, moreover, including the whole party) so immediately

after your arrival!”

“I am the less surprised at what has happened,” replied Sir

William, “from that knowledge of what the manners of the great

really are, which my situation in life has allowed me to acquire.

About the court, such instances of elegant breeding are not

uncommon.”

Scarcely anything was talked of the whole day or next morning but

their visit to Rosings. Mr. Collins was carefully instructing

them in what they were to expect, that the sight of such rooms,

so many servants, and so splendid a dinner, might not wholly

overpower them.

When the ladies were separating for the toilette, he said to

Elizabeth—

“Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel.

Lady Catherine is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us

which becomes herself and her daughter. I would advise you merely

to put on whatever of your clothes is superior to the rest—there

is no occasion for anything more. Lady Catherine will not think

the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the

distinction of rank preserved.”

While they were dressing, he came two or three times to their

different doors, to recommend their being quick, as Lady

Catherine very much objected to be kept waiting for her dinner.

Such formidable accounts of her ladyship, and her manner of

living, quite frightened Maria Lucas who had been little used to

company, and she looked forward to her introduction at Rosings

with as much apprehension as her father had done to his

presentation at St. James’s.

As the weather was fine, they had a pleasant walk of about half a

mile across the park. Every park has its beauty and its

prospects; and Elizabeth saw much to be pleased with, though she

could not be in such raptures as Mr. Collins expected the scene

to inspire, and was but slightly affected by his enumeration of

the windows in front of the house, and his relation of what the

glazing altogether had originally cost Sir Lewis de Bourgh.

When they ascended the steps to the hall, Maria’s alarm was every

moment increasing, and even Sir William did not look perfectly

calm. Elizabeth’s courage did not fail her. She had heard nothing

of Lady Catherine that spoke her awful from any extraordinary

talents or miraculous virtue, and the mere stateliness of money

or rank she thought she could witness without trepidation.

From the entrance-hall, of which Mr. Collins pointed out, with a

rapturous air, the fine proportion and the finished ornaments,

they followed the servants through an ante-chamber, to the room

where Lady Catherine, her daughter, and Mrs. Jenkinson were

sitting. Her ladyship, with great condescension, arose to receive

them; and as Mrs. Collins had settled it with her husband that

the office of introduction should be hers, it was performed in a

proper manner, without any of those apologies and thanks which he

would have thought necessary.

In spite of having been at St. James’s, Sir William was so

completely awed by the grandeur surrounding him, that he had but

just courage enough to make a very low bow, and take his seat

without saying a word; and his daughter, frightened almost out of

her senses, sat on the edge of her chair, not knowing which way

to look. Elizabeth found herself quite equal to the scene, and

could observe the three ladies before her composedly. Lady

Catherine was a tall, large woman, with strongly-marked features,

which might once have been handsome. Her air was not

conciliating, nor was her manner of receiving them such as to

make her visitors forget their inferior rank. She was not

rendered formidable by silence; but whatever she said was spoken

in so authoritative a tone, as marked her self-importance, and

brought Mr. Wickham immediately to Elizabeth’s mind; and from the

observation of the day altogether, she believed Lady Catherine to

be exactly what he represented.

When, after examining the mother, in whose countenance and

deportment she soon found some resemblance of Mr. Darcy, she

turned her eyes on the daughter, she could almost have joined in

Maria’s astonishment at her being so thin and so small. There was

neither in figure nor face any likeness between the ladies. Miss

de Bourgh was pale and sickly; her features, though not plain,

were insignificant; and she spoke very little, except in a low

voice, to Mrs. Jenkinson, in whose appearance there was nothing

remarkable, and who was entirely engaged in listening to what she

said, and placing a screen in the proper direction before her

eyes.

After sitting a few minutes, they were all sent to one of the

windows to admire the view, Mr. Collins attending them to point

out its beauties, and Lady Catherine kindly informing them that

it was much better worth looking at in the summer.

The dinner was exceedingly handsome, and there were all the

servants and all the articles of plate which Mr. Collins had

promised; and, as he had likewise foretold, he took his seat at

the bottom of the table, by her ladyship’s desire, and looked as

if he felt that life could furnish nothing greater. He carved,

and ate, and praised with delighted alacrity; and every dish was

commended, first by him and then by Sir William, who was now

enough recovered to echo whatever his son-in-law said, in a

manner which Elizabeth wondered Lady Catherine could bear. But

Lady Catherine seemed gratified by their excessive admiration,

and gave most gracious smiles, especially when any dish on the

table proved a novelty to them. The party did not supply much

conversation. Elizabeth was ready to speak whenever there was an

opening, but she was seated between Charlotte and Miss de

Bourgh—the former of whom was engaged in listening to Lady

Catherine, and the latter said not a word to her all dinner-time.

Mrs. Jenkinson was chiefly employed in watching how little Miss

de Bourgh ate, pressing her to try some other dish, and fearing

she was indisposed. Maria thought speaking out of the question,

and the gentlemen did nothing but eat and admire.

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room, there was little to

be done but to hear Lady Catherine talk, which she did without

any intermission till coffee came in, delivering her opinion on

every subject in so decisive a manner, as proved that she was not

used to have her judgement controverted. She enquired into

Charlotte’s domestic concerns familiarly and minutely, gave her a

great deal of advice as to the management of them all; told her

how everything ought to be regulated in so small a family as

hers, and instructed her as to the care of her cows and her

poultry. Elizabeth found that nothing was beneath this great

lady’s attention, which could furnish her with an occasion of

dictating to others. In the intervals of her discourse with Mrs.

Collins, she addressed a variety of questions to Maria and

Elizabeth, but especially to the latter, of whose connections she

knew the least, and who she observed to Mrs. Collins was a very

genteel, pretty kind of girl. She asked her, at different times,

how many sisters she had, whether they were older or younger than

herself, whether any of them were likely to be married, whether

they were handsome, where they had been educated, what carriage

her father kept, and what had been her mother’s maiden name?

Elizabeth felt all the impertinence of her questions but answered

them very composedly. Lady Catherine then observed,

“Your father’s estate is entailed on Mr. Collins, I think. For

your sake,” turning to Charlotte, “I am glad of it; but otherwise

I see no occasion for entailing estates from the female line. It

was not thought necessary in Sir Lewis de Bourgh’s family. Do you

play and sing, Miss Bennet?”

“A little.”

“Oh! then—some time or other we shall be happy to hear you. Our

instrument is a capital one, probably superior to——You shall try

it some day. Do your sisters play and sing?”

“One of them does.”

“Why did not you all learn? You ought all to have learned. The

Miss Webbs all play, and their father has not so good an income

as yours. Do you draw?”

“No, not at all.”

“What, none of you?”

“Not one.”

“That is very strange. But I suppose you had no opportunity. Your

mother should have taken you to town every spring for the benefit

of masters.”

“My mother would have had no objection, but my father hates

London.”

“Has your governess left you?”

“We never had any governess.”

“No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up

at home without a governess! I never heard of such a thing. Your

mother must have been quite a slave to your education.”

Elizabeth could hardly help smiling as she assured her that had

not been the case.

“Then, who taught you? who attended to you? Without a governess,

you must have been neglected.”

“Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us

as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always

encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary.

Those who chose to be idle, certainly might.”

“Aye, no doubt; but that is what a governess will prevent, and if

I had known your mother, I should have advised her most

strenuously to engage one. I always say that nothing is to be

done in education without steady and regular instruction, and

nobody but a governess can give it. It is wonderful how many

families I have been the means of supplying in that way. I am

always glad to get a young person well placed out. Four nieces of

Mrs. Jenkinson are most delightfully situated through my means;

and it was but the other day that I recommended another young

person, who was merely accidentally mentioned to me, and the

family are quite delighted with her. Mrs. Collins, did I tell you

of Lady Metcalf’s calling yesterday to thank me? She finds Miss

Pope a treasure. ‘Lady Catherine,’ said she, ‘you have given me a

treasure.’ Are any of your younger sisters out, Miss Bennet?”

“Yes, ma’am, all.”

“All! What, all five out at once? Very odd! And you only the

second. The younger ones out before the elder ones are married!

Your younger sisters must be very young?”

“Yes, my youngest is not sixteen. Perhaps \_she\_ is full young to

be much in company. But really, ma’am, I think it would be very

hard upon younger sisters, that they should not have their share

of society and amusement, because the elder may not have the

means or inclination to marry early. The last-born has as good a

right to the pleasures of youth as the first. And to be kept back

on \_such\_ a motive! I think it would not be very likely to

promote sisterly affection or delicacy of mind.”

“Upon my word,” said her ladyship, “you give your opinion very

decidedly for so young a person. Pray, what is your age?”

“With three younger sisters grown up,” replied Elizabeth,

smiling, “your ladyship can hardly expect me to own it.”

Lady Catherine seemed quite astonished at not receiving a direct

answer; and Elizabeth suspected herself to be the first creature

who had ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence.

“You cannot be more than twenty, I am sure, therefore you need

not conceal your age.”

“I am not one-and-twenty.”

When the gentlemen had joined them, and tea was over, the

card-tables were placed. Lady Catherine, Sir William, and Mr. and

Mrs. Collins sat down to quadrille; and as Miss de Bourgh chose

to play at cassino, the two girls had the honour of assisting

Mrs. Jenkinson to make up her party. Their table was

superlatively stupid. Scarcely a syllable was uttered that did

not relate to the game, except when Mrs. Jenkinson expressed her

fears of Miss de Bourgh’s being too hot or too cold, or having

too much or too little light. A great deal more passed at the

other table. Lady Catherine was generally speaking—stating the

mistakes of the three others, or relating some anecdote of

herself. Mr. Collins was employed in agreeing to everything her

ladyship said, thanking her for every fish he won, and

apologising if he thought he won too many. Sir William did not

say much. He was storing his memory with anecdotes and noble

names.

When Lady Catherine and her daughter had played as long as they

chose, the tables were broken up, the carriage was offered to

Mrs. Collins, gratefully accepted and immediately ordered. The

party then gathered round the fire to hear Lady Catherine

determine what weather they were to have on the morrow. From

these instructions they were summoned by the arrival of the

coach; and with many speeches of thankfulness on Mr. Collins’s

side and as many bows on Sir William’s they departed. As soon as

they had driven from the door, Elizabeth was called on by her

cousin to give her opinion of all that she had seen at Rosings,

which, for Charlotte’s sake, she made more favourable than it

really was. But her commendation, though costing her some

trouble, could by no means satisfy Mr. Collins, and he was very

soon obliged to take her ladyship’s praise into his own hands.

Chapter 30

Sir William stayed only a week at Hunsford, but his visit was

long enough to convince him of his daughter’s being most

comfortably settled, and of her possessing such a husband and

such a neighbour as were not often met with. While Sir William

was with them, Mr. Collins devoted his morning to driving him out

in his gig, and showing him the country; but when he went away,

the whole family returned to their usual employments, and

Elizabeth was thankful to find that they did not see more of her

cousin by the alteration, for the chief of the time between

breakfast and dinner was now passed by him either at work in the

garden or in reading and writing, and looking out of the window

in his own book-room, which fronted the road. The room in which

the ladies sat was backwards. Elizabeth had at first rather

wondered that Charlotte should not prefer the dining-parlour for

common use; it was a better sized room, and had a more pleasant

aspect; but she soon saw that her friend had an excellent reason

for what she did, for Mr. Collins would undoubtedly have been

much less in his own apartment, had they sat in one equally

lively; and she gave Charlotte credit for the arrangement.

From the drawing-room they could distinguish nothing in the lane,

and were indebted to Mr. Collins for the knowledge of what

carriages went along, and how often especially Miss de Bourgh

drove by in her phaeton, which he never failed coming to inform

them of, though it happened almost every day. She not

unfrequently stopped at the Parsonage, and had a few minutes’

conversation with Charlotte, but was scarcely ever prevailed upon

to get out.

Very few days passed in which Mr. Collins did not walk to

Rosings, and not many in which his wife did not think it

necessary to go likewise; and till Elizabeth recollected that

there might be other family livings to be disposed of, she could

not understand the sacrifice of so many hours. Now and then they

were honoured with a call from her ladyship, and nothing escaped

her observation that was passing in the room during these visits.

She examined into their employments, looked at their work, and

advised them to do it differently; found fault with the

arrangement of the furniture; or detected the housemaid in

negligence; and if she accepted any refreshment, seemed to do it

only for the sake of finding out that Mrs. Collins’s joints of

meat were too large for her family.

Elizabeth soon perceived, that though this great lady was not in

the commission of the peace of the county, she was a most active

magistrate in her own parish, the minutest concerns of which were

carried to her by Mr. Collins; and whenever any of the cottagers

were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented, or too poor, she

sallied forth into the village to settle their differences,

silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty.

The entertainment of dining at Rosings was repeated about twice a

week; and, allowing for the loss of Sir William, and there being

only one card-table in the evening, every such entertainment was

the counterpart of the first. Their other engagements were few,

as the style of living in the neighbourhood in general was beyond

Mr. Collins’s reach. This, however, was no evil to Elizabeth, and

upon the whole she spent her time comfortably enough; there were

half-hours of pleasant conversation with Charlotte, and the

weather was so fine for the time of year that she had often great

enjoyment out of doors. Her favourite walk, and where she

frequently went while the others were calling on Lady Catherine,

was along the open grove which edged that side of the park, where

there was a nice sheltered path, which no one seemed to value but

herself, and where she felt beyond the reach of Lady Catherine’s

curiosity.

In this quiet way, the first fortnight of her visit soon passed

away. Easter was approaching, and the week preceding it was to

bring an addition to the family at Rosings, which in so small a

circle must be important. Elizabeth had heard soon after her

arrival that Mr. Darcy was expected there in the course of a few

weeks, and though there were not many of her acquaintances whom

she did not prefer, his coming would furnish one comparatively

new to look at in their Rosings parties, and she might be amused

in seeing how hopeless Miss Bingley’s designs on him were, by his

behaviour to his cousin, for whom he was evidently destined by

Lady Catherine, who talked of his coming with the greatest

satisfaction, spoke of him in terms of the highest admiration,

and seemed almost angry to find that he had already been

frequently seen by Miss Lucas and herself.

His arrival was soon known at the Parsonage; for Mr. Collins was

walking the whole morning within view of the lodges opening into

Hunsford Lane, in order to have the earliest assurance of it, and

after making his bow as the carriage turned into the Park,

hurried home with the great intelligence. On the following

morning he hastened to Rosings to pay his respects. There were

two nephews of Lady Catherine to require them, for Mr. Darcy had

brought with him a Colonel Fitzwilliam, the younger son of his

uncle Lord ——, and, to the great surprise of all the party, when

Mr. Collins returned, the gentlemen accompanied him. Charlotte

had seen them from her husband’s room, crossing the road, and

immediately running into the other, told the girls what an honour

they might expect, adding:

“I may thank you, Eliza, for this piece of civility. Mr. Darcy

would never have come so soon to wait upon me.”

Elizabeth had scarcely time to disclaim all right to the

compliment, before their approach was announced by the door-bell,

and shortly afterwards the three gentlemen entered the room.

Colonel Fitzwilliam, who led the way, was about thirty, not

handsome, but in person and address most truly the gentleman. Mr.

Darcy looked just as he had been used to look in

Hertfordshire—paid his compliments, with his usual reserve, to

Mrs. Collins, and whatever might be his feelings toward her

friend, met her with every appearance of composure. Elizabeth

merely curtseyed to him without saying a word.

Colonel Fitzwilliam entered into conversation directly with the

readiness and ease of a well-bred man, and talked very

pleasantly; but his cousin, after having addressed a slight

observation on the house and garden to Mrs. Collins, sat for some

time without speaking to anybody. At length, however, his

civility was so far awakened as to enquire of Elizabeth after the

health of her family. She answered him in the usual way, and

after a moment’s pause, added:

“My eldest sister has been in town these three months. Have you

never happened to see her there?”

She was perfectly sensible that he never had; but she wished to

see whether he would betray any consciousness of what had passed

between the Bingleys and Jane, and she thought he looked a little

confused as he answered that he had never been so fortunate as to

meet Miss Bennet. The subject was pursued no farther, and the

gentlemen soon afterwards went away.

Chapter 31

Colonel Fitzwilliam’s manners were very much admired at the

Parsonage, and the ladies all felt that he must add considerably

to the pleasures of their engagements at Rosings. It was some

days, however, before they received any invitation thither—for

while there were visitors in the house, they could not be

necessary; and it was not till Easter-day, almost a week after

the gentlemen’s arrival, that they were honoured by such an

attention, and then they were merely asked on leaving church to

come there in the evening. For the last week they had seen very

little of Lady Catherine or her daughter. Colonel Fitzwilliam had

called at the Parsonage more than once during the time, but Mr.

Darcy they had seen only at church.

The invitation was accepted of course, and at a proper hour they

joined the party in Lady Catherine’s drawing-room. Her ladyship

received them civilly, but it was plain that their company was by

no means so acceptable as when she could get nobody else; and she

was, in fact, almost engrossed by her nephews, speaking to them,

especially to Darcy, much more than to any other person in the

room.

Colonel Fitzwilliam seemed really glad to see them; anything was

a welcome relief to him at Rosings; and Mrs. Collins’s pretty

friend had moreover caught his fancy very much. He now seated

himself by her, and talked so agreeably of Kent and

Hertfordshire, of travelling and staying at home, of new books

and music, that Elizabeth had never been half so well entertained

in that room before; and they conversed with so much spirit and

flow, as to draw the attention of Lady Catherine herself, as well

as of Mr. Darcy. \_His\_ eyes had been soon and repeatedly turned

towards them with a look of curiosity; and that her ladyship,

after a while, shared the feeling, was more openly acknowledged,

for she did not scruple to call out:

“What is that you are saying, Fitzwilliam? What is it you are

talking of? What are you telling Miss Bennet? Let me hear what it

is.”

“We are speaking of music, madam,” said he, when no longer able

to avoid a reply.

“Of music! Then pray speak aloud. It is of all subjects my

delight. I must have my share in the conversation if you are

speaking of music. There are few people in England, I suppose,

who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a better

natural taste. If I had ever learnt, I should have been a great

proficient. And so would Anne, if her health had allowed her to

apply. I am confident that she would have performed delightfully.

How does Georgiana get on, Darcy?”

Mr. Darcy spoke with affectionate praise of his sister’s

proficiency.

“I am very glad to hear such a good account of her,” said Lady

Catherine; “and pray tell her from me, that she cannot expect to

excel if she does not practice a good deal.”

“I assure you, madam,” he replied, “that she does not need such

advice. She practises very constantly.”

“So much the better. It cannot be done too much; and when I next

write to her, I shall charge her not to neglect it on any

account. I often tell young ladies that no excellence in music is

to be acquired without constant practice. I have told Miss Bennet

several times, that she will never play really well unless she

practises more; and though Mrs. Collins has no instrument, she is

very welcome, as I have often told her, to come to Rosings every

day, and play on the pianoforte in Mrs. Jenkinson’s room. She

would be in nobody’s way, you know, in that part of the house.”

Mr. Darcy looked a little ashamed of his aunt’s ill-breeding, and

made no answer.

When coffee was over, Colonel Fitzwilliam reminded Elizabeth of

having promised to play to him; and she sat down directly to the

instrument. He drew a chair near her. Lady Catherine listened to

half a song, and then talked, as before, to her other nephew;

till the latter walked away from her, and making with his usual

deliberation towards the pianoforte stationed himself so as to

command a full view of the fair performer’s countenance.

Elizabeth saw what he was doing, and at the first convenient

pause, turned to him with an arch smile, and said:

“You mean to frighten me, Mr. Darcy, by coming in all this state

to hear me? I will not be alarmed though your sister \_does\_ play

so well. There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to

be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at

every attempt to intimidate me.”

“I shall not say you are mistaken,” he replied, “because you

could not really believe me to entertain any design of alarming

you; and I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance long enough

to know that you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing

opinions which in fact are not your own.”

Elizabeth laughed heartily at this picture of herself, and said

to Colonel Fitzwilliam, “Your cousin will give you a very pretty

notion of me, and teach you not to believe a word I say. I am

particularly unlucky in meeting with a person so able to expose

my real character, in a part of the world where I had hoped to

pass myself off with some degree of credit. Indeed, Mr. Darcy, it

is very ungenerous in you to mention all that you knew to my

disadvantage in Hertfordshire—and, give me leave to say, very

impolitic too—for it is provoking me to retaliate, and such

things may come out as will shock your relations to hear.”

“I am not afraid of you,” said he, smilingly.

“Pray let me hear what you have to accuse him of,” cried Colonel

Fitzwilliam. “I should like to know how he behaves among

strangers.”

“You shall hear then—but prepare yourself for something very

dreadful. The first time of my ever seeing him in Hertfordshire,

you must know, was at a ball—and at this ball, what do you think

he did? He danced only four dances, though gentlemen were scarce;

and, to my certain knowledge, more than one young lady was

sitting down in want of a partner. Mr. Darcy, you cannot deny the

fact.”

“I had not at that time the honour of knowing any lady in the

assembly beyond my own party.”

“True; and nobody can ever be introduced in a ball-room. Well,

Colonel Fitzwilliam, what do I play next? My fingers wait your

orders.”

“Perhaps,” said Darcy, “I should have judged better, had I sought

an introduction; but I am ill-qualified to recommend myself to

strangers.”

“Shall we ask your cousin the reason of this?” said Elizabeth,

still addressing Colonel Fitzwilliam. “Shall we ask him why a man

of sense and education, and who has lived in the world, is ill

qualified to recommend himself to strangers?”

“I can answer your question,” said Fitzwilliam, “without applying

to him. It is because he will not give himself the trouble.”

“I certainly have not the talent which some people possess,” said

Darcy, “of conversing easily with those I have never seen before.

I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested

in their concerns, as I often see done.”

“My fingers,” said Elizabeth, “do not move over this instrument

in the masterly manner which I see so many women’s do. They have

not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same

expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own

fault—because I will not take the trouble of practising. It is

not that I do not believe \_my\_ fingers as capable as any other

woman’s of superior execution.”

Darcy smiled and said, “You are perfectly right. You have

employed your time much better. No one admitted to the privilege

of hearing you can think anything wanting. We neither of us

perform to strangers.”

Here they were interrupted by Lady Catherine, who called out to

know what they were talking of. Elizabeth immediately began

playing again. Lady Catherine approached, and, after listening

for a few minutes, said to Darcy:

“Miss Bennet would not play at all amiss if she practised more,

and could have the advantage of a London master. She has a very

good notion of fingering, though her taste is not equal to

Anne’s. Anne would have been a delightful performer, had her

health allowed her to learn.”

Elizabeth looked at Darcy to see how cordially he assented to his

cousin’s praise; but neither at that moment nor at any other

could she discern any symptom of love; and from the whole of his

behaviour to Miss de Bourgh she derived this comfort for Miss

Bingley, that he might have been just as likely to marry \_her\_,

had she been his relation.

Lady Catherine continued her remarks on Elizabeth’s performance,

mixing with them many instructions on execution and taste.

Elizabeth received them with all the forbearance of civility,

and, at the request of the gentlemen, remained at the instrument

till her ladyship’s carriage was ready to take them all home.

Chapter 32

Elizabeth was sitting by herself the next morning, and writing to

Jane while Mrs. Collins and Maria were gone on business into the

village, when she was startled by a ring at the door, the certain

signal of a visitor. As she had heard no carriage, she thought it

not unlikely to be Lady Catherine, and under that apprehension

was putting away her half-finished letter that she might escape

all impertinent questions, when the door opened, and, to her very

great surprise, Mr. Darcy, and Mr. Darcy only, entered the room.

He seemed astonished too on finding her alone, and apologised for

his intrusion by letting her know that he had understood all the

ladies were to be within.

They then sat down, and when her enquiries after Rosings were

made, seemed in danger of sinking into total silence. It was

absolutely necessary, therefore, to think of something, and in

this emergence recollecting \_when\_ she had seen him last in

Hertfordshire, and feeling curious to know what he would say on

the subject of their hasty departure, she observed:

“How very suddenly you all quitted Netherfield last November, Mr.

Darcy! It must have been a most agreeable surprise to Mr. Bingley

to see you all after him so soon; for, if I recollect right, he

went but the day before. He and his sisters were well, I hope,

when you left London?”

“Perfectly so, I thank you.”

She found that she was to receive no other answer, and, after a

short pause added:

“I think I have understood that Mr. Bingley has not much idea of

ever returning to Netherfield again?”

“I have never heard him say so; but it is probable that he may

spend very little of his time there in the future. He has many

friends, and is at a time of life when friends and engagements

are continually increasing.”

“If he means to be but little at Netherfield, it would be better

for the neighbourhood that he should give up the place entirely,

for then we might possibly get a settled family there. But,

perhaps, Mr. Bingley did not take the house so much for the

convenience of the neighbourhood as for his own, and we must

expect him to keep it or quit it on the same principle.”

“I should not be surprised,” said Darcy, “if he were to give it

up as soon as any eligible purchase offers.”

Elizabeth made no answer. She was afraid of talking longer of his

friend; and, having nothing else to say, was now determined to

leave the trouble of finding a subject to him.

He took the hint, and soon began with, “This seems a very

comfortable house. Lady Catherine, I believe, did a great deal to

it when Mr. Collins first came to Hunsford.”

“I believe she did—and I am sure she could not have bestowed her

kindness on a more grateful object.”

“Mr. Collins appears to be very fortunate in his choice of a

wife.”

“Yes, indeed, his friends may well rejoice in his having met with

one of the very few sensible women who would have accepted him,

or have made him happy if they had. My friend has an excellent

understanding—though I am not certain that I consider her

marrying Mr. Collins as the wisest thing she ever did. She seems

perfectly happy, however, and in a prudential light it is

certainly a very good match for her.”

“It must be very agreeable for her to be settled within so easy a

distance of her own family and friends.”

“An easy distance, do you call it? It is nearly fifty miles.”

“And what is fifty miles of good road? Little more than half a

day’s journey. Yes, I call it a very easy distance.”

“I should never have considered the distance as one of the

\_advantages\_ of the match,” cried Elizabeth. “I should never have

said Mrs. Collins was settled \_near\_ her family.”

“It is a proof of your own attachment to Hertfordshire. Anything

beyond the very neighbourhood of Longbourn, I suppose, would

appear far.”

As he spoke there was a sort of smile which Elizabeth fancied she

understood; he must be supposing her to be thinking of Jane and

Netherfield, and she blushed as she answered:

“I do not mean to say that a woman may not be settled too near

her family. The far and the near must be relative, and depend on

many varying circumstances. Where there is fortune to make the

expenses of travelling unimportant, distance becomes no evil. But

that is not the case \_here\_. Mr. and Mrs. Collins have a

comfortable income, but not such a one as will allow of frequent

journeys—and I am persuaded my friend would not call herself

\_near\_ her family under less than \_half\_ the present distance.”

Mr. Darcy drew his chair a little towards her, and said, “\_You\_

cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment. \_You\_

cannot have been always at Longbourn.”

Elizabeth looked surprised. The gentleman experienced some change

of feeling; he drew back his chair, took a newspaper from the

table, and glancing over it, said, in a colder voice:

“Are you pleased with Kent?”

A short dialogue on the subject of the country ensued, on either

side calm and concise—and soon put an end to by the entrance of

Charlotte and her sister, just returned from her walk. The

\_tête-à-tête\_ surprised them. Mr. Darcy related the mistake which

had occasioned his intruding on Miss Bennet, and after sitting a

few minutes longer without saying much to anybody, went away.

“What can be the meaning of this?” said Charlotte, as soon as he

was gone. “My dear, Eliza, he must be in love with you, or he

would never have called on us in this familiar way.”

But when Elizabeth told of his silence, it did not seem very

likely, even to Charlotte’s wishes, to be the case; and after

various conjectures, they could at last only suppose his visit to

proceed from the difficulty of finding anything to do, which was

the more probable from the time of year. All field sports were

over. Within doors there was Lady Catherine, books, and a

billiard-table, but gentlemen cannot always be within doors; and

in the nearness of the Parsonage, or the pleasantness of the walk

to it, or of the people who lived in it, the two cousins found a

temptation from this period of walking thither almost every day.

They called at various times of the morning, sometimes

separately, sometimes together, and now and then accompanied by

their aunt. It was plain to them all that Colonel Fitzwilliam

came because he had pleasure in their society, a persuasion which

of course recommended him still more; and Elizabeth was reminded

by her own satisfaction in being with him, as well as by his

evident admiration of her, of her former favourite George

Wickham; and though, in comparing them, she saw there was less

captivating softness in Colonel Fitzwilliam’s manners, she

believed he might have the best informed mind.

But why Mr. Darcy came so often to the Parsonage, it was more

difficult to understand. It could not be for society, as he

frequently sat there ten minutes together without opening his

lips; and when he did speak, it seemed the effect of necessity

rather than of choice—a sacrifice to propriety, not a pleasure to

himself. He seldom appeared really animated. Mrs. Collins knew

not what to make of him. Colonel Fitzwilliam’s occasionally

laughing at his stupidity, proved that he was generally

different, which her own knowledge of him could not have told

her; and as she would liked to have believed this change the

effect of love, and the object of that love her friend Eliza, she

set herself seriously to work to find it out. She watched him

whenever they were at Rosings, and whenever he came to Hunsford;

but without much success. He certainly looked at her friend a

great deal, but the expression of that look was disputable. It

was an earnest, steadfast gaze, but she often doubted whether

there were much admiration in it, and sometimes it seemed nothing

but absence of mind.

She had once or twice suggested to Elizabeth the possibility of

his being partial to her, but Elizabeth always laughed at the

idea; and Mrs. Collins did not think it right to press the

subject, from the danger of raising expectations which might only

end in disappointment; for in her opinion it admitted not of a

doubt, that all her friend’s dislike would vanish, if she could

suppose him to be in her power.

In her kind schemes for Elizabeth, she sometimes planned her

marrying Colonel Fitzwilliam. He was beyond comparison the most

pleasant man; he certainly admired her, and his situation in life

was most eligible; but, to counterbalance these advantages, Mr.

Darcy had considerable patronage in the church, and his cousin

could have none at all.

Chapter 33

More than once did Elizabeth, in her ramble within the park,

unexpectedly meet Mr. Darcy. She felt all the perverseness of the

mischance that should bring him where no one else was brought,

and, to prevent its ever happening again, took care to inform him

at first that it was a favourite haunt of hers. How it could

occur a second time, therefore, was very odd! Yet it did, and

even a third. It seemed like wilful ill-nature, or a voluntary

penance, for on these occasions it was not merely a few formal

enquiries and an awkward pause and then away, but he actually

thought it necessary to turn back and walk with her. He never

said a great deal, nor did she give herself the trouble of

talking or of listening much; but it struck her in the course of

their third rencontre that he was asking some odd unconnected

questions—about her pleasure in being at Hunsford, her love of

solitary walks, and her opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Collins’s

happiness; and that in speaking of Rosings and her not perfectly

understanding the house, he seemed to expect that whenever she

came into Kent again she would be staying \_there\_ too. His words

seemed to imply it. Could he have Colonel Fitzwilliam in his

thoughts? She supposed, if he meant anything, he must mean an

allusion to what might arise in that quarter. It distressed her a

little, and she was quite glad to find herself at the gate in the

pales opposite the Parsonage.

She was engaged one day as she walked, in perusing Jane’s last

letter, and dwelling on some passages which proved that Jane had

not written in spirits, when, instead of being again surprised by

Mr. Darcy, she saw on looking up that Colonel Fitzwilliam was

meeting her. Putting away the letter immediately and forcing a

smile, she said:

“I did not know before that you ever walked this way.”

“I have been making the tour of the park,” he replied, “as I

generally do every year, and intend to close it with a call at

the Parsonage. Are you going much farther?”

“No, I should have turned in a moment.”

And accordingly she did turn, and they walked towards the

Parsonage together.

“Do you certainly leave Kent on Saturday?” said she.

“Yes—if Darcy does not put it off again. But I am at his

disposal. He arranges the business just as he pleases.”

“And if not able to please himself in the arrangement, he has at

least pleasure in the great power of choice. I do not know

anybody who seems more to enjoy the power of doing what he likes

than Mr. Darcy.”

“He likes to have his own way very well,” replied Colonel

Fitzwilliam. “But so we all do. It is only that he has better

means of having it than many others, because he is rich, and many

others are poor. I speak feelingly. A younger son, you know, must

be inured to self-denial and dependence.”

“In my opinion, the younger son of an earl can know very little

of either. Now seriously, what have you ever known of self-denial

and dependence? When have you been prevented by want of money

from going wherever you chose, or procuring anything you had a

fancy for?”

“These are home questions—and perhaps I cannot say that I have

experienced many hardships of that nature. But in matters of

greater weight, I may suffer from want of money. Younger sons

cannot marry where they like.”

“Unless where they like women of fortune, which I think they very

often do.”

“Our habits of expense make us too dependent, and there are not

many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some

attention to money.”

“Is this,” thought Elizabeth, “meant for me?” and she coloured at

the idea; but, recovering herself, said in a lively tone, “And

pray, what is the usual price of an earl’s younger son? Unless

the elder brother is very sickly, I suppose you would not ask

above fifty thousand pounds.”

He answered her in the same style, and the subject dropped. To

interrupt a silence which might make him fancy her affected with

what had passed, she soon afterwards said:

“I imagine your cousin brought you down with him chiefly for the

sake of having someone at his disposal. I wonder he does not

marry, to secure a lasting convenience of that kind. But,

perhaps, his sister does as well for the present, and, as she is

under his sole care, he may do what he likes with her.”

“No,” said Colonel Fitzwilliam, “that is an advantage which he

must divide with me. I am joined with him in the guardianship of

Miss Darcy.”

“Are you indeed? And pray what sort of guardians do you make?

Does your charge give you much trouble? Young ladies of her age

are sometimes a little difficult to manage, and if she has the

true Darcy spirit, she may like to have her own way.”

As she spoke she observed him looking at her earnestly; and the

manner in which he immediately asked her why she supposed Miss

Darcy likely to give them any uneasiness, convinced her that she

had somehow or other got pretty near the truth. She directly

replied:

“You need not be frightened. I never heard any harm of her; and I

dare say she is one of the most tractable creatures in the world.

She is a very great favourite with some ladies of my

acquaintance, Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley. I think I have heard

you say that you know them.”

“I know them a little. Their brother is a pleasant gentlemanlike

man—he is a great friend of Darcy’s.”

“Oh! yes,” said Elizabeth drily; “Mr. Darcy is uncommonly kind to

Mr. Bingley, and takes a prodigious deal of care of him.”

“Care of him! Yes, I really believe Darcy \_does\_ take care of him

in those points where he most wants care. From something that he

told me in our journey hither, I have reason to think Bingley

very much indebted to him. But I ought to beg his pardon, for I

have no right to suppose that Bingley was the person meant. It

was all conjecture.”

“What is it you mean?”

“It is a circumstance which Darcy could not wish to be generally

known, because if it were to get round to the lady’s family, it

would be an unpleasant thing.”

“You may depend upon my not mentioning it.”

“And remember that I have not much reason for supposing it to be

Bingley. What he told me was merely this: that he congratulated

himself on having lately saved a friend from the inconveniences

of a most imprudent marriage, but without mentioning names or any

other particulars, and I only suspected it to be Bingley from

believing him the kind of young man to get into a scrape of that

sort, and from knowing them to have been together the whole of

last summer.”

“Did Mr. Darcy give you reasons for this interference?”

“I understood that there were some very strong objections against

the lady.”

“And what arts did he use to separate them?”

“He did not talk to me of his own arts,” said Fitzwilliam,

smiling. “He only told me what I have now told you.”

Elizabeth made no answer, and walked on, her heart swelling with

indignation. After watching her a little, Fitzwilliam asked her

why she was so thoughtful.

“I am thinking of what you have been telling me,” said she. “Your

cousin’s conduct does not suit my feelings. Why was he to be the

judge?”

“You are rather disposed to call his interference officious?”

“I do not see what right Mr. Darcy had to decide on the propriety

of his friend’s inclination, or why, upon his own judgement

alone, he was to determine and direct in what manner his friend

was to be happy. But,” she continued, recollecting herself, “as

we know none of the particulars, it is not fair to condemn him.

It is not to be supposed that there was much affection in the

case.”

“That is not an unnatural surmise,” said Fitzwilliam, “but it is

a lessening of the honour of my cousin’s triumph very sadly.”

This was spoken jestingly; but it appeared to her so just a

picture of Mr. Darcy, that she would not trust herself with an

answer, and therefore, abruptly changing the conversation talked

on indifferent matters until they reached the Parsonage. There,

shut into her own room, as soon as their visitor left them, she

could think without interruption of all that she had heard. It

was not to be supposed that any other people could be meant than

those with whom she was connected. There could not exist in the

world \_two\_ men over whom Mr. Darcy could have such boundless

influence. That he had been concerned in the measures taken to

separate Bingley and Jane she had never doubted; but she had

always attributed to Miss Bingley the principal design and

arrangement of them. If his own vanity, however, did not mislead

him, \_he\_ was the cause, his pride and caprice were the cause, of

all that Jane had suffered, and still continued to suffer. He had

ruined for a while every hope of happiness for the most

affectionate, generous heart in the world; and no one could say

how lasting an evil he might have inflicted.

“There were some very strong objections against the lady,” were

Colonel Fitzwilliam’s words; and those strong objections probably

were, her having one uncle who was a country attorney, and

another who was in business in London.

“To Jane herself,” she exclaimed, “there could be no possibility

of objection; all loveliness and goodness as she is!—her

understanding excellent, her mind improved, and her manners

captivating. Neither could anything be urged against my father,

who, though with some peculiarities, has abilities Mr. Darcy

himself need not disdain, and respectability which he will

probably never reach.” When she thought of her mother, her

confidence gave way a little; but she would not allow that any

objections \_there\_ had material weight with Mr. Darcy, whose

pride, she was convinced, would receive a deeper wound from the

want of importance in his friend’s connections, than from their

want of sense; and she was quite decided, at last, that he had

been partly governed by this worst kind of pride, and partly by

the wish of retaining Mr. Bingley for his sister.

The agitation and tears which the subject occasioned, brought on

a headache; and it grew so much worse towards the evening, that,

added to her unwillingness to see Mr. Darcy, it determined her

not to attend her cousins to Rosings, where they were engaged to

drink tea. Mrs. Collins, seeing that she was really unwell, did

not press her to go and as much as possible prevented her husband

from pressing her; but Mr. Collins could not conceal his

apprehension of Lady Catherine’s being rather displeased by her

staying at home.

Chapter 34

When they were gone, Elizabeth, as if intending to exasperate

herself as much as possible against Mr. Darcy, chose for her

employment the examination of all the letters which Jane had

written to her since her being in Kent. They contained no actual

complaint, nor was there any revival of past occurrences, or any

communication of present suffering. But in all, and in almost

every line of each, there was a want of that cheerfulness which

had been used to characterise her style, and which, proceeding

from the serenity of a mind at ease with itself and kindly

disposed towards everyone, had been scarcely ever clouded.

Elizabeth noticed every sentence conveying the idea of

uneasiness, with an attention which it had hardly received on the

first perusal. Mr. Darcy’s shameful boast of what misery he had

been able to inflict, gave her a keener sense of her sister’s

sufferings. It was some consolation to think that his visit to

Rosings was to end on the day after the next—and, a still

greater, that in less than a fortnight she should herself be with

Jane again, and enabled to contribute to the recovery of her

spirits, by all that affection could do.

She could not think of Darcy’s leaving Kent without remembering

that his cousin was to go with him; but Colonel Fitzwilliam had

made it clear that he had no intentions at all, and agreeable as

he was, she did not mean to be unhappy about him.

While settling this point, she was suddenly roused by the sound

of the door-bell, and her spirits were a little fluttered by the

idea of its being Colonel Fitzwilliam himself, who had once

before called late in the evening, and might now come to enquire

particularly after her. But this idea was soon banished, and her

spirits were very differently affected, when, to her utter

amazement, she saw Mr. Darcy walk into the room. In an hurried

manner he immediately began an enquiry after her health, imputing

his visit to a wish of hearing that she were better. She answered

him with cold civility. He sat down for a few moments, and then

getting up, walked about the room. Elizabeth was surprised, but

said not a word. After a silence of several minutes, he came

towards her in an agitated manner, and thus began:

“In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not

be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire

and love you.”

Elizabeth’s astonishment was beyond expression. She stared,

coloured, doubted, and was silent. This he considered sufficient

encouragement; and the avowal of all that he felt, and had long

felt for her, immediately followed. He spoke well; but there were

feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed; and he was

not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His

sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family

obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on

with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was

wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.

In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be

insensible to the compliment of such a man’s affection, and

though her intentions did not vary for an instant, she was at

first sorry for the pain he was to receive; till, roused to

resentment by his subsequent language, she lost all compassion in

anger. She tried, however, to compose herself to answer him with

patience, when he should have done. He concluded with

representing to her the strength of that attachment which, in

spite of all his endeavours, he had found impossible to conquer;

and with expressing his hope that it would now be rewarded by her

acceptance of his hand. As he said this, she could easily see

that he had no doubt of a favourable answer. He \_spoke\_ of

apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance expressed real

security. Such a circumstance could only exasperate farther, and,

when he ceased, the colour rose into her cheeks, and she said:

“In such cases as this, it is, I believe, the established mode to

express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however

unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation

should be felt, and if I could \_feel\_ gratitude, I would now

thank you. But I cannot—I have never desired your good opinion,

and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry

to have occasioned pain to anyone. It has been most unconsciously

done, however, and I hope will be of short duration. The feelings

which, you tell me, have long prevented the acknowledgment of

your regard, can have little difficulty in overcoming it after

this explanation.”

Mr. Darcy, who was leaning against the mantelpiece with his eyes

fixed on her face, seemed to catch her words with no less

resentment than surprise. His complexion became pale with anger,

and the disturbance of his mind was visible in every feature. He

was struggling for the appearance of composure, and would not

open his lips till he believed himself to have attained it. The

pause was to Elizabeth’s feelings dreadful. At length, with a

voice of forced calmness, he said:

“And this is all the reply which I am to have the honour of

expecting! I might, perhaps, wish to be informed why, with so

little \_endeavour\_ at civility, I am thus rejected. But it is of

small importance.”

“I might as well enquire,” replied she, “why with so evident a

desire of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that

you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even

against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility,

if I \_was\_ uncivil? But I have other provocations. You know I

have. Had not my feelings decided against you—had they been

indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that

any consideration would tempt me to accept the man who has been

the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most

beloved sister?”

As she pronounced these words, Mr. Darcy changed colour; but the

emotion was short, and he listened without attempting to

interrupt her while she continued:

“I have every reason in the world to think ill of you. No motive

can excuse the unjust and ungenerous part you acted \_there\_. You

dare not, you cannot deny, that you have been the principal, if

not the only means of dividing them from each other—of exposing

one to the censure of the world for caprice and instability, and

the other to its derision for disappointed hopes, and involving

them both in misery of the acutest kind.”

She paused, and saw with no slight indignation that he was

listening with an air which proved him wholly unmoved by any

feeling of remorse. He even looked at her with a smile of

affected incredulity.

“Can you deny that you have done it?” she repeated.

With assumed tranquillity he then replied: “I have no wish of

denying that I did everything in my power to separate my friend

from your sister, or that I rejoice in my success. Towards \_him\_

I have been kinder than towards myself.”

Elizabeth disdained the appearance of noticing this civil

reflection, but its meaning did not escape, nor was it likely to

conciliate her.

“But it is not merely this affair,” she continued, “on which my

dislike is founded. Long before it had taken place my opinion of

you was decided. Your character was unfolded in the recital which

I received many months ago from Mr. Wickham. On this subject,

what can you have to say? In what imaginary act of friendship can

you here defend yourself? or under what misrepresentation can you

here impose upon others?”

“You take an eager interest in that gentleman’s concerns,” said

Darcy, in a less tranquil tone, and with a heightened colour.

“Who that knows what his misfortunes have been, can help feeling

an interest in him?”

“His misfortunes!” repeated Darcy contemptuously; “yes, his

misfortunes have been great indeed.”

“And of your infliction,” cried Elizabeth with energy. “You have

reduced him to his present state of poverty—comparative poverty.

You have withheld the advantages which you must know to have been

designed for him. You have deprived the best years of his life of

that independence which was no less his due than his desert. You

have done all this! and yet you can treat the mention of his

misfortune with contempt and ridicule.”

“And this,” cried Darcy, as he walked with quick steps across the

room, “is your opinion of me! This is the estimation in which you

hold me! I thank you for explaining it so fully. My faults,

according to this calculation, are heavy indeed! But perhaps,”

added he, stopping in his walk, and turning towards her, “these

offenses might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt

by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented

my forming any serious design. These bitter accusations might

have been suppressed, had I, with greater policy, concealed my

struggles, and flattered you into the belief of my being impelled

by unqualified, unalloyed inclination; by reason, by reflection,

by everything. But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence. Nor

am I ashamed of the feelings I related. They were natural and

just. Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your

connections?—to congratulate myself on the hope of relations,

whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?”

Elizabeth felt herself growing more angry every moment; yet she

tried to the utmost to speak with composure when she said:

“You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of

your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared

me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you

behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner.”

She saw him start at this, but he said nothing, and she

continued:

“You could not have made the offer of your hand in any possible

way that would have tempted me to accept it.”

Again his astonishment was obvious; and he looked at her with an

expression of mingled incredulity and mortification. She went on:

“From the very beginning—from the first moment, I may almost

say—of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with

the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your

selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form

the groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have

built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month

before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I

could ever be prevailed on to marry.”

“You have said quite enough, madam. I perfectly comprehend your

feelings, and have now only to be ashamed of what my own have

been. Forgive me for having taken up so much of your time, and

accept my best wishes for your health and happiness.”

And with these words he hastily left the room, and Elizabeth

heard him the next moment open the front door and quit the house.

The tumult of her mind, was now painfully great. She knew not how

to support herself, and from actual weakness sat down and cried

for half-an-hour. Her astonishment, as she reflected on what had

passed, was increased by every review of it. That she should

receive an offer of marriage from Mr. Darcy! That he should have

been in love with her for so many months! So much in love as to

wish to marry her in spite of all the objections which had made

him prevent his friend’s marrying her sister, and which must

appear at least with equal force in his own case—was almost

incredible! It was gratifying to have inspired unconsciously so

strong an affection. But his pride, his abominable pride—his

shameless avowal of what he had done with respect to Jane—his

unpardonable assurance in acknowledging, though he could not

justify it, and the unfeeling manner in which he had mentioned

Mr. Wickham, his cruelty towards whom he had not attempted to

deny, soon overcame the pity which the consideration of his

attachment had for a moment excited. She continued in very

agitated reflections till the sound of Lady Catherine’s carriage

made her feel how unequal she was to encounter Charlotte’s

observation, and hurried her away to her room.

Chapter 35

Elizabeth awoke the next morning to the same thoughts and

meditations which had at length closed her eyes. She could not

yet recover from the surprise of what had happened; it was

impossible to think of anything else; and, totally indisposed for

employment, she resolved, soon after breakfast, to indulge

herself in air and exercise. She was proceeding directly to her

favourite walk, when the recollection of Mr. Darcy’s sometimes

coming there stopped her, and instead of entering the park, she

turned up the lane, which led farther from the turnpike-road. The

park paling was still the boundary on one side, and she soon

passed one of the gates into the ground.

After walking two or three times along that part of the lane, she

was tempted, by the pleasantness of the morning, to stop at the

gates and look into the park. The five weeks which she had now

passed in Kent had made a great difference in the country, and

every day was adding to the verdure of the early trees. She was

on the point of continuing her walk, when she caught a glimpse of

a gentleman within the sort of grove which edged the park; he was

moving that way; and, fearful of its being Mr. Darcy, she was

directly retreating. But the person who advanced was now near

enough to see her, and stepping forward with eagerness,

pronounced her name. She had turned away; but on hearing herself

called, though in a voice which proved it to be Mr. Darcy, she

moved again towards the gate. He had by that time reached it

also, and, holding out a letter, which she instinctively took,

said, with a look of haughty composure, “I have been walking in

the grove some time in the hope of meeting you. Will you do me

the honour of reading that letter?” And then, with a slight bow,

turned again into the plantation, and was soon out of sight.

With no expectation of pleasure, but with the strongest

curiosity, Elizabeth opened the letter, and, to her still

increasing wonder, perceived an envelope containing two sheets of

letter-paper, written quite through, in a very close hand. The

envelope itself was likewise full. Pursuing her way along the

lane, she then began it. It was dated from Rosings, at eight

o’clock in the morning, and was as follows:—

“Be not alarmed, madam, on receiving this letter, by the

apprehension of its containing any repetition of those sentiments

or renewal of those offers which were last night so disgusting to

you. I write without any intention of paining you, or humbling

myself, by dwelling on wishes which, for the happiness of both,

cannot be too soon forgotten; and the effort which the formation

and the perusal of this letter must occasion, should have been

spared, had not my character required it to be written and read.

You must, therefore, pardon the freedom with which I demand your

attention; your feelings, I know, will bestow it unwillingly, but

I demand it of your justice.

“Two offenses of a very different nature, and by no means of

equal magnitude, you last night laid to my charge. The first

mentioned was, that, regardless of the sentiments of either, I

had detached Mr. Bingley from your sister, and the other, that I

had, in defiance of various claims, in defiance of honour and

humanity, ruined the immediate prosperity and blasted the

prospects of Mr. Wickham. Wilfully and wantonly to have thrown

off the companion of my youth, the acknowledged favourite of my

father, a young man who had scarcely any other dependence than on

our patronage, and who had been brought up to expect its

exertion, would be a depravity, to which the separation of two

young persons, whose affection could be the growth of only a few

weeks, could bear no comparison. But from the severity of that

blame which was last night so liberally bestowed, respecting each

circumstance, I shall hope to be in the future secured, when the

following account of my actions and their motives has been read.

If, in the explanation of them, which is due to myself, I am

under the necessity of relating feelings which may be offensive

to yours, I can only say that I am sorry. The necessity must be

obeyed, and further apology would be absurd.

“I had not been long in Hertfordshire, before I saw, in common

with others, that Bingley preferred your elder sister to any

other young woman in the country. But it was not till the evening

of the dance at Netherfield that I had any apprehension of his

feeling a serious attachment. I had often seen him in love

before. At that ball, while I had the honour of dancing with you,

I was first made acquainted, by Sir William Lucas’s accidental

information, that Bingley’s attentions to your sister had given

rise to a general expectation of their marriage. He spoke of it

as a certain event, of which the time alone could be undecided.

From that moment I observed my friend’s behaviour attentively;

and I could then perceive that his partiality for Miss Bennet was

beyond what I had ever witnessed in him. Your sister I also

watched. Her look and manners were open, cheerful, and engaging

as ever, but without any symptom of peculiar regard, and I

remained convinced from the evening’s scrutiny, that though she

received his attentions with pleasure, she did not invite them by

any participation of sentiment. If \_you\_ have not been mistaken

here, \_I\_ must have been in error. Your superior knowledge of

your sister must make the latter probable. If it be so, if I have

been misled by such error to inflict pain on her, your resentment

has not been unreasonable. But I shall not scruple to assert,

that the serenity of your sister’s countenance and air was such

as might have given the most acute observer a conviction that,

however amiable her temper, her heart was not likely to be easily

touched. That I was desirous of believing her indifferent is

certain—but I will venture to say that my investigation and

decisions are not usually influenced by my hopes or fears. I did

not believe her to be indifferent because I wished it; I believed

it on impartial conviction, as truly as I wished it in reason. My

objections to the marriage were not merely those which I last

night acknowledged to have required the utmost force of passion

to put aside, in my own case; the want of connection could not be

so great an evil to my friend as to me. But there were other

causes of repugnance; causes which, though still existing, and

existing to an equal degree in both instances, I had myself

endeavoured to forget, because they were not immediately before

me. These causes must be stated, though briefly. The situation of

your mother’s family, though objectionable, was nothing in

comparison to that total want of propriety so frequently, so

almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger

sisters, and occasionally even by your father. Pardon me. It

pains me to offend you. But amidst your concern for the defects

of your nearest relations, and your displeasure at this

representation of them, let it give you consolation to consider

that, to have conducted yourselves so as to avoid any share of

the like censure, is praise no less generally bestowed on you and

your elder sister, than it is honourable to the sense and

disposition of both. I will only say farther that from what

passed that evening, my opinion of all parties was confirmed, and

every inducement heightened which could have led me before, to

preserve my friend from what I esteemed a most unhappy

connection. He left Netherfield for London, on the day following,

as you, I am certain, remember, with the design of soon

returning.

“The part which I acted is now to be explained. His sisters’

uneasiness had been equally excited with my own; our coincidence

of feeling was soon discovered, and, alike sensible that no time

was to be lost in detaching their brother, we shortly resolved on

joining him directly in London. We accordingly went—and there I

readily engaged in the office of pointing out to my friend the

certain evils of such a choice. I described, and enforced them

earnestly. But, however this remonstrance might have staggered or

delayed his determination, I do not suppose that it would

ultimately have prevented the marriage, had it not been seconded

by the assurance that I hesitated not in giving, of your sister’s

indifference. He had before believed her to return his affection

with sincere, if not with equal regard. But Bingley has great

natural modesty, with a stronger dependence on my judgement than

on his own. To convince him, therefore, that he had deceived

himself, was no very difficult point. To persuade him against

returning into Hertfordshire, when that conviction had been

given, was scarcely the work of a moment. I cannot blame myself

for having done thus much. There is but one part of my conduct in

the whole affair on which I do not reflect with satisfaction; it

is that I condescended to adopt the measures of art so far as to

conceal from him your sister’s being in town. I knew it myself,

as it was known to Miss Bingley; but her brother is even yet

ignorant of it. That they might have met without ill consequence

is perhaps probable; but his regard did not appear to me enough

extinguished for him to see her without some danger. Perhaps this

concealment, this disguise was beneath me; it is done, however,

and it was done for the best. On this subject I have nothing more

to say, no other apology to offer. If I have wounded your

sister’s feelings, it was unknowingly done and though the motives

which governed me may to you very naturally appear insufficient,

I have not yet learnt to condemn them.

“With respect to that other, more weighty accusation, of having

injured Mr. Wickham, I can only refute it by laying before you

the whole of his connection with my family. Of what he has

\_particularly\_ accused me I am ignorant; but of the truth of what

I shall relate, I can summon more than one witness of undoubted

veracity.

“Mr. Wickham is the son of a very respectable man, who had for

many years the management of all the Pemberley estates, and whose

good conduct in the discharge of his trust naturally inclined my

father to be of service to him; and on George Wickham, who was

his godson, his kindness was therefore liberally bestowed. My

father supported him at school, and afterwards at Cambridge—most

important assistance, as his own father, always poor from the

extravagance of his wife, would have been unable to give him a

gentleman’s education. My father was not only fond of this young

man’s society, whose manners were always engaging; he had also

the highest opinion of him, and hoping the church would be his

profession, intended to provide for him in it. As for myself, it

is many, many years since I first began to think of him in a very

different manner. The vicious propensities—the want of principle,

which he was careful to guard from the knowledge of his best

friend, could not escape the observation of a young man of nearly

the same age with himself, and who had opportunities of seeing

him in unguarded moments, which Mr. Darcy could not have. Here

again I shall give you pain—to what degree you only can tell. But

whatever may be the sentiments which Mr. Wickham has created, a

suspicion of their nature shall not prevent me from unfolding his

real character—it adds even another motive.

“My excellent father died about five years ago; and his

attachment to Mr. Wickham was to the last so steady, that in his

will he particularly recommended it to me, to promote his

advancement in the best manner that his profession might

allow—and if he took orders, desired that a valuable family

living might be his as soon as it became vacant. There was also a

legacy of one thousand pounds. His own father did not long

survive mine, and within half a year from these events, Mr.

Wickham wrote to inform me that, having finally resolved against

taking orders, he hoped I should not think it unreasonable for

him to expect some more immediate pecuniary advantage, in lieu of

the preferment, by which he could not be benefited. He had some

intention, he added, of studying law, and I must be aware that

the interest of one thousand pounds would be a very insufficient

support therein. I rather wished, than believed him to be

sincere; but, at any rate, was perfectly ready to accede to his

proposal. I knew that Mr. Wickham ought not to be a clergyman;

the business was therefore soon settled—he resigned all claim to

assistance in the church, were it possible that he could ever be

in a situation to receive it, and accepted in return three

thousand pounds. All connection between us seemed now dissolved.

I thought too ill of him to invite him to Pemberley, or admit his

society in town. In town I believe he chiefly lived, but his

studying the law was a mere pretence, and being now free from all

restraint, his life was a life of idleness and dissipation. For

about three years I heard little of him; but on the decease of

the incumbent of the living which had been designed for him, he

applied to me again by letter for the presentation. His

circumstances, he assured me, and I had no difficulty in

believing it, were exceedingly bad. He had found the law a most

unprofitable study, and was now absolutely resolved on being

ordained, if I would present him to the living in question—of

which he trusted there could be little doubt, as he was well

assured that I had no other person to provide for, and I could

not have forgotten my revered father’s intentions. You will

hardly blame me for refusing to comply with this entreaty, or for

resisting every repetition to it. His resentment was in

proportion to the distress of his circumstances—and he was

doubtless as violent in his abuse of me to others as in his

reproaches to myself. After this period every appearance of

acquaintance was dropped. How he lived I know not. But last

summer he was again most painfully obtruded on my notice.

“I must now mention a circumstance which I would wish to forget

myself, and which no obligation less than the present should

induce me to unfold to any human being. Having said thus much, I

feel no doubt of your secrecy. My sister, who is more than ten

years my junior, was left to the guardianship of my mother’s

nephew, Colonel Fitzwilliam, and myself. About a year ago, she

was taken from school, and an establishment formed for her in

London; and last summer she went with the lady who presided over

it, to Ramsgate; and thither also went Mr. Wickham, undoubtedly

by design; for there proved to have been a prior acquaintance

between him and Mrs. Younge, in whose character we were most

unhappily deceived; and by her connivance and aid, he so far

recommended himself to Georgiana, whose affectionate heart

retained a strong impression of his kindness to her as a child,

that she was persuaded to believe herself in love, and to consent

to an elopement. She was then but fifteen, which must be her

excuse; and after stating her imprudence, I am happy to add, that

I owed the knowledge of it to herself. I joined them unexpectedly

a day or two before the intended elopement, and then Georgiana,

unable to support the idea of grieving and offending a brother

whom she almost looked up to as a father, acknowledged the whole

to me. You may imagine what I felt and how I acted. Regard for my

sister’s credit and feelings prevented any public exposure; but I

wrote to Mr. Wickham, who left the place immediately, and Mrs.

Younge was of course removed from her charge. Mr. Wickham’s chief

object was unquestionably my sister’s fortune, which is thirty

thousand pounds; but I cannot help supposing that the hope of

revenging himself on me was a strong inducement. His revenge

would have been complete indeed.

“This, madam, is a faithful narrative of every event in which we

have been concerned together; and if you do not absolutely reject

it as false, you will, I hope, acquit me henceforth of cruelty

towards Mr. Wickham. I know not in what manner, under what form

of falsehood he had imposed on you; but his success is not

perhaps to be wondered at. Ignorant as you previously were of

everything concerning either, detection could not be in your

power, and suspicion certainly not in your inclination.

“You may possibly wonder why all this was not told you last

night; but I was not then master enough of myself to know what

could or ought to be revealed. For the truth of everything here

related, I can appeal more particularly to the testimony of

Colonel Fitzwilliam, who, from our near relationship and constant

intimacy, and, still more, as one of the executors of my father’s

will, has been unavoidably acquainted with every particular of

these transactions. If your abhorrence of \_me\_ should make \_my\_

assertions valueless, you cannot be prevented by the same cause

from confiding in my cousin; and that there may be the

possibility of consulting him, I shall endeavour to find some

opportunity of putting this letter in your hands in the course of

the morning. I will only add, God bless you.

“FITZWILLIAM DARCY”

Chapter 36

If Elizabeth, when Mr. Darcy gave her the letter, did not expect

it to contain a renewal of his offers, she had formed no

expectation at all of its contents. But such as they were, it may

well be supposed how eagerly she went through them, and what a

contrariety of emotion they excited. Her feelings as she read

were scarcely to be defined. With amazement did she first

understand that he believed any apology to be in his power; and

steadfastly was she persuaded, that he could have no explanation

to give, which a just sense of shame would not conceal. With a

strong prejudice against everything he might say, she began his

account of what had happened at Netherfield. She read with an

eagerness which hardly left her power of comprehension, and from

impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was

incapable of attending to the sense of the one before her eyes.

His belief of her sister’s insensibility she instantly resolved

to be false; and his account of the real, the worst objections to

the match, made her too angry to have any wish of doing him

justice. He expressed no regret for what he had done which

satisfied her; his style was not penitent, but haughty. It was

all pride and insolence.

But when this subject was succeeded by his account of Mr.

Wickham—when she read with somewhat clearer attention a relation

of events which, if true, must overthrow every cherished opinion

of his worth, and which bore so alarming an affinity to his own

history of himself—her feelings were yet more acutely painful and

more difficult of definition. Astonishment, apprehension, and

even horror, oppressed her. She wished to discredit it entirely,

repeatedly exclaiming, “This must be false! This cannot be! This

must be the grossest falsehood!”—and when she had gone through

the whole letter, though scarcely knowing anything of the last

page or two, put it hastily away, protesting that she would not

regard it, that she would never look in it again.

In this perturbed state of mind, with thoughts that could rest on

nothing, she walked on; but it would not do; in half a minute the

letter was unfolded again, and collecting herself as well as she

could, she again began the mortifying perusal of all that related

to Wickham, and commanded herself so far as to examine the

meaning of every sentence. The account of his connection with the

Pemberley family was exactly what he had related himself; and the

kindness of the late Mr. Darcy, though she had not before known

its extent, agreed equally well with his own words. So far each

recital confirmed the other; but when she came to the will, the

difference was great. What Wickham had said of the living was

fresh in her memory, and as she recalled his very words, it was

impossible not to feel that there was gross duplicity on one side

or the other; and, for a few moments, she flattered herself that

her wishes did not err. But when she read and re-read with the

closest attention, the particulars immediately following of

Wickham’s resigning all pretensions to the living, of his

receiving in lieu so considerable a sum as three thousand pounds,

again was she forced to hesitate. She put down the letter,

weighed every circumstance with what she meant to be

impartiality—deliberated on the probability of each statement—but

with little success. On both sides it was only assertion. Again

she read on; but every line proved more clearly that the affair,

which she had believed it impossible that any contrivance could

so represent as to render Mr. Darcy’s conduct in it less than

infamous, was capable of a turn which must make him entirely

blameless throughout the whole.

The extravagance and general profligacy which he scrupled not to

lay at Mr. Wickham’s charge, exceedingly shocked her; the more

so, as she could bring no proof of its injustice. She had never

heard of him before his entrance into the ——shire Militia, in

which he had engaged at the persuasion of the young man who, on

meeting him accidentally in town, had there renewed a slight

acquaintance. Of his former way of life nothing had been known in

Hertfordshire but what he told himself. As to his real character,

had information been in her power, she had never felt a wish of

enquiring. His countenance, voice, and manner had established him

at once in the possession of every virtue. She tried to recollect

some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity

or benevolence, that might rescue him from the attacks of Mr.

Darcy; or at least, by the predominance of virtue, atone for

those casual errors under which she would endeavour to class what

Mr. Darcy had described as the idleness and vice of many years’

continuance. But no such recollection befriended her. She could

see him instantly before her, in every charm of air and address;

but she could remember no more substantial good than the general

approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which his social

powers had gained him in the mess. After pausing on this point a

considerable while, she once more continued to read. But, alas!

the story which followed, of his designs on Miss Darcy, received

some confirmation from what had passed between Colonel

Fitzwilliam and herself only the morning before; and at last she

was referred for the truth of every particular to Colonel

Fitzwilliam himself—from whom she had previously received the

information of his near concern in all his cousin’s affairs, and

whose character she had no reason to question. At one time she

had almost resolved on applying to him, but the idea was checked

by the awkwardness of the application, and at length wholly

banished by the conviction that Mr. Darcy would never have

hazarded such a proposal, if he had not been well assured of his

cousin’s corroboration.

She perfectly remembered everything that had passed in

conversation between Wickham and herself, in their first evening

at Mr. Phillips’s. Many of his expressions were still fresh in

her memory. She was \_now\_ struck with the impropriety of such

communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped her

before. She saw the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he

had done, and the inconsistency of his professions with his

conduct. She remembered that he had boasted of having no fear of

seeing Mr. Darcy—that Mr. Darcy might leave the country, but that

\_he\_ should stand his ground; yet he had avoided the Netherfield

ball the very next week. She remembered also that, till the

Netherfield family had quitted the country, he had told his story

to no one but herself; but that after their removal it had been

everywhere discussed; that he had then no reserves, no scruples

in sinking Mr. Darcy’s character, though he had assured her that

respect for the father would always prevent his exposing the son.

How differently did everything now appear in which he was

concerned! His attentions to Miss King were now the consequence

of views solely and hatefully mercenary; and the mediocrity of

her fortune proved no longer the moderation of his wishes, but

his eagerness to grasp at anything. His behaviour to herself

could now have had no tolerable motive; he had either been

deceived with regard to her fortune, or had been gratifying his

vanity by encouraging the preference which she believed she had

most incautiously shown. Every lingering struggle in his favour

grew fainter and fainter; and in farther justification of Mr.

Darcy, she could not but allow that Mr. Bingley, when questioned

by Jane, had long ago asserted his blamelessness in the affair;

that proud and repulsive as were his manners, she had never, in

the whole course of their acquaintance—an acquaintance which had

latterly brought them much together, and given her a sort of

intimacy with his ways—seen anything that betrayed him to be

unprincipled or unjust—anything that spoke him of irreligious or

immoral habits; that among his own connections he was esteemed

and valued—that even Wickham had allowed him merit as a brother,

and that she had often heard him speak so affectionately of his

sister as to prove him capable of some amiable feeling; that had

his actions been what Mr. Wickham represented them, so gross a

violation of everything right could hardly have been concealed

from the world; and that friendship between a person capable of

it, and such an amiable man as Mr. Bingley, was incomprehensible.

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor

Wickham could she think without feeling she had been blind,

partial, prejudiced, absurd.

“How despicably I have acted!” she cried; “I, who have prided

myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my

abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my

sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable mistrust!

How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation!

Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind!

But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the

preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on

the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted

prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either

were concerned. Till this moment I never knew myself.”

From herself to Jane—from Jane to Bingley, her thoughts were in a

line which soon brought to her recollection that Mr. Darcy’s

explanation \_there\_ had appeared very insufficient, and she read

it again. Widely different was the effect of a second perusal.

How could she deny that credit to his assertions in one instance,

which she had been obliged to give in the other? He declared

himself to be totally unsuspicious of her sister’s attachment;

and she could not help remembering what Charlotte’s opinion had

always been. Neither could she deny the justice of his

description of Jane. She felt that Jane’s feelings, though

fervent, were little displayed, and that there was a constant

complacency in her air and manner not often united with great

sensibility.

When she came to that part of the letter in which her family were

mentioned in terms of such mortifying, yet merited reproach, her

sense of shame was severe. The justice of the charge struck her

too forcibly for denial, and the circumstances to which he

particularly alluded as having passed at the Netherfield ball,

and as confirming all his first disapprobation, could not have

made a stronger impression on his mind than on hers.

The compliment to herself and her sister was not unfelt. It

soothed, but it could not console her for the contempt which had

thus been self-attracted by the rest of her family; and as she

considered that Jane’s disappointment had in fact been the work

of her nearest relations, and reflected how materially the credit

of both must be hurt by such impropriety of conduct, she felt

depressed beyond anything she had ever known before.

After wandering along the lane for two hours, giving way to every

variety of thought—re-considering events, determining

probabilities, and reconciling herself, as well as she could, to

a change so sudden and so important, fatigue, and a recollection

of her long absence, made her at length return home; and she

entered the house with the wish of appearing cheerful as usual,

and the resolution of repressing such reflections as must make

her unfit for conversation.

She was immediately told that the two gentlemen from Rosings had

each called during her absence; Mr. Darcy, only for a few

minutes, to take leave—but that Colonel Fitzwilliam had been

sitting with them at least an hour, hoping for her return, and

almost resolving to walk after her till she could be found.

Elizabeth could but just \_affect\_ concern in missing him; she

really rejoiced at it. Colonel Fitzwilliam was no longer an

object; she could think only of her letter.

Chapter 37

The two gentlemen left Rosings the next morning, and Mr. Collins

having been in waiting near the lodges, to make them his parting

obeisance, was able to bring home the pleasing intelligence, of

their appearing in very good health, and in as tolerable spirits

as could be expected, after the melancholy scene so lately gone

through at Rosings. To Rosings he then hastened, to console Lady

Catherine and her daughter; and on his return brought back, with

great satisfaction, a message from her ladyship, importing that

she felt herself so dull as to make her very desirous of having

them all to dine with her.

Elizabeth could not see Lady Catherine without recollecting that,

had she chosen it, she might by this time have been presented to

her as her future niece; nor could she think, without a smile, of

what her ladyship’s indignation would have been. “What would she

have said? how would she have behaved?” were questions with which

she amused herself.

Their first subject was the diminution of the Rosings party. “I

assure you, I feel it exceedingly,” said Lady Catherine; “I

believe no one feels the loss of friends so much as I do. But I

am particularly attached to these young men, and know them to be

so much attached to me! They were excessively sorry to go! But so

they always are. The dear Colonel rallied his spirits tolerably

till just at last; but Darcy seemed to feel it most acutely,

more, I think, than last year. His attachment to Rosings

certainly increases.”

Mr. Collins had a compliment, and an allusion to throw in here,

which were kindly smiled on by the mother and daughter.

Lady Catherine observed, after dinner, that Miss Bennet seemed

out of spirits, and immediately accounting for it herself, by

supposing that she did not like to go home again so soon, she

added:

“But if that is the case, you must write to your mother and beg

that you may stay a little longer. Mrs. Collins will be very glad

of your company, I am sure.”

“I am much obliged to your ladyship for your kind invitation,”

replied Elizabeth, “but it is not in my power to accept it. I

must be in town next Saturday.”

“Why, at that rate, you will have been here only six weeks. I

expected you to stay two months. I told Mrs. Collins so before

you came. There can be no occasion for your going so soon. Mrs.

Bennet could certainly spare you for another fortnight.”

“But my father cannot. He wrote last week to hurry my return.”

“Oh! your father of course may spare you, if your mother can.

Daughters are never of so much consequence to a father. And if

you will stay another \_month\_ complete, it will be in my power to

take one of you as far as London, for I am going there early in

June, for a week; and as Dawson does not object to the

barouche-box, there will be very good room for one of you—and

indeed, if the weather should happen to be cool, I should not

object to taking you both, as you are neither of you large.”

“You are all kindness, madam; but I believe we must abide by our

original plan.”

Lady Catherine seemed resigned. “Mrs. Collins, you must send a

servant with them. You know I always speak my mind, and I cannot

bear the idea of two young women travelling post by themselves.

It is highly improper. You must contrive to send somebody. I have

the greatest dislike in the world to that sort of thing. Young

women should always be properly guarded and attended, according

to their situation in life. When my niece Georgiana went to

Ramsgate last summer, I made a point of her having two

men-servants go with her. Miss Darcy, the daughter of Mr. Darcy,

of Pemberley, and Lady Anne, could not have appeared with

propriety in a different manner. I am excessively attentive to

all those things. You must send John with the young ladies, Mrs.

Collins. I am glad it occurred to me to mention it; for it would

really be discreditable to \_you\_ to let them go alone.”

“My uncle is to send a servant for us.”

“Oh! Your uncle! He keeps a man-servant, does he? I am very glad

you have somebody who thinks of these things. Where shall you

change horses? Oh! Bromley, of course. If you mention my name at

the Bell, you will be attended to.”

Lady Catherine had many other questions to ask respecting their

journey, and as she did not answer them all herself, attention

was necessary, which Elizabeth believed to be lucky for her; or,

with a mind so occupied, she might have forgotten where she was.

Reflection must be reserved for solitary hours; whenever she was

alone, she gave way to it as the greatest relief; and not a day

went by without a solitary walk, in which she might indulge in

all the delight of unpleasant recollections.

Mr. Darcy’s letter she was in a fair way of soon knowing by

heart. She studied every sentence; and her feelings towards its

writer were at times widely different. When she remembered the

style of his address, she was still full of indignation; but when

she considered how unjustly she had condemned and upbraided him,

her anger was turned against herself; and his disappointed

feelings became the object of compassion. His attachment excited

gratitude, his general character respect; but she could not

approve him; nor could she for a moment repent her refusal, or

feel the slightest inclination ever to see him again. In her own

past behaviour, there was a constant source of vexation and

regret; and in the unhappy defects of her family, a subject of

yet heavier chagrin. They were hopeless of remedy. Her father,

contented with laughing at them, would never exert himself to

restrain the wild giddiness of his youngest daughters; and her

mother, with manners so far from right herself, was entirely

insensible of the evil. Elizabeth had frequently united with Jane

in an endeavour to check the imprudence of Catherine and Lydia;

but while they were supported by their mother’s indulgence, what

chance could there be of improvement? Catherine, weak-spirited,

irritable, and completely under Lydia’s guidance, had been always

affronted by their advice; and Lydia, self-willed and careless,

would scarcely give them a hearing. They were ignorant, idle, and

vain. While there was an officer in Meryton, they would flirt

with him; and while Meryton was within a walk of Longbourn, they

would be going there forever.

Anxiety on Jane’s behalf was another prevailing concern; and Mr.

Darcy’s explanation, by restoring Bingley to all her former good

opinion, heightened the sense of what Jane had lost. His

affection was proved to have been sincere, and his conduct

cleared of all blame, unless any could attach to the implicitness

of his confidence in his friend. How grievous then was the

thought that, of a situation so desirable in every respect, so

replete with advantage, so promising for happiness, Jane had been

deprived, by the folly and indecorum of her own family!

When to these recollections was added the development of

Wickham’s character, it may be easily believed that the happy

spirits which had seldom been depressed before, were now so much

affected as to make it almost impossible for her to appear

tolerably cheerful.

Their engagements at Rosings were as frequent during the last

week of her stay as they had been at first. The very last evening

was spent there; and her ladyship again enquired minutely into

the particulars of their journey, gave them directions as to the

best method of packing, and was so urgent on the necessity of

placing gowns in the only right way, that Maria thought herself

obliged, on her return, to undo all the work of the morning, and

pack her trunk afresh.

When they parted, Lady Catherine, with great condescension,

wished them a good journey, and invited them to come to Hunsford

again next year; and Miss de Bourgh exerted herself so far as to

curtsey and hold out her hand to both.

Chapter 38

On Saturday morning Elizabeth and Mr. Collins met for breakfast a

few minutes before the others appeared; and he took the

opportunity of paying the parting civilities which he deemed

indispensably necessary.

“I know not, Miss Elizabeth,” said he, “whether Mrs. Collins has

yet expressed her sense of your kindness in coming to us; but I

am very certain you will not leave the house without receiving

her thanks for it. The favour of your company has been much felt,

I assure you. We know how little there is to tempt anyone to our

humble abode. Our plain manner of living, our small rooms and few

domestics, and the little we see of the world, must make Hunsford

extremely dull to a young lady like yourself; but I hope you will

believe us grateful for the condescension, and that we have done

everything in our power to prevent your spending your time

unpleasantly.”

Elizabeth was eager with her thanks and assurances of happiness.

She had spent six weeks with great enjoyment; and the pleasure of

being with Charlotte, and the kind attentions she had received,

must make \_her\_ feel the obliged. Mr. Collins was gratified, and

with a more smiling solemnity replied:

“It gives me great pleasure to hear that you have passed your

time not disagreeably. We have certainly done our best; and most

fortunately having it in our power to introduce you to very

superior society, and, from our connection with Rosings, the

frequent means of varying the humble home scene, I think we may

flatter ourselves that your Hunsford visit cannot have been

entirely irksome. Our situation with regard to Lady Catherine’s

family is indeed the sort of extraordinary advantage and blessing

which few can boast. You see on what a footing we are. You see

how continually we are engaged there. In truth I must acknowledge

that, with all the disadvantages of this humble parsonage, I

should not think anyone abiding in it an object of compassion,

while they are sharers of our intimacy at Rosings.”

Words were insufficient for the elevation of his feelings; and he

was obliged to walk about the room, while Elizabeth tried to

unite civility and truth in a few short sentences.

“You may, in fact, carry a very favourable report of us into

Hertfordshire, my dear cousin. I flatter myself at least that you

will be able to do so. Lady Catherine’s great attentions to Mrs.

Collins you have been a daily witness of; and altogether I trust

it does not appear that your friend has drawn an unfortunate—but

on this point it will be as well to be silent. Only let me assure

you, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that I can from my heart most

cordially wish you equal felicity in marriage. My dear Charlotte

and I have but one mind and one way of thinking. There is in

everything a most remarkable resemblance of character and ideas

between us. We seem to have been designed for each other.”

Elizabeth could safely say that it was a great happiness where

that was the case, and with equal sincerity could add, that she

firmly believed and rejoiced in his domestic comforts. She was

not sorry, however, to have the recital of them interrupted by

the lady from whom they sprang. Poor Charlotte! it was melancholy

to leave her to such society! But she had chosen it with her eyes

open; and though evidently regretting that her visitors were to

go, she did not seem to ask for compassion. Her home and her

housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent

concerns, had not yet lost their charms.

At length the chaise arrived, the trunks were fastened on, the

parcels placed within, and it was pronounced to be ready. After

an affectionate parting between the friends, Elizabeth was

attended to the carriage by Mr. Collins, and as they walked down

the garden he was commissioning her with his best respects to all

her family, not forgetting his thanks for the kindness he had

received at Longbourn in the winter, and his compliments to Mr.

and Mrs. Gardiner, though unknown. He then handed her in, Maria

followed, and the door was on the point of being closed, when he

suddenly reminded them, with some consternation, that they had

hitherto forgotten to leave any message for the ladies at

Rosings.

“But,” he added, “you will of course wish to have your humble

respects delivered to them, with your grateful thanks for their

kindness to you while you have been here.”

Elizabeth made no objection; the door was then allowed to be

shut, and the carriage drove off.

“Good gracious!” cried Maria, after a few minutes’ silence, “it

seems but a day or two since we first came! and yet how many

things have happened!”

“A great many indeed,” said her companion with a sigh.

“We have dined nine times at Rosings, besides drinking tea there

twice! How much I shall have to tell!”

Elizabeth added privately, “And how much I shall have to

conceal!”

Their journey was performed without much conversation, or any

alarm; and within four hours of their leaving Hunsford they

reached Mr. Gardiner’s house, where they were to remain a few

days.

Jane looked well, and Elizabeth had little opportunity of

studying her spirits, amidst the various engagements which the

kindness of her aunt had reserved for them. But Jane was to go

home with her, and at Longbourn there would be leisure enough for

observation.

It was not without an effort, meanwhile, that she could wait even

for Longbourn, before she told her sister of Mr. Darcy’s

proposals. To know that she had the power of revealing what would

so exceedingly astonish Jane, and must, at the same time, so

highly gratify whatever of her own vanity she had not yet been

able to reason away, was such a temptation to openness as nothing

could have conquered but the state of indecision in which she

remained as to the extent of what she should communicate; and her

fear, if she once entered on the subject, of being hurried into

repeating something of Bingley which might only grieve her sister

further.

Chapter 39

It was the second week in May, in which the three young ladies

set out together from Gracechurch Street for the town of ——, in

Hertfordshire; and, as they drew near the appointed inn where Mr.

Bennet’s carriage was to meet them, they quickly perceived, in

token of the coachman’s punctuality, both Kitty and Lydia looking

out of a dining-room up stairs. These two girls had been above an

hour in the place, happily employed in visiting an opposite

milliner, watching the sentinel on guard, and dressing a salad

and cucumber.

After welcoming their sisters, they triumphantly displayed a

table set out with such cold meat as an inn larder usually

affords, exclaiming, “Is not this nice? Is not this an agreeable

surprise?”

“And we mean to treat you all,” added Lydia, “but you must lend

us the money, for we have just spent ours at the shop out there.”

Then, showing her purchases—“Look here, I have bought this

bonnet. I do not think it is very pretty; but I thought I might

as well buy it as not. I shall pull it to pieces as soon as I get

home, and see if I can make it up any better.”

And when her sisters abused it as ugly, she added, with perfect

unconcern, “Oh! but there were two or three much uglier in the

shop; and when I have bought some prettier-coloured satin to trim

it with fresh, I think it will be very tolerable. Besides, it

will not much signify what one wears this summer, after the

——shire have left Meryton, and they are going in a fortnight.”

“Are they indeed!” cried Elizabeth, with the greatest

satisfaction.

“They are going to be encamped near Brighton; and I do so want

papa to take us all there for the summer! It would be such a

delicious scheme; and I dare say would hardly cost anything at

all. Mamma would like to go too of all things! Only think what a

miserable summer else we shall have!”

“Yes,” thought Elizabeth, “\_that\_ would be a delightful scheme

indeed, and completely do for us at once. Good Heaven! Brighton,

and a whole campful of soldiers, to us, who have been overset

already by one poor regiment of militia, and the monthly balls of

Meryton!”

“Now I have got some news for you,” said Lydia, as they sat down

at table. “What do you think? It is excellent news—capital

news—and about a certain person we all like!”

Jane and Elizabeth looked at each other, and the waiter was told

he need not stay. Lydia laughed, and said:

“Aye, that is just like your formality and discretion. You

thought the waiter must not hear, as if he cared! I dare say he

often hears worse things said than I am going to say. But he is

an ugly fellow! I am glad he is gone. I never saw such a long

chin in my life. Well, but now for my news; it is about dear

Wickham; too good for the waiter, is it not? There is no danger

of Wickham’s marrying Mary King. There’s for you! She is gone

down to her uncle at Liverpool: gone to stay. Wickham is safe.”

“And Mary King is safe!” added Elizabeth; “safe from a connection

imprudent as to fortune.”

“She is a great fool for going away, if she liked him.”

“But I hope there is no strong attachment on either side,” said

Jane.

“I am sure there is not on \_his\_. I will answer for it, he never

cared three straws about her—who \_could\_ about such a nasty

little freckled thing?”

Elizabeth was shocked to think that, however incapable of such

coarseness of \_expression\_ herself, the coarseness of the

\_sentiment\_ was little other than her own breast had harboured

and fancied liberal!

As soon as all had ate, and the elder ones paid, the carriage was

ordered; and after some contrivance, the whole party, with all

their boxes, work-bags, and parcels, and the unwelcome addition

of Kitty’s and Lydia’s purchases, were seated in it.

“How nicely we are all crammed in,” cried Lydia. “I am glad I

bought my bonnet, if it is only for the fun of having another

bandbox! Well, now let us be quite comfortable and snug, and talk

and laugh all the way home. And in the first place, let us hear

what has happened to you all since you went away. Have you seen

any pleasant men? Have you had any flirting? I was in great hopes

that one of you would have got a husband before you came back.

Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost

three-and-twenty! Lord, how ashamed I should be of not being

married before three-and-twenty! My aunt Phillips wants you so to

get husbands, you can’t think. She says Lizzy had better have

taken Mr. Collins; but \_I\_ do not think there would have been any

fun in it. Lord! how I should like to be married before any of

you; and then I would \_chaperon\_ you about to all the balls. Dear

me! we had such a good piece of fun the other day at Colonel

Forster’s. Kitty and me were to spend the day there, and Mrs.

Forster promised to have a little dance in the evening; (by the

bye, Mrs. Forster and me are \_such\_ friends!) and so she asked

the two Harringtons to come, but Harriet was ill, and so Pen was

forced to come by herself; and then, what do you think we did? We

dressed up Chamberlayne in woman’s clothes on purpose to pass for

a lady, only think what fun! Not a soul knew of it, but Colonel

and Mrs. Forster, and Kitty and me, except my aunt, for we were

forced to borrow one of her gowns; and you cannot imagine how

well he looked! When Denny, and Wickham, and Pratt, and two or

three more of the men came in, they did not know him in the

least. Lord! how I laughed! and so did Mrs. Forster. I thought I

should have died. And \_that\_ made the men suspect something, and

then they soon found out what was the matter.”

With such kinds of histories of their parties and good jokes, did

Lydia, assisted by Kitty’s hints and additions, endeavour to

amuse her companions all the way to Longbourn. Elizabeth listened

as little as she could, but there was no escaping the frequent

mention of Wickham’s name.

Their reception at home was most kind. Mrs. Bennet rejoiced to

see Jane in undiminished beauty; and more than once during dinner

did Mr. Bennet say voluntarily to Elizabeth:

“I am glad you are come back, Lizzy.”

Their party in the dining-room was large, for almost all the

Lucases came to meet Maria and hear the news; and various were

the subjects that occupied them: Lady Lucas was enquiring of

Maria, after the welfare and poultry of her eldest daughter; Mrs.

Bennet was doubly engaged, on one hand collecting an account of

the present fashions from Jane, who sat some way below her, and,

on the other, retailing them all to the younger Lucases; and

Lydia, in a voice rather louder than any other person’s, was

enumerating the various pleasures of the morning to anybody who

would hear her.

“Oh! Mary,” said she, “I wish you had gone with us, for we had

such fun! As we went along, Kitty and I drew up the blinds, and

pretended there was nobody in the coach; and I should have gone

so all the way, if Kitty had not been sick; and when we got to

the George, I do think we behaved very handsomely, for we treated

the other three with the nicest cold luncheon in the world, and

if you would have gone, we would have treated you too. And then

when we came away it was such fun! I thought we never should have

got into the coach. I was ready to die of laughter. And then we

were so merry all the way home! we talked and laughed so loud,

that anybody might have heard us ten miles off!”

To this Mary very gravely replied, “Far be it from me, my dear

sister, to depreciate such pleasures! They would doubtless be

congenial with the generality of female minds. But I confess they

would have no charms for \_me\_—I should infinitely prefer a book.”

But of this answer Lydia heard not a word. She seldom listened to

anybody for more than half a minute, and never attended to Mary

at all.

In the afternoon Lydia was urgent with the rest of the girls to

walk to Meryton, and to see how everybody went on; but Elizabeth

steadily opposed the scheme. It should not be said that the Miss

Bennets could not be at home half a day before they were in

pursuit of the officers. There was another reason too for her

opposition. She dreaded seeing Mr. Wickham again, and was

resolved to avoid it as long as possible. The comfort to \_her\_ of

the regiment’s approaching removal was indeed beyond expression.

In a fortnight they were to go—and once gone, she hoped there

could be nothing more to plague her on his account.

She had not been many hours at home before she found that the

Brighton scheme, of which Lydia had given them a hint at the inn,

was under frequent discussion between her parents. Elizabeth saw

directly that her father had not the smallest intention of

yielding; but his answers were at the same time so vague and

equivocal, that her mother, though often disheartened, had never

yet despaired of succeeding at last.

Chapter 40

Elizabeth’s impatience to acquaint Jane with what had happened

could no longer be overcome; and at length, resolving to suppress

every particular in which her sister was concerned, and preparing

her to be surprised, she related to her the next morning the

chief of the scene between Mr. Darcy and herself.

Miss Bennet’s astonishment was soon lessened by the strong

sisterly partiality which made any admiration of Elizabeth appear

perfectly natural; and all surprise was shortly lost in other

feelings. She was sorry that Mr. Darcy should have delivered his

sentiments in a manner so little suited to recommend them; but

still more was she grieved for the unhappiness which her sister’s

refusal must have given him.

“His being so sure of succeeding was wrong,” said she, “and

certainly ought not to have appeared; but consider how much it

must increase his disappointment!”

“Indeed,” replied Elizabeth, “I am heartily sorry for him; but he

has other feelings, which will probably soon drive away his

regard for me. You do not blame me, however, for refusing him?”

“Blame you! Oh, no.”

“But you blame me for having spoken so warmly of Wickham?”

“No—I do not know that you were wrong in saying what you did.”

“But you \_will\_ know it, when I tell you what happened the very

next day.”

She then spoke of the letter, repeating the whole of its contents

as far as they concerned George Wickham. What a stroke was this

for poor Jane! who would willingly have gone through the world

without believing that so much wickedness existed in the whole

race of mankind, as was here collected in one individual. Nor was

Darcy’s vindication, though grateful to her feelings, capable of

consoling her for such discovery. Most earnestly did she labour

to prove the probability of error, and seek to clear the one

without involving the other.

“This will not do,” said Elizabeth; “you never will be able to

make both of them good for anything. Take your choice, but you

must be satisfied with only one. There is but such a quantity of

merit between them; just enough to make one good sort of man; and

of late it has been shifting about pretty much. For my part, I am

inclined to believe it all Darcy’s; but you shall do as you

choose.”

It was some time, however, before a smile could be extorted from

Jane.

“I do not know when I have been more shocked,” said she. “Wickham

so very bad! It is almost past belief. And poor Mr. Darcy! Dear

Lizzy, only consider what he must have suffered. Such a

disappointment! and with the knowledge of your ill opinion, too!

and having to relate such a thing of his sister! It is really too

distressing. I am sure you must feel it so.”

“Oh! no, my regret and compassion are all done away by seeing you

so full of both. I know you will do him such ample justice, that

I am growing every moment more unconcerned and indifferent. Your

profusion makes me saving; and if you lament over him much

longer, my heart will be as light as a feather.”

“Poor Wickham! there is such an expression of goodness in his

countenance! such an openness and gentleness in his manner!”

“There certainly was some great mismanagement in the education of

those two young men. One has got all the goodness, and the other

all the appearance of it.”

“I never thought Mr. Darcy so deficient in the \_appearance\_ of it

as you used to do.”

“And yet I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a

dislike to him, without any reason. It is such a spur to one’s

genius, such an opening for wit, to have a dislike of that kind.

One may be continually abusive without saying anything just; but

one cannot always be laughing at a man without now and then

stumbling on something witty.”

“Lizzy, when you first read that letter, I am sure you could not

treat the matter as you do now.”

“Indeed, I could not. I was uncomfortable enough, I may say

unhappy. And with no one to speak to about what I felt, no Jane

to comfort me and say that I had not been so very weak and vain

and nonsensical as I knew I had! Oh! how I wanted you!”

“How unfortunate that you should have used such very strong

expressions in speaking of Wickham to Mr. Darcy, for now they

\_do\_ appear wholly undeserved.”

“Certainly. But the misfortune of speaking with bitterness is a

most natural consequence of the prejudices I had been

encouraging. There is one point on which I want your advice. I

want to be told whether I ought, or ought not, to make our

acquaintances in general understand Wickham’s character.”

Miss Bennet paused a little, and then replied, “Surely there can

be no occasion for exposing him so dreadfully. What is your

opinion?”

“That it ought not to be attempted. Mr. Darcy has not authorised

me to make his communication public. On the contrary, every

particular relative to his sister was meant to be kept as much as

possible to myself; and if I endeavour to undeceive people as to

the rest of his conduct, who will believe me? The general

prejudice against Mr. Darcy is so violent, that it would be the

death of half the good people in Meryton to attempt to place him

in an amiable light. I am not equal to it. Wickham will soon be

gone; and therefore it will not signify to anyone here what he

really is. Some time hence it will be all found out, and then we

may laugh at their stupidity in not knowing it before. At present

I will say nothing about it.”

“You are quite right. To have his errors made public might ruin

him for ever. He is now, perhaps, sorry for what he has done, and

anxious to re-establish a character. We must not make him

desperate.”

The tumult of Elizabeth’s mind was allayed by this conversation.

She had got rid of two of the secrets which had weighed on her

for a fortnight, and was certain of a willing listener in Jane,

whenever she might wish to talk again of either. But there was

still something lurking behind, of which prudence forbade the

disclosure. She dared not relate the other half of Mr. Darcy’s

letter, nor explain to her sister how sincerely she had been

valued by her friend. Here was knowledge in which no one could

partake; and she was sensible that nothing less than a perfect

understanding between the parties could justify her in throwing

off this last encumbrance of mystery. “And then,” said she, “if

that very improbable event should ever take place, I shall merely

be able to tell what Bingley may tell in a much more agreeable

manner himself. The liberty of communication cannot be mine till

it has lost all its value!”

She was now, on being settled at home, at leisure to observe the

real state of her sister’s spirits. Jane was not happy. She still

cherished a very tender affection for Bingley. Having never even

fancied herself in love before, her regard had all the warmth of

first attachment, and, from her age and disposition, greater

steadiness than most first attachments often boast; and so

fervently did she value his remembrance, and prefer him to every

other man, that all her good sense, and all her attention to the

feelings of her friends, were requisite to check the indulgence

of those regrets which must have been injurious to her own health

and their tranquillity.

“Well, Lizzy,” said Mrs. Bennet one day, “what is your opinion

\_now\_ of this sad business of Jane’s? For my part, I am

determined never to speak of it again to anybody. I told my

sister Phillips so the other day. But I cannot find out that Jane

saw anything of him in London. Well, he is a very undeserving

young man—and I do not suppose there’s the least chance in the

world of her ever getting him now. There is no talk of his coming

to Netherfield again in the summer; and I have enquired of

everybody, too, who is likely to know.”

“I do not believe he will ever live at Netherfield any more.”

“Oh well! it is just as he chooses. Nobody wants him to come.

Though I shall always say he used my daughter extremely ill; and

if I was her, I would not have put up with it. Well, my comfort

is, I am sure Jane will die of a broken heart; and then he will

be sorry for what he has done.”

But as Elizabeth could not receive comfort from any such

expectation, she made no answer.

“Well, Lizzy,” continued her mother, soon afterwards, “and so the

Collinses live very comfortable, do they? Well, well, I only hope

it will last. And what sort of table do they keep? Charlotte is

an excellent manager, I dare say. If she is half as sharp as her

mother, she is saving enough. There is nothing extravagant in

\_their\_ housekeeping, I dare say.”

“No, nothing at all.”

“A great deal of good management, depend upon it. Yes, yes.

\_They\_ will take care not to outrun their income. \_They\_ will

never be distressed for money. Well, much good may it do them!

And so, I suppose, they often talk of having Longbourn when your

father is dead. They look upon it as quite their own, I dare say,

whenever that happens.”

“It was a subject which they could not mention before me.”

“No; it would have been strange if they had; but I make no doubt

they often talk of it between themselves. Well, if they can be

easy with an estate that is not lawfully their own, so much the

better. \_I\_ should be ashamed of having one that was only

entailed on me.”

Chapter 41

The first week of their return was soon gone. The second began.

It was the last of the regiment’s stay in Meryton, and all the

young ladies in the neighbourhood were drooping apace. The

dejection was almost universal. The elder Miss Bennets alone were

still able to eat, drink, and sleep, and pursue the usual course

of their employments. Very frequently were they reproached for

this insensibility by Kitty and Lydia, whose own misery was

extreme, and who could not comprehend such hard-heartedness in

any of the family.

“Good Heaven! what is to become of us? What are we to do?” would

they often exclaim in the bitterness of woe. “How can you be

smiling so, Lizzy?”

Their affectionate mother shared all their grief; she remembered

what she had herself endured on a similar occasion,

five-and-twenty years ago.

“I am sure,” said she, “I cried for two days together when

Colonel Miller’s regiment went away. I thought I should have

broken my heart.”

“I am sure I shall break \_mine\_,” said Lydia.

“If one could but go to Brighton!” observed Mrs. Bennet.

“Oh, yes!—if one could but go to Brighton! But papa is so

disagreeable.”

“A little sea-bathing would set me up forever.”

“And my aunt Phillips is sure it would do \_me\_ a great deal of

good,” added Kitty.

Such were the kind of lamentations resounding perpetually through

Longbourn House. Elizabeth tried to be diverted by them; but all

sense of pleasure was lost in shame. She felt anew the justice of

Mr. Darcy’s objections; and never had she been so much disposed

to pardon his interference in the views of his friend.

But the gloom of Lydia’s prospect was shortly cleared away; for

she received an invitation from Mrs. Forster, the wife of the

colonel of the regiment, to accompany her to Brighton. This

invaluable friend was a very young woman, and very lately

married. A resemblance in good humour and good spirits had

recommended her and Lydia to each other, and out of their \_three\_

months’ acquaintance they had been intimate \_two\_.

The rapture of Lydia on this occasion, her adoration of Mrs.

Forster, the delight of Mrs. Bennet, and the mortification of

Kitty, are scarcely to be described. Wholly inattentive to her

sister’s feelings, Lydia flew about the house in restless

ecstasy, calling for everyone’s congratulations, and laughing and

talking with more violence than ever; whilst the luckless Kitty

continued in the parlour repining at her fate in terms as

unreasonable as her accent was peevish.

“I cannot see why Mrs. Forster should not ask \_me\_ as well as

Lydia,” said she, “Though I am \_not\_ her particular friend. I

have just as much right to be asked as she has, and more too, for

I am two years older.”

In vain did Elizabeth attempt to make her reasonable, and Jane to

make her resigned. As for Elizabeth herself, this invitation was

so far from exciting in her the same feelings as in her mother

and Lydia, that she considered it as the death warrant of all

possibility of common sense for the latter; and detestable as

such a step must make her were it known, she could not help

secretly advising her father not to let her go. She represented

to him all the improprieties of Lydia’s general behaviour, the

little advantage she could derive from the friendship of such a

woman as Mrs. Forster, and the probability of her being yet more

imprudent with such a companion at Brighton, where the

temptations must be greater than at home. He heard her

attentively, and then said:

“Lydia will never be easy until she has exposed herself in some

public place or other, and we can never expect her to do it with

so little expense or inconvenience to her family as under the

present circumstances.”

“If you were aware,” said Elizabeth, “of the very great

disadvantage to us all which must arise from the public notice of

Lydia’s unguarded and imprudent manner—nay, which has already

arisen from it, I am sure you would judge differently in the

affair.”

“Already arisen?” repeated Mr. Bennet. “What, has she frightened

away some of your lovers? Poor little Lizzy! But do not be cast

down. Such squeamish youths as cannot bear to be connected with a

little absurdity are not worth a regret. Come, let me see the

list of pitiful fellows who have been kept aloof by Lydia’s

folly.”

“Indeed you are mistaken. I have no such injuries to resent. It

is not of particular, but of general evils, which I am now

complaining. Our importance, our respectability in the world must

be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of

all restraint which mark Lydia’s character. Excuse me, for I must

speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble

of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her

present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will

soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be

fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt

that ever made herself or her family ridiculous; a flirt, too, in

the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any

attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and, from the

ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off

any portion of that universal contempt which her rage for

admiration will excite. In this danger Kitty also is

comprehended. She will follow wherever Lydia leads. Vain,

ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrolled! Oh! my dear father,

can you suppose it possible that they will not be censured and

despised wherever they are known, and that their sisters will not

be often involved in the disgrace?”

Mr. Bennet saw that her whole heart was in the subject, and

affectionately taking her hand said in reply:

“Do not make yourself uneasy, my love. Wherever you and Jane are

known you must be respected and valued; and you will not appear

to less advantage for having a couple of—or I may say, three—very

silly sisters. We shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia does

not go to Brighton. Let her go, then. Colonel Forster is a

sensible man, and will keep her out of any real mischief; and she

is luckily too poor to be an object of prey to anybody. At

Brighton she will be of less importance even as a common flirt

than she has been here. The officers will find women better worth

their notice. Let us hope, therefore, that her being there may

teach her her own insignificance. At any rate, she cannot grow

many degrees worse, without authorising us to lock her up for the

rest of her life.”

With this answer Elizabeth was forced to be content; but her own

opinion continued the same, and she left him disappointed and

sorry. It was not in her nature, however, to increase her

vexations by dwelling on them. She was confident of having

performed her duty, and to fret over unavoidable evils, or

augment them by anxiety, was no part of her disposition.

Had Lydia and her mother known the substance of her conference

with her father, their indignation would hardly have found

expression in their united volubility. In Lydia’s imagination, a

visit to Brighton comprised every possibility of earthly

happiness. She saw, with the creative eye of fancy, the streets

of that gay bathing-place covered with officers. She saw herself

the object of attention, to tens and to scores of them at present

unknown. She saw all the glories of the camp—its tents stretched

forth in beauteous uniformity of lines, crowded with the young

and the gay, and dazzling with scarlet; and, to complete the

view, she saw herself seated beneath a tent, tenderly flirting

with at least six officers at once.

Had she known her sister sought to tear her from such prospects

and such realities as these, what would have been her sensations?

They could have been understood only by her mother, who might

have felt nearly the same. Lydia’s going to Brighton was all that

consoled her for her melancholy conviction of her husband’s never

intending to go there himself.

But they were entirely ignorant of what had passed; and their

raptures continued, with little intermission, to the very day of

Lydia’s leaving home.

Elizabeth was now to see Mr. Wickham for the last time. Having

been frequently in company with him since her return, agitation

was pretty well over; the agitations of former partiality

entirely so. She had even learnt to detect, in the very

gentleness which had first delighted her, an affectation and a

sameness to disgust and weary. In his present behaviour to

herself, moreover, she had a fresh source of displeasure, for the

inclination he soon testified of renewing those intentions which

had marked the early part of their acquaintance could only serve,

after what had since passed, to provoke her. She lost all concern

for him in finding herself thus selected as the object of such

idle and frivolous gallantry; and while she steadily repressed

it, could not but feel the reproof contained in his believing,

that however long, and for whatever cause, his attentions had

been withdrawn, her vanity would be gratified, and her preference

secured at any time by their renewal.

On the very last day of the regiment’s remaining at Meryton, he

dined, with others of the officers, at Longbourn; and so little

was Elizabeth disposed to part from him in good humour, that on

his making some enquiry as to the manner in which her time had

passed at Hunsford, she mentioned Colonel Fitzwilliam’s and Mr.

Darcy’s having both spent three weeks at Rosings, and asked him,

if he was acquainted with the former.

He looked surprised, displeased, alarmed; but with a moment’s

recollection and a returning smile, replied, that he had formerly

seen him often; and, after observing that he was a very

gentlemanlike man, asked her how she had liked him. Her answer

was warmly in his favour. With an air of indifference he soon

afterwards added:

“How long did you say he was at Rosings?”

“Nearly three weeks.”

“And you saw him frequently?”

“Yes, almost every day.”

“His manners are very different from his cousin’s.”

“Yes, very different. But I think Mr. Darcy improves upon

acquaintance.”

“Indeed!” cried Mr. Wickham with a look which did not escape her.

“And pray, may I ask?—” But checking himself, he added, in a

gayer tone, “Is it in address that he improves? Has he deigned to

add aught of civility to his ordinary style?—for I dare not

hope,” he continued in a lower and more serious tone, “that he is

improved in essentials.”

“Oh, no!” said Elizabeth. “In essentials, I believe, he is very

much what he ever was.”

While she spoke, Wickham looked as if scarcely knowing whether to

rejoice over her words, or to distrust their meaning. There was a

something in her countenance which made him listen with an

apprehensive and anxious attention, while she added:

“When I said that he improved on acquaintance, I did not mean

that his mind or his manners were in a state of improvement, but

that, from knowing him better, his disposition was better

understood.”

Wickham’s alarm now appeared in a heightened complexion and

agitated look; for a few minutes he was silent, till, shaking off

his embarrassment, he turned to her again, and said in the

gentlest of accents:

“You, who so well know my feeling towards Mr. Darcy, will readily

comprehend how sincerely I must rejoice that he is wise enough to

assume even the \_appearance\_ of what is right. His pride, in that

direction, may be of service, if not to himself, to many others,

for it must only deter him from such foul misconduct as I have

suffered by. I only fear that the sort of cautiousness to which

you, I imagine, have been alluding, is merely adopted on his

visits to his aunt, of whose good opinion and judgement he stands

much in awe. His fear of her has always operated, I know, when

they were together; and a good deal is to be imputed to his wish

of forwarding the match with Miss de Bourgh, which I am certain

he has very much at heart.”

Elizabeth could not repress a smile at this, but she answered

only by a slight inclination of the head. She saw that he wanted

to engage her on the old subject of his grievances, and she was

in no humour to indulge him. The rest of the evening passed with

the \_appearance\_, on his side, of usual cheerfulness, but with no

further attempt to distinguish Elizabeth; and they parted at last

with mutual civility, and possibly a mutual desire of never

meeting again.

When the party broke up, Lydia returned with Mrs. Forster to

Meryton, from whence they were to set out early the next morning.

The separation between her and her family was rather noisy than

pathetic. Kitty was the only one who shed tears; but she did weep

from vexation and envy. Mrs. Bennet was diffuse in her good

wishes for the felicity of her daughter, and impressive in her

injunctions that she should not miss the opportunity of enjoying

herself as much as possible—advice which there was every reason

to believe would be well attended to; and in the clamorous

happiness of Lydia herself in bidding farewell, the more gentle

adieus of her sisters were uttered without being heard.

Chapter 42

Had Elizabeth’s opinion been all drawn from her own family, she

could not have formed a very pleasing opinion of conjugal

felicity or domestic comfort. Her father, captivated by youth and

beauty, and that appearance of good humour which youth and beauty

generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and

illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all

real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence had

vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were

overthrown. But Mr. Bennet was not of a disposition to seek

comfort for the disappointment which his own imprudence had

brought on, in any of those pleasures which too often console the

unfortunate for their folly or their vice. He was fond of the

country and of books; and from these tastes had arisen his

principal enjoyments. To his wife he was very little otherwise

indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his

amusement. This is not the sort of happiness which a man would in

general wish to owe to his wife; but where other powers of

entertainment are wanting, the true philosopher will derive

benefit from such as are given.

Elizabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of

her father’s behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with

pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his

affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what

she could not overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that

continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in

exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so

highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now

the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable

a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising

from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents, which,

rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of

his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his

wife.

When Elizabeth had rejoiced over Wickham’s departure she found

little other cause for satisfaction in the loss of the regiment.

Their parties abroad were less varied than before, and at home

she had a mother and sister whose constant repinings at the

dullness of everything around them threw a real gloom over their

domestic circle; and, though Kitty might in time regain her

natural degree of sense, since the disturbers of her brain were

removed, her other sister, from whose disposition greater evil

might be apprehended, was likely to be hardened in all her folly

and assurance by a situation of such double danger as a

watering-place and a camp. Upon the whole, therefore, she found,

what has been sometimes found before, that an event to which she

had looked forward with impatient desire did not, in taking

place, bring all the satisfaction she had promised herself. It

was consequently necessary to name some other period for the

commencement of actual felicity—to have some other point on which

her wishes and hopes might be fixed, and by again enjoying the

pleasure of anticipation, console herself for the present, and

prepare for another disappointment. Her tour to the Lakes was now

the object of her happiest thoughts; it was her best consolation

for all the uncomfortable hours which the discontentedness of her

mother and Kitty made inevitable; and could she have included

Jane in the scheme, every part of it would have been perfect.

“But it is fortunate,” thought she, “that I have something to

wish for. Were the whole arrangement complete, my disappointment

would be certain. But here, by carrying with me one ceaseless

source of regret in my sister’s absence, I may reasonably hope to

have all my expectations of pleasure realised. A scheme of which

every part promises delight can never be successful; and general

disappointment is only warded off by the defence of some little

peculiar vexation.”

When Lydia went away she promised to write very often and very

minutely to her mother and Kitty; but her letters were always

long expected, and always very short. Those to her mother

contained little else than that they were just returned from the

library, where such and such officers had attended them, and

where she had seen such beautiful ornaments as made her quite

wild; that she had a new gown, or a new parasol, which she would

have described more fully, but was obliged to leave off in a

violent hurry, as Mrs. Forster called her, and they were going

off to the camp; and from her correspondence with her sister,

there was still less to be learnt—for her letters to Kitty,

though rather longer, were much too full of lines under the words

to be made public.

After the first fortnight or three weeks of her absence, health,

good humour, and cheerfulness began to reappear at Longbourn.

Everything wore a happier aspect. The families who had been in

town for the winter came back again, and summer finery and summer

engagements arose. Mrs. Bennet was restored to her usual

querulous serenity; and, by the middle of June, Kitty was so much

recovered as to be able to enter Meryton without tears; an event

of such happy promise as to make Elizabeth hope that by the

following Christmas she might be so tolerably reasonable as not

to mention an officer above once a day, unless, by some cruel and

malicious arrangement at the War Office, another regiment should

be quartered in Meryton.

The time fixed for the beginning of their northern tour was now

fast approaching, and a fortnight only was wanting of it, when a

letter arrived from Mrs. Gardiner, which at once delayed its

commencement and curtailed its extent. Mr. Gardiner would be

prevented by business from setting out till a fortnight later in

July, and must be in London again within a month, and as that

left too short a period for them to go so far, and see so much as

they had proposed, or at least to see it with the leisure and

comfort they had built on, they were obliged to give up the

Lakes, and substitute a more contracted tour, and, according to

the present plan, were to go no farther northwards than

Derbyshire. In that county there was enough to be seen to occupy

the chief of their three weeks; and to Mrs. Gardiner it had a

peculiarly strong attraction. The town where she had formerly

passed some years of her life, and where they were now to spend a

few days, was probably as great an object of her curiosity as all

the celebrated beauties of Matlock, Chatsworth, Dovedale, or the

Peak.

Elizabeth was excessively disappointed; she had set her heart on

seeing the Lakes, and still thought there might have been time

enough. But it was her business to be satisfied—and certainly her

temper to be happy; and all was soon right again.

With the mention of Derbyshire there were many ideas connected.

It was impossible for her to see the word without thinking of

Pemberley and its owner. “But surely,” said she, “I may enter his

county with impunity, and rob it of a few petrified spars without

his perceiving me.”

The period of expectation was now doubled. Four weeks were to

pass away before her uncle and aunt’s arrival. But they did pass

away, and Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, with their four children, did at

length appear at Longbourn. The children, two girls of six and

eight years old, and two younger boys, were to be left under the

particular care of their cousin Jane, who was the general

favourite, and whose steady sense and sweetness of temper exactly

adapted her for attending to them in every way—teaching them,

playing with them, and loving them.

The Gardiners stayed only one night at Longbourn, and set off the

next morning with Elizabeth in pursuit of novelty and amusement.

One enjoyment was certain—that of suitableness of companions; a

suitableness which comprehended health and temper to bear

inconveniences—cheerfulness to enhance every pleasure—and

affection and intelligence, which might supply it among

themselves if there were disappointments abroad.

It is not the object of this work to give a description of

Derbyshire, nor of any of the remarkable places through which

their route thither lay; Oxford, Blenheim, Warwick, Kenilworth,

Birmingham, etc. are sufficiently known. A small part of

Derbyshire is all the present concern. To the little town of

Lambton, the scene of Mrs. Gardiner’s former residence, and where

she had lately learned some acquaintance still remained, they

bent their steps, after having seen all the principal wonders of

the country; and within five miles of Lambton, Elizabeth found

from her aunt that Pemberley was situated. It was not in their

direct road, nor more than a mile or two out of it. In talking

over their route the evening before, Mrs. Gardiner expressed an

inclination to see the place again. Mr. Gardiner declared his

willingness, and Elizabeth was applied to for her approbation.

“My love, should not you like to see a place of which you have

heard so much?” said her aunt; “a place, too, with which so many

of your acquaintances are connected. Wickham passed all his youth

there, you know.”

Elizabeth was distressed. She felt that she had no business at

Pemberley, and was obliged to assume a disinclination for seeing

it. She must own that she was tired of seeing great houses; after

going over so many, she really had no pleasure in fine carpets or

satin curtains.

Mrs. Gardiner abused her stupidity. “If it were merely a fine

house richly furnished,” said she, “I should not care about it

myself; but the grounds are delightful. They have some of the

finest woods in the country.”

Elizabeth said no more—but her mind could not acquiesce. The

possibility of meeting Mr. Darcy, while viewing the place,

instantly occurred. It would be dreadful! She blushed at the very

idea, and thought it would be better to speak openly to her aunt

than to run such a risk. But against this there were objections;

and she finally resolved that it could be the last resource, if

her private enquiries to the absence of the family were

unfavourably answered.

Accordingly, when she retired at night, she asked the chambermaid

whether Pemberley were not a very fine place? what was the name

of its proprietor? and, with no little alarm, whether the family

were down for the summer? A most welcome negative followed the

last question—and her alarms now being removed, she was at

leisure to feel a great deal of curiosity to see the house

herself; and when the subject was revived the next morning, and

she was again applied to, could readily answer, and with a proper

air of indifference, that she had not really any dislike to the

scheme. To Pemberley, therefore, they were to go.

Chapter 43

Elizabeth, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance

of Pemberley Woods with some perturbation; and when at length

they turned in at the lodge, her spirits were in a high flutter.

The park was very large, and contained great variety of ground.

They entered it in one of its lowest points, and drove for some

time through a beautiful wood stretching over a wide extent.

Elizabeth’s mind was too full for conversation, but she saw and

admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually

ascended for half-a-mile, and then found themselves at the top of

a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was

instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite

side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound.

It was a large, handsome stone building, standing well on rising

ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; and in front,

a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but

without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal

nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen

a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty

had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were

all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt

that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!

They descended the hill, crossed the bridge, and drove to the

door; and, while examining the nearer aspect of the house, all

her apprehension of meeting its owner returned. She dreaded lest

the chambermaid had been mistaken. On applying to see the place,

they were admitted into the hall; and Elizabeth, as they waited

for the housekeeper, had leisure to wonder at her being where she

was.

The housekeeper came; a respectable-looking elderly woman, much

less fine, and more civil, than she had any notion of finding

her. They followed her into the dining-parlour. It was a large,

well proportioned room, handsomely fitted up. Elizabeth, after

slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its prospect.

The hill, crowned with wood, which they had descended, receiving

increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object.

Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the

whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks and the

winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with

delight. As they passed into other rooms these objects were

taking different positions; but from every window there were

beauties to be seen. The rooms were lofty and handsome, and their

furniture suitable to the fortune of its proprietor; but

Elizabeth saw, with admiration of his taste, that it was neither

gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendour, and more real

elegance, than the furniture of Rosings.

“And of this place,” thought she, “I might have been mistress!

With these rooms I might now have been familiarly acquainted!

Instead of viewing them as a stranger, I might have rejoiced in

them as my own, and welcomed to them as visitors my uncle and

aunt. But no,”—recollecting herself—“that could never be; my

uncle and aunt would have been lost to me; I should not have been

allowed to invite them.”

This was a lucky recollection—it saved her from something very

like regret.

She longed to enquire of the housekeeper whether her master was

really absent, but had not the courage for it. At length however,

the question was asked by her uncle; and she turned away with

alarm, while Mrs. Reynolds replied that he was, adding, “But we

expect him to-morrow, with a large party of friends.” How

rejoiced was Elizabeth that their own journey had not by any

circumstance been delayed a day!

Her aunt now called her to look at a picture. She approached and

saw the likeness of Mr. Wickham, suspended, amongst several other

miniatures, over the mantelpiece. Her aunt asked her, smilingly,

how she liked it. The housekeeper came forward, and told them it

was a picture of a young gentleman, the son of her late master’s

steward, who had been brought up by him at his own expense. “He

is now gone into the army,” she added; “but I am afraid he has

turned out very wild.”

Mrs. Gardiner looked at her niece with a smile, but Elizabeth

could not return it.

“And that,” said Mrs. Reynolds, pointing to another of the

miniatures, “is my master—and very like him. It was drawn at the

same time as the other—about eight years ago.”

“I have heard much of your master’s fine person,” said Mrs.

Gardiner, looking at the picture; “it is a handsome face. But,

Lizzy, you can tell us whether it is like or not.”

Mrs. Reynolds respect for Elizabeth seemed to increase on this

intimation of her knowing her master.

“Does that young lady know Mr. Darcy?”

Elizabeth coloured, and said: “A little.”

“And do not you think him a very handsome gentleman, ma’am?”

“Yes, very handsome.”

“I am sure \_I\_ know none so handsome; but in the gallery up

stairs you will see a finer, larger picture of him than this.

This room was my late master’s favourite room, and these

miniatures are just as they used to be then. He was very fond of

them.”

This accounted to Elizabeth for Mr. Wickham’s being among them.

Mrs. Reynolds then directed their attention to one of Miss Darcy,

drawn when she was only eight years old.

“And is Miss Darcy as handsome as her brother?” said Mrs.

Gardiner.

“Oh! yes—the handsomest young lady that ever was seen; and so

accomplished!—She plays and sings all day long. In the next room

is a new instrument just come down for her—a present from my

master; she comes here to-morrow with him.”

Mr. Gardiner, whose manners were very easy and pleasant,

encouraged her communicativeness by his questions and remarks;

Mrs. Reynolds, either by pride or attachment, had evidently great

pleasure in talking of her master and his sister.

“Is your master much at Pemberley in the course of the year?”

“Not so much as I could wish, sir; but I dare say he may spend

half his time here; and Miss Darcy is always down for the summer

months.”

“Except,” thought Elizabeth, “when she goes to Ramsgate.”

“If your master would marry, you might see more of him.”

“Yes, sir; but I do not know when \_that\_ will be. I do not know

who is good enough for him.”

Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner smiled. Elizabeth could not help saying,

“It is very much to his credit, I am sure, that you should think

so.”

“I say no more than the truth, and everybody will say that knows

him,” replied the other. Elizabeth thought this was going pretty

far; and she listened with increasing astonishment as the

housekeeper added, “I have never known a cross word from him in

my life, and I have known him ever since he was four years old.”

This was praise, of all others most extraordinary, most opposite

to her ideas. That he was not a good-tempered man had been her

firmest opinion. Her keenest attention was awakened; she longed

to hear more, and was grateful to her uncle for saying:

“There are very few people of whom so much can be said. You are

lucky in having such a master.”

“Yes, sir, I know I am. If I were to go through the world, I

could not meet with a better. But I have always observed, that

they who are good-natured when children, are good-natured when

they grow up; and he was always the sweetest-tempered, most

generous-hearted boy in the world.”

Elizabeth almost stared at her. “Can this be Mr. Darcy?” thought

she.

“His father was an excellent man,” said Mrs. Gardiner.

“Yes, ma’am, that he was indeed; and his son will be just like

him—just as affable to the poor.”

Elizabeth listened, wondered, doubted, and was impatient for

more. Mrs. Reynolds could interest her on no other point. She

related the subjects of the pictures, the dimensions of the

rooms, and the price of the furniture, in vain. Mr. Gardiner,

highly amused by the kind of family prejudice to which he

attributed her excessive commendation of her master, soon led

again to the subject; and she dwelt with energy on his many

merits as they proceeded together up the great staircase.

“He is the best landlord, and the best master,” said she, “that

ever lived; not like the wild young men nowadays, who think of

nothing but themselves. There is not one of his tenants or

servants but will give him a good name. Some people call him

proud; but I am sure I never saw anything of it. To my fancy, it

is only because he does not rattle away like other young men.”

“In what an amiable light does this place him!” thought

Elizabeth.

“This fine account of him,” whispered her aunt as they walked,

“is not quite consistent with his behaviour to our poor friend.”

“Perhaps we might be deceived.”

“That is not very likely; our authority was too good.”

On reaching the spacious lobby above they were shown into a very

pretty sitting-room, lately fitted up with greater elegance and

lightness than the apartments below; and were informed that it

was but just done to give pleasure to Miss Darcy, who had taken a

liking to the room when last at Pemberley.

“He is certainly a good brother,” said Elizabeth, as she walked

towards one of the windows.

Mrs. Reynolds anticipated Miss Darcy’s delight, when she should

enter the room. “And this is always the way with him,” she added.

“Whatever can give his sister any pleasure is sure to be done in

a moment. There is nothing he would not do for her.”

The picture-gallery, and two or three of the principal bedrooms,

were all that remained to be shown. In the former were many good

paintings; but Elizabeth knew nothing of the art; and from such

as had been already visible below, she had willingly turned to

look at some drawings of Miss Darcy’s, in crayons, whose subjects

were usually more interesting, and also more intelligible.

In the gallery there were many family portraits, but they could

have little to fix the attention of a stranger. Elizabeth walked

in quest of the only face whose features would be known to her.

At last it arrested her—and she beheld a striking resemblance to

Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face as she remembered to

have sometimes seen when he looked at her. She stood several

minutes before the picture, in earnest contemplation, and

returned to it again before they quitted the gallery. Mrs.

Reynolds informed them that it had been taken in his father’s

lifetime.

There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth’s mind, a more

gentle sensation towards the original than she had ever felt at

the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed on

him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is

more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a

brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people’s

happiness were in his guardianship!—how much of pleasure or pain

was it in his power to bestow!—how much of good or evil must be

done by him! Every idea that had been brought forward by the

housekeeper was favourable to his character, and as she stood

before the canvas on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes

upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment

of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its

warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression.

When all of the house that was open to general inspection had

been seen, they returned downstairs, and, taking leave of the

housekeeper, were consigned over to the gardener, who met them at

the hall-door.

As they walked across the hall towards the river, Elizabeth

turned back to look again; her uncle and aunt stopped also, and

while the former was conjecturing as to the date of the building,

the owner of it himself suddenly came forward from the road,

which led behind it to the stables.

They were within twenty yards of each other, and so abrupt was

his appearance, that it was impossible to avoid his sight. Their

eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of both were overspread with

the deepest blush. He absolutely started, and for a moment seemed

immovable from surprise; but shortly recovering himself, advanced

towards the party, and spoke to Elizabeth, if not in terms of

perfect composure, at least of perfect civility.

She had instinctively turned away; but stopping on his approach,

received his compliments with an embarrassment impossible to be

overcome. Had his first appearance, or his resemblance to the

picture they had just been examining, been insufficient to assure

the other two that they now saw Mr. Darcy, the gardener’s

expression of surprise, on beholding his master, must immediately

have told it. They stood a little aloof while he was talking to

their niece, who, astonished and confused, scarcely dared lift

her eyes to his face, and knew not what answer she returned to

his civil enquiries after her family. Amazed at the alteration of

his manner since they last parted, every sentence that he uttered

was increasing her embarrassment; and every idea of the

impropriety of her being found there recurring to her mind, the

few minutes in which they continued were some of the most

uncomfortable in her life. Nor did he seem much more at ease;

when he spoke, his accent had none of its usual sedateness; and

he repeated his enquiries as to the time of her having left

Longbourn, and of her stay in Derbyshire, so often, and in so

hurried a way, as plainly spoke the distraction of his thoughts.

At length every idea seemed to fail him; and, after standing a

few moments without saying a word, he suddenly recollected

himself, and took leave.

The others then joined her, and expressed admiration of his

figure; but Elizabeth heard not a word, and wholly engrossed by

her own feelings, followed them in silence. She was overpowered

by shame and vexation. Her coming there was the most unfortunate,

the most ill-judged thing in the world! How strange it must

appear to him! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so

vain a man! It might seem as if she had purposely thrown herself

in his way again! Oh! why did she come? Or, why did he thus come

a day before he was expected? Had they been only ten minutes

sooner, they should have been beyond the reach of his

discrimination; for it was plain that he was that moment

arrived—that moment alighted from his horse or his carriage. She

blushed again and again over the perverseness of the meeting. And

his behaviour, so strikingly altered—what could it mean? That he

should even speak to her was amazing!—but to speak with such

civility, to enquire after her family! Never in her life had she

seen his manners so little dignified, never had he spoken with

such gentleness as on this unexpected meeting. What a contrast

did it offer to his last address in Rosings Park, when he put his

letter into her hand! She knew not what to think, or how to

account for it.

They had now entered a beautiful walk by the side of the water,

and every step was bringing forward a nobler fall of ground, or a

finer reach of the woods to which they were approaching; but it

was some time before Elizabeth was sensible of any of it; and,

though she answered mechanically to the repeated appeals of her

uncle and aunt, and seemed to direct her eyes to such objects as

they pointed out, she distinguished no part of the scene. Her

thoughts were all fixed on that one spot of Pemberley House,

whichever it might be, where Mr. Darcy then was. She longed to

know what at the moment was passing in his mind—in what manner he

thought of her, and whether, in defiance of everything, she was

still dear to him. Perhaps he had been civil only because he felt

himself at ease; yet there had been \_that\_ in his voice which was

not like ease. Whether he had felt more of pain or of pleasure in

seeing her she could not tell, but he certainly had not seen her

with composure.

At length, however, the remarks of her companions on her absence

of mind aroused her, and she felt the necessity of appearing more

like herself.

They entered the woods, and bidding adieu to the river for a

while, ascended some of the higher grounds; when, in spots where

the opening of the trees gave the eye power to wander, were many

charming views of the valley, the opposite hills, with the long

range of woods overspreading many, and occasionally part of the

stream. Mr. Gardiner expressed a wish of going round the whole

park, but feared it might be beyond a walk. With a triumphant

smile they were told that it was ten miles round. It settled the

matter; and they pursued the accustomed circuit; which brought

them again, after some time, in a descent among hanging woods, to

the edge of the water, and one of its narrowest parts. They

crossed it by a simple bridge, in character with the general air

of the scene; it was a spot less adorned than any they had yet

visited; and the valley, here contracted into a glen, allowed

room only for the stream, and a narrow walk amidst the rough

coppice-wood which bordered it. Elizabeth longed to explore its

windings; but when they had crossed the bridge, and perceived

their distance from the house, Mrs. Gardiner, who was not a great

walker, could go no farther, and thought only of returning to the

carriage as quickly as possible. Her niece was, therefore,

obliged to submit, and they took their way towards the house on

the opposite side of the river, in the nearest direction; but

their progress was slow, for Mr. Gardiner, though seldom able to

indulge the taste, was very fond of fishing, and was so much

engaged in watching the occasional appearance of some trout in

the water, and talking to the man about them, that he advanced

but little. Whilst wandering on in this slow manner, they were

again surprised, and Elizabeth’s astonishment was quite equal to

what it had been at first, by the sight of Mr. Darcy approaching

them, and at no great distance. The walk being here less

sheltered than on the other side, allowed them to see him before

they met. Elizabeth, however astonished, was at least more

prepared for an interview than before, and resolved to appear and

to speak with calmness, if he really intended to meet them. For a

few moments, indeed, she felt that he would probably strike into

some other path. The idea lasted while a turning in the walk

concealed him from their view; the turning past, he was

immediately before them. With a glance, she saw that he had lost

none of his recent civility; and, to imitate his politeness, she

began, as they met, to admire the beauty of the place; but she

had not got beyond the words “delightful,” and “charming,” when

some unlucky recollections obtruded, and she fancied that praise

of Pemberley from her might be mischievously construed. Her

colour changed, and she said no more.

Mrs. Gardiner was standing a little behind; and on her pausing,

he asked her if she would do him the honour of introducing him to

her friends. This was a stroke of civility for which she was

quite unprepared; and she could hardly suppress a smile at his

being now seeking the acquaintance of some of those very people

against whom his pride had revolted in his offer to herself.

“What will be his surprise,” thought she, “when he knows who they

are? He takes them now for people of fashion.”

The introduction, however, was immediately made; and as she named

their relationship to herself, she stole a sly look at him, to

see how he bore it, and was not without the expectation of his

decamping as fast as he could from such disgraceful companions.

That he was \_surprised\_ by the connection was evident; he

sustained it, however, with fortitude, and so far from going

away, turned back with them, and entered into conversation with

Mr. Gardiner. Elizabeth could not but be pleased, could not but

triumph. It was consoling that he should know she had some

relations for whom there was no need to blush. She listened most

attentively to all that passed between them, and gloried in every

expression, every sentence of her uncle, which marked his

intelligence, his taste, or his good manners.

The conversation soon turned upon fishing; and she heard Mr.

Darcy invite him, with the greatest civility, to fish there as

often as he chose while he continued in the neighbourhood,

offering at the same time to supply him with fishing tackle, and

pointing out those parts of the stream where there was usually

most sport. Mrs. Gardiner, who was walking arm-in-arm with

Elizabeth, gave her a look expressive of wonder. Elizabeth said

nothing, but it gratified her exceedingly; the compliment must be

all for herself. Her astonishment, however, was extreme, and

continually was she repeating, “Why is he so altered? From what

can it proceed? It cannot be for \_me\_—it cannot be for \_my\_ sake

that his manners are thus softened. My reproofs at Hunsford could

not work such a change as this. It is impossible that he should

still love me.”

After walking some time in this way, the two ladies in front, the

two gentlemen behind, on resuming their places, after descending

to the brink of the river for the better inspection of some

curious water-plant, there chanced to be a little alteration. It

originated in Mrs. Gardiner, who, fatigued by the exercise of the

morning, found Elizabeth’s arm inadequate to her support, and

consequently preferred her husband’s. Mr. Darcy took her place by

her niece, and they walked on together. After a short silence,

the lady first spoke. She wished him to know that she had been

assured of his absence before she came to the place, and

accordingly began by observing, that his arrival had been very

unexpected—“for your housekeeper,” she added, “informed us that

you would certainly not be here till to-morrow; and indeed,

before we left Bakewell, we understood that you were not

immediately expected in the country.” He acknowledged the truth

of it all, and said that business with his steward had occasioned

his coming forward a few hours before the rest of the party with

whom he had been travelling. “They will join me early to-morrow,”

he continued, “and among them are some who will claim an

acquaintance with you—Mr. Bingley and his sisters.”

Elizabeth answered only by a slight bow. Her thoughts were

instantly driven back to the time when Mr. Bingley’s name had

been the last mentioned between them; and, if she might judge by

his complexion, \_his\_ mind was not very differently engaged.

“There is also one other person in the party,” he continued after

a pause, “who more particularly wishes to be known to you. Will

you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my sister to

your acquaintance during your stay at Lambton?”

The surprise of such an application was great indeed; it was too

great for her to know in what manner she acceded to it. She

immediately felt that whatever desire Miss Darcy might have of

being acquainted with her must be the work of her brother, and,

without looking farther, it was satisfactory; it was gratifying

to know that his resentment had not made him think really ill of

her.

They now walked on in silence, each of them deep in thought.

Elizabeth was not comfortable; that was impossible; but she was

flattered and pleased. His wish of introducing his sister to her

was a compliment of the highest kind. They soon outstripped the

others, and when they had reached the carriage, Mr. and Mrs.

Gardiner were half a quarter of a mile behind.

He then asked her to walk into the house—but she declared herself

not tired, and they stood together on the lawn. At such a time

much might have been said, and silence was very awkward. She

wanted to talk, but there seemed to be an embargo on every

subject. At last she recollected that she had been travelling,

and they talked of Matlock and Dove Dale with great perseverance.

Yet time and her aunt moved slowly—and her patience and her ideas

were nearly worn out before the \_tête-à-tête\_ was over.

On Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner’s coming up they were all pressed to go

into the house and take some refreshment; but this was declined,

and they parted on each side with utmost politeness. Mr. Darcy

handed the ladies into the carriage; and when it drove off,

Elizabeth saw him walking slowly towards the house.

The observations of her uncle and aunt now began; and each of

them pronounced him to be infinitely superior to anything they

had expected. “He is perfectly well behaved, polite, and

unassuming,” said her uncle.

“There \_is\_ something a little stately in him, to be sure,”

replied her aunt, “but it is confined to his air, and is not

unbecoming. I can now say with the housekeeper, that though some

people may call him proud, \_I\_ have seen nothing of it.”

“I was never more surprised than by his behaviour to us. It was

more than civil; it was really attentive; and there was no

necessity for such attention. His acquaintance with Elizabeth was

very trifling.”

“To be sure, Lizzy,” said her aunt, “he is not so handsome as

Wickham; or, rather, he has not Wickham’s countenance, for his

features are perfectly good. But how came you to tell me that he

was so disagreeable?”

Elizabeth excused herself as well as she could; said that she had

liked him better when they had met in Kent than before, and that

she had never seen him so pleasant as this morning.

“But perhaps he may be a little whimsical in his civilities,”

replied her uncle. “Your great men often are; and therefore I

shall not take him at his word, as he might change his mind

another day, and warn me off his grounds.”

Elizabeth felt that they had entirely misunderstood his

character, but said nothing.

“From what we have seen of him,” continued Mrs. Gardiner, “I

really should not have thought that he could have behaved in so

cruel a way by anybody as he has done by poor Wickham. He has not

an ill-natured look. On the contrary, there is something pleasing

about his mouth when he speaks. And there is something of dignity

in his countenance that would not give one an unfavourable idea

of his heart. But, to be sure, the good lady who showed us his

house did give him a most flaming character! I could hardly help

laughing aloud sometimes. But he is a liberal master, I suppose,

and \_that\_ in the eye of a servant comprehends every virtue.”

Elizabeth here felt herself called on to say something in

vindication of his behaviour to Wickham; and therefore gave them

to understand, in as guarded a manner as she could, that by what

she had heard from his relations in Kent, his actions were

capable of a very different construction; and that his character

was by no means so faulty, nor Wickham’s so amiable, as they had

been considered in Hertfordshire. In confirmation of this, she

related the particulars of all the pecuniary transactions in

which they had been connected, without actually naming her

authority, but stating it to be such as might be relied on.

Mrs. Gardiner was surprised and concerned; but as they were now

approaching the scene of her former pleasures, every idea gave

way to the charm of recollection; and she was too much engaged in

pointing out to her husband all the interesting spots in its

environs to think of anything else. Fatigued as she had been by

the morning’s walk they had no sooner dined than she set off

again in quest of her former acquaintance, and the evening was

spent in the satisfactions of an intercourse renewed after many

years’ discontinuance.

The occurrences of the day were too full of interest to leave

Elizabeth much attention for any of these new friends; and she

could do nothing but think, and think with wonder, of Mr. Darcy’s

civility, and, above all, of his wishing her to be acquainted

with his sister.

Chapter 44

Elizabeth had settled it that Mr. Darcy would bring his sister to

visit her the very day after her reaching Pemberley; and was

consequently resolved not to be out of sight of the inn the whole

of that morning. But her conclusion was false; for on the very

morning after their arrival at Lambton, these visitors came. They

had been walking about the place with some of their new friends,

and were just returning to the inn to dress themselves for dining

with the same family, when the sound of a carriage drew them to a

window, and they saw a gentleman and a lady in a curricle driving

up the street. Elizabeth immediately recognizing the livery,

guessed what it meant, and imparted no small degree of her

surprise to her relations by acquainting them with the honour

which she expected. Her uncle and aunt were all amazement; and

the embarrassment of her manner as she spoke, joined to the

circumstance itself, and many of the circumstances of the

preceding day, opened to them a new idea on the business. Nothing

had ever suggested it before, but they felt that there was no

other way of accounting for such attentions from such a quarter

than by supposing a partiality for their niece. While these

newly-born notions were passing in their heads, the perturbation

of Elizabeth’s feelings was at every moment increasing. She was

quite amazed at her own discomposure; but amongst other causes of

disquiet, she dreaded lest the partiality of the brother should

have said too much in her favour; and, more than commonly anxious

to please, she naturally suspected that every power of pleasing

would fail her.

She retreated from the window, fearful of being seen; and as she

walked up and down the room, endeavouring to compose herself, saw

such looks of enquiring surprise in her uncle and aunt as made

everything worse.

Miss Darcy and her brother appeared, and this formidable

introduction took place. With astonishment did Elizabeth see that

her new acquaintance was at least as much embarrassed as herself.

Since her being at Lambton, she had heard that Miss Darcy was

exceedingly proud; but the observation of a very few minutes

convinced her that she was only exceedingly shy. She found it

difficult to obtain even a word from her beyond a monosyllable.

Miss Darcy was tall, and on a larger scale than Elizabeth; and,

though little more than sixteen, her figure was formed, and her

appearance womanly and graceful. She was less handsome than her

brother; but there was sense and good humour in her face, and her

manners were perfectly unassuming and gentle. Elizabeth, who had

expected to find in her as acute and unembarrassed an observer as

ever Mr. Darcy had been, was much relieved by discerning such

different feelings.

They had not long been together before Mr. Darcy told her that

Bingley was also coming to wait on her; and she had barely time

to express her satisfaction, and prepare for such a visitor, when

Bingley’s quick step was heard on the stairs, and in a moment he

entered the room. All Elizabeth’s anger against him had been long

done away; but had she still felt any, it could hardly have stood

its ground against the unaffected cordiality with which he

expressed himself on seeing her again. He enquired in a friendly,

though general way, after her family, and looked and spoke with

the same good-humoured ease that he had ever done.

To Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner he was scarcely a less interesting

personage than to herself. They had long wished to see him. The

whole party before them, indeed, excited a lively attention. The

suspicions which had just arisen of Mr. Darcy and their niece

directed their observation towards each with an earnest though

guarded enquiry; and they soon drew from those enquiries the full

conviction that one of them at least knew what it was to love. Of

the lady’s sensations they remained a little in doubt; but that

the gentleman was overflowing with admiration was evident enough.

Elizabeth, on her side, had much to do. She wanted to ascertain

the feelings of each of her visitors; she wanted to compose her

own, and to make herself agreeable to all; and in the latter

object, where she feared most to fail, she was most sure of

success, for those to whom she endeavoured to give pleasure were

prepossessed in her favour. Bingley was ready, Georgiana was

eager, and Darcy determined, to be pleased.

In seeing Bingley, her thoughts naturally flew to her sister;

and, oh! how ardently did she long to know whether any of his

were directed in a like manner. Sometimes she could fancy that he

talked less than on former occasions, and once or twice pleased

herself with the notion that, as he looked at her, he was trying

to trace a resemblance. But, though this might be imaginary, she

could not be deceived as to his behaviour to Miss Darcy, who had

been set up as a rival to Jane. No look appeared on either side

that spoke particular regard. Nothing occurred between them that

could justify the hopes of his sister. On this point she was soon

satisfied; and two or three little circumstances occurred ere

they parted, which, in her anxious interpretation, denoted a

recollection of Jane not untinctured by tenderness, and a wish of

saying more that might lead to the mention of her, had he dared.

He observed to her, at a moment when the others were talking

together, and in a tone which had something of real regret, that

it “was a very long time since he had had the pleasure of seeing

her;” and, before she could reply, he added, “It is above eight

months. We have not met since the 26th of November, when we were

all dancing together at Netherfield.”

Elizabeth was pleased to find his memory so exact; and he

afterwards took occasion to ask her, when unattended to by any of

the rest, whether \_all\_ her sisters were at Longbourn. There was

not much in the question, nor in the preceding remark; but there

was a look and a manner which gave them meaning.

It was not often that she could turn her eyes on Mr. Darcy

himself; but, whenever she did catch a glimpse, she saw an

expression of general complaisance, and in all that he said she

heard an accent so removed from \_hauteur\_ or disdain of his

companions, as convinced her that the improvement of manners

which she had yesterday witnessed however temporary its existence

might prove, had at least outlived one day. When she saw him thus

seeking the acquaintance and courting the good opinion of people

with whom any intercourse a few months ago would have been a

disgrace—when she saw him thus civil, not only to herself, but to

the very relations whom he had openly disdained, and recollected

their last lively scene in Hunsford Parsonage—the difference, the

change was so great, and struck so forcibly on her mind, that she

could hardly restrain her astonishment from being visible. Never,

even in the company of his dear friends at Netherfield, or his

dignified relations at Rosings, had she seen him so desirous to

please, so free from self-consequence or unbending reserve, as

now, when no importance could result from the success of his

endeavours, and when even the acquaintance of those to whom his

attentions were addressed would draw down the ridicule and

censure of the ladies both of Netherfield and Rosings.

Their visitors stayed with them above half-an-hour; and when they

arose to depart, Mr. Darcy called on his sister to join him in

expressing their wish of seeing Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, and Miss

Bennet, to dinner at Pemberley, before they left the country.

Miss Darcy, though with a diffidence which marked her little in

the habit of giving invitations, readily obeyed. Mrs. Gardiner

looked at her niece, desirous of knowing how \_she\_, whom the

invitation most concerned, felt disposed as to its acceptance,

but Elizabeth had turned away her head. Presuming however, that

this studied avoidance spoke rather a momentary embarrassment

than any dislike of the proposal, and seeing in her husband, who

was fond of society, a perfect willingness to accept it, she

ventured to engage for her attendance, and the day after the next

was fixed on.

Bingley expressed great pleasure in the certainty of seeing

Elizabeth again, having still a great deal to say to her, and

many enquiries to make after all their Hertfordshire friends.

Elizabeth, construing all this into a wish of hearing her speak

of her sister, was pleased, and on this account, as well as some

others, found herself, when their visitors left them, capable of

considering the last half-hour with some satisfaction, though

while it was passing, the enjoyment of it had been little. Eager

to be alone, and fearful of enquiries or hints from her uncle and

aunt, she stayed with them only long enough to hear their

favourable opinion of Bingley, and then hurried away to dress.

But she had no reason to fear Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner’s curiosity;

it was not their wish to force her communication. It was evident

that she was much better acquainted with Mr. Darcy than they had

before any idea of; it was evident that he was very much in love

with her. They saw much to interest, but nothing to justify

enquiry.

Of Mr. Darcy it was now a matter of anxiety to think well; and,

as far as their acquaintance reached, there was no fault to find.

They could not be untouched by his politeness; and had they drawn

his character from their own feelings and his servant’s report,

without any reference to any other account, the circle in

Hertfordshire to which he was known would not have recognized it

for Mr. Darcy. There was now an interest, however, in believing

the housekeeper; and they soon became sensible that the authority

of a servant who had known him since he was four years old, and

whose own manners indicated respectability, was not to be hastily

rejected. Neither had anything occurred in the intelligence of

their Lambton friends that could materially lessen its weight.

They had nothing to accuse him of but pride; pride he probably

had, and if not, it would certainly be imputed by the inhabitants

of a small market-town where the family did not visit. It was

acknowledged, however, that he was a liberal man, and did much

good among the poor.

With respect to Wickham, the travellers soon found that he was

not held there in much estimation; for though the chief of his

concerns with the son of his patron were imperfectly understood,

it was yet a well-known fact that, on his quitting Derbyshire, he

had left many debts behind him, which Mr. Darcy afterwards

discharged.

As for Elizabeth, her thoughts were at Pemberley this evening

more than the last; and the evening, though as it passed it

seemed long, was not long enough to determine her feelings

towards \_one\_ in that mansion; and she lay awake two whole hours

endeavouring to make them out. She certainly did not hate him.

No; hatred had vanished long ago, and she had almost as long been

ashamed of ever feeling a dislike against him, that could be so

called. The respect created by the conviction of his valuable

qualities, though at first unwillingly admitted, had for some

time ceased to be repugnant to her feeling; and it was now

heightened into somewhat of a friendlier nature, by the testimony

so highly in his favour, and bringing forward his disposition in

so amiable a light, which yesterday had produced. But above all,

above respect and esteem, there was a motive within her of

goodwill which could not be overlooked. It was gratitude;

gratitude, not merely for having once loved her, but for loving

her still well enough to forgive all the petulance and acrimony

of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations

accompanying her rejection. He who, she had been persuaded, would

avoid her as his greatest enemy, seemed, on this accidental

meeting, most eager to preserve the acquaintance, and without any

indelicate display of regard, or any peculiarity of manner, where

their two selves only were concerned, was soliciting the good

opinion of her friends, and bent on making her known to his

sister. Such a change in a man of so much pride exciting not only

astonishment but gratitude—for to love, ardent love, it must be

attributed; and as such its impression on her was of a sort to be

encouraged, as by no means unpleasing, though it could not be

exactly defined. She respected, she esteemed, she was grateful to

him, she felt a real interest in his welfare; and she only wanted

to know how far she wished that welfare to depend upon herself,

and how far it would be for the happiness of both that she should

employ the power, which her fancy told her she still possessed,

of bringing on her the renewal of his addresses.

It had been settled in the evening between the aunt and the

niece, that such a striking civility as Miss Darcy’s in coming to

see them on the very day of her arrival at Pemberley, for she had

reached it only to a late breakfast, ought to be imitated, though

it could not be equalled, by some exertion of politeness on their

side; and, consequently, that it would be highly expedient to

wait on her at Pemberley the following morning. They were,

therefore, to go. Elizabeth was pleased; though when she asked

herself the reason, she had very little to say in reply.

Mr. Gardiner left them soon after breakfast. The fishing scheme

had been renewed the day before, and a positive engagement made

of his meeting some of the gentlemen at Pemberley before noon.

Chapter 45

Convinced as Elizabeth now was that Miss Bingley’s dislike of her

had originated in jealousy, she could not help feeling how

unwelcome her appearance at Pemberley must be to her, and was

curious to know with how much civility on that lady’s side the

acquaintance would now be renewed.

On reaching the house, they were shown through the hall into the

saloon, whose northern aspect rendered it delightful for summer.

Its windows opening to the ground, admitted a most refreshing

view of the high woody hills behind the house, and of the

beautiful oaks and Spanish chestnuts which were scattered over

the intermediate lawn.

In this house they were received by Miss Darcy, who was sitting

there with Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley, and the lady with whom

she lived in London. Georgiana’s reception of them was very

civil, but attended with all the embarrassment which, though

proceeding from shyness and the fear of doing wrong, would easily

give to those who felt themselves inferior the belief of her

being proud and reserved. Mrs. Gardiner and her niece, however,

did her justice, and pitied her.

By Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley they were noticed only by a

curtsey; and, on their being seated, a pause, awkward as such

pauses must always be, succeeded for a few moments. It was first

broken by Mrs. Annesley, a genteel, agreeable-looking woman,

whose endeavour to introduce some kind of discourse proved her to

be more truly well-bred than either of the others; and between

her and Mrs. Gardiner, with occasional help from Elizabeth, the

conversation was carried on. Miss Darcy looked as if she wished

for courage enough to join in it; and sometimes did venture a

short sentence when there was least danger of its being heard.

Elizabeth soon saw that she was herself closely watched by Miss

Bingley, and that she could not speak a word, especially to Miss

Darcy, without calling her attention. This observation would not

have prevented her from trying to talk to the latter, had they

not been seated at an inconvenient distance; but she was not

sorry to be spared the necessity of saying much. Her own thoughts

were employing her. She expected every moment that some of the

gentlemen would enter the room. She wished, she feared that the

master of the house might be amongst them; and whether she wished

or feared it most, she could scarcely determine. After sitting in

this manner a quarter of an hour without hearing Miss Bingley’s

voice, Elizabeth was roused by receiving from her a cold enquiry

after the health of her family. She answered with equal

indifference and brevity, and the other said no more.

The next variation which their visit afforded was produced by the

entrance of servants with cold meat, cake, and a variety of all

the finest fruits in season; but this did not take place till

after many a significant look and smile from Mrs. Annesley to

Miss Darcy had been given, to remind her of her post. There was

now employment for the whole party—for though they could not all

talk, they could all eat; and the beautiful pyramids of grapes,

nectarines, and peaches soon collected them round the table.

While thus engaged, Elizabeth had a fair opportunity of deciding

whether she most feared or wished for the appearance of Mr.

Darcy, by the feelings which prevailed on his entering the room;

and then, though but a moment before she had believed her wishes

to predominate, she began to regret that he came.

He had been some time with Mr. Gardiner, who, with two or three

other gentlemen from the house, was engaged by the river, and had

left him only on learning that the ladies of the family intended

a visit to Georgiana that morning. No sooner did he appear than

Elizabeth wisely resolved to be perfectly easy and unembarrassed;

a resolution the more necessary to be made, but perhaps not the

more easily kept, because she saw that the suspicions of the

whole party were awakened against them, and that there was

scarcely an eye which did not watch his behaviour when he first

came into the room. In no countenance was attentive curiosity so

strongly marked as in Miss Bingley’s, in spite of the smiles

which overspread her face whenever she spoke to one of its

objects; for jealousy had not yet made her desperate, and her

attentions to Mr. Darcy were by no means over. Miss Darcy, on her

brother’s entrance, exerted herself much more to talk, and

Elizabeth saw that he was anxious for his sister and herself to

get acquainted, and forwarded as much as possible, every attempt

at conversation on either side. Miss Bingley saw all this

likewise; and, in the imprudence of anger, took the first

opportunity of saying, with sneering civility:

“Pray, Miss Eliza, are not the ——shire Militia removed from

Meryton? They must be a great loss to \_your\_ family.”

In Darcy’s presence she dared not mention Wickham’s name; but

Elizabeth instantly comprehended that he was uppermost in her

thoughts; and the various recollections connected with him gave

her a moment’s distress; but exerting herself vigorously to repel

the ill-natured attack, she presently answered the question in a

tolerably detached tone. While she spoke, an involuntary glance

showed her Darcy, with a heightened complexion, earnestly looking

at her, and his sister overcome with confusion, and unable to

lift up her eyes. Had Miss Bingley known what pain she was then

giving her beloved friend, she undoubtedly would have refrained

from the hint; but she had merely intended to discompose

Elizabeth by bringing forward the idea of a man to whom she

believed her partial, to make her betray a sensibility which

might injure her in Darcy’s opinion, and, perhaps, to remind the

latter of all the follies and absurdities by which some part of

her family were connected with that corps. Not a syllable had

ever reached her of Miss Darcy’s meditated elopement. To no

creature had it been revealed, where secrecy was possible, except

to Elizabeth; and from all Bingley’s connections her brother was

particularly anxious to conceal it, from the very wish which

Elizabeth had long ago attributed to him, of their becoming

hereafter her own. He had certainly formed such a plan, and

without meaning that it should affect his endeavour to separate

him from Miss Bennet, it is probable that it might add something

to his lively concern for the welfare of his friend.

Elizabeth’s collected behaviour, however, soon quieted his

emotion; and as Miss Bingley, vexed and disappointed, dared not

approach nearer to Wickham, Georgiana also recovered in time,

though not enough to be able to speak any more. Her brother,

whose eye she feared to meet, scarcely recollected her interest

in the affair, and the very circumstance which had been designed

to turn his thoughts from Elizabeth seemed to have fixed them on

her more and more cheerfully.

Their visit did not continue long after the question and answer

above mentioned; and while Mr. Darcy was attending them to their

carriage Miss Bingley was venting her feelings in criticisms on

Elizabeth’s person, behaviour, and dress. But Georgiana would not

join her. Her brother’s recommendation was enough to ensure her

favour; his judgement could not err. And he had spoken in such

terms of Elizabeth as to leave Georgiana without the power of

finding her otherwise than lovely and amiable. When Darcy

returned to the saloon, Miss Bingley could not help repeating to

him some part of what she had been saying to his sister.

“How very ill Miss Eliza Bennet looks this morning, Mr. Darcy,”

she cried; “I never in my life saw anyone so much altered as she

is since the winter. She is grown so brown and coarse! Louisa and

I were agreeing that we should not have known her again.”

However little Mr. Darcy might have liked such an address, he

contented himself with coolly replying that he perceived no other

alteration than her being rather tanned, no miraculous

consequence of travelling in the summer.

“For my own part,” she rejoined, “I must confess that I never

could see any beauty in her. Her face is too thin; her complexion

has no brilliancy; and her features are not at all handsome. Her

nose wants character—there is nothing marked in its lines. Her

teeth are tolerable, but not out of the common way; and as for

her eyes, which have sometimes been called so fine, I could never

see anything extraordinary in them. They have a sharp, shrewish

look, which I do not like at all; and in her air altogether there

is a self-sufficiency without fashion, which is intolerable.”

Persuaded as Miss Bingley was that Darcy admired Elizabeth, this

was not the best method of recommending herself; but angry people

are not always wise; and in seeing him at last look somewhat

nettled, she had all the success she expected. He was resolutely

silent, however, and, from a determination of making him speak,

she continued:

“I remember, when we first knew her in Hertfordshire, how amazed

we all were to find that she was a reputed beauty; and I

particularly recollect your saying one night, after they had been

dining at Netherfield, ‘\_She\_ a beauty!—I should as soon call her

mother a wit.’ But afterwards she seemed to improve on you, and I

believe you thought her rather pretty at one time.”

“Yes,” replied Darcy, who could contain himself no longer, “but

\_that\_ was only when I first saw her, for it is many months since

I have considered her as one of the handsomest women of my

acquaintance.”

He then went away, and Miss Bingley was left to all the

satisfaction of having forced him to say what gave no one any

pain but herself.

Mrs. Gardiner and Elizabeth talked of all that had occurred

during their visit, as they returned, except what had

particularly interested them both. The look and behaviour of

everybody they had seen were discussed, except of the person who

had mostly engaged their attention. They talked of his sister,

his friends, his house, his fruit—of everything but himself; yet

Elizabeth was longing to know what Mrs. Gardiner thought of him,

and Mrs. Gardiner would have been highly gratified by her niece’s

beginning the subject.

Chapter 46

Elizabeth had been a good deal disappointed in not finding a

letter from Jane on their first arrival at Lambton; and this

disappointment had been renewed on each of the mornings that had

now been spent there; but on the third her repining was over, and

her sister justified, by the receipt of two letters from her at

once, on one of which was marked that it had been missent

elsewhere. Elizabeth was not surprised at it, as Jane had written

the direction remarkably ill.

They had just been preparing to walk as the letters came in; and

her uncle and aunt, leaving her to enjoy them in quiet, set off

by themselves. The one missent must first be attended to; it had

been written five days ago. The beginning contained an account of

all their little parties and engagements, with such news as the

country afforded; but the latter half, which was dated a day

later, and written in evident agitation, gave more important

intelligence. It was to this effect:

“Since writing the above, dearest Lizzy, something has occurred

of a most unexpected and serious nature; but I am afraid of

alarming you—be assured that we are all well. What I have to say

relates to poor Lydia. An express came at twelve last night, just

as we were all gone to bed, from Colonel Forster, to inform us

that she was gone off to Scotland with one of his officers; to

own the truth, with Wickham! Imagine our surprise. To Kitty,

however, it does not seem so wholly unexpected. I am very, very

sorry. So imprudent a match on both sides! But I am willing to

hope the best, and that his character has been misunderstood.

Thoughtless and indiscreet I can easily believe him, but this

step (and let us rejoice over it) marks nothing bad at heart. His

choice is disinterested at least, for he must know my father can

give her nothing. Our poor mother is sadly grieved. My father

bears it better. How thankful am I that we never let them know

what has been said against him; we must forget it ourselves. They

were off Saturday night about twelve, as is conjectured, but were

not missed till yesterday morning at eight. The express was sent

off directly. My dear Lizzy, they must have passed within ten

miles of us. Colonel Forster gives us reason to expect him here

soon. Lydia left a few lines for his wife, informing her of their

intention. I must conclude, for I cannot be long from my poor

mother. I am afraid you will not be able to make it out, but I

hardly know what I have written.”

Without allowing herself time for consideration, and scarcely

knowing what she felt, Elizabeth on finishing this letter

instantly seized the other, and opening it with the utmost

impatience, read as follows: it had been written a day later than

the conclusion of the first.

“By this time, my dearest sister, you have received my hurried

letter; I wish this may be more intelligible, but though not

confined for time, my head is so bewildered that I cannot answer

for being coherent. Dearest Lizzy, I hardly know what I would

write, but I have bad news for you, and it cannot be delayed.

Imprudent as the marriage between Mr. Wickham and our poor Lydia

would be, we are now anxious to be assured it has taken place,

for there is but too much reason to fear they are not gone to

Scotland. Colonel Forster came yesterday, having left Brighton

the day before, not many hours after the express. Though Lydia’s

short letter to Mrs. F. gave them to understand that they were

going to Gretna Green, something was dropped by Denny expressing

his belief that W. never intended to go there, or to marry Lydia

at all, which was repeated to Colonel F., who, instantly taking

the alarm, set off from B. intending to trace their route. He did

trace them easily to Clapham, but no further; for on entering

that place, they removed into a hackney coach, and dismissed the

chaise that brought them from Epsom. All that is known after this

is, that they were seen to continue the London road. I know not

what to think. After making every possible enquiry on that side

London, Colonel F. came on into Hertfordshire, anxiously renewing

them at all the turnpikes, and at the inns in Barnet and

Hatfield, but without any success—no such people had been seen to

pass through. With the kindest concern he came on to Longbourn,

and broke his apprehensions to us in a manner most creditable to

his heart. I am sincerely grieved for him and Mrs. F., but no one

can throw any blame on them. Our distress, my dear Lizzy, is very

great. My father and mother believe the worst, but I cannot think

so ill of him. Many circumstances might make it more eligible for

them to be married privately in town than to pursue their first

plan; and even if \_he\_ could form such a design against a young

woman of Lydia’s connections, which is not likely, can I suppose

her so lost to everything? Impossible! I grieve to find, however,

that Colonel F. is not disposed to depend upon their marriage; he

shook his head when I expressed my hopes, and said he feared W.

was not a man to be trusted. My poor mother is really ill, and

keeps her room. Could she exert herself, it would be better; but

this is not to be expected. And as to my father, I never in my

life saw him so affected. Poor Kitty has anger for having

concealed their attachment; but as it was a matter of confidence,

one cannot wonder. I am truly glad, dearest Lizzy, that you have

been spared something of these distressing scenes; but now, as

the first shock is over, shall I own that I long for your return?

I am not so selfish, however, as to press for it, if

inconvenient. Adieu! I take up my pen again to do what I have

just told you I would not; but circumstances are such that I

cannot help earnestly begging you all to come here as soon as

possible. I know my dear uncle and aunt so well, that I am not

afraid of requesting it, though I have still something more to

ask of the former. My father is going to London with Colonel

Forster instantly, to try to discover her. What he means to do I

am sure I know not; but his excessive distress will not allow him

to pursue any measure in the best and safest way, and Colonel

Forster is obliged to be at Brighton again to-morrow evening. In

such an exigence, my uncle’s advice and assistance would be

everything in the world; he will immediately comprehend what I

must feel, and I rely upon his goodness.”

“Oh! where, where is my uncle?” cried Elizabeth, darting from her

seat as she finished the letter, in eagerness to follow him,

without losing a moment of the time so precious; but as she

reached the door it was opened by a servant, and Mr. Darcy

appeared. Her pale face and impetuous manner made him start, and

before he could recover himself to speak, she, in whose mind

every idea was superseded by Lydia’s situation, hastily

exclaimed, “I beg your pardon, but I must leave you. I must find

Mr. Gardiner this moment, on business that cannot be delayed; I

have not an instant to lose.”

“Good God! what is the matter?” cried he, with more feeling than

politeness; then recollecting himself, “I will not detain you a

minute; but let me, or let the servant go after Mr. and Mrs.

Gardiner. You are not well enough; you cannot go yourself.”

Elizabeth hesitated, but her knees trembled under her and she

felt how little would be gained by her attempting to pursue them.

Calling back the servant, therefore, she commissioned him, though

in so breathless an accent as made her almost unintelligible, to

fetch his master and mistress home instantly.

On his quitting the room she sat down, unable to support herself,

and looking so miserably ill, that it was impossible for Darcy to

leave her, or to refrain from saying, in a tone of gentleness and

commiseration, “Let me call your maid. Is there nothing you could

take to give you present relief? A glass of wine; shall I get you

one? You are very ill.”

“No, I thank you,” she replied, endeavouring to recover herself.

“There is nothing the matter with me. I am quite well; I am only

distressed by some dreadful news which I have just received from

Longbourn.”

She burst into tears as she alluded to it, and for a few minutes

could not speak another word. Darcy, in wretched suspense, could

only say something indistinctly of his concern, and observe her

in compassionate silence. At length she spoke again. “I have just

had a letter from Jane, with such dreadful news. It cannot be

concealed from anyone. My younger sister has left all her

friends—has eloped; has thrown herself into the power of—of Mr.

Wickham. They are gone off together from Brighton. \_You\_ know him

too well to doubt the rest. She has no money, no connections,

nothing that can tempt him to—she is lost for ever.”

Darcy was fixed in astonishment. “When I consider,” she added in

a yet more agitated voice, “that \_I\_ might have prevented it! \_I\_

who knew what he was. Had I but explained some part of it

only—some part of what I learnt, to my own family! Had his

character been known, this could not have happened. But it is

all—all too late now.”

“I am grieved indeed,” cried Darcy; “grieved—shocked. But is it

certain—absolutely certain?”

“Oh, yes! They left Brighton together on Sunday night, and were

traced almost to London, but not beyond; they are certainly not

gone to Scotland.”

“And what has been done, what has been attempted, to recover

her?”

“My father is gone to London, and Jane has written to beg my

uncle’s immediate assistance; and we shall be off, I hope, in

half-an-hour. But nothing can be done—I know very well that

nothing can be done. How is such a man to be worked on? How are

they even to be discovered? I have not the smallest hope. It is

every way horrible!”

Darcy shook his head in silent acquiescence.

“When \_my\_ eyes were opened to his real character—Oh! had I known

what I ought, what I dared to do! But I knew not—I was afraid of

doing too much. Wretched, wretched mistake!”

Darcy made no answer. He seemed scarcely to hear her, and was

walking up and down the room in earnest meditation, his brow

contracted, his air gloomy. Elizabeth soon observed, and

instantly understood it. Her power was sinking; everything \_must\_

sink under such a proof of family weakness, such an assurance of

the deepest disgrace. She could neither wonder nor condemn, but

the belief of his self-conquest brought nothing consolatory to

her bosom, afforded no palliation of her distress. It was, on the

contrary, exactly calculated to make her understand her own

wishes; and never had she so honestly felt that she could have

loved him, as now, when all love must be vain.

But self, though it would intrude, could not engross her.

Lydia—the humiliation, the misery she was bringing on them all,

soon swallowed up every private care; and covering her face with

her handkerchief, Elizabeth was soon lost to everything else;

and, after a pause of several minutes, was only recalled to a

sense of her situation by the voice of her companion, who, in a

manner which, though it spoke compassion, spoke likewise

restraint, said, “I am afraid you have been long desiring my

absence, nor have I anything to plead in excuse of my stay, but

real, though unavailing concern. Would to Heaven that anything

could be either said or done on my part that might offer

consolation to such distress! But I will not torment you with

vain wishes, which may seem purposely to ask for your thanks.

This unfortunate affair will, I fear, prevent my sister’s having

the pleasure of seeing you at Pemberley to-day.”

“Oh, yes. Be so kind as to apologise for us to Miss Darcy. Say

that urgent business calls us home immediately. Conceal the

unhappy truth as long as it is possible, I know it cannot be

long.”

He readily assured her of his secrecy; again expressed his sorrow

for her distress, wished it a happier conclusion than there was

at present reason to hope, and leaving his compliments for her

relations, with only one serious, parting look, went away.

As he quitted the room, Elizabeth felt how improbable it was that

they should ever see each other again on such terms of cordiality

as had marked their several meetings in Derbyshire; and as she

threw a retrospective glance over the whole of their

acquaintance, so full of contradictions and varieties, sighed at

the perverseness of those feelings which would now have promoted

its continuance, and would formerly have rejoiced in its

termination.

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection,

Elizabeth’s change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor

faulty. But if otherwise—if regard springing from such sources is

unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often

described as arising on a first interview with its object, and

even before two words have been exchanged, nothing can be said in

her defence, except that she had given somewhat of a trial to the

latter method in her partiality for Wickham, and that its ill

success might, perhaps, authorise her to seek the other less

interesting mode of attachment. Be that as it may, she saw him go

with regret; and in this early example of what Lydia’s infamy

must produce, found additional anguish as she reflected on that

wretched business. Never, since reading Jane’s second letter, had

she entertained a hope of Wickham’s meaning to marry her. No one

but Jane, she thought, could flatter herself with such an

expectation. Surprise was the least of her feelings on this

development. While the contents of the first letter remained in

her mind, she was all surprise—all astonishment that Wickham

should marry a girl whom it was impossible he could marry for

money; and how Lydia could ever have attached him had appeared

incomprehensible. But now it was all too natural. For such an

attachment as this she might have sufficient charms; and though

she did not suppose Lydia to be deliberately engaging in an

elopement without the intention of marriage, she had no

difficulty in believing that neither her virtue nor her

understanding would preserve her from falling an easy prey.

She had never perceived, while the regiment was in Hertfordshire,

that Lydia had any partiality for him; but she was convinced that

Lydia wanted only encouragement to attach herself to anybody.

Sometimes one officer, sometimes another, had been her favourite,

as their attentions raised them in her opinion. Her affections

had continually been fluctuating but never without an object. The

mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a

girl—oh! how acutely did she now feel it!

She was wild to be at home—to hear, to see, to be upon the spot

to share with Jane in the cares that must now fall wholly upon

her, in a family so deranged, a father absent, a mother incapable

of exertion, and requiring constant attendance; and though almost

persuaded that nothing could be done for Lydia, her uncle’s

interference seemed of the utmost importance, and till he entered

the room her impatience was severe. Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner had

hurried back in alarm, supposing by the servant’s account that

their niece was taken suddenly ill; but satisfying them instantly

on that head, she eagerly communicated the cause of their

summons, reading the two letters aloud, and dwelling on the

postscript of the last with trembling energy.— Though Lydia had

never been a favourite with them, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner could not

but be deeply afflicted. Not Lydia only, but all were concerned

in it; and after the first exclamations of surprise and horror,

Mr. Gardiner promised every assistance in his power. Elizabeth,

though expecting no less, thanked him with tears of gratitude;

and all three being actuated by one spirit, everything relating

to their journey was speedily settled. They were to be off as

soon as possible. “But what is to be done about Pemberley?” cried

Mrs. Gardiner. “John told us Mr. Darcy was here when you sent for

us; was it so?”

“Yes; and I told him we should not be able to keep our

engagement. \_That\_ is all settled.”

“That is all settled;” repeated the other, as she ran into her

room to prepare. “And are they upon such terms as for her to

disclose the real truth? Oh, that I knew how it was!”

But wishes were vain, or at least could only serve to amuse her

in the hurry and confusion of the following hour. Had Elizabeth

been at leisure to be idle, she would have remained certain that

all employment was impossible to one so wretched as herself; but

she had her share of business as well as her aunt, and amongst

the rest there were notes to be written to all their friends at

Lambton, with false excuses for their sudden departure. An hour,

however, saw the whole completed; and Mr. Gardiner meanwhile

having settled his account at the inn, nothing remained to be

done but to go; and Elizabeth, after all the misery of the

morning, found herself, in a shorter space of time than she could

have supposed, seated in the carriage, and on the road to

Longbourn.

Chapter 47

“I have been thinking it over again, Elizabeth,” said her uncle,

as they drove from the town; “and really, upon serious

consideration, I am much more inclined than I was to judge as

your eldest sister does on the matter. It appears to me so very

unlikely that any young man should form such a design against a

girl who is by no means unprotected or friendless, and who was

actually staying in his colonel’s family, that I am strongly

inclined to hope the best. Could he expect that her friends would

not step forward? Could he expect to be noticed again by the

regiment, after such an affront to Colonel Forster? His

temptation is not adequate to the risk!”

“Do you really think so?” cried Elizabeth, brightening up for a

moment.

“Upon my word,” said Mrs. Gardiner, “I begin to be of your

uncle’s opinion. It is really too great a violation of decency,

honour, and interest, for him to be guilty of. I cannot think so

very ill of Wickham. Can you yourself, Lizzy, so wholly give him

up, as to believe him capable of it?”

“Not, perhaps, of neglecting his own interest; but of every other

neglect I can believe him capable. If, indeed, it should be so!

But I dare not hope it. Why should they not go on to Scotland if

that had been the case?”

“In the first place,” replied Mr. Gardiner, “there is no absolute

proof that they are not gone to Scotland.”

“Oh! but their removing from the chaise into a hackney coach is

such a presumption! And, besides, no traces of them were to be

found on the Barnet road.”

“Well, then—supposing them to be in London. They may be there,

though for the purpose of concealment, for no more exceptional

purpose. It is not likely that money should be very abundant on

either side; and it might strike them that they could be more

economically, though less expeditiously, married in London than

in Scotland.”

“But why all this secrecy? Why any fear of detection? Why must

their marriage be private? Oh, no, no—this is not likely. His

most particular friend, you see by Jane’s account, was persuaded

of his never intending to marry her. Wickham will never marry a

woman without some money. He cannot afford it. And what claims

has Lydia—what attraction has she beyond youth, health, and good

humour that could make him, for her sake, forego every chance of

benefiting himself by marrying well? As to what restraint the

apprehensions of disgrace in the corps might throw on a

dishonourable elopement with her, I am not able to judge; for I

know nothing of the effects that such a step might produce. But

as to your other objection, I am afraid it will hardly hold good.

Lydia has no brothers to step forward; and he might imagine, from

my father’s behaviour, from his indolence and the little

attention he has ever seemed to give to what was going forward in

his family, that \_he\_ would do as little, and think as little

about it, as any father could do, in such a matter.”

“But can you think that Lydia is so lost to everything but love

of him as to consent to live with him on any terms other than

marriage?”

“It does seem, and it is most shocking indeed,” replied

Elizabeth, with tears in her eyes, “that a sister’s sense of

decency and virtue in such a point should admit of doubt. But,

really, I know not what to say. Perhaps I am not doing her

justice. But she is very young; she has never been taught to

think on serious subjects; and for the last half-year, nay, for a

twelvemonth—she has been given up to nothing but amusement and

vanity. She has been allowed to dispose of her time in the most

idle and frivolous manner, and to adopt any opinions that came in

her way. Since the ——shire were first quartered in Meryton,

nothing but love, flirtation, and officers have been in her head.

She has been doing everything in her power by thinking and

talking on the subject, to give greater—what shall I call it?

susceptibility to her feelings; which are naturally lively

enough. And we all know that Wickham has every charm of person

and address that can captivate a woman.”

“But you see that Jane,” said her aunt, “does not think so very

ill of Wickham as to believe him capable of the attempt.”

“Of whom does Jane ever think ill? And who is there, whatever

might be their former conduct, that she would think capable of

such an attempt, till it were proved against them? But Jane

knows, as well as I do, what Wickham really is. We both know that

he has been profligate in every sense of the word; that he has

neither integrity nor honour; that he is as false and deceitful

as he is insinuating.”

“And do you really know all this?” cried Mrs. Gardiner, whose

curiosity as to the mode of her intelligence was all alive.

“I do indeed,” replied Elizabeth, colouring. “I told you, the

other day, of his infamous behaviour to Mr. Darcy; and you

yourself, when last at Longbourn, heard in what manner he spoke

of the man who had behaved with such forbearance and liberality

towards him. And there are other circumstances which I am not at

liberty—which it is not worth while to relate; but his lies about

the whole Pemberley family are endless. From what he said of Miss

Darcy I was thoroughly prepared to see a proud, reserved,

disagreeable girl. Yet he knew to the contrary himself. He must

know that she was as amiable and unpretending as we have found

her.”

“But does Lydia know nothing of this? can she be ignorant of what

you and Jane seem so well to understand?”

“Oh, yes!—that, that is the worst of all. Till I was in Kent, and

saw so much both of Mr. Darcy and his relation Colonel

Fitzwilliam, I was ignorant of the truth myself. And when I

returned home, the ——shire was to leave Meryton in a week or

fortnight’s time. As that was the case, neither Jane, to whom I

related the whole, nor I, thought it necessary to make our

knowledge public; for of what use could it apparently be to any

one, that the good opinion which all the neighbourhood had of him

should then be overthrown? And even when it was settled that

Lydia should go with Mrs. Forster, the necessity of opening her

eyes to his character never occurred to me. That \_she\_ could be

in any danger from the deception never entered my head. That such

a consequence as \_this\_ could ensue, you may easily believe, was

far enough from my thoughts.”

“When they all removed to Brighton, therefore, you had no reason,

I suppose, to believe them fond of each other?”

“Not the slightest. I can remember no symptom of affection on

either side; and had anything of the kind been perceptible, you

must be aware that ours is not a family on which it could be

thrown away. When first he entered the corps, she was ready

enough to admire him; but so we all were. Every girl in or near

Meryton was out of her senses about him for the first two months;

but he never distinguished \_her\_ by any particular attention;

and, consequently, after a moderate period of extravagant and

wild admiration, her fancy for him gave way, and others of the

regiment, who treated her with more distinction, again became her

favourites.”

It may be easily believed, that however little of novelty could

be added to their fears, hopes, and conjectures, on this

interesting subject, by its repeated discussion, no other could

detain them from it long, during the whole of the journey. From

Elizabeth’s thoughts it was never absent. Fixed there by the

keenest of all anguish, self-reproach, she could find no interval

of ease or forgetfulness.

They travelled as expeditiously as possible, and, sleeping one

night on the road, reached Longbourn by dinner time the next day.

It was a comfort to Elizabeth to consider that Jane could not

have been wearied by long expectations.

The little Gardiners, attracted by the sight of a chaise, were

standing on the steps of the house as they entered the paddock;

and, when the carriage drove up to the door, the joyful surprise

that lighted up their faces, and displayed itself over their

whole bodies, in a variety of capers and frisks, was the first

pleasing earnest of their welcome.

Elizabeth jumped out; and, after giving each of them a hasty

kiss, hurried into the vestibule, where Jane, who came running

down from her mother’s apartment, immediately met her.

Elizabeth, as she affectionately embraced her, whilst tears

filled the eyes of both, lost not a moment in asking whether

anything had been heard of the fugitives.

“Not yet,” replied Jane. “But now that my dear uncle is come, I

hope everything will be well.”

“Is my father in town?”

“Yes, he went on Tuesday, as I wrote you word.”

“And have you heard from him often?”

“We have heard only twice. He wrote me a few lines on Wednesday

to say that he had arrived in safety, and to give me his

directions, which I particularly begged him to do. He merely

added that he should not write again till he had something of

importance to mention.”

“And my mother—how is she? How are you all?”

“My mother is tolerably well, I trust; though her spirits are

greatly shaken. She is up stairs and will have great satisfaction

in seeing you all. She does not yet leave her dressing-room. Mary

and Kitty, thank Heaven, are quite well.”

“But you—how are you?” cried Elizabeth. “You look pale. How much

you must have gone through!”

Her sister, however, assured her of her being perfectly well; and

their conversation, which had been passing while Mr. and Mrs.

Gardiner were engaged with their children, was now put an end to

by the approach of the whole party. Jane ran to her uncle and

aunt, and welcomed and thanked them both, with alternate smiles

and tears.

When they were all in the drawing-room, the questions which

Elizabeth had already asked were of course repeated by the

others, and they soon found that Jane had no intelligence to

give. The sanguine hope of good, however, which the benevolence

of her heart suggested had not yet deserted her; she still

expected that it would all end well, and that every morning would

bring some letter, either from Lydia or her father, to explain

their proceedings, and, perhaps, announce their marriage.

Mrs. Bennet, to whose apartment they all repaired, after a few

minutes’ conversation together, received them exactly as might be

expected; with tears and lamentations of regret, invectives

against the villainous conduct of Wickham, and complaints of her

own sufferings and ill-usage; blaming everybody but the person to

whose ill-judging indulgence the errors of her daughter must

principally be owing.

“If I had been able,” said she, “to carry my point in going to

Brighton, with all my family, \_this\_ would not have happened; but

poor dear Lydia had nobody to take care of her. Why did the

Forsters ever let her go out of their sight? I am sure there was

some great neglect or other on their side, for she is not the

kind of girl to do such a thing if she had been well looked

after. I always thought they were very unfit to have the charge

of her; but I was overruled, as I always am. Poor dear child! And

now here’s Mr. Bennet gone away, and I know he will fight

Wickham, wherever he meets him and then he will be killed, and

what is to become of us all? The Collinses will turn us out

before he is cold in his grave, and if you are not kind to us,

brother, I do not know what we shall do.”

They all exclaimed against such terrific ideas; and Mr. Gardiner,

after general assurances of his affection for her and all her

family, told her that he meant to be in London the very next day,

and would assist Mr. Bennet in every endeavour for recovering

Lydia.

“Do not give way to useless alarm,” added he; “though it is right

to be prepared for the worst, there is no occasion to look on it

as certain. It is not quite a week since they left Brighton. In a

few days more we may gain some news of them; and till we know

that they are not married, and have no design of marrying, do not

let us give the matter over as lost. As soon as I get to town I

shall go to my brother, and make him come home with me to

Gracechurch Street; and then we may consult together as to what

is to be done.”

“Oh! my dear brother,” replied Mrs. Bennet, “that is exactly what

I could most wish for. And now do, when you get to town, find

them out, wherever they may be; and if they are not married

already, \_make\_ them marry. And as for wedding clothes, do not

let them wait for that, but tell Lydia she shall have as much

money as she chooses to buy them, after they are married. And,

above all, keep Mr. Bennet from fighting. Tell him what a

dreadful state I am in, that I am frighted out of my wits—and

have such tremblings, such flutterings, all over me—such spasms

in my side and pains in my head, and such beatings at heart, that

I can get no rest by night nor by day. And tell my dear Lydia not

to give any directions about her clothes till she has seen me,

for she does not know which are the best warehouses. Oh, brother,

how kind you are! I know you will contrive it all.”

But Mr. Gardiner, though he assured her again of his earnest

endeavours in the cause, could not avoid recommending moderation

to her, as well in her hopes as her fear; and after talking with

her in this manner till dinner was on the table, they all left

her to vent all her feelings on the housekeeper, who attended in

the absence of her daughters.

Though her brother and sister were persuaded that there was no

real occasion for such a seclusion from the family, they did not

attempt to oppose it, for they knew that she had not prudence

enough to hold her tongue before the servants, while they waited

at table, and judged it better that \_one\_ only of the household,

and the one whom they could most trust should comprehend all her

fears and solicitude on the subject.

In the dining-room they were soon joined by Mary and Kitty, who

had been too busily engaged in their separate apartments to make

their appearance before. One came from her books, and the other

from her toilette. The faces of both, however, were tolerably

calm; and no change was visible in either, except that the loss

of her favourite sister, or the anger which she had herself

incurred in this business, had given more of fretfulness than

usual to the accents of Kitty. As for Mary, she was mistress

enough of herself to whisper to Elizabeth, with a countenance of

grave reflection, soon after they were seated at table:

“This is a most unfortunate affair, and will probably be much

talked of. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the

wounded bosoms of each other the balm of sisterly consolation.”

Then, perceiving in Elizabeth no inclination of replying, she

added, “Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from

it this useful lesson: that loss of virtue in a female is

irretrievable; that one false step involves her in endless ruin;

that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful; and

that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the

undeserving of the other sex.”

Elizabeth lifted up her eyes in amazement, but was too much

oppressed to make any reply. Mary, however, continued to console

herself with such kind of moral extractions from the evil before

them.

In the afternoon, the two elder Miss Bennets were able to be for

half-an-hour by themselves; and Elizabeth instantly availed

herself of the opportunity of making many enquiries, which Jane

was equally eager to satisfy. After joining in general

lamentations over the dreadful sequel of this event, which

Elizabeth considered as all but certain, and Miss Bennet could

not assert to be wholly impossible, the former continued the

subject, by saying, “But tell me all and everything about it

which I have not already heard. Give me further particulars. What

did Colonel Forster say? Had they no apprehension of anything

before the elopement took place? They must have seen them

together for ever.”

“Colonel Forster did own that he had often suspected some

partiality, especially on Lydia’s side, but nothing to give him

any alarm. I am so grieved for him! His behaviour was attentive

and kind to the utmost. He \_was\_ coming to us, in order to assure

us of his concern, before he had any idea of their not being gone

to Scotland: when that apprehension first got abroad, it hastened

his journey.”

“And was Denny convinced that Wickham would not marry? Did he

know of their intending to go off? Had Colonel Forster seen Denny

himself?”

“Yes; but, when questioned by \_him\_, Denny denied knowing

anything of their plans, and would not give his real opinion

about it. He did not repeat his persuasion of their not

marrying—and from \_that\_, I am inclined to hope, he might have

been misunderstood before.”

“And till Colonel Forster came himself, not one of you

entertained a doubt, I suppose, of their being really married?”

“How was it possible that such an idea should enter our brains? I

felt a little uneasy—a little fearful of my sister’s happiness

with him in marriage, because I knew that his conduct had not

been always quite right. My father and mother knew nothing of

that; they only felt how imprudent a match it must be. Kitty then

owned, with a very natural triumph on knowing more than the rest

of us, that in Lydia’s last letter she had prepared her for such

a step. She had known, it seems, of their being in love with each

other, many weeks.”

“But not before they went to Brighton?”

“No, I believe not.”

“And did Colonel Forster appear to think well of Wickham himself?

Does he know his real character?”

“I must confess that he did not speak so well of Wickham as he

formerly did. He believed him to be imprudent and extravagant.

And since this sad affair has taken place, it is said that he

left Meryton greatly in debt; but I hope this may be false.”

“Oh, Jane, had we been less secret, had we told what we knew of

him, this could not have happened!”

“Perhaps it would have been better,” replied her sister. “But to

expose the former faults of any person without knowing what their

present feelings were, seemed unjustifiable. We acted with the

best intentions.”

“Could Colonel Forster repeat the particulars of Lydia’s note to

his wife?”

“He brought it with him for us to see.”

Jane then took it from her pocket-book, and gave it to Elizabeth.

These were the contents:

“My dear Harriet,

“You will laugh when you know where I am gone, and I cannot help

laughing myself at your surprise to-morrow morning, as soon as I

am missed. I am going to Gretna Green, and if you cannot guess

with who, I shall think you a simpleton, for there is but one man

in the world I love, and he is an angel. I should never be happy

without him, so think it no harm to be off. You need not send

them word at Longbourn of my going, if you do not like it, for it

will make the surprise the greater, when I write to them and sign

my name ‘Lydia Wickham.’ What a good joke it will be! I can

hardly write for laughing. Pray make my excuses to Pratt for not

keeping my engagement, and dancing with him to-night. Tell him I

hope he will excuse me when he knows all; and tell him I will

dance with him at the next ball we meet, with great pleasure. I

shall send for my clothes when I get to Longbourn; but I wish you

would tell Sally to mend a great slit in my worked muslin gown

before they are packed up. Good-bye. Give my love to Colonel

Forster. I hope you will drink to our good journey.

“Your affectionate friend,

“LYDIA BENNET.”

“Oh! thoughtless, thoughtless Lydia!” cried Elizabeth when she

had finished it. “What a letter is this, to be written at such a

moment! But at least it shows that \_she\_ was serious on the

subject of their journey. Whatever he might afterwards persuade

her to, it was not on her side a \_scheme\_ of infamy. My poor

father! how he must have felt it!”

“I never saw anyone so shocked. He could not speak a word for

full ten minutes. My mother was taken ill immediately, and the

whole house in such confusion!”

“Oh! Jane,” cried Elizabeth, “was there a servant belonging to it

who did not know the whole story before the end of the day?”

“I do not know. I hope there was. But to be guarded at such a

time is very difficult. My mother was in hysterics, and though I

endeavoured to give her every assistance in my power, I am afraid

I did not do so much as I might have done! But the horror of what

might possibly happen almost took from me my faculties.”

“Your attendance upon her has been too much for you. You do not

look well. Oh that I had been with you! you have had every care

and anxiety upon yourself alone.”

“Mary and Kitty have been very kind, and would have shared in

every fatigue, I am sure; but I did not think it right for either

of them. Kitty is slight and delicate; and Mary studies so much,

that her hours of repose should not be broken in on. My aunt

Phillips came to Longbourn on Tuesday, after my father went away;

and was so good as to stay till Thursday with me. She was of

great use and comfort to us all. And Lady Lucas has been very

kind; she walked here on Wednesday morning to condole with us,

and offered her services, or any of her daughters’, if they

should be of use to us.”

“She had better have stayed at home,” cried Elizabeth; “perhaps

she \_meant\_ well, but, under such a misfortune as this, one

cannot see too little of one’s neighbours. Assistance is

impossible; condolence insufferable. Let them triumph over us at

a distance, and be satisfied.”

She then proceeded to enquire into the measures which her father

had intended to pursue, while in town, for the recovery of his

daughter.

“He meant I believe,” replied Jane, “to go to Epsom, the place

where they last changed horses, see the postilions and try if

anything could be made out from them. His principal object must

be to discover the number of the hackney coach which took them

from Clapham. It had come with a fare from London; and as he

thought that the circumstance of a gentleman and lady’s removing

from one carriage into another might be remarked he meant to make

enquiries at Clapham. If he could anyhow discover at what house

the coachman had before set down his fare, he determined to make

enquiries there, and hoped it might not be impossible to find out

the stand and number of the coach. I do not know of any other

designs that he had formed; but he was in such a hurry to be

gone, and his spirits so greatly discomposed, that I had

difficulty in finding out even so much as this.”

Chapter 48

The whole party were in hopes of a letter from Mr. Bennet the

next morning, but the post came in without bringing a single line

from him. His family knew him to be, on all common occasions, a

most negligent and dilatory correspondent; but at such a time

they had hoped for exertion. They were forced to conclude that he

had no pleasing intelligence to send; but even of \_that\_ they

would have been glad to be certain. Mr. Gardiner had waited only

for the letters before he set off.

When he was gone, they were certain at least of receiving

constant information of what was going on, and their uncle

promised, at parting, to prevail on Mr. Bennet to return to

Longbourn, as soon as he could, to the great consolation of his

sister, who considered it as the only security for her husband’s

not being killed in a duel.

Mrs. Gardiner and the children were to remain in Hertfordshire a

few days longer, as the former thought her presence might be

serviceable to her nieces. She shared in their attendance on Mrs.

Bennet, and was a great comfort to them in their hours of

freedom. Their other aunt also visited them frequently, and

always, as she said, with the design of cheering and heartening

them up—though, as she never came without reporting some fresh

instance of Wickham’s extravagance or irregularity, she seldom

went away without leaving them more dispirited than she found

them.

All Meryton seemed striving to blacken the man who, but three

months before, had been almost an angel of light. He was declared

to be in debt to every tradesman in the place, and his intrigues,

all honoured with the title of seduction, had been extended into

every tradesman’s family. Everybody declared that he was the

wickedest young man in the world; and everybody began to find out

that they had always distrusted the appearance of his goodness.

Elizabeth, though she did not credit above half of what was said,

believed enough to make her former assurance of her sister’s ruin

more certain; and even Jane, who believed still less of it,

became almost hopeless, more especially as the time was now come

when, if they had gone to Scotland, which she had never before

entirely despaired of, they must in all probability have gained

some news of them.

Mr. Gardiner left Longbourn on Sunday; on Tuesday his wife

received a letter from him; it told them that, on his arrival, he

had immediately found out his brother, and persuaded him to come

to Gracechurch Street; that Mr. Bennet had been to Epsom and

Clapham, before his arrival, but without gaining any satisfactory

information; and that he was now determined to enquire at all the

principal hotels in town, as Mr. Bennet thought it possible they

might have gone to one of them, on their first coming to London,

before they procured lodgings. Mr. Gardiner himself did not

expect any success from this measure, but as his brother was

eager in it, he meant to assist him in pursuing it. He added that

Mr. Bennet seemed wholly disinclined at present to leave London

and promised to write again very soon. There was also a

postscript to this effect:

“I have written to Colonel Forster to desire him to find out, if

possible, from some of the young man’s intimates in the regiment,

whether Wickham has any relations or connections who would be

likely to know in what part of town he has now concealed himself.

If there were anyone that one could apply to with a probability

of gaining such a clue as that, it might be of essential

consequence. At present we have nothing to guide us. Colonel

Forster will, I dare say, do everything in his power to satisfy

us on this head. But, on second thoughts, perhaps, Lizzy could

tell us what relations he has now living, better than any other

person.”

Elizabeth was at no loss to understand from whence this deference

to her authority proceeded; but it was not in her power to give

any information of so satisfactory a nature as the compliment

deserved. She had never heard of his having had any relations,

except a father and mother, both of whom had been dead many

years. It was possible, however, that some of his companions in

the ——shire might be able to give more information; and though

she was not very sanguine in expecting it, the application was a

something to look forward to.

Every day at Longbourn was now a day of anxiety; but the most

anxious part of each was when the post was expected. The arrival

of letters was the grand object of every morning’s impatience.

Through letters, whatever of good or bad was to be told would be

communicated, and every succeeding day was expected to bring some

news of importance.

But before they heard again from Mr. Gardiner, a letter arrived

for their father, from a different quarter, from Mr. Collins;

which, as Jane had received directions to open all that came for

him in his absence, she accordingly read; and Elizabeth, who knew

what curiosities his letters always were, looked over her, and

read it likewise. It was as follows:

“My dear Sir,

“I feel myself called upon, by our relationship, and my situation

in life, to condole with you on the grievous affliction you are

now suffering under, of which we were yesterday informed by a

letter from Hertfordshire. Be assured, my dear sir, that Mrs.

Collins and myself sincerely sympathise with you and all your

respectable family, in your present distress, which must be of

the bitterest kind, because proceeding from a cause which no time

can remove. No arguments shall be wanting on my part that can

alleviate so severe a misfortune—or that may comfort you, under a

circumstance that must be of all others the most afflicting to a

parent’s mind. The death of your daughter would have been a

blessing in comparison of this. And it is the more to be

lamented, because there is reason to suppose as my dear Charlotte

informs me, that this licentiousness of behaviour in your

daughter has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence;

though, at the same time, for the consolation of yourself and

Mrs. Bennet, I am inclined to think that her own disposition must

be naturally bad, or she could not be guilty of such an enormity,

at so early an age. Howsoever that may be, you are grievously to

be pitied; in which opinion I am not only joined by Mrs. Collins,

but likewise by Lady Catherine and her daughter, to whom I have

related the affair. They agree with me in apprehending that this

false step in one daughter will be injurious to the fortunes of

all the others; for who, as Lady Catherine herself

condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family?

And this consideration leads me moreover to reflect, with

augmented satisfaction, on a certain event of last November; for

had it been otherwise, I must have been involved in all your

sorrow and disgrace. Let me then advise you, dear sir, to console

yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child

from your affection for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of

her own heinous offense.

“I am, dear sir, etc., etc.”

Mr. Gardiner did not write again till he had received an answer

from Colonel Forster; and then he had nothing of a pleasant

nature to send. It was not known that Wickham had a single

relationship with whom he kept up any connection, and it was

certain that he had no near one living. His former acquaintances

had been numerous; but since he had been in the militia, it did

not appear that he was on terms of particular friendship with any

of them. There was no one, therefore, who could be pointed out as

likely to give any news of him. And in the wretched state of his

own finances, there was a very powerful motive for secrecy, in

addition to his fear of discovery by Lydia’s relations, for it

had just transpired that he had left gaming debts behind him to a

very considerable amount. Colonel Forster believed that more than

a thousand pounds would be necessary to clear his expenses at

Brighton. He owed a good deal in town, but his debts of honour

were still more formidable. Mr. Gardiner did not attempt to

conceal these particulars from the Longbourn family. Jane heard

them with horror. “A gamester!” she cried. “This is wholly

unexpected. I had not an idea of it.”

Mr. Gardiner added in his letter, that they might expect to see

their father at home on the following day, which was Saturday.

Rendered spiritless by the ill-success of all their endeavours,

he had yielded to his brother-in-law’s entreaty that he would

return to his family, and leave it to him to do whatever occasion

might suggest to be advisable for continuing their pursuit. When

Mrs. Bennet was told of this, she did not express so much

satisfaction as her children expected, considering what her

anxiety for his life had been before.

“What, is he coming home, and without poor Lydia?” she cried.

“Sure he will not leave London before he has found them. Who is

to fight Wickham, and make him marry her, if he comes away?”

As Mrs. Gardiner began to wish to be at home, it was settled that

she and the children should go to London, at the same time that

Mr. Bennet came from it. The coach, therefore, took them the

first stage of their journey, and brought its master back to

Longbourn.

Mrs. Gardiner went away in all the perplexity about Elizabeth and

her Derbyshire friend that had attended her from that part of the

world. His name had never been voluntarily mentioned before them

by her niece; and the kind of half-expectation which Mrs.

Gardiner had formed, of their being followed by a letter from

him, had ended in nothing. Elizabeth had received none since her

return that could come from Pemberley.

The present unhappy state of the family rendered any other excuse

for the lowness of her spirits unnecessary; nothing, therefore,

could be fairly conjectured from \_that\_, though Elizabeth, who

was by this time tolerably well acquainted with her own feelings,

was perfectly aware that, had she known nothing of Darcy, she

could have borne the dread of Lydia’s infamy somewhat better. It

would have spared her, she thought, one sleepless night out of

two.

When Mr. Bennet arrived, he had all the appearance of his usual

philosophic composure. He said as little as he had ever been in

the habit of saying; made no mention of the business that had

taken him away, and it was some time before his daughters had

courage to speak of it.

It was not till the afternoon, when he had joined them at tea,

that Elizabeth ventured to introduce the subject; and then, on

her briefly expressing her sorrow for what he must have endured,

he replied, “Say nothing of that. Who should suffer but myself?

It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it.”

“You must not be too severe upon yourself,” replied Elizabeth.

“You may well warn me against such an evil. Human nature is so

prone to fall into it! No, Lizzy, let me once in my life feel how

much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered

by the impression. It will pass away soon enough.”

“Do you suppose them to be in London?”

“Yes; where else can they be so well concealed?”

“And Lydia used to want to go to London,” added Kitty.

“She is happy then,” said her father drily; “and her residence

there will probably be of some duration.”

Then after a short silence he continued:

“Lizzy, I bear you no ill-will for being justified in your advice

to me last May, which, considering the event, shows some

greatness of mind.”

They were interrupted by Miss Bennet, who came to fetch her

mother’s tea.

“This is a parade,” he cried, “which does one good; it gives such

an elegance to misfortune! Another day I will do the same; I will

sit in my library, in my nightcap and powdering gown, and give as

much trouble as I can; or, perhaps, I may defer it till Kitty

runs away.”

“I am not going to run away, papa,” said Kitty fretfully. “If \_I\_

should ever go to Brighton, I would behave better than Lydia.”

“\_You\_ go to Brighton. I would not trust you so near it as

Eastbourne for fifty pounds! No, Kitty, I have at last learnt to

be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it. No officer is

ever to enter into my house again, nor even to pass through the

village. Balls will be absolutely prohibited, unless you stand up

with one of your sisters. And you are never to stir out of doors

till you can prove that you have spent ten minutes of every day

in a rational manner.”

Kitty, who took all these threats in a serious light, began to

cry.

“Well, well,” said he, “do not make yourself unhappy. If you are

a good girl for the next ten years, I will take you to a review

at the end of them.”

Chapter 49

Two days after Mr. Bennet’s return, as Jane and Elizabeth were

walking together in the shrubbery behind the house, they saw the

housekeeper coming towards them, and, concluding that she came to

call them to their mother, went forward to meet her; but, instead

of the expected summons, when they approached her, she said to

Miss Bennet, “I beg your pardon, madam, for interrupting you, but

I was in hopes you might have got some good news from town, so I

took the liberty of coming to ask.”

“What do you mean, Hill? We have heard nothing from town.”

“Dear madam,” cried Mrs. Hill, in great astonishment, “don’t you

know there is an express come for master from Mr. Gardiner? He

has been here this half-hour, and master has had a letter.”

Away ran the girls, too eager to get in to have time for speech.

They ran through the vestibule into the breakfast-room; from

thence to the library; their father was in neither; and they were

on the point of seeking him up stairs with their mother, when

they were met by the butler, who said:

“If you are looking for my master, ma’am, he is walking towards

the little copse.”

Upon this information, they instantly passed through the hall

once more, and ran across the lawn after their father, who was

deliberately pursuing his way towards a small wood on one side of

the paddock.

Jane, who was not so light nor so much in the habit of running as

Elizabeth, soon lagged behind, while her sister, panting for

breath, came up with him, and eagerly cried out:

“Oh, papa, what news—what news? Have you heard from my uncle?”

“Yes I have had a letter from him by express.”

“Well, and what news does it bring—good or bad?”

“What is there of good to be expected?” said he, taking the

letter from his pocket. “But perhaps you would like to read it.”

Elizabeth impatiently caught it from his hand. Jane now came up.

“Read it aloud,” said their father, “for I hardly know myself

what it is about.”

“Gracechurch Street, \_Monday, August\_ 2.

“My dear Brother,

“At last I am able to send you some tidings of my niece, and such

as, upon the whole, I hope it will give you satisfaction. Soon

after you left me on Saturday, I was fortunate enough to find out

in what part of London they were. The particulars I reserve till

we meet; it is enough to know they are discovered. I have seen

them both—”

“Then it is as I always hoped,” cried Jane; “they are

married!”

Elizabeth read on:

“I have seen them both. They are not married, nor can I find

there was any intention of being so; but if you are willing to

perform the engagements which I have ventured to make on your

side, I hope it will not be long before they are. All that is

required of you is, to assure to your daughter, by settlement,

her equal share of the five thousand pounds secured among your

children after the decease of yourself and my sister; and,

moreover, to enter into an engagement of allowing her, during

your life, one hundred pounds per annum. These are conditions

which, considering everything, I had no hesitation in complying

with, as far as I thought myself privileged, for you. I shall

send this by express, that no time may be lost in bringing me

your answer. You will easily comprehend, from these particulars,

that Mr. Wickham’s circumstances are not so hopeless as they are

generally believed to be. The world has been deceived in that

respect; and I am happy to say there will be some little money,

even when all his debts are discharged, to settle on my niece, in

addition to her own fortune. If, as I conclude will be the case,

you send me full powers to act in your name throughout the whole

of this business, I will immediately give directions to

Haggerston for preparing a proper settlement. There will not be

the smallest occasion for your coming to town again; therefore

stay quiet at Longbourn, and depend on my diligence and care.

Send back your answer as fast as you can, and be careful to write

explicitly. We have judged it best that my niece should be

married from this house, of which I hope you will approve. She

comes to us to-day. I shall write again as soon as anything more

is determined on. Yours, etc.,

“EDW. GARDINER.”

“Is it possible?” cried Elizabeth, when she had finished. “Can it

be possible that he will marry her?”

“Wickham is not so undeserving, then, as we thought him,” said

her sister. “My dear father, I congratulate you.”

“And have you answered the letter?” cried Elizabeth.

“No; but it must be done soon.”

Most earnestly did she then entreat him to lose no more time

before he wrote.

“Oh! my dear father,” she cried, “come back and write

immediately. Consider how important every moment is in such a

case.”

“Let me write for you,” said Jane, “if you dislike the trouble

yourself.”

“I dislike it very much,” he replied; “but it must be done.”

And so saying, he turned back with them, and walked towards the

house.

“And may I ask—” said Elizabeth; “but the terms, I suppose, must

be complied with.”

“Complied with! I am only ashamed of his asking so little.”

“And they \_must\_ marry! Yet he is \_such\_ a man!”

“Yes, yes, they must marry. There is nothing else to be done. But

there are two things that I want very much to know; one is, how

much money your uncle has laid down to bring it about; and the

other, how am I ever to pay him.”

“Money! My uncle!” cried Jane, “what do you mean, sir?”

“I mean, that no man in his senses would marry Lydia on so slight

a temptation as one hundred a year during my life, and fifty

after I am gone.”

“That is very true,” said Elizabeth; “though it had not occurred

to me before. His debts to be discharged, and something still to

remain! Oh! it must be my uncle’s doings! Generous, good man, I

am afraid he has distressed himself. A small sum could not do all

this.”

“No,” said her father; “Wickham’s a fool if he takes her with a

farthing less than ten thousand pounds. I should be sorry to

think so ill of him, in the very beginning of our relationship.”

“Ten thousand pounds! Heaven forbid! How is half such a sum to be

repaid?”

Mr. Bennet made no answer, and each of them, deep in thought,

continued silent till they reached the house. Their father then

went on to the library to write, and the girls walked into the

breakfast-room.

“And they are really to be married!” cried Elizabeth, as soon as

they were by themselves. “How strange this is! And for \_this\_ we

are to be thankful. That they should marry, small as is their

chance of happiness, and wretched as is his character, we are

forced to rejoice. Oh, Lydia!”

“I comfort myself with thinking,” replied Jane, “that he

certainly would not marry Lydia if he had not a real regard for

her. Though our kind uncle has done something towards clearing

him, I cannot believe that ten thousand pounds, or anything like

it, has been advanced. He has children of his own, and may have

more. How could he spare half ten thousand pounds?”

“If he were ever able to learn what Wickham’s debts have been,”

said Elizabeth, “and how much is settled on his side on our

sister, we shall exactly know what Mr. Gardiner has done for

them, because Wickham has not sixpence of his own. The kindness

of my uncle and aunt can never be requited. Their taking her

home, and affording her their personal protection and

countenance, is such a sacrifice to her advantage as years of

gratitude cannot enough acknowledge. By this time she is actually

with them! If such goodness does not make her miserable now, she

will never deserve to be happy! What a meeting for her, when she

first sees my aunt!”

“We must endeavour to forget all that has passed on either side,”

said Jane: “I hope and trust they will yet be happy. His

consenting to marry her is a proof, I will believe, that he is

come to a right way of thinking. Their mutual affection will

steady them; and I flatter myself they will settle so quietly,

and live in so rational a manner, as may in time make their past

imprudence forgotten.”

“Their conduct has been such,” replied Elizabeth, “as neither

you, nor I, nor anybody can ever forget. It is useless to talk of

it.”

It now occurred to the girls that their mother was in all

likelihood perfectly ignorant of what had happened. They went to

the library, therefore, and asked their father whether he would

not wish them to make it known to her. He was writing and,

without raising his head, coolly replied:

“Just as you please.”

“May we take my uncle’s letter to read to her?”

“Take whatever you like, and get away.”

Elizabeth took the letter from his writing-table, and they went

up stairs together. Mary and Kitty were both with Mrs. Bennet:

one communication would, therefore, do for all. After a slight

preparation for good news, the letter was read aloud. Mrs. Bennet

could hardly contain herself. As soon as Jane had read Mr.

Gardiner’s hope of Lydia’s being soon married, her joy burst

forth, and every following sentence added to its exuberance. She

was now in an irritation as violent from delight, as she had ever

been fidgety from alarm and vexation. To know that her daughter

would be married was enough. She was disturbed by no fear for her

felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of her misconduct.

“My dear, dear Lydia!” she cried. “This is delightful indeed! She

will be married! I shall see her again! She will be married at

sixteen! My good, kind brother! I knew how it would be. I knew he

would manage everything! How I long to see her! and to see dear

Wickham too! But the clothes, the wedding clothes! I will write

to my sister Gardiner about them directly. Lizzy, my dear, run

down to your father, and ask him how much he will give her. Stay,

stay, I will go myself. Ring the bell, Kitty, for Hill. I will

put on my things in a moment. My dear, dear Lydia! How merry we

shall be together when we meet!”

Her eldest daughter endeavoured to give some relief to the

violence of these transports, by leading her thoughts to the

obligations which Mr. Gardiner’s behaviour laid them all under.

“For we must attribute this happy conclusion,” she added, “in a

great measure to his kindness. We are persuaded that he has

pledged himself to assist Mr. Wickham with money.”

“Well,” cried her mother, “it is all very right; who should do it

but her own uncle? If he had not had a family of his own, I and

my children must have had all his money, you know; and it is the

first time we have ever had anything from him, except a few

presents. Well! I am so happy! In a short time I shall have a

daughter married. Mrs. Wickham! How well it sounds! And she was

only sixteen last June. My dear Jane, I am in such a flutter,

that I am sure I can’t write; so I will dictate, and you write

for me. We will settle with your father about the money

afterwards; but the things should be ordered immediately.”

She was then proceeding to all the particulars of calico, muslin,

and cambric, and would shortly have dictated some very plentiful

orders, had not Jane, though with some difficulty, persuaded her

to wait till her father was at leisure to be consulted. One day’s

delay, she observed, would be of small importance; and her mother

was too happy to be quite so obstinate as usual. Other schemes,

too, came into her head.

“I will go to Meryton,” said she, “as soon as I am dressed, and

tell the good, good news to my sister Philips. And as I come

back, I can call on Lady Lucas and Mrs. Long. Kitty, run down and

order the carriage. An airing would do me a great deal of good, I

am sure. Girls, can I do anything for you in Meryton? Oh! Here

comes Hill! My dear Hill, have you heard the good news? Miss

Lydia is going to be married; and you shall all have a bowl of

punch to make merry at her wedding.”

Mrs. Hill began instantly to express her joy. Elizabeth received

her congratulations amongst the rest, and then, sick of this

folly, took refuge in her own room, that she might think with

freedom.

Poor Lydia’s situation must, at best, be bad enough; but that it

was no worse, she had need to be thankful. She felt it so; and

though, in looking forward, neither rational happiness nor

worldly prosperity could be justly expected for her sister, in

looking back to what they had feared, only two hours ago, she

felt all the advantages of what they had gained.

Chapter 50

Mr. Bennet had very often wished before this period of his life

that, instead of spending his whole income, he had laid by an

annual sum for the better provision of his children, and of his

wife, if she survived him. He now wished it more than ever. Had

he done his duty in that respect, Lydia need not have been

indebted to her uncle for whatever of honour or credit could now

be purchased for her. The satisfaction of prevailing on one of

the most worthless young men in Great Britain to be her husband

might then have rested in its proper place.

He was seriously concerned that a cause of so little advantage to

anyone should be forwarded at the sole expense of his

brother-in-law, and he was determined, if possible, to find out

the extent of his assistance, and to discharge the obligation as

soon as he could.

When first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be

perfectly useless, for, of course, they were to have a son. The

son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should

be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means

be provided for. Five daughters successively entered the world,

but yet the son was to come; and Mrs. Bennet, for many years

after Lydia’s birth, had been certain that he would. This event

had at last been despaired of, but it was then too late to be

saving. Mrs. Bennet had no turn for economy, and her husband’s

love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their

income.

Five thousand pounds was settled by marriage articles on Mrs.

Bennet and the children. But in what proportions it should be

divided amongst the latter depended on the will of the parents.

This was one point, with regard to Lydia, at least, which was now

to be settled, and Mr. Bennet could have no hesitation in

acceding to the proposal before him. In terms of grateful

acknowledgment for the kindness of his brother, though expressed

most concisely, he then delivered on paper his perfect

approbation of all that was done, and his willingness to fulfil

the engagements that had been made for him. He had never before

supposed that, could Wickham be prevailed on to marry his

daughter, it would be done with so little inconvenience to

himself as by the present arrangement. He would scarcely be ten

pounds a year the loser by the hundred that was to be paid them;

for, what with her board and pocket allowance, and the continual

presents in money which passed to her through her mother’s hands,

Lydia’s expenses had been very little within that sum.

That it would be done with such trifling exertion on his side,

too, was another very welcome surprise; for his wish at present

was to have as little trouble in the business as possible. When

the first transports of rage which had produced his activity in

seeking her were over, he naturally returned to all his former

indolence. His letter was soon dispatched; for, though dilatory

in undertaking business, he was quick in its execution. He begged

to know further particulars of what he was indebted to his

brother, but was too angry with Lydia to send any message to her.

The good news spread quickly through the house, and with

proportionate speed through the neighbourhood. It was borne in

the latter with decent philosophy. To be sure, it would have been

more for the advantage of conversation had Miss Lydia Bennet come

upon the town; or, as the happiest alternative, been secluded

from the world, in some distant farmhouse. But there was much to

be talked of in marrying her; and the good-natured wishes for her

well-doing which had proceeded before from all the spiteful old

ladies in Meryton lost but a little of their spirit in this

change of circumstances, because with such an husband her misery

was considered certain.

It was a fortnight since Mrs. Bennet had been downstairs; but on

this happy day she again took her seat at the head of her table,

and in spirits oppressively high. No sentiment of shame gave a

damp to her triumph. The marriage of a daughter, which had been

the first object of her wishes since Jane was sixteen, was now on

the point of accomplishment, and her thoughts and her words ran

wholly on those attendants of elegant nuptials, fine muslins, new

carriages, and servants. She was busily searching through the

neighbourhood for a proper situation for her daughter, and,

without knowing or considering what their income might be,

rejected many as deficient in size and importance.

“Haye Park might do,” said she, “if the Gouldings could quit

it—or the great house at Stoke, if the drawing-room were larger;

but Ashworth is too far off! I could not bear to have her ten

miles from me; and as for Pulvis Lodge, the attics are dreadful.”

Her husband allowed her to talk on without interruption while the

servants remained. But when they had withdrawn, he said to her:

“Mrs. Bennet, before you take any or all of these houses for your

son and daughter, let us come to a right understanding. Into

\_one\_ house in this neighbourhood they shall never have

admittance. I will not encourage the impudence of either, by

receiving them at Longbourn.”

A long dispute followed this declaration; but Mr. Bennet was

firm. It soon led to another; and Mrs. Bennet found, with

amazement and horror, that her husband would not advance a guinea

to buy clothes for his daughter. He protested that she should

receive from him no mark of affection whatever on the occasion.

Mrs. Bennet could hardly comprehend it. That his anger could be

carried to such a point of inconceivable resentment as to refuse

his daughter a privilege without which her marriage would

scarcely seem valid, exceeded all she could believe possible. She

was more alive to the disgrace which her want of new clothes must

reflect on her daughter’s nuptials, than to any sense of shame at

her eloping and living with Wickham a fortnight before they took

place.

Elizabeth was now most heartily sorry that she had, from the

distress of the moment, been led to make Mr. Darcy acquainted

with their fears for her sister; for since her marriage would so

shortly give the proper termination to the elopement, they might

hope to conceal its unfavourable beginning from all those who

were not immediately on the spot.

She had no fear of its spreading farther through his means. There

were few people on whose secrecy she would have more confidently

depended; but, at the same time, there was no one whose knowledge

of a sister’s frailty would have mortified her so much—not,

however, from any fear of disadvantage from it individually to

herself, for, at any rate, there seemed a gulf impassable between

them. Had Lydia’s marriage been concluded on the most honourable

terms, it was not to be supposed that Mr. Darcy would connect

himself with a family where, to every other objection, would now

be added an alliance and relationship of the nearest kind with a

man whom he so justly scorned.

From such a connection she could not wonder that he would shrink.

The wish of procuring her regard, which she had assured herself

of his feeling in Derbyshire, could not in rational expectation

survive such a blow as this. She was humbled, she was grieved;

she repented, though she hardly knew of what. She became jealous

of his esteem, when she could no longer hope to be benefited by

it. She wanted to hear of him, when there seemed the least chance

of gaining intelligence. She was convinced that she could have

been happy with him, when it was no longer likely they should

meet.

What a triumph for him, as she often thought, could he know that

the proposals which she had proudly spurned only four months ago,

would now have been most gladly and gratefully received! He was

as generous, she doubted not, as the most generous of his sex;

but while he was mortal, there must be a triumph.

She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man who, in

disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding

and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her

wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of

both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been

softened, his manners improved; and from his judgement,

information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received

benefit of greater importance.

But no such happy marriage could now teach the admiring multitude

what connubial felicity really was. An union of a different

tendency, and precluding the possibility of the other, was soon

to be formed in their family.

How Wickham and Lydia were to be supported in tolerable

independence, she could not imagine. But how little of permanent

happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together

because their passions were stronger than their virtue, she could

easily conjecture.

Mr. Gardiner soon wrote again to his brother. To Mr. Bennet’s

acknowledgments he briefly replied, with assurance of his

eagerness to promote the welfare of any of his family; and

concluded with entreaties that the subject might never be

mentioned to him again. The principal purport of his letter was

to inform them that Mr. Wickham had resolved on quitting the

militia.

“It was greatly my wish that he should do so,” he added, “as soon

as his marriage was fixed on. And I think you will agree with me,

in considering the removal from that corps as highly advisable,

both on his account and my niece’s. It is Mr. Wickham’s intention

to go into the regulars; and among his former friends, there are

still some who are able and willing to assist him in the army. He

has the promise of an ensigncy in General ——’s regiment, now

quartered in the North. It is an advantage to have it so far from

this part of the kingdom. He promises fairly; and I hope among

different people, where they may each have a character to

preserve, they will both be more prudent. I have written to

Colonel Forster, to inform him of our present arrangements, and

to request that he will satisfy the various creditors of Mr.

Wickham in and near Brighton, with assurances of speedy payment,

for which I have pledged myself. And will you give yourself the

trouble of carrying similar assurances to his creditors in

Meryton, of whom I shall subjoin a list according to his

information? He has given in all his debts; I hope at least he

has not deceived us. Haggerston has our directions, and all will

be completed in a week. They will then join his regiment, unless

they are first invited to Longbourn; and I understand from Mrs.

Gardiner, that my niece is very desirous of seeing you all before

she leaves the South. She is well, and begs to be dutifully

remembered to you and her mother.—Yours, etc.,

“E. GARDINER.”

Mr. Bennet and his daughters saw all the advantages of Wickham’s

removal from the ——shire as clearly as Mr. Gardiner could do. But

Mrs. Bennet was not so well pleased with it. Lydia’s being

settled in the North, just when she had expected most pleasure

and pride in her company, for she had by no means given up her

plan of their residing in Hertfordshire, was a severe

disappointment; and, besides, it was such a pity that Lydia

should be taken from a regiment where she was acquainted with

everybody, and had so many favourites.

“She is so fond of Mrs. Forster,” said she, “it will be quite

shocking to send her away! And there are several of the young

men, too, that she likes very much. The officers may not be so

pleasant in General ——’s regiment.”

His daughter’s request, for such it might be considered, of being

admitted into her family again before she set off for the North,

received at first an absolute negative. But Jane and Elizabeth,

who agreed in wishing, for the sake of their sister’s feelings

and consequence, that she should be noticed on her marriage by

her parents, urged him so earnestly yet so rationally and so

mildly, to receive her and her husband at Longbourn, as soon as

they were married, that he was prevailed on to think as they

thought, and act as they wished. And their mother had the

satisfaction of knowing that she would be able to show her

married daughter in the neighbourhood before she was banished to

the North. When Mr. Bennet wrote again to his brother, therefore,

he sent his permission for them to come; and it was settled, that

as soon as the ceremony was over, they should proceed to

Longbourn. Elizabeth was surprised, however, that Wickham should

consent to such a scheme, and had she consulted only her own

inclination, any meeting with him would have been the last object

of her wishes.

Chapter 51

Their sister’s wedding day arrived; and Jane and Elizabeth felt

for her probably more than she felt for herself. The carriage was

sent to meet them at ——, and they were to return in it by

dinner-time. Their arrival was dreaded by the elder Miss Bennets,

and Jane more especially, who gave Lydia the feelings which would

have attended herself, had \_she\_ been the culprit, and was

wretched in the thought of what her sister must endure.

They came. The family were assembled in the breakfast room to

receive them. Smiles decked the face of Mrs. Bennet as the

carriage drove up to the door; her husband looked impenetrably

grave; her daughters, alarmed, anxious, uneasy.

Lydia’s voice was heard in the vestibule; the door was thrown

open, and she ran into the room. Her mother stepped forwards,

embraced her, and welcomed her with rapture; gave her hand, with

an affectionate smile, to Wickham, who followed his lady; and

wished them both joy with an alacrity which shewed no doubt of

their happiness.

Their reception from Mr. Bennet, to whom they then turned, was

not quite so cordial. His countenance rather gained in austerity;

and he scarcely opened his lips. The easy assurance of the young

couple, indeed, was enough to provoke him. Elizabeth was

disgusted, and even Miss Bennet was shocked. Lydia was Lydia

still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless. She turned

from sister to sister, demanding their congratulations; and when

at length they all sat down, looked eagerly round the room, took

notice of some little alteration in it, and observed, with a

laugh, that it was a great while since she had been there.

Wickham was not at all more distressed than herself, but his

manners were always so pleasing, that had his character and his

marriage been exactly what they ought, his smiles and his easy

address, while he claimed their relationship, would have

delighted them all. Elizabeth had not before believed him quite

equal to such assurance; but she sat down, resolving within

herself to draw no limits in future to the impudence of an

impudent man. \_She\_ blushed, and Jane blushed; but the cheeks of

the two who caused their confusion suffered no variation of

colour.

There was no want of discourse. The bride and her mother could

neither of them talk fast enough; and Wickham, who happened to

sit near Elizabeth, began enquiring after his acquaintance in

that neighbourhood, with a good humoured ease which she felt very

unable to equal in her replies. They seemed each of them to have

the happiest memories in the world. Nothing of the past was

recollected with pain; and Lydia led voluntarily to subjects

which her sisters would not have alluded to for the world.

“Only think of its being three months,” she cried, “since I went

away; it seems but a fortnight I declare; and yet there have been

things enough happened in the time. Good gracious! when I went

away, I am sure I had no more idea of being married till I came

back again! though I thought it would be very good fun if I was.”

Her father lifted up his eyes. Jane was distressed. Elizabeth

looked expressively at Lydia; but she, who never heard nor saw

anything of which she chose to be insensible, gaily continued,

“Oh! mamma, do the people hereabouts know I am married to-day? I

was afraid they might not; and we overtook William Goulding in

his curricle, so I was determined he should know it, and so I let

down the side-glass next to him, and took off my glove, and let

my hand just rest upon the window frame, so that he might see the

ring, and then I bowed and smiled like anything.”

Elizabeth could bear it no longer. She got up, and ran out of the

room; and returned no more, till she heard them passing through

the hall to the dining parlour. She then joined them soon enough

to see Lydia, with anxious parade, walk up to her mother’s right

hand, and hear her say to her eldest sister, “Ah! Jane, I take

your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married

woman.”

It was not to be supposed that time would give Lydia that

embarrassment from which she had been so wholly free at first.

Her ease and good spirits increased. She longed to see Mrs.

Phillips, the Lucases, and all their other neighbours, and to

hear herself called “Mrs. Wickham” by each of them; and in the

mean time, she went after dinner to show her ring, and boast of

being married, to Mrs. Hill and the two housemaids.

“Well, mamma,” said she, when they were all returned to the

breakfast room, “and what do you think of my husband? Is not he a

charming man? I am sure my sisters must all envy me. I only hope

they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Brighton.

That is the place to get husbands. What a pity it is, mamma, we

did not all go.”

“Very true; and if I had my will, we should. But my dear Lydia, I

don’t at all like your going such a way off. Must it be so?”

“Oh, lord! yes;—there is nothing in that. I shall like it of all

things. You and papa, and my sisters, must come down and see us.

We shall be at Newcastle all the winter, and I dare say there

will be some balls, and I will take care to get good partners for

them all.”

“I should like it beyond anything!” said her mother.

“And then when you go away, you may leave one or two of my

sisters behind you; and I dare say I shall get husbands for them

before the winter is over.”

“I thank you for my share of the favour,” said Elizabeth; “but I

do not particularly like your way of getting husbands.”

Their visitors were not to remain above ten days with them. Mr.

Wickham had received his commission before he left London, and he

was to join his regiment at the end of a fortnight.

No one but Mrs. Bennet regretted that their stay would be so

short; and she made the most of the time by visiting about with

her daughter, and having very frequent parties at home. These

parties were acceptable to all; to avoid a family circle was even

more desirable to such as did think, than such as did not.

Wickham’s affection for Lydia was just what Elizabeth had

expected to find it; not equal to Lydia’s for him. She had

scarcely needed her present observation to be satisfied, from the

reason of things, that their elopement had been brought on by the

strength of her love, rather than by his; and she would have

wondered why, without violently caring for her, he chose to elope

with her at all, had she not felt certain that his flight was

rendered necessary by distress of circumstances; and if that were

the case, he was not the young man to resist an opportunity of

having a companion.

Lydia was exceedingly fond of him. He was her dear Wickham on

every occasion; no one was to be put in competition with him. He

did every thing best in the world; and she was sure he would kill

more birds on the first of September, than any body else in the

country.

One morning, soon after their arrival, as she was sitting with

her two elder sisters, she said to Elizabeth:

“Lizzy, I never gave \_you\_ an account of my wedding, I believe.

You were not by, when I told mamma and the others all about it.

Are not you curious to hear how it was managed?”

“No really,” replied Elizabeth; “I think there cannot be too

little said on the subject.”

“La! You are so strange! But I must tell you how it went off. We

were married, you know, at St. Clement’s, because Wickham’s

lodgings were in that parish. And it was settled that we should

all be there by eleven o’clock. My uncle and aunt and I were to

go together; and the others were to meet us at the church. Well,

Monday morning came, and I was in such a fuss! I was so afraid,

you know, that something would happen to put it off, and then I

should have gone quite distracted. And there was my aunt, all the

time I was dressing, preaching and talking away just as if she

was reading a sermon. However, I did not hear above one word in

ten, for I was thinking, you may suppose, of my dear Wickham. I

longed to know whether he would be married in his blue coat.”

“Well, and so we breakfasted at ten as usual; I thought it would

never be over; for, by the bye, you are to understand, that my

uncle and aunt were horrid unpleasant all the time I was with

them. If you’ll believe me, I did not once put my foot out of

doors, though I was there a fortnight. Not one party, or scheme,

or anything. To be sure London was rather thin, but, however, the

Little Theatre was open. Well, and so just as the carriage came

to the door, my uncle was called away upon business to that

horrid man Mr. Stone. And then, you know, when once they get

together, there is no end of it. Well, I was so frightened I did

not know what to do, for my uncle was to give me away; and if we

were beyond the hour, we could not be married all day. But,

luckily, he came back again in ten minutes’ time, and then we all

set out. However, I recollected afterwards that if he \_had\_ been

prevented going, the wedding need not be put off, for Mr. Darcy

might have done as well.”

“Mr. Darcy!” repeated Elizabeth, in utter amazement.

“Oh, yes!—he was to come there with Wickham, you know. But

gracious me! I quite forgot! I ought not to have said a word

about it. I promised them so faithfully! What will Wickham say?

It was to be such a secret!”

“If it was to be secret,” said Jane, “say not another word on the

subject. You may depend upon my seeking no further.”

“Oh! certainly,” said Elizabeth, though burning with curiosity;

“we will ask you no questions.”

“Thank you,” said Lydia, “for if you did, I should certainly tell

you all, and then Wickham would be angry.”

On such encouragement to ask, Elizabeth was forced to put it out

of her power, by running away.

But to live in ignorance on such a point was impossible; or at

least it was impossible not to try for information. Mr. Darcy had

been at her sister’s wedding. It was exactly a scene, and exactly

among people, where he had apparently least to do, and least

temptation to go. Conjectures as to the meaning of it, rapid and

wild, hurried into her brain; but she was satisfied with none.

Those that best pleased her, as placing his conduct in the

noblest light, seemed most improbable. She could not bear such

suspense; and hastily seizing a sheet of paper, wrote a short

letter to her aunt, to request an explanation of what Lydia had

dropt, if it were compatible with the secrecy which had been

intended.

“You may readily comprehend,” she added, “what my curiosity must

be to know how a person unconnected with any of us, and

(comparatively speaking) a stranger to our family, should have

been amongst you at such a time. Pray write instantly, and let me

understand it—unless it is, for very cogent reasons, to remain in

the secrecy which Lydia seems to think necessary; and then I must

endeavour to be satisfied with ignorance.”

“Not that I \_shall\_, though,” she added to herself, as she

finished the letter; “and my dear aunt, if you do not tell me in

an honourable manner, I shall certainly be reduced to tricks and

stratagems to find it out.”

Jane’s delicate sense of honour would not allow her to speak to

Elizabeth privately of what Lydia had let fall; Elizabeth was

glad of it;—till it appeared whether her enquiries would receive

any satisfaction, she had rather be without a confidante.

Chapter 52

Elizabeth had the satisfaction of receiving an answer to her

letter as soon as she possibly could. She was no sooner in

possession of it than, hurrying into the little copse, where she

was least likely to be interrupted, she sat down on one of the

benches and prepared to be happy; for the length of the letter

convinced her that it did not contain a denial.

“Gracechurch Street, \_Sept\_. 6.

“My dear Niece,

“I have just received your letter, and shall devote this whole

morning to answering it, as I foresee that a \_little\_ writing

will not comprise what I have to tell you. I must confess myself

surprised by your application; I did not expect it from \_you\_.

Don’t think me angry, however, for I only mean to let you know

that I had not imagined such enquiries to be necessary on \_your\_

side. If you do not choose to understand me, forgive my

impertinence. Your uncle is as much surprised as I am—and nothing

but the belief of your being a party concerned would have allowed

him to act as he has done. But if you are really innocent and

ignorant, I must be more explicit.

“On the very day of my coming home from Longbourn, your uncle had

a most unexpected visitor. Mr. Darcy called, and was shut up with

him several hours. It was all over before I arrived; so my

curiosity was not so dreadfully racked as \_yours\_ seems to have

been. He came to tell Mr. Gardiner that he had found out where

your sister and Mr. Wickham were, and that he had seen and talked

with them both; Wickham repeatedly, Lydia once. From what I can

collect, he left Derbyshire only one day after ourselves, and

came to town with the resolution of hunting for them. The motive

professed was his conviction of its being owing to himself that

Wickham’s worthlessness had not been so well known as to make it

impossible for any young woman of character to love or confide in

him. He generously imputed the whole to his mistaken pride, and

confessed that he had before thought it beneath him to lay his

private actions open to the world. His character was to speak for

itself. He called it, therefore, his duty to step forward, and

endeavour to remedy an evil which had been brought on by himself.

If he \_had another\_ motive, I am sure it would never disgrace

him. He had been some days in town, before he was able to

discover them; but he had something to direct his search, which

was more than \_we\_ had; and the consciousness of this was another

reason for his resolving to follow us.

“There is a lady, it seems, a Mrs. Younge, who was some time ago

governess to Miss Darcy, and was dismissed from her charge on

some cause of disapprobation, though he did not say what. She

then took a large house in Edward-street, and has since

maintained herself by letting lodgings. This Mrs. Younge was, he

knew, intimately acquainted with Wickham; and he went to her for

intelligence of him as soon as he got to town. But it was two or

three days before he could get from her what he wanted. She would

not betray her trust, I suppose, without bribery and corruption,

for she really did know where her friend was to be found. Wickham

indeed had gone to her on their first arrival in London, and had

she been able to receive them into her house, they would have

taken up their abode with her. At length, however, our kind

friend procured the wished-for direction. They were in —— street.

He saw Wickham, and afterwards insisted on seeing Lydia. His

first object with her, he acknowledged, had been to persuade her

to quit her present disgraceful situation, and return to her

friends as soon as they could be prevailed on to receive her,

offering his assistance, as far as it would go. But he found

Lydia absolutely resolved on remaining where she was. She cared

for none of her friends; she wanted no help of his; she would not

hear of leaving Wickham. She was sure they should be married some

time or other, and it did not much signify when. Since such were

her feelings, it only remained, he thought, to secure and

expedite a marriage, which, in his very first conversation with

Wickham, he easily learnt had never been \_his\_ design. He

confessed himself obliged to leave the regiment, on account of

some debts of honour, which were very pressing; and scrupled not

to lay all the ill-consequences of Lydia’s flight on her own

folly alone. He meant to resign his commission immediately; and

as to his future situation, he could conjecture very little about

it. He must go somewhere, but he did not know where, and he knew

he should have nothing to live on.

“Mr. Darcy asked him why he had not married your sister at once.

Though Mr. Bennet was not imagined to be very rich, he would have

been able to do something for him, and his situation must have

been benefited by marriage. But he found, in reply to this

question, that Wickham still cherished the hope of more

effectually making his fortune by marriage in some other country.

Under such circumstances, however, he was not likely to be proof

against the temptation of immediate relief.

“They met several times, for there was much to be discussed.

Wickham of course wanted more than he could get; but at length

was reduced to be reasonable.

“Everything being settled between \_them\_, Mr. Darcy’s next step

was to make your uncle acquainted with it, and he first called in

Gracechurch street the evening before I came home. But Mr.

Gardiner could not be seen, and Mr. Darcy found, on further

enquiry, that your father was still with him, but would quit town

the next morning. He did not judge your father to be a person

whom he could so properly consult as your uncle, and therefore

readily postponed seeing him till after the departure of the

former. He did not leave his name, and till the next day it was

only known that a gentleman had called on business.

“On Saturday he came again. Your father was gone, your uncle at

home, and, as I said before, they had a great deal of talk

together.

“They met again on Sunday, and then \_I\_ saw him too. It was not

all settled before Monday: as soon as it was, the express was

sent off to Longbourn. But our visitor was very obstinate. I

fancy, Lizzy, that obstinacy is the real defect of his character,

after all. He has been accused of many faults at different times,

but \_this\_ is the true one. Nothing was to be done that he did

not do himself; though I am sure (and I do not speak it to be

thanked, therefore say nothing about it), your uncle would most

readily have settled the whole.

“They battled it together for a long time, which was more than

either the gentleman or lady concerned in it deserved. But at

last your uncle was forced to yield, and instead of being allowed

to be of use to his niece, was forced to put up with only having

the probable credit of it, which went sorely against the grain;

and I really believe your letter this morning gave him great

pleasure, because it required an explanation that would rob him

of his borrowed feathers, and give the praise where it was due.

But, Lizzy, this must go no farther than yourself, or Jane at

most.

“You know pretty well, I suppose, what has been done for the

young people. His debts are to be paid, amounting, I believe, to

considerably more than a thousand pounds, another thousand in

addition to her own settled upon \_her\_, and his commission

purchased. The reason why all this was to be done by him alone,

was such as I have given above. It was owing to him, to his

reserve and want of proper consideration, that Wickham’s

character had been so misunderstood, and consequently that he had

been received and noticed as he was. Perhaps there was some truth

in \_this\_; though I doubt whether \_his\_ reserve, or \_anybody’s\_

reserve, can be answerable for the event. But in spite of all

this fine talking, my dear Lizzy, you may rest perfectly assured

that your uncle would never have yielded, if we had not given him

credit for \_another interest\_ in the affair.

“When all this was resolved on, he returned again to his friends,

who were still staying at Pemberley; but it was agreed that he

should be in London once more when the wedding took place, and

all money matters were then to receive the last finish.

“I believe I have now told you every thing. It is a relation

which you tell me is to give you great surprise; I hope at least

it will not afford you any displeasure. Lydia came to us; and

Wickham had constant admission to the house. \_He\_ was exactly

what he had been, when I knew him in Hertfordshire; but I would

not tell you how little I was satisfied with \_her\_ behaviour

while she staid with us, if I had not perceived, by Jane’s letter

last Wednesday, that her conduct on coming home was exactly of a

piece with it, and therefore what I now tell you can give you no

fresh pain. I talked to her repeatedly in the most serious

manner, representing to her all the wickedness of what she had

done, and all the unhappiness she had brought on her family. If

she heard me, it was by good luck, for I am sure she did not

listen. I was sometimes quite provoked, but then I recollected my

dear Elizabeth and Jane, and for their sakes had patience with

her.

“Mr. Darcy was punctual in his return, and as Lydia informed you,

attended the wedding. He dined with us the next day, and was to

leave town again on Wednesday or Thursday. Will you be very angry

with me, my dear Lizzy, if I take this opportunity of saying

(what I was never bold enough to say before) how much I like him.

His behaviour to us has, in every respect, been as pleasing as

when we were in Derbyshire. His understanding and opinions all

please me; he wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and

\_that\_, if he marry \_prudently\_, his wife may teach him. I

thought him very sly;—he hardly ever mentioned your name. But

slyness seems the fashion.

“Pray forgive me if I have been very presuming, or at least do

not punish me so far as to exclude me from P. I shall never be

quite happy till I have been all round the park. A low phaeton,

with a nice little pair of ponies, would be the very thing.

“But I must write no more. The children have been wanting me this

half hour.

“Yours, very sincerely,

“M. GARDINER.”

The contents of this letter threw Elizabeth into a flutter of

spirits, in which it was difficult to determine whether pleasure

or pain bore the greatest share. The vague and unsettled

suspicions which uncertainty had produced of what Mr. Darcy might

have been doing to forward her sister’s match, which she had

feared to encourage as an exertion of goodness too great to be

probable, and at the same time dreaded to be just, from the pain

of obligation, were proved beyond their greatest extent to be

true! He had followed them purposely to town, he had taken on

himself all the trouble and mortification attendant on such a

research; in which supplication had been necessary to a woman

whom he must abominate and despise, and where he was reduced to

meet, frequently meet, reason with, persuade, and finally bribe,

the man whom he always most wished to avoid, and whose very name

it was punishment to him to pronounce. He had done all this for a

girl whom he could neither regard nor esteem. Her heart did

whisper that he had done it for her. But it was a hope shortly

checked by other considerations, and she soon felt that even her

vanity was insufficient, when required to depend on his affection

for her—for a woman who had already refused him—as able to

overcome a sentiment so natural as abhorrence against

relationship with Wickham. Brother-in-law of Wickham! Every kind

of pride must revolt from the connection. He had, to be sure,

done much. She was ashamed to think how much. But he had given a

reason for his interference, which asked no extraordinary stretch

of belief. It was reasonable that he should feel he had been

wrong; he had liberality, and he had the means of exercising it;

and though she would not place herself as his principal

inducement, she could, perhaps, believe that remaining partiality

for her might assist his endeavours in a cause where her peace of

mind must be materially concerned. It was painful, exceedingly

painful, to know that they were under obligations to a person who

could never receive a return. They owed the restoration of Lydia,

her character, every thing, to him. Oh! how heartily did she

grieve over every ungracious sensation she had ever encouraged,

every saucy speech she had ever directed towards him. For herself

she was humbled; but she was proud of him. Proud that in a cause

of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of

himself. She read over her aunt’s commendation of him again and

again. It was hardly enough; but it pleased her. She was even

sensible of some pleasure, though mixed with regret, on finding

how steadfastly both she and her uncle had been persuaded that

affection and confidence subsisted between Mr. Darcy and herself.

She was roused from her seat, and her reflections, by some one’s

approach; and before she could strike into another path, she was

overtaken by Wickham.

“I am afraid I interrupt your solitary ramble, my dear sister?”

said he, as he joined her.

“You certainly do,” she replied with a smile; “but it does not

follow that the interruption must be unwelcome.”

“I should be sorry indeed, if it were. \_We\_ were always good

friends; and now we are better.”

“True. Are the others coming out?”

“I do not know. Mrs. Bennet and Lydia are going in the carriage

to Meryton. And so, my dear sister, I find, from our uncle and

aunt, that you have actually seen Pemberley.”

She replied in the affirmative.

“I almost envy you the pleasure, and yet I believe it would be

too much for me, or else I could take it in my way to Newcastle.

And you saw the old housekeeper, I suppose? Poor Reynolds, she

was always very fond of me. But of course she did not mention my

name to you.”

“Yes, she did.”

“And what did she say?”

“That you were gone into the army, and she was afraid had—not

turned out well. At such a distance as \_that\_, you know, things

are strangely misrepresented.”

“Certainly,” he replied, biting his lips. Elizabeth hoped she had

silenced him; but he soon afterwards said:

“I was surprised to see Darcy in town last month. We passed each

other several times. I wonder what he can be doing there.”

“Perhaps preparing for his marriage with Miss de Bourgh,” said

Elizabeth. “It must be something particular, to take him there at

this time of year.”

“Undoubtedly. Did you see him while you were at Lambton? I

thought I understood from the Gardiners that you had.”

“Yes; he introduced us to his sister.”

“And do you like her?”

“Very much.”

“I have heard, indeed, that she is uncommonly improved within

this year or two. When I last saw her, she was not very

promising. I am very glad you liked her. I hope she will turn out

well.”

“I dare say she will; she has got over the most trying age.”

“Did you go by the village of Kympton?”

“I do not recollect that we did.”

“I mention it, because it is the living which I ought to have

had. A most delightful place!—Excellent Parsonage House! It would

have suited me in every respect.”

“How should you have liked making sermons?”

“Exceedingly well. I should have considered it as part of my

duty, and the exertion would soon have been nothing. One ought

not to repine;—but, to be sure, it would have been such a thing

for me! The quiet, the retirement of such a life would have

answered all my ideas of happiness! But it was not to be. Did you

ever hear Darcy mention the circumstance, when you were in Kent?”

“I \_have\_ heard from authority, which I thought \_as good\_, that

it was left you conditionally only, and at the will of the

present patron.”

“You have. Yes, there was something in \_that\_; I told you so from

the first, you may remember.”

“I \_did\_ hear, too, that there was a time, when sermon-making was

not so palatable to you as it seems to be at present; that you

actually declared your resolution of never taking orders, and

that the business had been compromised accordingly.”

“You did! and it was not wholly without foundation. You may

remember what I told you on that point, when first we talked of

it.”

They were now almost at the door of the house, for she had walked

fast to get rid of him; and unwilling, for her sister’s sake, to

provoke him, she only said in reply, with a good-humoured smile:

“Come, Mr. Wickham, we are brother and sister, you know. Do not

let us quarrel about the past. In future, I hope we shall be

always of one mind.”

She held out her hand; he kissed it with affectionate gallantry,

though he hardly knew how to look, and they entered the house.

Chapter 53

Mr. Wickham was so perfectly satisfied with this conversation

that he never again distressed himself, or provoked his dear

sister Elizabeth, by introducing the subject of it; and she was

pleased to find that she had said enough to keep him quiet.

The day of his and Lydia’s departure soon came, and Mrs. Bennet

was forced to submit to a separation, which, as her husband by no

means entered into her scheme of their all going to Newcastle,

was likely to continue at least a twelvemonth.

“Oh! my dear Lydia,” she cried, “when shall we meet again?”

“Oh, lord! I don’t know. Not these two or three years, perhaps.”

“Write to me very often, my dear.”

“As often as I can. But you know married women have never much

time for writing. My sisters may write to \_me\_. They will have

nothing else to do.”

Mr. Wickham’s adieus were much more affectionate than his wife’s.

He smiled, looked handsome, and said many pretty things.

“He is as fine a fellow,” said Mr. Bennet, as soon as they were

out of the house, “as ever I saw. He simpers, and smirks, and

makes love to us all. I am prodigiously proud of him. I defy even

Sir William Lucas himself to produce a more valuable son-in-law.”

The loss of her daughter made Mrs. Bennet very dull for several

days.

“I often think,” said she, “that there is nothing so bad as

parting with one’s friends. One seems so forlorn without them.”

“This is the consequence, you see, Madam, of marrying a

daughter,” said Elizabeth. “It must make you better satisfied

that your other four are single.”

“It is no such thing. Lydia does not leave me because she is

married, but only because her husband’s regiment happens to be so

far off. If that had been nearer, she would not have gone so

soon.”

But the spiritless condition which this event threw her into was

shortly relieved, and her mind opened again to the agitation of

hope, by an article of news which then began to be in

circulation. The housekeeper at Netherfield had received orders

to prepare for the arrival of her master, who was coming down in

a day or two, to shoot there for several weeks. Mrs. Bennet was

quite in the fidgets. She looked at Jane, and smiled and shook

her head by turns.

“Well, well, and so Mr. Bingley is coming down, sister,” (for

Mrs. Phillips first brought her the news). “Well, so much the

better. Not that I care about it, though. He is nothing to us,

you know, and I am sure I never want to see him again. But,

however, he is very welcome to come to Netherfield, if he likes

it. And who knows what \_may\_ happen? But that is nothing to us.

You know, sister, we agreed long ago never to mention a word

about it. And so, is it quite certain he is coming?”

“You may depend on it,” replied the other, “for Mrs. Nicholls was

in Meryton last night; I saw her passing by, and went out myself

on purpose to know the truth of it; and she told me that it was

certain true. He comes down on Thursday at the latest, very

likely on Wednesday. She was going to the butcher’s, she told me,

on purpose to order in some meat on Wednesday, and she has got

three couple of ducks just fit to be killed.”

Miss Bennet had not been able to hear of his coming without

changing colour. It was many months since she had mentioned his

name to Elizabeth; but now, as soon as they were alone together,

she said:

“I saw you look at me to-day, Lizzy, when my aunt told us of the

present report; and I know I appeared distressed. But don’t

imagine it was from any silly cause. I was only confused for the

moment, because I felt that I \_should\_ be looked at. I do assure

you that the news does not affect me either with pleasure or

pain. I am glad of one thing, that he comes alone; because we

shall see the less of him. Not that I am afraid of \_myself\_, but

I dread other people’s remarks.”

Elizabeth did not know what to make of it. Had she not seen him

in Derbyshire, she might have supposed him capable of coming

there with no other view than what was acknowledged; but she

still thought him partial to Jane, and she wavered as to the

greater probability of his coming there \_with\_ his friend’s

permission, or being bold enough to come without it.

“Yet it is hard,” she sometimes thought, “that this poor man

cannot come to a house which he has legally hired, without

raising all this speculation! I \_will\_ leave him to himself.”

In spite of what her sister declared, and really believed to be

her feelings in the expectation of his arrival, Elizabeth could

easily perceive that her spirits were affected by it. They were

more disturbed, more unequal, than she had often seen them.

The subject which had been so warmly canvassed between their

parents, about a twelvemonth ago, was now brought forward again.

“As soon as ever Mr. Bingley comes, my dear,” said Mrs. Bennet,

“you will wait on him of course.”

“No, no. You forced me into visiting him last year, and promised,

if I went to see him, he should marry one of my daughters. But it

ended in nothing, and I will not be sent on a fool’s errand

again.”

His wife represented to him how absolutely necessary such an

attention would be from all the neighbouring gentlemen, on his

returning to Netherfield.

“’Tis an \_etiquette\_ I despise,” said he. “If he wants our

society, let him seek it. He knows where we live. I will not

spend \_my\_ hours in running after my neighbours every time they

go away and come back again.”

“Well, all I know is, that it will be abominably rude if you do

not wait on him. But, however, that shan’t prevent my asking him

to dine here, I am determined. We must have Mrs. Long and the

Gouldings soon. That will make thirteen with ourselves, so there

will be just room at table for him.”

Consoled by this resolution, she was the better able to bear her

husband’s incivility; though it was very mortifying to know that

her neighbours might all see Mr. Bingley, in consequence of it,

before \_they\_ did. As the day of his arrival drew near,—

“I begin to be sorry that he comes at all,” said Jane to her

sister. “It would be nothing; I could see him with perfect

indifference, but I can hardly bear to hear it thus perpetually

talked of. My mother means well; but she does not know, no one

can know, how much I suffer from what she says. Happy shall I be,

when his stay at Netherfield is over!”

“I wish I could say anything to comfort you,” replied Elizabeth;

“but it is wholly out of my power. You must feel it; and the

usual satisfaction of preaching patience to a sufferer is denied

me, because you have always so much.”

Mr. Bingley arrived. Mrs. Bennet, through the assistance of

servants, contrived to have the earliest tidings of it, that the

period of anxiety and fretfulness on her side might be as long as

it could. She counted the days that must intervene before their

invitation could be sent; hopeless of seeing him before. But on

the third morning after his arrival in Hertfordshire, she saw

him, from her dressing-room window, enter the paddock and ride

towards the house.

Her daughters were eagerly called to partake of her joy. Jane

resolutely kept her place at the table; but Elizabeth, to satisfy

her mother, went to the window—she looked,—she saw Mr. Darcy with

him, and sat down again by her sister.

“There is a gentleman with him, mamma,” said Kitty; “who can it

be?”

“Some acquaintance or other, my dear, I suppose; I am sure I do

not know.”

“La!” replied Kitty, “it looks just like that man that used to be

with him before. Mr. what’s-his-name. That tall, proud man.”

“Good gracious! Mr. Darcy!—and so it does, I vow. Well, any

friend of Mr. Bingley’s will always be welcome here, to be sure;

but else I must say that I hate the very sight of him.”

Jane looked at Elizabeth with surprise and concern. She knew but

little of their meeting in Derbyshire, and therefore felt for the

awkwardness which must attend her sister, in seeing him almost

for the first time after receiving his explanatory letter. Both

sisters were uncomfortable enough. Each felt for the other, and

of course for themselves; and their mother talked on, of her

dislike of Mr. Darcy, and her resolution to be civil to him only

as Mr. Bingley’s friend, without being heard by either of them.

But Elizabeth had sources of uneasiness which could not be

suspected by Jane, to whom she had never yet had courage to shew

Mrs. Gardiner’s letter, or to relate her own change of sentiment

towards him. To Jane, he could be only a man whose proposals she

had refused, and whose merit she had undervalued; but to her own

more extensive information, he was the person to whom the whole

family were indebted for the first of benefits, and whom she

regarded herself with an interest, if not quite so tender, at

least as reasonable and just as what Jane felt for Bingley. Her

astonishment at his coming—at his coming to Netherfield, to

Longbourn, and voluntarily seeking her again, was almost equal to

what she had known on first witnessing his altered behaviour in

Derbyshire.

The colour which had been driven from her face, returned for half

a minute with an additional glow, and a smile of delight added

lustre to her eyes, as she thought for that space of time that

his affection and wishes must still be unshaken. But she would

not be secure.

“Let me first see how he behaves,” said she; “it will then be

early enough for expectation.”

She sat intently at work, striving to be composed, and without

daring to lift up her eyes, till anxious curiosity carried them

to the face of her sister as the servant was approaching the

door. Jane looked a little paler than usual, but more sedate than

Elizabeth had expected. On the gentlemen’s appearing, her colour

increased; yet she received them with tolerable ease, and with a

propriety of behaviour equally free from any symptom of

resentment or any unnecessary complaisance.

Elizabeth said as little to either as civility would allow, and

sat down again to her work, with an eagerness which it did not

often command. She had ventured only one glance at Darcy. He

looked serious, as usual; and, she thought, more as he had been

used to look in Hertfordshire, than as she had seen him at

Pemberley. But, perhaps he could not in her mother’s presence be

what he was before her uncle and aunt. It was a painful, but not

an improbable, conjecture.

Bingley, she had likewise seen for an instant, and in that short

period saw him looking both pleased and embarrassed. He was

received by Mrs. Bennet with a degree of civility which made her

two daughters ashamed, especially when contrasted with the cold

and ceremonious politeness of her curtsey and address to his

friend.

Elizabeth, particularly, who knew that her mother owed to the

latter the preservation of her favourite daughter from

irremediable infamy, was hurt and distressed to a most painful

degree by a distinction so ill applied.

Darcy, after enquiring of her how Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner did, a

question which she could not answer without confusion, said

scarcely anything. He was not seated by her; perhaps that was the

reason of his silence; but it had not been so in Derbyshire.

There he had talked to her friends, when he could not to herself.

But now several minutes elapsed without bringing the sound of his

voice; and when occasionally, unable to resist the impulse of

curiosity, she raised her eyes to his face, she as often found

him looking at Jane as at herself, and frequently on no object

but the ground. More thoughtfulness and less anxiety to please,

than when they last met, were plainly expressed. She was

disappointed, and angry with herself for being so.

“Could I expect it to be otherwise!” said she. “Yet why did he

come?”

She was in no humour for conversation with anyone but himself;

and to him she had hardly courage to speak.

She enquired after his sister, but could do no more.

“It is a long time, Mr. Bingley, since you went away,” said Mrs.

Bennet.

He readily agreed to it.

“I began to be afraid you would never come back again. People

\_did\_ say you meant to quit the place entirely at Michaelmas;

but, however, I hope it is not true. A great many changes have

happened in the neighbourhood, since you went away. Miss Lucas is

married and settled. And one of my own daughters. I suppose you

have heard of it; indeed, you must have seen it in the papers. It

was in The Times and The Courier, I know; though it was not put

in as it ought to be. It was only said, ‘Lately, George Wickham,

Esq. to Miss Lydia Bennet,’ without there being a syllable said

of her father, or the place where she lived, or anything. It was

my brother Gardiner’s drawing up too, and I wonder how he came to

make such an awkward business of it. Did you see it?”

Bingley replied that he did, and made his congratulations.

Elizabeth dared not lift up her eyes. How Mr. Darcy looked,

therefore, she could not tell.

“It is a delightful thing, to be sure, to have a daughter well

married,” continued her mother, “but at the same time, Mr.

Bingley, it is very hard to have her taken such a way from me.

They are gone down to Newcastle, a place quite northward, it

seems, and there they are to stay I do not know how long. His

regiment is there; for I suppose you have heard of his leaving

the ——shire, and of his being gone into the regulars. Thank

Heaven! he has \_some\_ friends, though perhaps not so many as he

deserves.”

Elizabeth, who knew this to be levelled at Mr. Darcy, was in such

misery of shame, that she could hardly keep her seat. It drew

from her, however, the exertion of speaking, which nothing else

had so effectually done before; and she asked Bingley whether he

meant to make any stay in the country at present. A few weeks, he

believed.

“When you have killed all your own birds, Mr. Bingley,” said her

mother, “I beg you will come here, and shoot as many as you

please on Mr. Bennet’s manor. I am sure he will be vastly happy

to oblige you, and will save all the best of the covies for you.”

Elizabeth’s misery increased, at such unnecessary, such officious

attention! Were the same fair prospect to arise at present as had

flattered them a year ago, every thing, she was persuaded, would

be hastening to the same vexatious conclusion. At that instant,

she felt that years of happiness could not make Jane or herself

amends for moments of such painful confusion.

“The first wish of my heart,” said she to herself, “is never more

to be in company with either of them. Their society can afford no

pleasure that will atone for such wretchedness as this! Let me

never see either one or the other again!”

Yet the misery, for which years of happiness were to offer no

compensation, received soon afterwards material relief, from

observing how much the beauty of her sister re-kindled the

admiration of her former lover. When first he came in, he had

spoken to her but little; but every five minutes seemed to be

giving her more of his attention. He found her as handsome as she

had been last year; as good natured, and as unaffected, though

not quite so chatty. Jane was anxious that no difference should

be perceived in her at all, and was really persuaded that she

talked as much as ever. But her mind was so busily engaged, that

she did not always know when she was silent.

When the gentlemen rose to go away, Mrs. Bennet was mindful of

her intended civility, and they were invited and engaged to dine

at Longbourn in a few days time.

“You are quite a visit in my debt, Mr. Bingley,” she added, “for

when you went to town last winter, you promised to take a family

dinner with us, as soon as you returned. I have not forgot, you

see; and I assure you, I was very much disappointed that you did

not come back and keep your engagement.”

Bingley looked a little silly at this reflection, and said

something of his concern at having been prevented by business.

They then went away.

Mrs. Bennet had been strongly inclined to ask them to stay and

dine there that day; but, though she always kept a very good

table, she did not think anything less than two courses could be

good enough for a man on whom she had such anxious designs, or

satisfy the appetite and pride of one who had ten thousand a

year.

Chapter 54

As soon as they were gone, Elizabeth walked out to recover her

spirits; or in other words, to dwell without interruption on

those subjects that must deaden them more. Mr. Darcy’s behaviour

astonished and vexed her.

“Why, if he came only to be silent, grave, and indifferent,” said

she, “did he come at all?”

She could settle it in no way that gave her pleasure.

“He could be still amiable, still pleasing, to my uncle and aunt,

when he was in town; and why not to me? If he fears me, why come

hither? If he no longer cares for me, why silent? Teasing,

teasing, man! I will think no more about him.”

Her resolution was for a short time involuntarily kept by the

approach of her sister, who joined her with a cheerful look,

which showed her better satisfied with their visitors, than

Elizabeth.

“Now,” said she, “that this first meeting is over, I feel

perfectly easy. I know my own strength, and I shall never be

embarrassed again by his coming. I am glad he dines here on

Tuesday. It will then be publicly seen that, on both sides, we

meet only as common and indifferent acquaintance.”

“Yes, very indifferent indeed,” said Elizabeth, laughingly. “Oh,

Jane, take care.”

“My dear Lizzy, you cannot think me so weak, as to be in danger

now?”

“I think you are in very great danger of making him as much in

love with you as ever.”

They did not see the gentlemen again till Tuesday; and Mrs.

Bennet, in the meanwhile, was giving way to all the happy

schemes, which the good humour and common politeness of Bingley,

in half an hour’s visit, had revived.

On Tuesday there was a large party assembled at Longbourn; and

the two who were most anxiously expected, to the credit of their

punctuality as sportsmen, were in very good time. When they

repaired to the dining-room, Elizabeth eagerly watched to see

whether Bingley would take the place, which, in all their former

parties, had belonged to him, by her sister. Her prudent mother,

occupied by the same ideas, forbore to invite him to sit by

herself. On entering the room, he seemed to hesitate; but Jane

happened to look round, and happened to smile: it was decided. He

placed himself by her.

Elizabeth, with a triumphant sensation, looked towards his

friend. He bore it with noble indifference, and she would have

imagined that Bingley had received his sanction to be happy, had

she not seen his eyes likewise turned towards Mr. Darcy, with an

expression of half-laughing alarm.

His behaviour to her sister was such, during dinner time, as

showed an admiration of her, which, though more guarded than

formerly, persuaded Elizabeth, that if left wholly to himself,

Jane’s happiness, and his own, would be speedily secured. Though

she dared not depend upon the consequence, she yet received

pleasure from observing his behaviour. It gave her all the

animation that her spirits could boast; for she was in no

cheerful humour. Mr. Darcy was almost as far from her as the

table could divide them. He was on one side of her mother. She

knew how little such a situation would give pleasure to either,

or make either appear to advantage. She was not near enough to

hear any of their discourse, but she could see how seldom they

spoke to each other, and how formal and cold was their manner

whenever they did. Her mother’s ungraciousness, made the sense of

what they owed him more painful to Elizabeth’s mind; and she

would, at times, have given anything to be privileged to tell him

that his kindness was neither unknown nor unfelt by the whole of

the family.

She was in hopes that the evening would afford some opportunity

of bringing them together; that the whole of the visit would not

pass away without enabling them to enter into something more of

conversation than the mere ceremonious salutation attending his

entrance. Anxious and uneasy, the period which passed in the

drawing-room, before the gentlemen came, was wearisome and dull

to a degree that almost made her uncivil. She looked forward to

their entrance as the point on which all her chance of pleasure

for the evening must depend.

“If he does not come to me, \_then\_,” said she, “I shall give him

up for ever.”

The gentlemen came; and she thought he looked as if he would have

answered her hopes; but, alas! the ladies had crowded round the

table, where Miss Bennet was making tea, and Elizabeth pouring

out the coffee, in so close a confederacy that there was not a

single vacancy near her which would admit of a chair. And on the

gentlemen’s approaching, one of the girls moved closer to her

than ever, and said, in a whisper:

“The men shan’t come and part us, I am determined. We want none

of them; do we?”

Darcy had walked away to another part of the room. She followed

him with her eyes, envied everyone to whom he spoke, had scarcely

patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged

against herself for being so silly!

“A man who has once been refused! How could I ever be foolish

enough to expect a renewal of his love? Is there one among the

sex, who would not protest against such a weakness as a second

proposal to the same woman? There is no indignity so abhorrent to

their feelings!”

She was a little revived, however, by his bringing back his

coffee cup himself; and she seized the opportunity of saying:

“Is your sister at Pemberley still?”

“Yes, she will remain there till Christmas.”

“And quite alone? Have all her friends left her?”

“Mrs. Annesley is with her. The others have been gone on to

Scarborough, these three weeks.”

She could think of nothing more to say; but if he wished to

converse with her, he might have better success. He stood by her,

however, for some minutes, in silence; and, at last, on the young

lady’s whispering to Elizabeth again, he walked away.

When the tea-things were removed, and the card-tables placed, the

ladies all rose, and Elizabeth was then hoping to be soon joined

by him, when all her views were overthrown by seeing him fall a

victim to her mother’s rapacity for whist players, and in a few

moments after seated with the rest of the party. She now lost

every expectation of pleasure. They were confined for the evening

at different tables, and she had nothing to hope, but that his

eyes were so often turned towards her side of the room, as to

make him play as unsuccessfully as herself.

Mrs. Bennet had designed to keep the two Netherfield gentlemen to

supper; but their carriage was unluckily ordered before any of

the others, and she had no opportunity of detaining them.

“Well girls,” said she, as soon as they were left to themselves,

“What say you to the day? I think every thing has passed off

uncommonly well, I assure you. The dinner was as well dressed as

any I ever saw. The venison was roasted to a turn—and everybody

said they never saw so fat a haunch. The soup was fifty times

better than what we had at the Lucases’ last week; and even Mr.

Darcy acknowledged, that the partridges were remarkably well

done; and I suppose he has two or three French cooks at least.

And, my dear Jane, I never saw you look in greater beauty. Mrs.

Long said so too, for I asked her whether you did not. And what

do you think she said besides? ‘Ah! Mrs. Bennet, we shall have

her at Netherfield at last.’ She did indeed. I do think Mrs. Long

is as good a creature as ever lived—and her nieces are very

pretty behaved girls, and not at all handsome: I like them

prodigiously.”

Mrs. Bennet, in short, was in very great spirits; she had seen

enough of Bingley’s behaviour to Jane, to be convinced that she

would get him at last; and her expectations of advantage to her

family, when in a happy humour, were so far beyond reason, that

she was quite disappointed at not seeing him there again the next

day, to make his proposals.

“It has been a very agreeable day,” said Miss Bennet to

Elizabeth. “The party seemed so well selected, so suitable one

with the other. I hope we may often meet again.”

Elizabeth smiled.

“Lizzy, you must not do so. You must not suspect me. It mortifies

me. I assure you that I have now learnt to enjoy his conversation

as an agreeable and sensible young man, without having a wish

beyond it. I am perfectly satisfied, from what his manners now

are, that he never had any design of engaging my affection. It is

only that he is blessed with greater sweetness of address, and a

stronger desire of generally pleasing, than any other man.”

“You are very cruel,” said her sister, “you will not let me

smile, and are provoking me to it every moment.”

“How hard it is in some cases to be believed!”

“And how impossible in others!”

“But why should you wish to persuade me that I feel more than I

acknowledge?”

“That is a question which I hardly know how to answer. We all

love to instruct, though we can teach only what is not worth

knowing. Forgive me; and if you persist in indifference, do not

make \_me\_ your confidante.”

Chapter 55

A few days after this visit, Mr. Bingley called again, and alone.

His friend had left him that morning for London, but was to

return home in ten days time. He sat with them above an hour, and

was in remarkably good spirits. Mrs. Bennet invited him to dine

with them; but, with many expressions of concern, he confessed

himself engaged elsewhere.

“Next time you call,” said she, “I hope we shall be more lucky.”

He should be particularly happy at any time, etc. etc.; and if

she would give him leave, would take an early opportunity of

waiting on them.

“Can you come to-morrow?”

Yes, he had no engagement at all for to-morrow; and her

invitation was accepted with alacrity.

He came, and in such very good time that the ladies were none of

them dressed. In ran Mrs. Bennet to her daughter’s room, in her

dressing gown, and with her hair half finished, crying out:

“My dear Jane, make haste and hurry down. He is come—Mr. Bingley

is come. He is, indeed. Make haste, make haste. Here, Sarah, come

to Miss Bennet this moment, and help her on with her gown. Never

mind Miss Lizzy’s hair.”

“We will be down as soon as we can,” said Jane; “but I dare say

Kitty is forwarder than either of us, for she went up stairs half

an hour ago.”

“Oh! hang Kitty! what has she to do with it? Come be quick, be

quick! Where is your sash, my dear?”

But when her mother was gone, Jane would not be prevailed on to

go down without one of her sisters.

The same anxiety to get them by themselves was visible again in

the evening. After tea, Mr. Bennet retired to the library, as was

his custom, and Mary went up stairs to her instrument. Two

obstacles of the five being thus removed, Mrs. Bennet sat looking

and winking at Elizabeth and Catherine for a considerable time,

without making any impression on them. Elizabeth would not

observe her; and when at last Kitty did, she very innocently

said, “What is the matter mamma? What do you keep winking at me

for? What am I to do?”

“Nothing child, nothing. I did not wink at you.” She then sat

still five minutes longer; but unable to waste such a precious

occasion, she suddenly got up, and saying to Kitty, “Come here,

my love, I want to speak to you,” took her out of the room. Jane

instantly gave a look at Elizabeth which spoke her distress at

such premeditation, and her entreaty that \_she\_ would not give in

to it. In a few minutes, Mrs. Bennet half-opened the door and

called out:

“Lizzy, my dear, I want to speak with you.”

Elizabeth was forced to go.

“We may as well leave them by themselves you know;” said her

mother, as soon as she was in the hall. “Kitty and I are going up

stairs to sit in my dressing-room.”

Elizabeth made no attempt to reason with her mother, but remained

quietly in the hall, till she and Kitty were out of sight, then

returned into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Bennet’s schemes for this day were ineffectual. Bingley was

every thing that was charming, except the professed lover of her

daughter. His ease and cheerfulness rendered him a most agreeable

addition to their evening party; and he bore with the ill-judged

officiousness of the mother, and heard all her silly remarks with

a forbearance and command of countenance particularly grateful to

the daughter.

He scarcely needed an invitation to stay supper; and before he

went away, an engagement was formed, chiefly through his own and

Mrs. Bennet’s means, for his coming next morning to shoot with

her husband.

After this day, Jane said no more of her indifference. Not a word

passed between the sisters concerning Bingley; but Elizabeth went

to bed in the happy belief that all must speedily be concluded,

unless Mr. Darcy returned within the stated time. Seriously,

however, she felt tolerably persuaded that all this must have

taken place with that gentleman’s concurrence.

Bingley was punctual to his appointment; and he and Mr. Bennet

spent the morning together, as had been agreed on. The latter was

much more agreeable than his companion expected. There was

nothing of presumption or folly in Bingley that could provoke his

ridicule, or disgust him into silence; and he was more

communicative, and less eccentric, than the other had ever seen

him. Bingley of course returned with him to dinner; and in the

evening Mrs. Bennet’s invention was again at work to get every

body away from him and her daughter. Elizabeth, who had a letter

to write, went into the breakfast room for that purpose soon

after tea; for as the others were all going to sit down to cards,

she could not be wanted to counteract her mother’s schemes.

But on returning to the drawing-room, when her letter was

finished, she saw, to her infinite surprise, there was reason to

fear that her mother had been too ingenious for her. On opening

the door, she perceived her sister and Bingley standing together

over the hearth, as if engaged in earnest conversation; and had

this led to no suspicion, the faces of both, as they hastily

turned round and moved away from each other, would have told it

all. \_Their\_ situation was awkward enough; but \_hers\_ she thought

was still worse. Not a syllable was uttered by either; and

Elizabeth was on the point of going away again, when Bingley, who

as well as the other had sat down, suddenly rose, and whispering

a few words to her sister, ran out of the room.

Jane could have no reserves from Elizabeth, where confidence

would give pleasure; and instantly embracing her, acknowledged,

with the liveliest emotion, that she was the happiest creature in

the world.

“’Tis too much!” she added, “by far too much. I do not deserve

it. Oh! why is not everybody as happy?”

Elizabeth’s congratulations were given with a sincerity, a

warmth, a delight, which words could but poorly express. Every

sentence of kindness was a fresh source of happiness to Jane. But

she would not allow herself to stay with her sister, or say half

that remained to be said for the present.

“I must go instantly to my mother;” she cried. “I would not on

any account trifle with her affectionate solicitude; or allow her

to hear it from anyone but myself. He is gone to my father

already. Oh! Lizzy, to know that what I have to relate will give

such pleasure to all my dear family! how shall I bear so much

happiness!”

She then hastened away to her mother, who had purposely broken up

the card party, and was sitting up stairs with Kitty.

Elizabeth, who was left by herself, now smiled at the rapidity

and ease with which an affair was finally settled, that had given

them so many previous months of suspense and vexation.

“And this,” said she, “is the end of all his friend’s anxious

circumspection! of all his sister’s falsehood and contrivance!

the happiest, wisest, most reasonable end!”

In a few minutes she was joined by Bingley, whose conference with

her father had been short and to the purpose.

“Where is your sister?” said he hastily, as he opened the door.

“With my mother up stairs. She will be down in a moment, I dare

say.”

He then shut the door, and, coming up to her, claimed the good

wishes and affection of a sister. Elizabeth honestly and heartily

expressed her delight in the prospect of their relationship. They

shook hands with great cordiality; and then, till her sister came

down, she had to listen to all he had to say of his own

happiness, and of Jane’s perfections; and in spite of his being a

lover, Elizabeth really believed all his expectations of felicity

to be rationally founded, because they had for basis the

excellent understanding, and super-excellent disposition of Jane,

and a general similarity of feeling and taste between her and

himself.

It was an evening of no common delight to them all; the

satisfaction of Miss Bennet’s mind gave a glow of such sweet

animation to her face, as made her look handsomer than ever.

Kitty simpered and smiled, and hoped her turn was coming soon.

Mrs. Bennet could not give her consent or speak her approbation

in terms warm enough to satisfy her feelings, though she talked

to Bingley of nothing else for half an hour; and when Mr. Bennet

joined them at supper, his voice and manner plainly showed how

really happy he was.

Not a word, however, passed his lips in allusion to it, till

their visitor took his leave for the night; but as soon as he was

gone, he turned to his daughter, and said:

“Jane, I congratulate you. You will be a very happy woman.”

Jane went to him instantly, kissed him, and thanked him for his

goodness.

“You are a good girl;” he replied, “and I have great pleasure in

thinking you will be so happily settled. I have not a doubt of

your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means

unlike. You are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever

be resolved on; so easy, that every servant will cheat you; and

so generous, that you will always exceed your income.”

“I hope not so. Imprudence or thoughtlessness in money matters

would be unpardonable in \_me\_.”

“Exceed their income! My dear Mr. Bennet,” cried his wife, “what

are you talking of? Why, he has four or five thousand a year, and

very likely more.” Then addressing her daughter, “Oh! my dear,

dear Jane, I am so happy! I am sure I shan’t get a wink of sleep

all night. I knew how it would be. I always said it must be so,

at last. I was sure you could not be so beautiful for nothing! I

remember, as soon as ever I saw him, when he first came into

Hertfordshire last year, I thought how likely it was that you

should come together. Oh! he is the handsomest young man that

ever was seen!”

Wickham, Lydia, were all forgotten. Jane was beyond competition

her favourite child. At that moment, she cared for no other. Her

younger sisters soon began to make interest with her for objects

of happiness which she might in future be able to dispense.

Mary petitioned for the use of the library at Netherfield; and

Kitty begged very hard for a few balls there every winter.

Bingley, from this time, was of course a daily visitor at

Longbourn; coming frequently before breakfast, and always

remaining till after supper; unless when some barbarous

neighbour, who could not be enough detested, had given him an

invitation to dinner which he thought himself obliged to accept.

Elizabeth had now but little time for conversation with her

sister; for while he was present, Jane had no attention to bestow

on anyone else; but she found herself considerably useful to both

of them in those hours of separation that must sometimes occur.

In the absence of Jane, he always attached himself to Elizabeth,

for the pleasure of talking of her; and when Bingley was gone,

Jane constantly sought the same means of relief.

“He has made me so happy,” said she, one evening, “by telling me

that he was totally ignorant of my being in town last spring! I

had not believed it possible.”

“I suspected as much,” replied Elizabeth. “But how did he account

for it?”

“It must have been his sister’s doing. They were certainly no

friends to his acquaintance with me, which I cannot wonder at,

since he might have chosen so much more advantageously in many

respects. But when they see, as I trust they will, that their

brother is happy with me, they will learn to be contented, and we

shall be on good terms again; though we can never be what we once

were to each other.”

“That is the most unforgiving speech,” said Elizabeth, “that I

ever heard you utter. Good girl! It would vex me, indeed, to see

you again the dupe of Miss Bingley’s pretended regard.”

“Would you believe it, Lizzy, that when he went to town last

November, he really loved me, and nothing but a persuasion of

\_my\_ being indifferent would have prevented his coming down

again!”

“He made a little mistake to be sure; but it is to the credit of

his modesty.”

This naturally introduced a panegyric from Jane on his

diffidence, and the little value he put on his own good

qualities. Elizabeth was pleased to find that he had not betrayed

the interference of his friend; for, though Jane had the most

generous and forgiving heart in the world, she knew it was a

circumstance which must prejudice her against him.

“I am certainly the most fortunate creature that ever existed!”

cried Jane. “Oh! Lizzy, why am I thus singled from my family, and

blessed above them all! If I could but see you as happy! If there

were but such another man for you!”

“If you were to give me forty such men, I never could be so happy

as you. Till I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can

have your happiness. No, no, let me shift for myself; and,

perhaps, if I have very good luck, I may meet with another Mr.

Collins in time.”

The situation of affairs in the Longbourn family could not be

long a secret. Mrs. Bennet was privileged to whisper it to Mrs.

Phillips, and she ventured, without any permission, to do the

same by all her neighbours in Meryton.

The Bennets were speedily pronounced to be the luckiest family in

the world, though only a few weeks before, when Lydia had first

run away, they had been generally proved to be marked out for

misfortune.

Chapter 56

One morning, about a week after Bingley’s engagement with Jane

had been formed, as he and the females of the family were sitting

together in the dining-room, their attention was suddenly drawn

to the window, by the sound of a carriage; and they perceived a

chaise and four driving up the lawn. It was too early in the

morning for visitors, and besides, the equipage did not answer to

that of any of their neighbours. The horses were post; and

neither the carriage, nor the livery of the servant who preceded

it, were familiar to them. As it was certain, however, that

somebody was coming, Bingley instantly prevailed on Miss Bennet

to avoid the confinement of such an intrusion, and walk away with

him into the shrubbery. They both set off, and the conjectures of

the remaining three continued, though with little satisfaction,

till the door was thrown open and their visitor entered. It was

Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

They were of course all intending to be surprised; but their

astonishment was beyond their expectation; and on the part of

Mrs. Bennet and Kitty, though she was perfectly unknown to them,

even inferior to what Elizabeth felt.

She entered the room with an air more than usually ungracious,

made no other reply to Elizabeth’s salutation than a slight

inclination of the head, and sat down without saying a word.

Elizabeth had mentioned her name to her mother on her ladyship’s

entrance, though no request of introduction had been made.

Mrs. Bennet, all amazement, though flattered by having a guest of

such high importance, received her with the utmost politeness.

After sitting for a moment in silence, she said very stiffly to

Elizabeth,

“I hope you are well, Miss Bennet. That lady, I suppose, is your

mother.”

Elizabeth replied very concisely that she was.

“And \_that\_ I suppose is one of your sisters.”

“Yes, madam,” said Mrs. Bennet, delighted to speak to Lady

Catherine. “She is my youngest girl but one. My youngest of all

is lately married, and my eldest is somewhere about the grounds,

walking with a young man who, I believe, will soon become a part

of the family.”

“You have a very small park here,” returned Lady Catherine after

a short silence.

“It is nothing in comparison of Rosings, my lady, I dare say; but

I assure you it is much larger than Sir William Lucas’s.”

“This must be a most inconvenient sitting room for the evening,

in summer; the windows are full west.”

Mrs. Bennet assured her that they never sat there after dinner,

and then added:

“May I take the liberty of asking your ladyship whether you left

Mr. and Mrs. Collins well.”

“Yes, very well. I saw them the night before last.”

Elizabeth now expected that she would produce a letter for her

from Charlotte, as it seemed the only probable motive for her

calling. But no letter appeared, and she was completely puzzled.

Mrs. Bennet, with great civility, begged her ladyship to take

some refreshment; but Lady Catherine very resolutely, and not

very politely, declined eating anything; and then, rising up,

said to Elizabeth,

“Miss Bennet, there seemed to be a prettyish kind of a little

wilderness on one side of your lawn. I should be glad to take a

turn in it, if you will favour me with your company.”

“Go, my dear,” cried her mother, “and show her ladyship about the

different walks. I think she will be pleased with the hermitage.”

Elizabeth obeyed, and running into her own room for her parasol,

attended her noble guest downstairs. As they passed through the

hall, Lady Catherine opened the doors into the dining-parlour and

drawing-room, and pronouncing them, after a short survey, to be

decent looking rooms, walked on.

Her carriage remained at the door, and Elizabeth saw that her

waiting-woman was in it. They proceeded in silence along the

gravel walk that led to the copse; Elizabeth was determined to

make no effort for conversation with a woman who was now more

than usually insolent and disagreeable.

“How could I ever think her like her nephew?” said she, as she

looked in her face.

As soon as they entered the copse, Lady Catherine began in the

following manner:—

“You can be at no loss, Miss Bennet, to understand the reason of

my journey hither. Your own heart, your own conscience, must tell

you why I come.”

Elizabeth looked with unaffected astonishment.

“Indeed, you are mistaken, Madam. I have not been at all able to

account for the honour of seeing you here.”

“Miss Bennet,” replied her ladyship, in an angry tone, “you ought

to know, that I am not to be trifled with. But however insincere

\_you\_ may choose to be, you shall not find \_me\_ so. My character

has ever been celebrated for its sincerity and frankness, and in

a cause of such moment as this, I shall certainly not depart from

it. A report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago. I

was told that not only your sister was on the point of being most

advantageously married, but that you, that Miss Elizabeth Bennet,

would, in all likelihood, be soon afterwards united to my nephew,

my own nephew, Mr. Darcy. Though I \_know\_ it must be a scandalous

falsehood, though I would not injure him so much as to suppose

the truth of it possible, I instantly resolved on setting off for

this place, that I might make my sentiments known to you.”

“If you believed it impossible to be true,” said Elizabeth,

colouring with astonishment and disdain, “I wonder you took the

trouble of coming so far. What could your ladyship propose by

it?”

“At once to insist upon having such a report universally

contradicted.”

“Your coming to Longbourn, to see me and my family,” said

Elizabeth coolly, “will be rather a confirmation of it; if,

indeed, such a report is in existence.”

“If! Do you then pretend to be ignorant of it? Has it not been

industriously circulated by yourselves? Do you not know that such

a report is spread abroad?”

“I never heard that it was.”

“And can you likewise declare, that there is no \_foundation\_ for

it?”

“I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your ladyship.

\_You\_ may ask questions which \_I\_ shall not choose to answer.”

“This is not to be borne. Miss Bennet, I insist on being

satisfied. Has he, has my nephew, made you an offer of marriage?”

“Your ladyship has declared it to be impossible.”

“It ought to be so; it must be so, while he retains the use of

his reason. But \_your\_ arts and allurements may, in a moment of

infatuation, have made him forget what he owes to himself and to

all his family. You may have drawn him in.”

“If I have, I shall be the last person to confess it.”

“Miss Bennet, do you know who I am? I have not been accustomed to

such language as this. I am almost the nearest relation he has in

the world, and am entitled to know all his dearest concerns.”

“But you are not entitled to know \_mine;\_ nor will such behaviour

as this, ever induce me to be explicit.”

“Let me be rightly understood. This match, to which you have the

presumption to aspire, can never take place. No, never. Mr. Darcy

is engaged to \_my daughter\_. Now what have you to say?”

“Only this; that if he is so, you can have no reason to suppose

he will make an offer to me.”

Lady Catherine hesitated for a moment, and then replied:

“The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. From their

infancy, they have been intended for each other. It was the

favourite wish of \_his\_ mother, as well as of hers. While in

their cradles, we planned the union: and now, at the moment when

the wishes of both sisters would be accomplished in their

marriage, to be prevented by a young woman of inferior birth, of

no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family! Do

you pay no regard to the wishes of his friends? To his tacit

engagement with Miss de Bourgh? Are you lost to every feeling of

propriety and delicacy? Have you not heard me say that from his

earliest hours he was destined for his cousin?”

“Yes, and I had heard it before. But what is that to me? If there

is no other objection to my marrying your nephew, I shall

certainly not be kept from it by knowing that his mother and aunt

wished him to marry Miss de Bourgh. You both did as much as you

could in planning the marriage. Its completion depended on

others. If Mr. Darcy is neither by honour nor inclination

confined to his cousin, why is not he to make another choice? And

if I am that choice, why may not I accept him?”

“Because honour, decorum, prudence, nay, interest, forbid it.

Yes, Miss Bennet, interest; for do not expect to be noticed by

his family or friends, if you wilfully act against the

inclinations of all. You will be censured, slighted, and

despised, by everyone connected with him. Your alliance will be a

disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us.”

“These are heavy misfortunes,” replied Elizabeth. “But the wife

of Mr. Darcy must have such extraordinary sources of happiness

necessarily attached to her situation, that she could, upon the

whole, have no cause to repine.”

“Obstinate, headstrong girl! I am ashamed of you! Is this your

gratitude for my attentions to you last spring? Is nothing due to

me on that score? Let us sit down. You are to understand, Miss

Bennet, that I came here with the determined resolution of

carrying my purpose; nor will I be dissuaded from it. I have not

been used to submit to any person’s whims. I have not been in the

habit of brooking disappointment.”

“\_That\_ will make your ladyship’s situation at present more

pitiable; but it will have no effect on \_me\_.”

“I will not be interrupted. Hear me in silence. My daughter and

my nephew are formed for each other. They are descended, on the

maternal side, from the same noble line; and, on the father’s,

from respectable, honourable, and ancient—though

untitled—families. Their fortune on both sides is splendid. They

are destined for each other by the voice of every member of their

respective houses; and what is to divide them? The upstart

pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or

fortune. Is this to be endured! But it must not, shall not be. If

you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit

the sphere in which you have been brought up.”

“In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as

quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s

daughter; so far we are equal.”

“True. You \_are\_ a gentleman’s daughter. But who was your mother?

Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of

their condition.”

“Whatever my connections may be,” said Elizabeth, “if your nephew

does not object to them, they can be nothing to \_you\_.”

“Tell me once for all, are you engaged to him?”

Though Elizabeth would not, for the mere purpose of obliging Lady

Catherine, have answered this question, she could not but say,

after a moment’s deliberation:

“I am not.”

Lady Catherine seemed pleased.

“And will you promise me, never to enter into such an

engagement?”

“I will make no promise of the kind.”

“Miss Bennet I am shocked and astonished. I expected to find a

more reasonable young woman. But do not deceive yourself into a

belief that I will ever recede. I shall not go away till you have

given me the assurance I require.”

“And I certainly \_never\_ shall give it. I am not to be

intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. Your ladyship

wants Mr. Darcy to marry your daughter; but would my giving you

the wished-for promise make \_their\_ marriage at all more

probable? Supposing him to be attached to me, would \_my\_ refusing

to accept his hand make him wish to bestow it on his cousin?

Allow me to say, Lady Catherine, that the arguments with which

you have supported this extraordinary application have been as

frivolous as the application was ill-judged. You have widely

mistaken my character, if you think I can be worked on by such

persuasions as these. How far your nephew might approve of your

interference in \_his\_ affairs, I cannot tell; but you have

certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg,

therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject.”

“Not so hasty, if you please. I have by no means done. To all the

objections I have already urged, I have still another to add. I

am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest sister’s

infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young man’s marrying

her was a patched-up business, at the expence of your father and

uncles. And is \_such\_ a girl to be my nephew’s sister? Is \_her\_

husband, who is the son of his late father’s steward, to be his

brother? Heaven and earth!—of what are you thinking? Are the

shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?”

“You can \_now\_ have nothing further to say,” she resentfully

answered. “You have insulted me in every possible method. I must

beg to return to the house.”

And she rose as she spoke. Lady Catherine rose also, and they

turned back. Her ladyship was highly incensed.

“You have no regard, then, for the honour and credit of my

nephew! Unfeeling, selfish girl! Do you not consider that a

connection with you must disgrace him in the eyes of everybody?”

“Lady Catherine, I have nothing further to say. You know my

sentiments.”

“You are then resolved to have him?”

“I have said no such thing. I am only resolved to act in that

manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness,

without reference to \_you\_, or to any person so wholly

unconnected with me.”

“It is well. You refuse, then, to oblige me. You refuse to obey

the claims of duty, honour, and gratitude. You are determined to

ruin him in the opinion of all his friends, and make him the

contempt of the world.”

“Neither duty, nor honour, nor gratitude,” replied Elizabeth,

“have any possible claim on me, in the present instance. No

principle of either would be violated by my marriage with Mr.

Darcy. And with regard to the resentment of his family, or the

indignation of the world, if the former \_were\_ excited by his

marrying me, it would not give me one moment’s concern—and the

world in general would have too much sense to join in the scorn.”

“And this is your real opinion! This is your final resolve! Very

well. I shall now know how to act. Do not imagine, Miss Bennet,

that your ambition will ever be gratified. I came to try you. I

hoped to find you reasonable; but, depend upon it, I will carry

my point.”

In this manner Lady Catherine talked on, till they were at the

door of the carriage, when, turning hastily round, she added, “I

take no leave of you, Miss Bennet. I send no compliments to your

mother. You deserve no such attention. I am most seriously

displeased.”

Elizabeth made no answer; and without attempting to persuade her

ladyship to return into the house, walked quietly into it

herself. She heard the carriage drive away as she proceeded up

stairs. Her mother impatiently met her at the door of the

dressing-room, to ask why Lady Catherine would not come in again

and rest herself.

“She did not choose it,” said her daughter, “she would go.”

“She is a very fine-looking woman! and her calling here was

prodigiously civil! for she only came, I suppose, to tell us the

Collinses were well. She is on her road somewhere, I dare say,

and so, passing through Meryton, thought she might as well call

on you. I suppose she had nothing particular to say to you,

Lizzy?”

Elizabeth was forced to give into a little falsehood here; for to

acknowledge the substance of their conversation was impossible.

Chapter 57

The discomposure of spirits which this extraordinary visit threw

Elizabeth into, could not be easily overcome; nor could she, for

many hours, learn to think of it less than incessantly. Lady

Catherine, it appeared, had actually taken the trouble of this

journey from Rosings, for the sole purpose of breaking off her

supposed engagement with Mr. Darcy. It was a rational scheme, to

be sure! but from what the report of their engagement could

originate, Elizabeth was at a loss to imagine; till she

recollected that \_his\_ being the intimate friend of Bingley, and

\_her\_ being the sister of Jane, was enough, at a time when the

expectation of one wedding made everybody eager for another, to

supply the idea. She had not herself forgotten to feel that the

marriage of her sister must bring them more frequently together.

And her neighbours at Lucas Lodge, therefore (for through their

communication with the Collinses, the report, she concluded, had

reached Lady Catherine), had only set \_that\_ down as almost

certain and immediate, which \_she\_ had looked forward to as

possible at some future time.

In revolving Lady Catherine’s expressions, however, she could not

help feeling some uneasiness as to the possible consequence of

her persisting in this interference. From what she had said of

her resolution to prevent their marriage, it occurred to

Elizabeth that she must meditate an application to her nephew;

and how he might take a similar representation of the evils

attached to a connection with her, she dared not pronounce. She

knew not the exact degree of his affection for his aunt, or his

dependence on her judgment, but it was natural to suppose that he

thought much higher of her ladyship than \_she\_ could do; and it

was certain that, in enumerating the miseries of a marriage with

\_one\_, whose immediate connections were so unequal to his own,

his aunt would address him on his weakest side. With his notions

of dignity, he would probably feel that the arguments, which to

Elizabeth had appeared weak and ridiculous, contained much good

sense and solid reasoning.

If he had been wavering before as to what he should do, which had

often seemed likely, the advice and entreaty of so near a

relation might settle every doubt, and determine him at once to

be as happy as dignity unblemished could make him. In that case

he would return no more. Lady Catherine might see him in her way

through town; and his engagement to Bingley of coming again to

Netherfield must give way.

“If, therefore, an excuse for not keeping his promise should come

to his friend within a few days,” she added, “I shall know how to

understand it. I shall then give over every expectation, every

wish of his constancy. If he is satisfied with only regretting

me, when he might have obtained my affections and hand, I shall

soon cease to regret him at all.”

The surprise of the rest of the family, on hearing who their

visitor had been, was very great; but they obligingly satisfied

it, with the same kind of supposition which had appeased Mrs.

Bennet’s curiosity; and Elizabeth was spared from much teasing on

the subject.

The next morning, as she was going downstairs, she was met by her

father, who came out of his library with a letter in his hand.

“Lizzy,” said he, “I was going to look for you; come into my

room.”

She followed him thither; and her curiosity to know what he had

to tell her was heightened by the supposition of its being in

some manner connected with the letter he held. It suddenly struck

her that it might be from Lady Catherine; and she anticipated

with dismay all the consequent explanations.

She followed her father to the fire place, and they both sat

down. He then said,

“I have received a letter this morning that has astonished me

exceedingly. As it principally concerns yourself, you ought to

know its contents. I did not know before, that I had \_two\_

daughters on the brink of matrimony. Let me congratulate you on a

very important conquest.”

The colour now rushed into Elizabeth’s cheeks in the

instantaneous conviction of its being a letter from the nephew,

instead of the aunt; and she was undetermined whether most to be

pleased that he explained himself at all, or offended that his

letter was not rather addressed to herself; when her father

continued:

“You look conscious. Young ladies have great penetration in such

matters as these; but I think I may defy even \_your\_ sagacity, to

discover the name of your admirer. This letter is from Mr.

Collins.”

“From Mr. Collins! and what can \_he\_ have to say?”

“Something very much to the purpose of course. He begins with

congratulations on the approaching nuptials of my eldest

daughter, of which, it seems, he has been told by some of the

good-natured, gossiping Lucases. I shall not sport with your

impatience, by reading what he says on that point. What relates

to yourself, is as follows: ‘Having thus offered you the sincere

congratulations of Mrs. Collins and myself on this happy event,

let me now add a short hint on the subject of another; of which

we have been advertised by the same authority. Your daughter

Elizabeth, it is presumed, will not long bear the name of Bennet,

after her elder sister has resigned it, and the chosen partner of

her fate may be reasonably looked up to as one of the most

illustrious personages in this land.’

“Can you possibly guess, Lizzy, who is meant by this? ‘This young

gentleman is blessed, in a peculiar way, with every thing the

heart of mortal can most desire,—splendid property, noble

kindred, and extensive patronage. Yet in spite of all these

temptations, let me warn my cousin Elizabeth, and yourself, of

what evils you may incur by a precipitate closure with this

gentleman’s proposals, which, of course, you will be inclined to

take immediate advantage of.’

“Have you any idea, Lizzy, who this gentleman is? But now it

comes out:

“‘My motive for cautioning you is as follows. We have reason to

imagine that his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, does not look on

the match with a friendly eye.’

“\_Mr. Darcy\_, you see, is the man! Now, Lizzy, I think I \_have\_

surprised you. Could he, or the Lucases, have pitched on any man

within the circle of our acquaintance, whose name would have

given the lie more effectually to what they related? Mr. Darcy,

who never looks at any woman but to see a blemish, and who

probably never looked at \_you\_ in his life! It is admirable!”

Elizabeth tried to join in her father’s pleasantry, but could

only force one most reluctant smile. Never had his wit been

directed in a manner so little agreeable to her.

“Are you not diverted?”

“Oh! yes. Pray read on.”

“‘After mentioning the likelihood of this marriage to her

ladyship last night, she immediately, with her usual

condescension, expressed what she felt on the occasion; when it

became apparent, that on the score of some family objections on

the part of my cousin, she would never give her consent to what

she termed so disgraceful a match. I thought it my duty to give

the speediest intelligence of this to my cousin, that she and her

noble admirer may be aware of what they are about, and not run

hastily into a marriage which has not been properly sanctioned.’

Mr. Collins moreover adds, ‘I am truly rejoiced that my cousin

Lydia’s sad business has been so well hushed up, and am only

concerned that their living together before the marriage took

place should be so generally known. I must not, however, neglect

the duties of my station, or refrain from declaring my amazement

at hearing that you received the young couple into your house as

soon as they were married. It was an encouragement of vice; and

had I been the rector of Longbourn, I should very strenuously

have opposed it. You ought certainly to forgive them, as a

Christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their

names to be mentioned in your hearing.’ \_That\_ is his notion of

Christian forgiveness! The rest of his letter is only about his

dear Charlotte’s situation, and his expectation of a young

olive-branch. But, Lizzy, you look as if you did not enjoy it.

You are not going to be \_missish\_, I hope, and pretend to be

affronted at an idle report. For what do we live, but to make

sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?”

“Oh!” cried Elizabeth, “I am excessively diverted. But it is so

strange!”

“Yes—\_that\_ is what makes it amusing. Had they fixed on any other

man it would have been nothing; but \_his\_ perfect indifference,

and \_your\_ pointed dislike, make it so delightfully absurd! Much

as I abominate writing, I would not give up Mr. Collins’s

correspondence for any consideration. Nay, when I read a letter

of his, I cannot help giving him the preference even over

Wickham, much as I value the impudence and hypocrisy of my

son-in-law. And pray, Lizzy, what said Lady Catherine about this

report? Did she call to refuse her consent?”

To this question his daughter replied only with a laugh; and as

it had been asked without the least suspicion, she was not

distressed by his repeating it. Elizabeth had never been more at

a loss to make her feelings appear what they were not. It was

necessary to laugh, when she would rather have cried. Her father

had most cruelly mortified her, by what he said of Mr. Darcy’s

indifference, and she could do nothing but wonder at such a want

of penetration, or fear that perhaps, instead of his seeing too

\_little\_, she might have fancied too \_much\_.

Chapter 58

Instead of receiving any such letter of excuse from his friend,

as Elizabeth half expected Mr. Bingley to do, he was able to

bring Darcy with him to Longbourn before many days had passed

after Lady Catherine’s visit. The gentlemen arrived early; and,

before Mrs. Bennet had time to tell him of their having seen his

aunt, of which her daughter sat in momentary dread, Bingley, who

wanted to be alone with Jane, proposed their all walking out. It

was agreed to. Mrs. Bennet was not in the habit of walking; Mary

could never spare time; but the remaining five set off together.

Bingley and Jane, however, soon allowed the others to outstrip

them. They lagged behind, while Elizabeth, Kitty, and Darcy were

to entertain each other. Very little was said by either; Kitty

was too much afraid of him to talk; Elizabeth was secretly

forming a desperate resolution; and perhaps he might be doing the

same.

They walked towards the Lucases, because Kitty wished to call

upon Maria; and as Elizabeth saw no occasion for making it a

general concern, when Kitty left them she went boldly on with him

alone. Now was the moment for her resolution to be executed, and,

while her courage was high, she immediately said:

“Mr. Darcy, I am a very selfish creature; and, for the sake of

giving relief to my own feelings, care not how much I may be

wounding yours. I can no longer help thanking you for your

unexampled kindness to my poor sister. Ever since I have known

it, I have been most anxious to acknowledge to you how gratefully

I feel it. Were it known to the rest of my family, I should not

have merely my own gratitude to express.”

“I am sorry, exceedingly sorry,” replied Darcy, in a tone of

surprise and emotion, “that you have ever been informed of what

may, in a mistaken light, have given you uneasiness. I did not

think Mrs. Gardiner was so little to be trusted.”

“You must not blame my aunt. Lydia’s thoughtlessness first

betrayed to me that you had been concerned in the matter; and, of

course, I could not rest till I knew the particulars. Let me

thank you again and again, in the name of all my family, for that

generous compassion which induced you to take so much trouble,

and bear so many mortifications, for the sake of discovering

them.”

“If you \_will\_ thank me,” he replied, “let it be for yourself

alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you might add force

to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to

deny. But your \_family\_ owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I

believe I thought only of \_you\_.”

Elizabeth was too much embarrassed to say a word. After a short

pause, her companion added, “You are too generous to trifle with

me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me

so at once. \_My\_ affections and wishes are unchanged, but one

word from you will silence me on this subject for ever.”

Elizabeth, feeling all the more than common awkwardness and

anxiety of his situation, now forced herself to speak; and

immediately, though not very fluently, gave him to understand

that her sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the

period to which he alluded, as to make her receive with gratitude

and pleasure his present assurances. The happiness which this

reply produced, was such as he had probably never felt before;

and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as

warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do. Had

Elizabeth been able to encounter his eye, she might have seen how

well the expression of heartfelt delight, diffused over his face,

became him; but, though she could not look, she could listen, and

he told her of feelings, which, in proving of what importance she

was to him, made his affection every moment more valuable.

They walked on, without knowing in what direction. There was too

much to be thought, and felt, and said, for attention to any

other objects. She soon learnt that they were indebted for their

present good understanding to the efforts of his aunt, who \_did\_

call on him in her return through London, and there relate her

journey to Longbourn, its motive, and the substance of her

conversation with Elizabeth; dwelling emphatically on every

expression of the latter which, in her ladyship’s apprehension,

peculiarly denoted her perverseness and assurance; in the belief

that such a relation must assist her endeavours to obtain that

promise from her nephew which \_she\_ had refused to give. But,

unluckily for her ladyship, its effect had been exactly

contrariwise.

“It taught me to hope,” said he, “as I had scarcely ever allowed

myself to hope before. I knew enough of your disposition to be

certain that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided

against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine,

frankly and openly.”

Elizabeth coloured and laughed as she replied, “Yes, you know

enough of my \_frankness\_ to believe me capable of \_that\_. After

abusing you so abominably to your face, I could have no scruple

in abusing you to all your relations.”

“What did you say of me, that I did not deserve? For, though your

accusations were ill-founded, formed on mistaken premises, my

behaviour to you at the time had merited the severest reproof. It

was unpardonable. I cannot think of it without abhorrence.”

“We will not quarrel for the greater share of blame annexed to

that evening,” said Elizabeth. “The conduct of neither, if

strictly examined, will be irreproachable; but since then, we

have both, I hope, improved in civility.”

“I cannot be so easily reconciled to myself. The recollection of

what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions

during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months,

inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I

shall never forget: ‘had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike

manner.’ Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely

conceive, how they have tortured me;—though it was some time, I

confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice.”

“I was certainly very far from expecting them to make so strong

an impression. I had not the smallest idea of their being ever

felt in such a way.”

“I can easily believe it. You thought me then devoid of every

proper feeling, I am sure you did. The turn of your countenance I

shall never forget, as you said that I could not have addressed

you in any possible way that would induce you to accept me.”

“Oh! do not repeat what I then said. These recollections will not

do at all. I assure you that I have long been most heartily

ashamed of it.”

Darcy mentioned his letter. “Did it,” said he, “did it soon make

you think better of me? Did you, on reading it, give any credit

to its contents?”

She explained what its effect on her had been, and how gradually

all her former prejudices had been removed.

“I knew,” said he, “that what I wrote must give you pain, but it

was necessary. I hope you have destroyed the letter. There was

one part especially, the opening of it, which I should dread your

having the power of reading again. I can remember some

expressions which might justly make you hate me.”

“The letter shall certainly be burnt, if you believe it essential

to the preservation of my regard; but, though we have both reason

to think my opinions not entirely unalterable, they are not, I

hope, quite so easily changed as that implies.”

“When I wrote that letter,” replied Darcy, “I believed myself

perfectly calm and cool, but I am since convinced that it was

written in a dreadful bitterness of spirit.”

“The letter, perhaps, began in bitterness, but it did not end so.

The adieu is charity itself. But think no more of the letter. The

feelings of the person who wrote, and the person who received it,

are now so widely different from what they were then, that every

unpleasant circumstance attending it ought to be forgotten. You

must learn some of my philosophy. Think only of the past as its

remembrance gives you pleasure.”

“I cannot give you credit for any philosophy of the kind. \_Your\_

retrospections must be so totally void of reproach, that the

contentment arising from them is not of philosophy, but, what is

much better, of innocence. But with \_me\_, it is not so. Painful

recollections will intrude which cannot, which ought not, to be

repelled. I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice,

though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was

\_right\_, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given

good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit.

Unfortunately an only son (for many years an only \_child\_), I was

spoilt by my parents, who, though good themselves (my father,

particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable), allowed,

encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing; to

care for none beyond my own family circle; to think meanly of all

the rest of the world; to \_wish\_ at least to think meanly of

their sense and worth compared with my own. Such I was, from

eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but

for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you! You

taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous.

By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of

my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my

pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased.”

“Had you then persuaded yourself that I should?”

“Indeed I had. What will you think of my vanity? I believed you

to be wishing, expecting my addresses.”

“My manners must have been in fault, but not intentionally, I

assure you. I never meant to deceive you, but my spirits might

often lead me wrong. How you must have hated me after \_that\_

evening?”

“Hate you! I was angry perhaps at first, but my anger soon began

to take a proper direction.”

“I am almost afraid of asking what you thought of me, when we met

at Pemberley. You blamed me for coming?”

“No indeed; I felt nothing but surprise.”

“Your surprise could not be greater than \_mine\_ in being noticed

by you. My conscience told me that I deserved no extraordinary

politeness, and I confess that I did not expect to receive \_more\_

than my due.”

“My object \_then\_,” replied Darcy, “was to show you, by every

civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the

past; and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill

opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended

to. How soon any other wishes introduced themselves I can hardly

tell, but I believe in about half an hour after I had seen you.”

He then told her of Georgiana’s delight in her acquaintance, and

of her disappointment at its sudden interruption; which naturally

leading to the cause of that interruption, she soon learnt that

his resolution of following her from Derbyshire in quest of her

sister had been formed before he quitted the inn, and that his

gravity and thoughtfulness there had arisen from no other

struggles than what such a purpose must comprehend.

She expressed her gratitude again, but it was too painful a

subject to each, to be dwelt on farther.

After walking several miles in a leisurely manner, and too busy

to know anything about it, they found at last, on examining their

watches, that it was time to be at home.

“What could become of Mr. Bingley and Jane!” was a wonder which

introduced the discussion of \_their\_ affairs. Darcy was delighted

with their engagement; his friend had given him the earliest

information of it.

“I must ask whether you were surprised?” said Elizabeth.

“Not at all. When I went away, I felt that it would soon happen.”

“That is to say, you had given your permission. I guessed as

much.” And though he exclaimed at the term, she found that it had

been pretty much the case.

“On the evening before my going to London,” said he, “I made a

confession to him, which I believe I ought to have made long ago.

I told him of all that had occurred to make my former

interference in his affairs absurd and impertinent. His surprise

was great. He had never had the slightest suspicion. I told him,

moreover, that I believed myself mistaken in supposing, as I had

done, that your sister was indifferent to him; and as I could

easily perceive that his attachment to her was unabated, I felt

no doubt of their happiness together.”

Elizabeth could not help smiling at his easy manner of directing

his friend.

“Did you speak from your own observation,” said she, “when you

told him that my sister loved him, or merely from my information

last spring?”

“From the former. I had narrowly observed her during the two

visits which I had lately made here; and I was convinced of her

affection.”

“And your assurance of it, I suppose, carried immediate

conviction to him.”

“It did. Bingley is most unaffectedly modest. His diffidence had

prevented his depending on his own judgment in so anxious a case,

but his reliance on mine made every thing easy. I was obliged to

confess one thing, which for a time, and not unjustly, offended

him. I could not allow myself to conceal that your sister had

been in town three months last winter, that I had known it, and

purposely kept it from him. He was angry. But his anger, I am

persuaded, lasted no longer than he remained in any doubt of your

sister’s sentiments. He has heartily forgiven me now.”

Elizabeth longed to observe that Mr. Bingley had been a most

delightful friend; so easily guided that his worth was

invaluable; but she checked herself. She remembered that he had

yet to learn to be laughed at, and it was rather too early to

begin. In anticipating the happiness of Bingley, which of course

was to be inferior only to his own, he continued the conversation

till they reached the house. In the hall they parted.

Chapter 59

“My dear Lizzy, where can you have been walking to?” was a

question which Elizabeth received from Jane as soon as she

entered their room, and from all the others when they sat down to

table. She had only to say in reply, that they had wandered

about, till she was beyond her own knowledge. She coloured as she

spoke; but neither that, nor anything else, awakened a suspicion

of the truth.

The evening passed quietly, unmarked by anything extraordinary.

The acknowledged lovers talked and laughed, the unacknowledged

were silent. Darcy was not of a disposition in which happiness

overflows in mirth; and Elizabeth, agitated and confused, rather

\_knew\_ that she was happy than \_felt\_ herself to be so; for,

besides the immediate embarrassment, there were other evils

before her. She anticipated what would be felt in the family when

her situation became known; she was aware that no one liked him

but Jane; and even feared that with the others it was a \_dislike\_

which not all his fortune and consequence might do away.

At night she opened her heart to Jane. Though suspicion was very

far from Miss Bennet’s general habits, she was absolutely

incredulous here.

“You are joking, Lizzy. This cannot be!—engaged to Mr. Darcy! No,

no, you shall not deceive me. I know it to be impossible.”

“This is a wretched beginning indeed! My sole dependence was on

you; and I am sure nobody else will believe me, if you do not.

Yet, indeed, I am in earnest. I speak nothing but the truth. He

still loves me, and we are engaged.”

Jane looked at her doubtingly. “Oh, Lizzy! it cannot be. I know

how much you dislike him.”

“You know nothing of the matter. \_That\_ is all to be forgot.

Perhaps I did not always love him so well as I do now. But in

such cases as these, a good memory is unpardonable. This is the

last time I shall ever remember it myself.”

Miss Bennet still looked all amazement. Elizabeth again, and more

seriously assured her of its truth.

“Good Heaven! can it be really so! Yet now I must believe you,”

cried Jane. “My dear, dear Lizzy, I would—I do congratulate

you—but are you certain? forgive the question—are you quite

certain that you can be happy with him?”

“There can be no doubt of that. It is settled between us already,

that we are to be the happiest couple in the world. But are you

pleased, Jane? Shall you like to have such a brother?”

“Very, very much. Nothing could give either Bingley or myself

more delight. But we considered it, we talked of it as

impossible. And do you really love him quite well enough? Oh,

Lizzy! do anything rather than marry without affection. Are you

quite sure that you feel what you ought to do?”

“Oh, yes! You will only think I feel \_more\_ than I ought to do,

when I tell you all.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, I must confess that I love him better than I do Bingley. I

am afraid you will be angry.”

“My dearest sister, now \_be\_ serious. I want to talk very

seriously. Let me know every thing that I am to know, without

delay. Will you tell me how long you have loved him?”

“It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it

began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his

beautiful grounds at Pemberley.”

Another entreaty that she would be serious, however, produced the

desired effect; and she soon satisfied Jane by her solemn

assurances of attachment. When convinced on that article, Miss

Bennet had nothing further to wish.

“Now I am quite happy,” said she, “for you will be as happy as

myself. I always had a value for him. Were it for nothing but his

love of you, I must always have esteemed him; but now, as

Bingley’s friend and your husband, there can be only Bingley and

yourself more dear to me. But Lizzy, you have been very sly, very

reserved with me. How little did you tell me of what passed at

Pemberley and Lambton! I owe all that I know of it to another,

not to you.”

Elizabeth told her the motives of her secrecy. She had been

unwilling to mention Bingley; and the unsettled state of her own

feelings had made her equally avoid the name of his friend. But

now she would no longer conceal from her his share in Lydia’s

marriage. All was acknowledged, and half the night spent in

conversation.

“Good gracious!” cried Mrs. Bennet, as she stood at a window the

next morning, “if that disagreeable Mr. Darcy is not coming here

again with our dear Bingley! What can he mean by being so

tiresome as to be always coming here? I had no notion but he

would go a-shooting, or something or other, and not disturb us

with his company. What shall we do with him? Lizzy, you must walk

out with him again, that he may not be in Bingley’s way.”

Elizabeth could hardly help laughing at so convenient a proposal;

yet was really vexed that her mother should be always giving him

such an epithet.

As soon as they entered, Bingley looked at her so expressively,

and shook hands with such warmth, as left no doubt of his good

information; and he soon afterwards said aloud, “Mrs. Bennet,

have you no more lanes hereabouts in which Lizzy may lose her way

again to-day?”

“I advise Mr. Darcy, and Lizzy, and Kitty,” said Mrs. Bennet, “to

walk to Oakham Mount this morning. It is a nice long walk, and

Mr. Darcy has never seen the view.”

“It may do very well for the others,” replied Mr. Bingley; “but I

am sure it will be too much for Kitty. Won’t it, Kitty?” Kitty

owned that she had rather stay at home. Darcy professed a great

curiosity to see the view from the Mount, and Elizabeth silently

consented. As she went up stairs to get ready, Mrs. Bennet

followed her, saying:

“I am quite sorry, Lizzy, that you should be forced to have that

disagreeable man all to yourself. But I hope you will not mind

it: it is all for Jane’s sake, you know; and there is no occasion

for talking to him, except just now and then. So, do not put

yourself to inconvenience.”

During their walk, it was resolved that Mr. Bennet’s consent

should be asked in the course of the evening. Elizabeth reserved

to herself the application for her mother’s. She could not

determine how her mother would take it; sometimes doubting

whether all his wealth and grandeur would be enough to overcome

her abhorrence of the man. But whether she were violently set

against the match, or violently delighted with it, it was certain

that her manner would be equally ill adapted to do credit to her

sense; and she could no more bear that Mr. Darcy should hear the

first raptures of her joy, than the first vehemence of her

disapprobation.

In the evening, soon after Mr. Bennet withdrew to the library,

she saw Mr. Darcy rise also and follow him, and her agitation on

seeing it was extreme. She did not fear her father’s opposition,

but he was going to be made unhappy; and that it should be

through her means—that \_she\_, his favourite child, should be

distressing him by her choice, should be filling him with fears

and regrets in disposing of her—was a wretched reflection, and

she sat in misery till Mr. Darcy appeared again, when, looking at

him, she was a little relieved by his smile. In a few minutes he

approached the table where she was sitting with Kitty; and, while

pretending to admire her work said in a whisper, “Go to your

father, he wants you in the library.” She was gone directly.

Her father was walking about the room, looking grave and anxious.

“Lizzy,” said he, “what are you doing? Are you out of your

senses, to be accepting this man? Have not you always hated him?”

How earnestly did she then wish that her former opinions had been

more reasonable, her expressions more moderate! It would have

spared her from explanations and professions which it was

exceedingly awkward to give; but they were now necessary, and she

assured him, with some confusion, of her attachment to Mr. Darcy.

“Or, in other words, you are determined to have him. He is rich,

to be sure, and you may have more fine clothes and fine carriages

than Jane. But will they make you happy?”

“Have you any other objection,” said Elizabeth, “than your belief

of my indifference?”

“None at all. We all know him to be a proud, unpleasant sort of

man; but this would be nothing if you really liked him.”

“I do, I do like him,” she replied, with tears in her eyes, “I

love him. Indeed he has no improper pride. He is perfectly

amiable. You do not know what he really is; then pray do not pain

me by speaking of him in such terms.”

“Lizzy,” said her father, “I have given him my consent. He is the

kind of man, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse anything,

which he condescended to ask. I now give it to \_you\_, if you are

resolved on having him. But let me advise you to think better of

it. I know your disposition, Lizzy. I know that you could be

neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your

husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively

talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal

marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My

child, let me not have the grief of seeing \_you\_ unable to

respect your partner in life. You know not what you are about.”

Elizabeth, still more affected, was earnest and solemn in her

reply; and at length, by repeated assurances that Mr. Darcy was

really the object of her choice, by explaining the gradual change

which her estimation of him had undergone, relating her absolute

certainty that his affection was not the work of a day, but had

stood the test of many months’ suspense, and enumerating with

energy all his good qualities, she did conquer her father’s

incredulity, and reconcile him to the match.

“Well, my dear,” said he, when she ceased speaking, “I have no

more to say. If this be the case, he deserves you. I could not

have parted with you, my Lizzy, to anyone less worthy.”

To complete the favourable impression, she then told him what Mr.

Darcy had voluntarily done for Lydia. He heard her with

astonishment.

“This is an evening of wonders, indeed! And so, Darcy did every

thing; made up the match, gave the money, paid the fellow’s

debts, and got him his commission! So much the better. It will

save me a world of trouble and economy. Had it been your uncle’s

doing, I must and \_would\_ have paid him; but these violent young

lovers carry every thing their own way. I shall offer to pay him

to-morrow; he will rant and storm about his love for you, and

there will be an end of the matter.”

He then recollected her embarrassment a few days before, on his

reading Mr. Collins’s letter; and after laughing at her some

time, allowed her at last to go—saying, as she quitted the room,

“If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in, for I am

quite at leisure.”

Elizabeth’s mind was now relieved from a very heavy weight; and,

after half an hour’s quiet reflection in her own room, she was

able to join the others with tolerable composure. Every thing was

too recent for gaiety, but the evening passed tranquilly away;

there was no longer anything material to be dreaded, and the

comfort of ease and familiarity would come in time.

When her mother went up to her dressing-room at night, she

followed her, and made the important communication. Its effect

was most extraordinary; for on first hearing it, Mrs. Bennet sat

quite still, and unable to utter a syllable. Nor was it under

many, many minutes that she could comprehend what she heard;

though not in general backward to credit what was for the

advantage of her family, or that came in the shape of a lover to

any of them. She began at length to recover, to fidget about in

her chair, get up, sit down again, wonder, and bless herself.

“Good gracious! Lord bless me! only think! dear me! Mr. Darcy!

Who would have thought it! And is it really true? Oh! my sweetest

Lizzy! how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what

jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane’s is nothing to

it—nothing at all. I am so pleased—so happy. Such a charming

man!—so handsome! so tall!—Oh, my dear Lizzy! pray apologise for

my having disliked him so much before. I hope he will overlook

it. Dear, dear Lizzy. A house in town! Every thing that is

charming! Three daughters married! Ten thousand a year! Oh, Lord!

What will become of me. I shall go distracted.”

This was enough to prove that her approbation need not be

doubted: and Elizabeth, rejoicing that such an effusion was heard

only by herself, soon went away. But before she had been three

minutes in her own room, her mother followed her.

“My dearest child,” she cried, “I can think of nothing else! Ten

thousand a year, and very likely more! ’Tis as good as a Lord!

And a special licence. You must and shall be married by a special

licence. But my dearest love, tell me what dish Mr. Darcy is

particularly fond of, that I may have it to-morrow.”

This was a sad omen of what her mother’s behaviour to the

gentleman himself might be; and Elizabeth found that, though in

the certain possession of his warmest affection, and secure of

her relations’ consent, there was still something to be wished

for. But the morrow passed off much better than she expected; for

Mrs. Bennet luckily stood in such awe of her intended son-in-law

that she ventured not to speak to him, unless it was in her power

to offer him any attention, or mark her deference for his

opinion.

Elizabeth had the satisfaction of seeing her father taking pains

to get acquainted with him; and Mr. Bennet soon assured her that

he was rising every hour in his esteem.

“I admire all my three sons-in-law highly,” said he. “Wickham,

perhaps, is my favourite; but I think I shall like \_your\_ husband

quite as well as Jane’s.”

Chapter 60

Elizabeth’s spirits soon rising to playfulness again, she wanted

Mr. Darcy to account for his having ever fallen in love with her.

“How could you begin?” said she. “I can comprehend your going on

charmingly, when you had once made a beginning; but what could

set you off in the first place?”

“I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the

words, which laid the foundation. It is too long ago. I was in

the middle before I knew that I \_had\_ begun.”

“My beauty you had early withstood, and as for my manners—my

behaviour to \_you\_ was at least always bordering on the uncivil,

and I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain

than not. Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?”

“For the liveliness of your mind, I did.”

“You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little

less. The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference,

of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who

were always speaking, and looking, and thinking for \_your\_

approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so

unlike \_them\_. Had you not been really amiable, you would have

hated me for it; but in spite of the pains you took to disguise

yourself, your feelings were always noble and just; and in your

heart, you thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously

courted you. There—I have saved you the trouble of accounting for

it; and really, all things considered, I begin to think it

perfectly reasonable. To be sure, you knew no actual good of

me—but nobody thinks of \_that\_ when they fall in love.”

“Was there no good in your affectionate behaviour to Jane while

she was ill at Netherfield?”

“Dearest Jane! who could have done less for her? But make a

virtue of it by all means. My good qualities are under your

protection, and you are to exaggerate them as much as possible;

and, in return, it belongs to me to find occasions for teasing

and quarrelling with you as often as may be; and I shall begin

directly by asking you what made you so unwilling to come to the

point at last. What made you so shy of me, when you first called,

and afterwards dined here? Why, especially, when you called, did

you look as if you did not care about me?”

“Because you were grave and silent, and gave me no

encouragement.”

“But I was embarrassed.”

“And so was I.”

“You might have talked to me more when you came to dinner.”

“A man who had felt less, might.”

“How unlucky that you should have a reasonable answer to give,

and that I should be so reasonable as to admit it! But I wonder

how long you \_would\_ have gone on, if you had been left to

yourself. I wonder when you \_would\_ have spoken, if I had not

asked you! My resolution of thanking you for your kindness to

Lydia had certainly great effect. \_Too much\_, I am afraid; for

what becomes of the moral, if our comfort springs from a breach

of promise? for I ought not to have mentioned the subject. This

will never do.”

“You need not distress yourself. The moral will be perfectly

fair. Lady Catherine’s unjustifiable endeavours to separate us

were the means of removing all my doubts. I am not indebted for

my present happiness to your eager desire of expressing your

gratitude. I was not in a humour to wait for any opening of

yours. My aunt’s intelligence had given me hope, and I was

determined at once to know every thing.”

“Lady Catherine has been of infinite use, which ought to make her

happy, for she loves to be of use. But tell me, what did you come

down to Netherfield for? Was it merely to ride to Longbourn and

be embarrassed? or had you intended any more serious

consequence?”

“My real purpose was to see \_you\_, and to judge, if I could,

whether I might ever hope to make you love me. My avowed one, or

what I avowed to myself, was to see whether your sister were

still partial to Bingley, and if she were, to make the confession

to him which I have since made.”

“Shall you ever have courage to announce to Lady Catherine what

is to befall her?”

“I am more likely to want time than courage, Elizabeth. But it

ought to be done, and if you will give me a sheet of paper, it

shall be done directly.”

“And if I had not a letter to write myself, I might sit by you

and admire the evenness of your writing, as another young lady

once did. But I have an aunt, too, who must not be longer

neglected.”

From an unwillingness to confess how much her intimacy with Mr.

Darcy had been over-rated, Elizabeth had never yet answered Mrs.

Gardiner’s long letter; but now, having \_that\_ to communicate

which she knew would be most welcome, she was almost ashamed to

find that her uncle and aunt had already lost three days of

happiness, and immediately wrote as follows:

“I would have thanked you before, my dear aunt, as I ought to

have done, for your long, kind, satisfactory, detail of

particulars; but to say the truth, I was too cross to write. You

supposed more than really existed. But \_now\_ suppose as much as

you choose; give a loose rein to your fancy, indulge your

imagination in every possible flight which the subject will

afford, and unless you believe me actually married, you cannot

greatly err. You must write again very soon, and praise him a

great deal more than you did in your last. I thank you, again and

again, for not going to the Lakes. How could I be so silly as to

wish it! Your idea of the ponies is delightful. We will go round

the Park every day. I am the happiest creature in the world.

Perhaps other people have said so before, but not one with such

justice. I am happier even than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh.

Mr. Darcy sends you all the love in the world that he can spare

from me. You are all to come to Pemberley at Christmas. Yours,

etc.”

Mr. Darcy’s letter to Lady Catherine was in a different style;

and still different from either was what Mr. Bennet sent to Mr.

Collins, in reply to his last.

“Dear Sir,

“I must trouble you once more for congratulations. Elizabeth will

soon be the wife of Mr. Darcy. Console Lady Catherine as well as

you can. But, if I were you, I would stand by the nephew. He has

more to give.

“Yours sincerely, etc.”

Miss Bingley’s congratulations to her brother, on his approaching

marriage, were all that was affectionate and insincere. She wrote

even to Jane on the occasion, to express her delight, and repeat

all her former professions of regard. Jane was not deceived, but

she was affected; and though feeling no reliance on her, could

not help writing her a much kinder answer than she knew was

deserved.

The joy which Miss Darcy expressed on receiving similar

information, was as sincere as her brother’s in sending it. Four

sides of paper were insufficient to contain all her delight, and

all her earnest desire of being loved by her sister.

Before any answer could arrive from Mr. Collins, or any

congratulations to Elizabeth from his wife, the Longbourn family

heard that the Collinses were come themselves to Lucas Lodge. The

reason of this sudden removal was soon evident. Lady Catherine

had been rendered so exceedingly angry by the contents of her

nephew’s letter, that Charlotte, really rejoicing in the match,

was anxious to get away till the storm was blown over. At such a

moment, the arrival of her friend was a sincere pleasure to

Elizabeth, though in the course of their meetings she must

sometimes think the pleasure dearly bought, when she saw Mr.

Darcy exposed to all the parading and obsequious civility of her

husband. He bore it, however, with admirable calmness. He could

even listen to Sir William Lucas, when he complimented him on

carrying away the brightest jewel of the country, and expressed

his hopes of their all meeting frequently at St. James’s, with

very decent composure. If he did shrug his shoulders, it was not

till Sir William was out of sight.

Mrs. Phillips’s vulgarity was another, and perhaps a greater, tax

on his forbearance; and though Mrs. Phillips, as well as her

sister, stood in too much awe of him to speak with the

familiarity which Bingley’s good humour encouraged, yet, whenever

she \_did\_ speak, she must be vulgar. Nor was her respect for him,

though it made her more quiet, at all likely to make her more

elegant. Elizabeth did all she could to shield him from the

frequent notice of either, and was ever anxious to keep him to

herself, and to those of her family with whom he might converse

without mortification; and though the uncomfortable feelings

arising from all this took from the season of courtship much of

its pleasure, it added to the hope of the future; and she looked

forward with delight to the time when they should be removed from

society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and

elegance of their family party at Pemberley.

Chapter 61

Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs.

Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters. With what

delighted pride she afterwards visited Mrs. Bingley, and talked

of Mrs. Darcy, may be guessed. I wish I could say, for the sake

of her family, that the accomplishment of her earnest desire in

the establishment of so many of her children produced so happy an

effect as to make her a sensible, amiable, well-informed woman

for the rest of her life; though perhaps it was lucky for her

husband, who might not have relished domestic felicity in so

unusual a form, that she still was occasionally nervous and

invariably silly.

Mr. Bennet missed his second daughter exceedingly; his affection

for her drew him oftener from home than anything else could do.

He delighted in going to Pemberley, especially when he was least

expected.

Mr. Bingley and Jane remained at Netherfield only a twelvemonth.

So near a vicinity to her mother and Meryton relations was not

desirable even to \_his\_ easy temper, or \_her\_ affectionate heart.

The darling wish of his sisters was then gratified; he bought an

estate in a neighbouring county to Derbyshire, and Jane and

Elizabeth, in addition to every other source of happiness, were

within thirty miles of each other.

Kitty, to her very material advantage, spent the chief of her

time with her two elder sisters. In society so superior to what

she had generally known, her improvement was great. She was not

of so ungovernable a temper as Lydia; and, removed from the

influence of Lydia’s example, she became, by proper attention and

management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid. From

the further disadvantage of Lydia’s society she was of course

carefully kept, and though Mrs. Wickham frequently invited her to

come and stay with her, with the promise of balls and young men,

her father would never consent to her going.

Mary was the only daughter who remained at home; and she was

necessarily drawn from the pursuit of accomplishments by Mrs.

Bennet’s being quite unable to sit alone. Mary was obliged to mix

more with the world, but she could still moralize over every

morning visit; and as she was no longer mortified by comparisons

between her sisters’ beauty and her own, it was suspected by her

father that she submitted to the change without much reluctance.

As for Wickham and Lydia, their characters suffered no revolution

from the marriage of her sisters. He bore with philosophy the

conviction that Elizabeth must now become acquainted with

whatever of his ingratitude and falsehood had before been unknown

to her; and in spite of every thing, was not wholly without hope

that Darcy might yet be prevailed on to make his fortune. The

congratulatory letter which Elizabeth received from Lydia on her

marriage, explained to her that, by his wife at least, if not by

himself, such a hope was cherished. The letter was to this

effect:

“My dear Lizzy,

“I wish you joy. If you love Mr. Darcy half as well as I do my

dear Wickham, you must be very happy. It is a great comfort to

have you so rich, and when you have nothing else to do, I hope

you will think of us. I am sure Wickham would like a place at

court very much, and I do not think we shall have quite money

enough to live upon without some help. Any place would do, of

about three or four hundred a year; but however, do not speak to

Mr. Darcy about it, if you had rather not.

“Yours, etc.”

As it happened that Elizabeth had much rather not, she

endeavoured in her answer to put an end to every entreaty and

expectation of the kind. Such relief, however, as it was in her

power to afford, by the practice of what might be called economy

in her own private expences, she frequently sent them. It had

always been evident to her that such an income as theirs, under

the direction of two persons so extravagant in their wants, and

heedless of the future, must be very insufficient to their

support; and whenever they changed their quarters, either Jane or

herself were sure of being applied to for some little assistance

towards discharging their bills. Their manner of living, even

when the restoration of peace dismissed them to a home, was

unsettled in the extreme. They were always moving from place to

place in quest of a cheap situation, and always spending more

than they ought. His affection for her soon sunk into

indifference; hers lasted a little longer; and in spite of her

youth and her manners, she retained all the claims to reputation

which her marriage had given her.

Though Darcy could never receive \_him\_ at Pemberley, yet, for

Elizabeth’s sake, he assisted him further in his profession.

Lydia was occasionally a visitor there, when her husband was gone

to enjoy himself in London or Bath; and with the Bingleys they

both of them frequently staid so long, that even Bingley’s good

humour was overcome, and he proceeded so far as to \_talk\_ of

giving them a hint to be gone.

Miss Bingley was very deeply mortified by Darcy’s marriage; but

as she thought it advisable to retain the right of visiting at

Pemberley, she dropt all her resentment; was fonder than ever of

Georgiana, almost as attentive to Darcy as heretofore, and paid

off every arrear of civility to Elizabeth.

Pemberley was now Georgiana’s home; and the attachment of the

sisters was exactly what Darcy had hoped to see. They were able

to love each other even as well as they intended. Georgiana had

the highest opinion in the world of Elizabeth; though at first

she often listened with an astonishment bordering on alarm at her

lively, sportive, manner of talking to her brother. He, who had

always inspired in herself a respect which almost overcame her

affection, she now saw the object of open pleasantry. Her mind

received knowledge which had never before fallen in her way. By

Elizabeth’s instructions, she began to comprehend that a woman

may take liberties with her husband which a brother will not

always allow in a sister more than ten years younger than

himself.

Lady Catherine was extremely indignant on the marriage of her

nephew; and as she gave way to all the genuine frankness of her

character in her reply to the letter which announced its

arrangement, she sent him language so very abusive, especially of

Elizabeth, that for some time all intercourse was at an end. But

at length, by Elizabeth’s persuasion, he was prevailed on to

overlook the offence, and seek a reconciliation; and, after a

little further resistance on the part of his aunt, her resentment

gave way, either to her affection for him, or her curiosity to

see how his wife conducted herself; and she condescended to wait

on them at Pemberley, in spite of that pollution which its woods

had received, not merely from the presence of such a mistress,

but the visits of her uncle and aunt from the city.

With the Gardiners, they were always on the most intimate terms.

Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them; and they were

both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons

who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of

uniting them.