

CALICO ILLUSTRATED CLASSICS
Jane Austen's

Pride and Prejudice



ADAPTED BY:
Jan Fields

ILLUSTRATED BY:
Eric Scott Fisher

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sweet and beautiful Jane and scatterbrained Lydia.

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The Bennets



It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

In the village of Longbourn, the arrival of a young man of fortune to the neighborhood was exciting beyond words. Nowhere was the excitement more obvious than at the estate house itself.

“You must visit Netherfield Park to meet Mr. Bingley,” Mrs. Bennet announced to her husband. “He must marry one of our girls.”

“Is that why he has come here?”

“Don’t be silly,” his wife said. “But he is certain to fall in love with one of them.”

“Perhaps you should visit him with all the girls,” her husband said. “I will send along a

note giving my permission to marry whichever one of you he likes!”

With five daughters of marrying age, Mrs. Bennet could think of little but marriage all the time. The Longbourn estate could only be passed from one male to another. With no Bennet sons, the house and income would move to a distant cousin when Mr. Bennet died. Mrs. Bennet’s only hope was to marry her daughters to fine gentlemen as quickly as possible.

“We’ll see Mr. Bingley at social events,” her second-oldest daughter Elizabeth said sensibly. “Mrs. Long has promised to introduce us.”

Her mother sniffed. “Like she would do that. She is a selfish woman with two daughters of her own. Oh, forget Mr. Bingley.”

“I wish you had told me before I visited him,” Mr. Bennet said with a smile. “Now you must meet him. It’s only proper.”

The girls squealed with joy and Mrs. Bennet scolded her husband for teasing her.

From talk with the neighbors, they learned Mr. Bingley was young, handsome, and pleasant. Also, he was fond of dancing!

“Oh, to be fond of dancing is a certain step toward falling in love,” Mrs. Bennet cried.

Now everyone in the village looked forward to the next ball. Mr. Bingley attended with his two sisters, his brother-in-law, and his best friend. Upon their entrance, whispers slipped through the crowd like a breeze.

“Mr. Bingley is very handsome,” Kitty Bennet noticed as she gripped her younger sister’s arm.

“And look at his sisters,” Lydia, the youngest Bennet, agreed with a giggle. “They’re so fashionable.”

Mary, the middle Bennet, merely peered at them without speaking. She was far more interested in books than fashion.

“Mr. Bingley looks cheerful,” Elizabeth said to her older sister Jane. “Though his friend Mr. Darcy is rather grim.”



“But he’s very tall and quite noble,” Jane replied. She always seemed to ferret out the kindest comment to say about anyone.

Mr. Darcy barely glanced at any of the young ladies in the room. He danced one time with each of Mr. Bingley’s sisters and no one else. Mr. Bingley danced all evening and seemed to pay particular note of Jane.

When Elizabeth sat to catch her breath between dances, she heard Bingley chatting with Darcy.

“You must dance, Darcy,” Bingley said. “I won’t have you standing by yourself.”

“I shall not dance. I detest dancing with anyone I do not know well. 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 am glad I do not feel that way,” Bingley said, laughing at his friend.

“You have been dancing with the only handsome girl in the room,” Darcy said.

“She is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen. Her sister is very attractive, and I see she is not dancing. Let me introduce you.” Bingley pulled Darcy slightly closer to Lizzy.

“What do you mean?” Darcy turned and looked Elizabeth Bennet full in the face. Then he shook off Bingley’s hand. “She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me.”

Bingley shook his head and walked away to dance again with Jane. Darcy walked off. And Elizabeth Bennet shook her head and laughed at Darcy’s rudeness.

After the ball, Mrs. Bennet declared her approval of Bingley and her dislike for Darcy. “I am glad he had no interest in any of my daughters.”

“I did like Mr. Bingley though,” Lizzy said, turning to Jane. “Didn’t you?”

Jane blushed slightly. “He is as lively and well mannered as a young man ought to be.”

“He is also handsome,” Elizabeth teased. “Which a young man ought to be if he can.

And he showed good taste in asking you to dance so much.”

“I did not expect such a compliment,” Jane agreed.

“That’s because you never expect compliments though you should.”

“Dear Lizzy!” Jane scolded.

“Oh, you never see a fault in anybody,” Lizzy said. “Nor do you properly see the great goodness in you. I have never heard you speak ill of anyone.”

“I always speak my mind,” Jane said.

“So do I,” Lizzy said. “But what comes out of our mouths is so different. I did not find Mr. Bingley’s sisters so friendly.”

“They are very kind when you speak with them,” Jane assured her.

Elizabeth was not so sure but chose not to share her feelings on the subject.



Mr. Darcy



Elizabeth Bennet's dearest friend lived nearby at Lucas Lodge. Charlotte Lucas was twenty-seven, sensible, and plain. She came to call at Longbourn the day after the ball.

"I noticed Mr. Bingley danced with you first, Charlotte," Mrs. Bennet said.

"But he preferred his second dance partner," Charlotte said. "I overheard him tell Mr. Robinson that Jane was the prettiest girl in the room."

Mrs. Bennet fluttered with happiness.

"I know Mr. Darcy was not nearly as pleasant to overhear," Charlotte said, looking at Lizzy with a smile.

Lizzy grinned back and would have said something, but her mother spoke first. "He is such a disagreeable man."

"Miss Bingley told me that he is very agreeable to close friends," Jane said.

"Well, if he should ever ask Elizabeth to dance," Mrs. Bennet said, "she should refuse."

"I believe I may safely promise never to dance with him," Lizzy said with a smile.

Charlotte raised her eyebrows at her friend. "He is proud, perhaps. But with his family standing and wealth, he has a right to be."

"I wouldn't mind his pride," Lizzy said, now openly laughing, "if he had not so injured mine."

Not long after this, the Bennet women made a visit to Bingley's sisters and later they returned the courtesy.

"I am glad Mr. Bingley's sisters like Jane," Elizabeth later told Charlotte. "I believe she is falling in love with him."

"Then she should show it. If a woman hides her feelings from a man, she may lose him,"

Charlotte warned. "Bingley clearly likes Jane, but he may never do more than like her if she does not help him along."

"Well, he must be simpleminded not to see her regard for him," Lizzy said. "Besides, she is still getting to know him."

"There is time enough to know one another after they are married," Charlotte said.

Lizzy burst out laughing. "Oh, that is silly. You know it is."

Now while Elizabeth was watching Bingley, someone else was watching her. With each meeting, Darcy found Elizabeth more interesting. He noticed how intelligent, well spoken, and well read she was. He noticed her light playfulness and began to wish he knew her better. His first chance was at a large party held by Sir William Lucas.

At the party, Sir William walked over to speak to the scowling Darcy. "Your friend Mr. Bingley certainly seems to love to dance. You danced quite well with Mr. Bingley's sisters at

the last ball. It would be a compliment to this place to see you dance again.”

“It is a compliment I never pay to any place when I can avoid it,” Darcy declared.

At that, Miss Elizabeth happened to pass by. Sir William insisted upon presenting her to Darcy. “Surely you cannot refuse to dance with so much beauty before you, Mr. Darcy?” he said.

Lizzy cheeks reddened as she waited for Darcy to insult her as he had at the last dance. Instead, he asked her to dance.

“Mr. Darcy is all politeness,” Elizabeth said, smiling. “But he need not feel compelled to dance with someone of so little temptation.” Then she slipped away through the crowd and Miss Bingley quickly took her place at Mr. Darcy’s side.

“I find these people nearly impossible to bear,” she moaned. “What do you think?”



“Actually, I was just thinking that intelligent eyes make a pretty woman even more appealing,” Darcy replied.

Miss Bingley stared in surprise and asked who had so captured his attention.

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet,” he said.

Miss Bingley frowned and said, “What a charming mother-in-law you will have.”

Darcy paid her no attention at all.



Staying at Netherfield



Three or four times a week, the Bennet sisters walked to Meryton to visit with their mother's sister and enjoy the bustle of the busy little town. Kitty and Lydia enjoyed these trips most of all. They gathered gossip from their aunt, which they could spread upon their return to Longbourn.

The newest bit of gossip was the arrival of a regiment of soldiers to Meryton. Lydia and Kitty were determined to meet every one of the officers in the lovely uniforms.

In the middle of their report, a footman entered with a note for Miss Jane Bennet from Netherfield. All of the sisters were interested, and their mother was quite excited.

“Who is it from?” Mrs. Bennet asked. “Do open it at once!”

“It is from Miss Bingley,” Jane said. “She invites me to dine with her and her sister. The gentlemen will be away, dining with the officers.”

Mrs. Bennet shook her head. “Mr. Bingley will not be there? That is very unlucky. You must go on horseback. I believe it is going to rain, and you’ll have to stay over if you don’t have the carriage. Then you may have a chance to visit with Mr. Bingley.”

“I am certain,” Elizabeth said smiling, “that they have a carriage at Netherfield that could be used to send her home.”

“Oh no,” Mrs. Bennet said. “The gentlemen will surely have that.”

Thus Jane traveled to Netherfield on horseback. She had barely gotten on her way when the rain began to fall.

The next morning a note arrived from Netherfield for Miss Elizabeth Bennet. After

getting wet during her ride, Jane was feeling unwell. The Bingley sisters had insisted she stay with them until she was better.

“Well, my dear,” Mr. Bennet said, “if Jane dies from this illness, you will have the comfort of knowing your wild plan did get one daughter out of the house.”

Mrs. Bennet scoffed at this. “She only has a cold.”

Elizabeth felt less sure and set out at once to walk the three miles to Netherfield. She crossed field after field at a very quick pace. She arrived at the house with sore ankles, dirty stockings, and muddy hems.

Her appearance was met with surprise. Though Mr. Bingley’s sisters were coldly polite, Lizzy saw they thought her behavior wild and common.

She was taken immediately to her sister’s room. Jane felt much worse than she’d said in her letter and welcomed the cool cloths Lizzy placed on her aching head.

After breakfast, Bingley's sisters joined them. Elizabeth almost liked them for the concern they showed Jane. Reluctantly, they invited Elizabeth to stay with her sister as long as she liked.

In the evening, Elizabeth joined the others for dinner while her sister slept. Bingley seemed very concerned about Jane. Lizzy rushed up to check on her sister as soon as dinner was over, but since Jane was deeply asleep, Lizzy could find no polite way to avoid rejoining the group below. She carried a book with her to avoid sitting with her hands in her lap while everyone ignored her.

Bingley's brother-in-law looked at the book in her hand with shock. "Surely you don't prefer reading over playing cards?" he asked.

"Miss Eliza Bennet is a great reader and despises anything else," Miss Bingley announced.

"If you grow tired of that book," Bingley said, "I will be happy to fetch you all that my library affords. I wish my collection were

larger, though I admit I have more than I ever look into.”

Elizabeth assured him that she was content.

“You have a wonderful library at Pemberley, Mr. Darcy,” Miss Bingley said.

“It is the work of many generations,” he said.

“I believe there is no finer place to live than Derbyshire,” Miss Bingley said, then turned to her brother. “You should build a house there.”

“I will buy Pemberley itself if Darcy will sell it,” Bingley said with a laugh.

Miss Bingley tutted at her brother and returned her attention to Darcy. “Is your sister much grown since the spring?”

“Yes,” Darcy said and turned his eyes toward Lizzy. “I believe she is Miss Bennet’s height if not taller.”

“I long to see her again,” Miss Bingley said. “She is so accomplished.”

“Young ladies are all amazingly accomplished,” Bingley said. “I never meet a young lady without hearing of her many skills.”

“I disagree,” said Darcy. “I have met fewer than a half dozen ladies who are truly accomplished.”

“Then you must require a great deal to call a woman accomplished,” Lizzy said.

“I do,” Darcy said.

“Oh yes,” gushed Miss Bingley in quick agreement. “A woman must know music, singing, drawing, dancing, and languages. She must possess a certain something in her air, her walk, and the tone of her voice.”

“Also, she must have improved her mind with extensive reading,” Darcy said.

“Oh, I do see,” Miss Bennet said, barely hiding a smile. “I marvel that you know any accomplished women at all!”

“You doubt your own sex?” Darcy said.

“I never saw such a woman,” Elizabeth said. Soon after, she excused herself to check on her sister.



Pride



Elizabeth spent the night in her sister's room and was pleased to see Jane's fever much reduced by morning. Mrs. Bennet arrived soon after breakfast with her two youngest daughters.

After sitting with Jane a bit, Mrs. Bennet and the three healthy Bennet daughters received an invitation to join Miss Bingley in the breakfast parlor. When they entered, Bingley leaped up and said he hoped Miss Jane Bennet was improving.

"She is still very ill," Mrs. Bennet said. "We must trespass a bit longer on your kindness."

"I am certain my sister would not hear of her removal," Bingley said.

“Miss Bennet shall receive every possible attention while she remains with us,” Miss Bingley said coldly.

“She is suffering,” Mrs. Bennet said. “Though she doesn’t like to complain. She has always been the sweetest girl. And this is a lovely place to rest and improve. I hope you are not thinking of leaving soon, Mr. Bingley.”

“I am quite enjoying it here,” Bingley said.

“That is because you have the right disposition to meet and appreciate others,” Mrs. Bennet said. “Not like some gentlemen.”

“Have you seen Charlotte Lucas since I have been away?” Elizabeth asked, hoping to distract her mother from being rude to Darcy.

“Yes, she called yesterday with her father. Sir William always has something to say to everybody. That is my idea of good breeding. Much like you, Mr. Bingley.”

“Did Charlotte dine with you?” Elizabeth asked desperately.

“No, she had to get home,” Mrs. Bennet said. “The Lucases have very good girls. It’s a pity they aren’t handsome. Charlotte is very plain.”

“She seems a pleasant young woman,” Bingley said.

“Oh dear, yes,” she agreed. “But very plain. When my own Jane was only fifteen, a young gentleman was so taken with her that he wrote pretty verses about her.”

“And so ended his affection,” Elizabeth said. “There is no better way to drive away love than through poetry.”

“I have always considered poetry the *food* of love,” Darcy said.

“Of a fine stout love, perhaps. But if it is only a thin sort of fondness, I am convinced that one good sonnet will starve it entirely away.”

Darcy only smiled. Elizabeth almost trembled for fear that her mother would say something terribly embarrassing again. Thankfully, Mrs. Bennet lavished more thanks

on Bingley and soon left with Kitty and Lydia. Though Kitty begged Bingley to have a ball at Netherfield before they left.

“I will do it as soon as your sister is well again,” Bingley agreed.

Lydia clapped her hands. “Then I shall insist that Colonial Forster have a ball after yours.”

The second they left, Lizzy fled upstairs to sit with Jane and mourn the behavior of her family. She could not be coaxed down again until after dinner, when her refusal would be proof of her own bad manners.

When Lizzy entered the parlor, she found Darcy busy writing a letter. Miss Bingley hovered over him and complimented his writing, the length of the letter, and his posture. Elizabeth almost laughed out loud at how hard Darcy ignored her.

“Pray, tell your sister I long to see her,” Miss Bingley said.

“I have already told her so once,” he said. “By your request.”



“Do you always write such long, charming letters to her?” Miss Bingley asked.

“They are generally long,” Darcy said. “I do not know if they are charming.”

“He hasn’t the ease for charm,” Bingley said with a laugh. “It takes too much energy to write using words of four syllables or more.”

Darcy glanced up at his friend and almost smiled. “My style of writing does differ from yours.”

“My ideas rush so I cannot seem to get them down between the blots,” Bingley said with a

laugh. "So my letters sometimes convey no ideas at all!"

Darcy finished his letter and asked Miss Bingley and Miss Bennet to play the piano. Miss Bingley nearly raced to the instrument, seated herself, and then said, "Oh, did you want to go first, Miss Bennet?"

"No, thank you," Lizzy said. "I would be happy not to play at all."

So Miss Bingley played while her sister sang. Darcy drew near Miss Bennet and said, "Do you not feel the urge, Miss Bennet, to dance a reel?"

She smiled but didn't answer. He repeated the question.

"Oh, I heard you before," she said. "I was thinking of a reply. I assume you wanted me to agree so you can make fun of me. But I don't think I will give you that pleasure. Instead I will tell you that I do not want to dance at all. Now, talk ill of me if you dare."

"Indeed, I do not dare."

Miss Bingley did not like seeing Darcy speaking with Miss Bennet. She soon announced she was too tired to play more. She stood up and walked about the room. Her figure was elegant and she walked well, but Darcy gave her barely a glance.

In desperation, Miss Bingley walked over and offered her hand to Elizabeth. "Do take a turn about the room with me."

Elizabeth was surprised but agreed immediately. Darcy's eyes follow them. Darcy was invited to join them, but he declined.

"I would not want to interfere with your plan," he said.

"What do you mean?" Miss Bingley asked.

Darcy replied, "You are either walking together because you have secrets to discuss and I would be in the way. Or you are walking to show off your figures and I can see them better from here."

"Oh, how shocking," Miss Bingley said. "How shall we punish him?"

“You should tease him and laugh at him,” Lizzy said. “I believe that will be punishment enough.”

“Oh no,” Miss Bingley said. “I could not do that.”

“Mr. Darcy is not to be laughed at!” Elizabeth said.

“Even the wisest of men may be shown foolish by one whose first object is to laugh,” Darcy said.

“I hope never to make fun of what is wise and good,” Lizzy said. “But I laugh at foolishness when I can.”

“I try to avoid those things that make one an easy target,” Darcy said.

A faint smile spread over Elizabeth’s face. “Such as vanity and pride?”

“Vanity is weakness indeed,” Darcy said. “But pride may be deserved.”

“You have examined Mr. Darcy,” Miss Bingley said. “What do you declare?”

"I declare he is without fault just as he believes," Elizabeth said.

"No," said Darcy. "I have faults enough. I believe I am too little yielding, perhaps. My good opinion once lost, is lost forever."

"That is a failing," Elizabeth said. "But you are safe from my laughing at it."

"There is failing in all people," he said.

"And yours is to hate everyone," she said.

"And yours is to misunderstand them on purpose."

"More music," Miss Bingley cried and the rest of the evening passed without conversation.



Wickham's Story



When Jane finally awoke well enough to go home, no one was happier than Elizabeth. The sisters borrowed a carriage from Netherfield. Their mother was clearly annoyed by their arrival. Their father was quietly pleased to see them.

Soon after the family was restored, Mr. Bennet announced that they would be having a houseguest. "It is my cousin. The one who will turn you all out on the street when I am dead. He is apparently coming to visit and offer the olive branch. He has been ordained by the Church of England and now has a rectory and a patroness."

"Well, perhaps he could make amends to our girls," Mrs. Bennet said.

“Do you think him a sensible man?” Elizabeth asked, looking over the letter her father had handed her.

Her father turned to her. “I do hope not. He will be much more entertaining if he isn’t.”

“His letter seems well expressed,” Mary said. She liked formal and flowery language.

Mr. Collins arrived exactly on time and was received politely. He proved to be very fond of talking.

“I had heard of the beauty of your family,” he said to Mrs. Bennet. “But I find the descriptions did not do justice to the truth. I am certain you will find your daughters well married soon.”

“You are kind, sir,” Mrs. Bennet said. “I hope you are correct or we shall all starve.”

“I am sensible of this hardship,” Mr. Collins said. “I hope to help ease it, but I will say no more for now.”

The young man lavished compliments on the style and taste shown in the house, the sweetness of the country air, and the quality of



the supper. "Which of your daughters should I compliment for this fine meal?"

Mrs. Bennet told him very coldly that her daughters had nothing to do with the kitchen. "We are quite capable of paying for a cook!"

Mr. Collins apologized for a full half hour until Mr. Bennet asked about his patroness. "Some say Lady Catherine is proud," Mr. Collins said. "But she has given me wise council on nearly every aspect of my life."

"How very civil," Mrs. Bennet said. "Does she live near you, sir?"

"The garden in which my house stands is separated by only a lane from Rosings Park. Lady Catherine lives there with her daughter."

"Oh, and what sort of young lady is she?" Mrs. Bennet asked. "Is she married?"

"She is most charming, but she must stay close to home, as she is sickly. Her weakness has robbed the British court of their brightest ornament. I said as much to Lady Catherine just last week."

“You are so skilled with your flattery,” Mr. Bennet said. “Do your compliments spring to mind in the moment or do you need to study on them ahead?”

“They arise chiefly from the moment,” Mr. Collins answered. “But I do try to have some compliments that may be used for any occasion.”

The next morning, Lydia and Kitty announced they were walking to Meryton. Elizabeth and Jane agreed to join them. Only Mary declined, as she tended to find the little town overwhelming.

Mr. Bennet insisted his cousin walk along with them. The entertainment he found in the young man had lessened when he learned his cousin simply would not stop talking.

On the walk to town, Mr. Collins kept up a steady stream of empty chatter. Then the younger Bennets spotted a handsome stranger walking with an officer. As Kitty and Lydia had already met the officer, they hurried over in hopes of an introduction.

Mr. Denny kindly met their hopes and introduced his friend Mr. Wickham. "I am happy to say Mr. Wickham has accepted a commission in our corps."

Wickham proved both handsome and friendly. While the group stood chatting, Darcy and Bingley rode down the street. Bingley stopped to speak to Jane and nearly all eyes were on the smiling couple.

Only Elizabeth noticed the odd behavior of Darcy and Wickham. They locked eyes and both changed color. Darcy's face became quite red, while Wickham turned pale. She could not guess what this meant.

The opportunity to satisfy her curiosity came soon after when the girls and their tiresome cousin were invited to have dinner at the home of Mrs. Bennet's sister. Several of the officers came as well, including Wickham.

Wickham chose to sit with Elizabeth. They had a pleasant conversation for a while. Then

Wickham asked, "How long has Mr. Darcy been staying in the area?"

"About a month," Elizabeth said. "I understand he is from Derbyshire."

"Yes, his estate is a noble one," Wickham said. "I have known his family since my infancy."

Elizabeth looked surprised at that. "I am afraid Mr. Darcy is not well liked around here."

"That is surprising," Wickham said. "I wonder if he is likely to be here much longer."

"I do not know," she said. "I hope your plans for remaining are not affected by his being in the neighborhood."

"Oh no. If he wishes to avoid me, he should go. It is he who used me ill," Wickham said.

Elizabeth was curious but knew it would be bad manners to ask for more information. So she merely said, "Have you always planned to be in the military?"

"No, I was trained for a career with the church," Wickham said. "The late Mr. Darcy paid for schooling so I might take over the

position in Derbyshire. But after his death, his son gave the position to another man. I believe he was jealous of me.”

“That is shocking!” Elizabeth said. “I had not thought Mr. Darcy as bad as that! Though he did boast that he had an unforgiving temper.”

“I will not trust myself on the subject of Mr. Darcy,” Wickham said. “It is from him that I have no money and no future outside the military.”

Elizabeth was quiet for some time but her upset grew. How could Darcy disgrace the



memory of his own father by going against his wishes?

“I am amazed that Mr. Darcy’s pride would allow such behavior,” Elizabeth said.

“Pride is his closest friend,” Wickham agreed. “He takes great pride in his family honor. I am sure he behaved as he did only because he knew I would never bring him to disgrace. I loved his father too much.”

“Is Mr. Darcy’s sister like him or like his father?” Elizabeth asked.

“She is proud like her brother,” Wickham said. “We were close when she was a child, just as Darcy and I were friends as small boys. The pride comes later, I suppose.”

“I am amazed that Mr. Bingley is so fond of them,” Elizabeth said. “He is such a kind man.”

“Darcy can be pleasant when he chooses,” Wickham said.

To Elizabeth’s distress, she discovered her cousin had been straining to hear their quiet

conversation. He called to Elizabeth in a loud voice, "You know of course that Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Lady Anne Darcy were sisters. Lady Catherine is the aunt to Mr. Darcy."

"I did not know this," Lizzy said quietly.

"Her daughter will have a very large fortune when she marries Darcy," Mr. Collins said.

That made Elizabeth smile at the thought that poor Miss Bingley was trying so very hard to interest a man who was promised to another. She turned to Wickham and asked quietly, "Do you know Lady Catherine?"

"I have not seen her for many years," he said. "She has the reputation of being sensible and clever, but I found her overly occupied with the business of others."

After this, other ladies claimed Wickham's attention and the evening passed without further surprises.



The Netherfield Ball



Elizabeth told Jane about her conversation with Wickham, then laughed as Jane tried to find an explanation that made no one the villain.

“Laugh as much as you choose, my dearest Lizzy,” Jane said. “But I cannot believe that Mr. Darcy’s dear friends can be so deceived in him.”

“Either that or Mr. Wickham made it all up,” Elizabeth said.

Jane said, “One does not know what to think.”

Elizabeth laughed again. “I believe one knows exactly what to think.”

The two sisters were interrupted by the arrival of Bingley and his sisters. They wanted to give their personal invitation to the ball at Netherfield. Mrs. Bennet chose to see the

personal invitation as proof of Bingley's regard for Jane.

Even Mary managed to show some interest in the ball. "Society has claims on us all," she said. "I consider small moments of recreation and amusement to be desirable."

By this point, it was clear to all the Bennets that Mr. Collins had come intending to marry one of the Bennet daughters. Mrs. Bennet had told him Jane was certain to be engaged before many days further.

When he heard of the ball, Mr. Collins said, "A ball given by a young man of character can have no evil tendency. I do not object to dancing and hope to dance with all my fair cousins." Then he turned to Elizabeth. "I would like to take this opportunity to ask you for the first two dances."

Elizabeth realized then that Mr. Collins had selected her as the Bennet sister he intended to marry. She chose to make no remark since none could be given with good manners. She

only hoped Mr. Collins would fix his attention on someone else before making any public declarations.

As soon as her family arrived at the ball, Elizabeth began her search for Wickham. He was not among the redcoats there. Lydia hurried to tell her that he had been invited but had gone to town on business instead. Elizabeth was certain that Wickham's absence was due to Darcy's presence.

Then the dancing began. Elizabeth found dancing with Mr. Collins quite unpleasant. The moment the dances were done, she hurried away in joy at being done with that obligation.

Her sense of great relief was the only thing that could explain what happened next. She nearly ran right into Darcy. He immediately asked for the next dance. In surprise, she accepted him.

"I just accepted a dance with Mr. Darcy!" Elizabeth told Charlotte.

"I dare say you will find him very agreeable," Charlotte said.

"That would be worst of all," Lizzy said. "To find a man agreeable when you are determined to hate him!"

"Don't be a goose," Charlotte whispered.

When the dancing began again, Darcy approached to take her hand. Elizabeth saw the looks of surprise on the faces of the other dancers when she took her place with Darcy.

"Dancing is very pleasant," she said after the first few movements.

"Surprisingly so," he replied.

They were silent for several movements. Then Lizzy said, "It is your turn to comment now, Mr. Darcy. I talked about the dance. Now you ought to make some remark on the size of the room or the number of couples."

"Whatever you wish me to say, should be considered said."

"Very well. That reply will do for the present," she answered. "Perhaps by and by

I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones. But now, we may be silent.”

“Do you usually talk while you are dancing?” he asked.

“Sometimes,” she said. “It would look odd to be silent for half an hour together. Still, if carefully arranged, one may be troubled to say as little as possible.”

“Is this your feelings you are speaking of?” he asked. “Or what you suppose mine to be?”

“Both,” Elizabeth said. “We always seem so similar in the turn of our minds. We are unwilling to speak unless we can say something that will amaze the whole room and be forever remembered.”

“That does not sound like your character,” he said. “Though I believe it may be how you imagine mine to be.”

They were again silent for a number of complex steps. Then he asked if she often walked to Meryton with her sisters. Elizabeth

said they did. “When you met us there the other day, we had just met someone new.”

Darcy did not speak for some moments, but drew himself very upright. Finally he said, “Mr. Wickham is blessed with the ability to make friends easily. How well he keeps them is less certain.”

“He has been unlucky enough to lose your friendship,” she replied. “And I seem to remember that once your friendship is lost, it is not regained.”



“That is true,” he said. “May I ask what you hope for in this conversation?”

“I merely hope to understand your character,” she said.

“And do you?”

She shook her head. “I hear such different accounts of you as to puzzle me exceedingly.”

“I ask that you not judge my character too soon,” Darcy said. “I fear that would reflect no credit on either of us.”

She said nothing more and they finished the dance in silence. As soon as they parted, Elizabeth hurried away. She found Jane with the happiest smile she had yet seen on her face.

“Mr. Bingley does not know anything about Mr. Wickham except that he offended Mr. Darcy in some great way,” Jane told her. “He does believe Mr. Wickham is not a respectable young man.”

“But he does not know him?” Lizzy said.

“No,” Jane said. “But he knows Mr. Darcy and defends him kindly.”

Elizabeth turned the conversation toward Bingley's clear interest in Jane. Her sister blushed happily. As they talked, Mr. Collins walked up in great excitement.

"I have found out," Mr. Collins said, "that Lady Catherine's nephew is here. I must pay my respects to him. I hope he will forgive me for not doing so before now."

"You aren't going to introduce yourself to Mr. Darcy?" Lizzy asked in horror.

"Indeed I am. I will assure him that her ladyship was quite well when last I saw her."

Elizabeth tried to explain that Darcy would consider such address from a stranger to be rude.

"I have the highest opinion of your excellent judgment," Mr. Collins said. "But such things do not regulate the clergy." Then he bowed and hurried away to attack Darcy.

Darcy looked at Mr. Collins with amazement, though he responded politely.

Mr. Collins rushed back over to Elizabeth. "Mr. Darcy was most civil. I believe he was pleased with my compliments to Lady Catherine."

As soon as possible, Elizabeth escaped her cousin and drifted around the room. She happened upon her mother speaking loudly to Lady Lucas about how pleased she was by Bingley's attentions toward Jane.

Elizabeth tried to change the topic of her mother's conversation and encourage her to speak with a less audible whisper. "Mr. Bingley's friend, Mr. Darcy, is standing well within range of your voice," Lizzy whispered.

Her mother only scolded her. "What should I care for the opinion of Mr. Darcy?"

"For heaven's sake, madam," Lizzy whispered, "speak lower. It cannot raise our opinion in the eyes of Mr. Bingley if we're rude to his dearest friend."

Nothing she said had any influence. Elizabeth blushed with shame. She watched Darcy's face

and saw the expression shift from indignant to a calm seriousness. Finally Mrs. Bennet ran out of anything to say.

Then Lizzy saw Mary preparing to sing for a group around the piano. Knowing her sister's skill in song, Elizabeth finally caught her father's eye and gestured toward Mary.

Mr. Bennet reached his middle daughter by the time she finished her song. "That will do extremely well, child," he said loudly. "You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young ladies have a chance to sing."

After this, Mr. Collins launched into a long formal speech about the duties of a rector. Many of those around him smiled in amusement. Elizabeth began to wonder if her family had made a plan to embarrass her as much as possible by the end of the evening.

As her family finally rode away in their carriage, Mrs. Bennet remarked loudly on how very pleased she would be when her oldest daughter was settled at Netherfield.



The Loss of Two Marriages



The day after the ball, Mr. Collins asked for a private audience with Elizabeth immediately after breakfast. Mrs. Bennet swept everyone away like a tide.

“Miss Elizabeth,” he said, “you must guess the purpose of this conversation. I have singled you out as the companion of my future life. I should explain my reasons before I am run away with by my feelings.”

Elizabeth had to bite her lip to avoid laughing as she tried to imagine the stiff young man being run away with by his feelings.

“Lady Catherine has advised me to choose a wife. I choose you. I believe it will add to my happiness if you will be my wife.”

Elizabeth took a breath to interrupt but he continued on. "Also, since I am to inherit this estate, our marriage will soften the loss to your family. I promise I will never reproach you for your lack of financial means."

"Thank you for the compliment you pay me, but I decline," Elizabeth said.

Mr. Collins bowed. "I know young ladies often reject the man they secretly intend to accept as a way of increasing his interest."

"Upon my word, sir," Elizabeth said in alarm, "I am not one of those young ladies. I am serious in my refusal."

Elizabeth repeated her refusal several times before Mrs. Bennet burst into the room. Lizzy dashed past her.

Mrs. Bennet fluttered around Mr. Collins. "Lizzy is a headstrong, foolish girl. She does not know her own interest! I will talk to her."

"Oh!" Mr. Collins said in serious alarm. "If she is headstrong and foolish, perhaps it is best if we do not marry."

“Oh, she is foolish only in this. In everything else she is most sensible and will make a wonderful wife.” Then she turned and ran out, bellowing for Mr. Bennet.

Finally Lizzy was called to the library to speak with her parents. “I understand Mr. Collins has made you an offer of marriage and you have refused,” her father said.

“I have, sir.”

“Your mother wants you to marry him.”

“Yes,” Mrs. Bennet said. “Or I will never see her again!”

“You have a great problem, Elizabeth,” Mr. Bennet said. “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 smiled in relief at having her father’s support. Mrs. Bennet scolded them both terribly.

During all this flurry of excitement, Charlotte Lucas came to visit. She spent some time comforting the distressed Mr. Collins.

After that, Mr. Collins visited the Lucases several times for more comforting. Lizzy felt sorry for her dear friend.

“You are so kind to listen to Mr. Collins,” Lizzy said to Charlotte. “It keeps him in good humor and I am more obliged to you than I can express.”

Charlotte assured her that it was no burden.

A few days later, a letter arrived for Miss Jane Bennet from Netherfield. It was from Miss Bingley. Jane grew quite pale as she read it.

“The whole party has left Netherfield. They are on their way to London, and they do not intend to come back.” She tried to say more but her voice grew choked.

“Surely Mr. Bingley will return,” Lizzy said.

“Miss Bingley says he will not,” Jane said and began to read. “When Charles gets to town, he will be in no hurry to leave it again. We have determined to follow him. Many of our

acquaintances are already there for the winter and will keep us all quite busy.”

Then Jane took a shaky breath. “The worst part of the letter is at the end. Miss Bingley says her brother admires Mr. Darcy’s sister. She is certain they will be a great match.”

“What is clear is that Miss Bingley sees that her brother is in love with you and wants him to marry Miss Darcy,” Lizzy said. “Her motive is probably to increase her own chance to marry Mr. Darcy.”

Jane shook her head again. “No, if Mr. Bingley were in love with me, his affection would not so easily turn away.”

Though Elizabeth completely disagreed, it was clear that Jane would not change her mind.

On the very next day, Mr. Collins announced he intended to marry Charlotte Lucas! Mrs. Bennet would not be comforted. She had come so close to having two daughters married. And now Charlotte Lucas would be married ahead



of the Bennets' beautiful daughters.

Elizabeth was shocked. At their first chance to get together, Lizzy cried, "Engaged to Mr. Collins! My dear Charlotte—impossible!"

"Why are you surprised?" Charlotte asked coldly. "Did you think he could not care for another after being turned down by you?"

"No, of course not," Lizzy said.

"I am not romantic, you know. I never was. I only want a comfortable home. I believe I can have that with this marriage."

"Undoubtedly," Lizzy whispered.

Though they remained friends after this conversation, they spoke no more about the coming marriage.

Elizabeth hoped for a letter from Bingley for Jane, but none arrived. Mrs. Bennet moaned constantly about the lost hopes of her daughters.

"I do wish she would restrain herself so that I might forget this error of fancy on my side," Jane said one day.

"I do not think you have erred," Elizabeth

said. "I believe Mr. Bingley's sisters have behaved badly and perhaps Mr. Darcy, too. Mr. Bingley should have been stronger."

"Please do not think ill of . . . that man . . . on my behalf," Jane said. "Women fancy admiration means more than it does. That's all."

Mr. Bennet treated the matter the most lightly of all. "Next to being married, being crossed in love gives a girl distinction. I believe you should try it, Lizzy. Let Mr. Wickham be your man. He is a pleasant fellow and should jilt you creditably."

"Thank you, sir," Lizzy said, finally smiling at her father's teasing. "But we must not all expect Jane's good fortune in being heartbroken."

"True," Mr. Bennet said. "But you do have the comfort of knowing that whatever happens, your mother will make a big fuss over it."

Jane never sulked or complained. Still, it was clear she was profoundly sad.

When Christmas came, Mrs. Bennet's

brother and sister-in-law came to visit. Mrs. Gardiner noticed Jane's distress at once. She said to Lizzy, "Poor Jane, do you think she would go back to London with us? A change of scene might help."

Elizabeth thought this an excellent idea. Removing Jane from her mother's constant reminders could only help.

Wickham was the one thing that had lightened the gloom over the family. They saw him often and he was always friendly.

"I know you will not let your fancy run away with you," Mrs. Gardiner said to Lizzy. "A man like that is certainly looking for a match with more fortune in it."

"Probably," Lizzy admitted with a laugh. "But I am not in love with Mr. Wickham."

"Then perhaps you should not encourage your mother to invite him here?"

Lizzy laughed again. "I have been guilty of that and I will stop."



Darcy Comes to Rosings



With Charlotte married, Jane in London, and her promise to avoid Wickham kept, Lizzy felt quite abandoned. Thankfully a constant flow of letters helped.

Jane said she had paid the required visit to the Bingley sisters. She found them gracious as always. Bingley was away when Jane visited, which she said was a relief.

Elizabeth also received a letter from her aunt, who invited her to come on a tour that summer. They would pick her up at the beginning of summer. Then her aunt asked after Wickham. Lizzy was glad to tell her that Wickham's interest had moved on to a young lady who had recently received a substantial inheritance.

“Clearly I was not much in love,” Lizzy wrote. “I find Kitty and Lydia mourn the end of his visits much more than I do.”

Charlotte wrote letters that were full of cheerful descriptions of her new home. She begged Lizzy to visit as soon as she could.

Elizabeth missed her dear friend terribly. So a plan was made for Elizabeth to travel with Charlotte’s father and her younger sister Maria. They left early one morning and arrived in London by noon.

Elizabeth was pleased to see that Jane looked as healthy and lovely as ever. But, they had little chance to talk during the short overnight visit.

Elizabeth made the rest of the journey to Hunsford in very high spirits. Finally, she glimpsed the parsonage. The garden sloped to the road and the house stood cheerfully in it.

Charlotte welcomed Elizabeth with joy. Mr. Collins held them for some time at the gate with his lengthy welcome. Elizabeth marveled

that her friend could be so cheerful with such a companion for life. It was clear Charlotte enjoyed her little home very much and that she had found small things to keep Mr. Collins outdoors for much of each day.

It was equally clear their neighbor kept them busy. "We dine at Rosings twice every week," Mr. Collins said. "I am certain Lady Catherine will include you in every invitation."

On the very next day, Lady Catherine's carriage pulled up in front of the house. Mr. and Mrs. Collins rushed out to meet it. Lady Catherine's daughter sat primly on the seat and would not come in.

Elizabeth smiled as she peered out the window. "She looks cross. She should make Darcy a perfect wife."

Mr. Collins and Charlotte stood at the gate to converse with Miss de Bourgh. Sir William stood just in the doorway of the house, constantly bowing whenever Miss de Bourgh looked that way. And Maria dashed from



window to window in search of the best view. At length the carriage drove on.

Charlotte said that they would all be dining at Rosings the next day. Mr. Collins lectured them at length about how they should behave. When they arrived, Sir William was nearly mute with awe and Maria looked like a rabbit under the shadow of a hawk.

Lady Catherine was very tall and might once have been handsome. Throughout the evening, she did most of the speaking.

“Do you play, Miss Bennet?” she asked.

“A little.”

“Do you draw?”

“No, not at all,” Lizzy answered.

Lady Catherine stared at her. “Your mother should have taken you to London every spring for the benefit of the masters.”

“My mother would have had no objection, but my father hates town,” Lizzy said.

Lady Catherine’s disapproval grew. She could not believe the Bennet girls had never had a governess. She was even more disturbed that all five of the girls mingled in society.

“I think it would be very hard upon younger sisters if they should have to stay home because the elder sister is unmarried,” Elizabeth said. “It could hardly promote sisterly affection.”

“You give your opinion strongly for so young a person,” Lady Catherine said. “Pray, what is your age?”

Elizabeth smiled slightly. “With three younger sisters grown up, your ladyship can

hardly expect me to own it.”

Lady Catherine’s shock at not getting a direct answer was clear. She frowned at Elizabeth for the rest of the evening.

Charlotte’s father stayed a full week with them and occupied most of Mr. Collins’s time. When Mr. Collins was in the house, Elizabeth often used the time to take long walks.

During one of the weekly dinners, Lady Catherine announced two of her nephews were coming to visit. Soon after they arrived at Rosings, Darcy and his cousin came to visit at the rectory.

Colonel Fitzwilliam proved to be a pleasant, well-bred man who entered into conversation with ease. Darcy spoke with his usual reserve, though he did ask Elizabeth about the health of her family. Fitzwilliam called in at the parsonage several more times during the week, but they did not see Darcy again except at church.

At Rosings, Lady Catherine now spoke almost entirely to her nephews. Colonel Fitzwilliam was as gracious as his aunt was cold. Elizabeth found the evening to be the most pleasant she had spent at Rosings, both because Fitzwilliam did speak to her and because Lady Catherine did not.

At one point Lady Catherine called out to her nephew, "What are you telling Miss Bennet?"

"We are speaking of music," Fitzwilliam said.

"I must take part if you are speaking of music," Lady Catherine insisted. "If I had ever learned, I would have been a great proficient!"

Once again Elizabeth had to fight a smile.

"How does Georgiana get on with her music, Darcy?" Lady Catherine asked her nephew. "Tell her from me that she must practice a great deal!"

"She does not need such advice," he said. "She practices constantly."

"Good. Practice is important. I have told Miss Bennet she may come here and practice

on the piano in the servant's rooms. She would be in nobody's way there."

Darcy made no answer. Fitzwilliam asked Elizabeth to play and she took her place at the piano.

"You mean to frighten me, Mr. Darcy," she said mildly when he walked over to the piano, "by coming to hear me when your sister plays so well. But I am too stubborn to give in to fear."

"I will not say that you are mistaken," he replied. "As I know you enjoy stating ideas you do not really hold."

Lizzy laughed at this picture of herself. "Your cousin will teach you not to believe a word I say," she said to Fitzwilliam. "But I could tell you things that would shock you."

"Do tell me," Fitzwilliam said.

"Your cousin went to a ball in Hertfordshire," she said. "And he would not dance. Not even with a poor girl sitting alone without a partner."

"I did not have the honor of knowing any of the ladies," Darcy said.

“And nobody can ever be introduced in a ballroom,” she said with a laugh.

“I do not possess the talent of conversing easily with those I have never seen before,” Darcy said.

Lady Catherine joined the men near the piano. “Anne would have been a delightful performer,” she announced, “if her health allowed her to play.”

Elizabeth watched Darcy closely for sign of affection toward Miss de Bourgh, but he showed no interest in the thin young woman at all.



Darcy Proposes



On the next morning, Elizabeth settled to write a letter to Jane as Charlotte and her family went to the village. She was interrupted by a visit from Darcy.

He sat and they exchanged the normal formal questions about family. “I hope Mr. Bingley and his sisters were well when you left London,” Elizabeth said.

“Perfectly so. I thank you.”

Elizabeth fell silent then. Darcy complimented the parsonage, mentioning he believed his aunt had helped with its décor.

“I am sure she could not have bestowed her kindness on a more grateful object than Mr. Collins,” Elizabeth said.

“Mr. Collins seems very fortunate in his choice of wife,” he said.

“I believe he has found the one sensible woman who would have him.”

Conversation waned a bit. Darcy seemed always on the verge of saying something without ever saying it. Finally, Charlotte and her sister returned.

Darcy sat with them a few minutes without talking, then went away. Charlotte looked after him. “My dear Lizzy, he must be in love with you to have called on us in this familiar way.”

Elizabeth described their painful conversation. “It seems unlikely behavior of a man in love. I expect he has simply fled the company of Lady Catherine and had nothing else to do.”

Over the next weeks, both Darcy and Fitzwilliam visited the parsonage frequently. Fitzwilliam was such a lively person and seemed to enjoy his conversations with them, so his visits were easy to understand.

Darcy was more difficult. He often sat for ten minutes or more without opening his mouth. During her frequent long walks, Elizabeth ran into Darcy more than once. He showed no sign of enjoying the meetings, but he never avoided them either.

Charlotte continued to believe Darcy was partial to Elizabeth, but Lizzy would not hear that idea without laughing.

One day, as she walked, Elizabeth came upon Colonel Fitzwilliam. He told her he would be leaving Kent on Saturday. "Though Darcy keeps putting off our departure."

"I would find it difficult to be at the whims of another," she said.

He smiled. "Younger sons are used to being at the whims of others. Even in marriage, we must think of money."

Elizabeth laughed. "And what is the usual price of an Earl's younger son? Could one be had for fifty pounds?"

He answered her in the same teasing way.

"Tell me of Miss Darcy," Elizabeth said.
"Does she have her brother's nature?"

"Oh no," Fitzwilliam said with a laugh. "She is a great favorite of everyone who knows her. I believe you know two of her friends, Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley. Their brother is a great friend of Darcy's."

"Is that so?" she said.

"Yes, Darcy told me he has saved his friend from an imprudent marriage. Apparently Bingley is the sort to fall madly in love instantly. There were strong objections to the lady."

Elizabeth walked silently then, nearly quivering with anger. She bade farewell to Fitzwilliam before she burst into tears. By the time she reached the parsonage, she had such a headache that she begged off an evening visit to Rosings and went to bed.

After the others had left, Lizzy read and reread her sister's letters. Now that she knew Darcy was the cause of her sister's pain, she was

happy that he would be leaving soon. She hated to think how she would behave around him.

At that thought, the bell rang. To her utter amazement, Darcy walked into the room. He asked after her health. She answered with cold civility. He sat down. Then he stood and walked around the room. Elizabeth watched him but did not speak.

Finally he stood in front of her. "I have struggled in vain against my feelings," Darcy said. "But they will not go away. You must allow me to tell you that I love you."

He admitted it would be degrading to be joined to a family like hers, but he wished to marry her anyway. He assured her that he had tried to stop his growing attachment since it was so unwise, but he could not. Then he fell silent.

"Shall I thank you?" she said. "I cannot. You have made it clear you bestow your regard unwillingly. I am sorry to cause pain to anyone, but I doubt you will suffer long. Your relief will ease your suffering, I am sure."

Mr. Darcy became pale with anger. "May I ask why you have rejected me with so little effort at good manners?"

"And I might ask why you chose to tell me you like me against your good judgment? Your offer could not have been better designed to offend and insult. This is reason enough for rudeness, if I was rude. But I have other reasons. What could possibly tempt me to accept the man who has ruined the happiness of my beloved sister?"

At this, Mr. Darcy's face changed from red to pale. He listened without interrupting.

"You have been the principal reason she was discarded without excuse. Your friend appears unkind and uncaring of a gentle girl. My sister is the talk of the village for daring to think he cared. You have inflicted them both with misery. Do you deny what you have done?"

"I do not. I did everything I could to separate them. I have been kinder to my friend than to myself," Darcy answered.

"And what act of friendship made you behave as you have toward Mr. Wickham?"

"You take an earnest interest in that gentleman's concerns," Darcy snapped.

"Any who know his misfortunes would feel an interest."

"His misfortunes!" Darcy spat. "Yes, his misfortunes have been very great indeed. I suspect these things would have been overlooked if I had not injured your pride!"

"My pride?" she gasped.

"I should have hidden my struggle under compliments," he said.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy," she said. "All your declaration did was spare me the concern I might have felt at telling you the truth. You are the last man in the world I would ever accept!"

"You have said quite enough," Darcy said. "Forgive me for taking up so much of your time."

He hastily left the room. Elizabeth sat and cried for half an hour and only moved when she heard the carriage bringing the others home.



Lydia Goes to Brighton



Elizabeth left for a walk directly after breakfast the next day. She saw a gentleman moving her way. Afraid it might be Darcy, she turned to hurry back. But the gentleman had caught sight of her and called her name.

It was Darcy. He quickly reached her and held out a letter. "I had hoped to meet you," he said. "Would you do me the honor of reading this letter?" He bowed and left.

Elizabeth opened the letter and began to read. In it, Darcy admitted that he saw Bingley preferred Jane over any other girl. He said he observed Jane as well and saw no sign that she felt the same way. Since he believed Jane did not love Bingley, he did not want his friend

caught up in a marriage that would bring him no joy.

“I had to consider the almost total lack of propriety displayed by your mother, your three younger sisters, and even occasionally by your father,” the letter read. “I must say you and your elder sister have always been honorable in speech and conduct.”

Elizabeth had to admit she had often seen her family behave in ways she found objectionable. How could a man like Darcy find it less so?

The letter went on to explain that Darcy had told Bingley that he believed Jane did not love him. Naturally modest, Bingley had easily believed Jane might not favor him.

Then the letter explained the situation of Wickham. The young man had been offered the situation he spoke of. He had declared he did not want the position. He had asked for money equal to the worth of the position. Darcy paid it. Then when Wickham had spent

all of the money, he returned to ask to have the position as well. Darcy had refused.

Wickham had turned to Darcy's sister Georgiana. She was only fifteen and soon believed herself completely in love with him. They planned to run away together.

Darcy had returned home just days before the intended elopement. Wickham fled, breaking the young girl's heart. Darcy was certain Wickham's motive for pursuing Georgiana had been both money and revenge.

Accepting Darcy's version of Wickham's tale was surprisingly easy. As Elizabeth went through each memory of her time with Wickham, her good opinion of him lessened. Still she could not let go of her hurt on Jane's behalf. The pain Jane had suffered was too great for her to easily forgive.

Elizabeth found she was eager to return home when the time came. Mr. Collins insisted upon a formal speech concerning her visit and

his own happiness in marriage. Then Elizabeth had an warm parting with Charlotte.

As the carriage pulled away, Maria turned to Elizabeth. "So many things have happened in this visit. I will have so much to tell!"

Elizabeth privately added, "And I will have so much to conceal."

When they reached London, Lizzy was glad Jane would be going home with her. She didn't know what she should say of Bingley, so she chose to say nothing at all.

Kitty and Lydia greeted their sisters in great excitement when they arrived. "We have some news for you," Lydia said. "Wickham is not marrying Mary King. She has gone to live with her uncle in Liverpool!"

"Then she is safe from an imprudent connection," Elizabeth said.

Lydia huffed. "She should have stayed if she liked him."

"I hope there was no strong attachment on either side," Jane said gently.



Lydia and Kitty went on to fill their ears with weeks of gossip. Elizabeth waited until she was alone with Jane to tell her of Darcy's proposal. She left out any mention of Bingley but told Jane about Wickham.

Jane said she could completely understand why Darcy was so taken with Elizabeth, and hoped he was not too unhappy in her refusal.

"I knew you would have compassion enough for both of us," Elizabeth teased. "Oh, how I have missed you!" She hugged her sister, then stopped. "Do you think we ought to make anyone aware of Wickham's character?"

"I don't know how we can without sharing things that are private to Mr. Darcy," Jane said.

"That is what I thought," Lizzy said. "And Wickham will soon be gone."

Elizabeth felt much better after talking with Jane.

Finally the regiment prepared to leave Meryton. Lydia received an invitation from Colonel Forster's new wife. She wanted Lydia

to come with them to Brighton so that she would not be alone in a new place.

Elizabeth felt this was a uniquely horrible idea. Lydia was barely controlled at home. How would she behave when far from the family? She tried to talk her father into forbidding the trip.

“We will have no peace if Lydia does not go,” her father said. “Colonel Forster is a sensible man. He will keep her out of trouble. And she has no fortune. She is hardly likely to be an object of prey to anyone.”

Elizabeth was not so confident, but there was nothing she could do. And so Lydia went to Brighton with the regiment.



Pemberley



In July, the Gardiners arrived at Longbourn to collect Elizabeth for their trip. The trip began later than planned because of Mr. Gardiner's business. They would limit the tour to the beautiful lands around Derbyshire.

Elizabeth was nervous of meeting Darcy since his home estate was in Derbyshire. But then she laughed at herself. In such a great large place, she was unlikely to see him at all.

As they passed through the beautiful countryside, Mr. Gardiner said Pemberley was nearby. "You would enjoy it. It's quite lovely."

"Oh, no," Elizabeth said. "I do not believe I would."

"Wouldn't you like to see the place of which you have heard so much?" her aunt asked.

“Oh, I am tired of great houses and fine carpets,” Elizabeth said.

“It is not only the house,” Mrs. Gardiner said. “The grounds are delightful. We will go tomorrow!”

When they arrived, Elizabeth had to admit, the house and grounds were beautiful. On reaching the house, they were shown around by the housekeeper.

For a moment, Elizabeth wondered what it would be like to be mistress of such a house. Then she looked at her dear aunt and uncle. Certainly Darcy would not allow such people to visit socially. That made her feel lucky again that she had turned him down.

The housekeeper pointed out a portrait of Darcy. “Lizzy,” Mrs. Gardiner said, “is this very like Mr. Darcy?”

“Yes.”

“Does the young lady know Mr. Darcy?” the housekeeper asked.

Elizabeth blushed and replied, "A little."

"Is Miss Darcy as handsome as her brother?" Mrs. Gardiner asked.

"Oh yes," said the housekeeper. "And so accomplished. She is to arrive tomorrow with her brother." Elizabeth felt a wave of relief at knowing she would not encounter Darcy.

After they had seen the house, they went for a walk. Elizabeth walked a bit ahead of her aunt and uncle. Suddenly, Darcy himself came forward from around the stables.

His appearance was so abrupt, there was no way for Elizabeth to hide. She felt deeply embarrassed, certain he must think she was throwing herself at him.

Their conversation was very formal and they soon ran out of things to say. Darcy bowed and hurried away.

When her aunt and uncle joined her, she was so distracted, she barely heard them. They walked together near the side of the river and

entered the woods. Mrs. Gardiner declared she could go no farther and was ready to return to the carriage.

To Elizabeth's very great shock, they turned and saw Darcy approaching them. Elizabeth assumed he would turn away and walk elsewhere now that he had seen them, but he walked closer.

"Would you do me the honor of introducing me to your friends?" he asked.

She quickly made the introductions, glad that her aunt and uncle were fashionable people and would do nothing ill-bred. Still, she expected he would turn away as quickly as possible. Instead, he entered into a lengthy conversation with Mr. Gardiner that turned eventually to fishing.

"Do come and fish here whenever you like," Darcy said and he pointed out the parts of the stream with the best fishing.

Her aunt linked arms with her as they walked along with the chatting men. Finally

Mrs. Gardiner asked that her husband take her arm as she was growing quite tired. Darcy then walked beside Elizabeth.

“Your housekeeper said you were not expected until tomorrow,” Elizabeth said quietly. “We did not wish to intrude.”

“My sister will arrive tomorrow,” he said. “Along with Mr. Bingley and his sisters. I would very much like to introduce my sister to you. She wants to know you.”

Surprised, Elizabeth agreed. Finally they reached the house and Darcy helped the ladies into the carriage. As they rode away, her aunt and uncle praised Darcy’s looks and manners.

“I have never seen him as pleasant as this morning,” Elizabeth said.

The conversation soon turned to the countryside and Elizabeth was very glad to drop the topic of Darcy. Still her mind rarely wandered far from him for the rest of the evening and into the next day. Would he really bring his sister to meet her?

Elizabeth's question was answered when a carriage pulled up in front of the inn where she stayed with her aunt and uncle. The Darcys were soon announced. Georgiana Darcy was very tall and graceful. Her manners were perfect, though it was clear she was very shy.

Before many words were exchanged, Bingley arrived. He didn't ask about Jane, but Elizabeth could see his interest in all the questions he almost asked.

On the next day, a letter from Longbourn arrived just as Lizzy was dressing for a walk with her aunt and uncle. She decided to stay behind, as she had been looking forward to a letter from Jane.

Elizabeth gasped as she read the letter. Lydia had eloped with Wickham. She left only a short note saying they were going to Scotland to be married. So far, no sign of them could be found in Scotland. Upon questioning, Mr. Denny said he believed Wickham never intended to marry her at all!

The letter went on to say that Mr. Bennet was leaving at once for London with Colonel Forster to search for the couple. Jane begged for their uncle to go to London to help in the search if he would.

“Oh no!” Elizabeth cried as she leaped from her chair and raced for the door. Just as she reached it, it opened and Darcy appeared. He looked at Lizzy’s pale face in alarm.

“I beg your pardon,” she said. “I must find Mr. Gardiner. Something terrible has happened.”

“What is the matter?” he cried, then spoke more calmly. “Let me send a servant for Mr. Gardiner, please. You do not look well.”

Elizabeth nodded. Her knees felt weak from shock. The servant was sent on his mission. Darcy didn’t know quite what to do. “Shall I get you a drink of water?”

“No, I thank you,” she said. “I am quite well. I am only recovering from the news I have received from Longbourn.” As soon as she said that much, she burst into tears.

Darcy could only sit beside her in silence until she recovered herself a bit. She told him about the letter she had received and what it said.

“When my eyes were opened to Mr. Wickham’s character, I should have warned my family in some way,” Lizzy admitted. “Now look what I have done.”

Darcy shook his head. “I wish anything could be either said or done on my part that might offer consolation to such distress.”

Her aunt and uncle arrived almost immediately after. In less time than she could have imagined, they were seated in the carriage on the way to Longbourn.



A Bennet Wedding



When they arrived, Mr. Bennet was still in London. Mrs. Bennet refused to leave her dressing room and had kept Jane quite busy waiting on her. Kitty seemed unworried. Mary simply lectured everyone about the importance of female virtue.

Elizabeth and the Gardiners hurried up to see Mrs. Bennet. "Mr. Bennet has gone away," she wailed. "I know he will fight Mr. Wickham and then he will be killed. What will happen to us then? The Collinses will turn us out before he is cold in his grave!"

"Do not give way to useless alarm," her brother scolded. "I will go to London and help."

"Oh, my dear brother," Mrs. Bennet said. "Find them and make them marry."

At that Mr. Gardiner left. Mrs. Gardiner stayed for a few days to help Jane and Elizabeth with their mother.

Now and then, Elizabeth thought of Darcy. She realized that Lydia's scandalous behavior surely meant the end of any communication between them.

Finally they received a letter from Mr. Gardiner in London. Mr. Bennet was returning home. Mr. Gardiner would keep up the search.

When he arrived, Mr. Bennet said nothing about the situation for several hours. Finally, Elizabeth dared to speak on the subject. "I am sorry for what you must have endured."

"It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it," he said. "Your advice to me last May showed some greatness of mind, and we suffer now for my not heeding it."

Mr. Bennet continued, "Your mother deals well with misfortune. Perhaps when Kitty runs away, I will take my turn of sitting in my nightcap and demanding things."

“I will never run away, Papa,” Kitty said. “If I should ever go to Brighton, I will behave better than Lydia.”

“You go to Brighton!” he said. “No, Kitty, I have learned to be cautious. You are never to stir out of doors.”

Thinking him serious, Kitty began to cry.

“Oh, don’t cry,” he said. “If you are a good girl for the next ten years, I will reconsider your case.”



Two days after Mr. Bennet's return, a letter arrived from Mr. Gardiner. Lydia and Wickham were found!

"We have brought Lydia to our house," Mr. Gardiner assured them in the letter. "Wickham will marry her as long as she is to receive 100 pounds a year from Mr. Bennet. We will have the wedding in this house as soon as we hear from you."

"I can write your answer for you," Jane said, "if you dislike the trouble yourself."

"I dislike it very much," he said. "But it must be done. Though I do not know how I can ever pay your uncle back the money he has spent."

"Money?" Jane said. "What do you mean?"

"Wickham would be a fool if he married Lydia for less than ten thousand pounds," her father said heavily. "I doubt he is a fool."

The sisters gasped. How could such a sum be repaid?

The change in their mother upon hearing this news was amazing. She rejoiced in the

marriage of her youngest daughter just as if no scandal was attached at all.

“I must go to Meryton and tell the good news to my sister,” she said. “And then call on Lady Lucas!”

The family soon received another letter from their uncle. He assured them they owed him nothing. The couple was married. Wickham would be moving to the North for a military position after a brief visit to Longbourn. Their uncle also attached a list of Wickham’s debts in Meryton. Mr. Bennet would need to pay them for the sake of his family’s reputation.

When the couple arrived, Lydia ran into the house with no sign of embarrassment. “Who knew when I left that I would be married when I returned?” Lydia asked, laughing. “In the carriage, I was sure to let my hand just rest upon the window frame so everyone might see my ring.”

Elizabeth stared at her laughing sister in shock.

“We shall be at Newcastle all the winter,” Lydia said to her mother. “I dare say there will be some balls. You may leave one or two of my sisters with me. I shall get husbands for them before the winter is over.”

“I thank you,” Elizabeth said. “But I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands.”

The newly married couple stayed for over a week, but they spent most of their time visiting. Lydia insisted upon talking about the wedding.

“My uncle was called away on business in the morning,” Lydia said. “He almost didn’t make it to the wedding to give me away. I worried, but I suppose Darcy might have done as well.”

“Mr. Darcy!” Elizabeth cried in amazement.

“Oh, that was a secret,” Lydia giggled.

Elizabeth wrote immediately to her aunt. She received an answer soon after. Her aunt and uncle thought Darcy had come at her request, though no one had said so.

It was Darcy who had found the couple. Darcy confronted Wickham and found he had

run away from his debt and taken Lydia along only because she wanted to come. He never intended to marry Lydia. Therefore, Darcy settled upon him enough money to make Lydia far more appealing.

“Your uncle tried to repay Mr. Darcy,” Mrs. Gardiner wrote, “but he refused. He insists that it was his pride in not revealing Wickham’s true character that led to your sister’s situation.”

Elizabeth didn’t know what to think. Could he have done it for her? But that made no sense. Darcy would never agree to be brother-in-law to Wickham. Finally she decided that his reason must have been just what he said. He felt responsible and he had the means to do something about it.

Finally the day came for the new couple to leave. Mrs. Bennet fussed over her youngest daughter but her sadness did not last long. A great surprise soon came to the neighborhood. Netherfield was preparing for the arrival of Bingley!



Bingley Arrives



“At least he is coming without his sisters so we aren’t likely to see him,” Jane said when she heard. “Not that I am afraid of myself, but I dread other people’s remarks.”

But Jane’s belief that she would see little of Bingley did not prove true. On the third morning after his arrival at Netherfield, Bingley was spotted riding toward their house.

“There’s a gentleman with him, Mama,” Kitty cried. “It looks like that man that used to be with him before. The tall, proud man.”

“Mr. Darcy!” Mrs. Bennet said. “I hate the very sight of him.”

When the gentlemen arrived, Jane and Elizabeth spoke as little as civility would allow. Darcy inquired after Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner,

which surprised Mrs. Bennet very much. Then Elizabeth inquired after Miss Darcy, which surprised her mother still more.

“It’s been a long time since you went away, Mr. Bingley,” Mrs. Bennet said, once formalities were over. “I began to fear you would never come back again. Many things have changed. Miss Lucas is married and settled. My own Lydia is married as well.”

Bingley gave his congratulations.

“It is a delightful thing to have a daughter married,” she said. “But so sad to have her taken such a long way from me.”

Elizabeth could not help noticing that Bingley spoke to Jane frequently and rarely looked away from her. Finally the gentlemen rose to leave and Mrs. Bennet said that she hoped they would see Mr. Bingley again soon.

Elizabeth went out walking as soon as they left. She was sad to see Darcy so solemn and indifferent to her. She could not imagine why

he had come, unless it was to show her that his regard had changed again.

Elizabeth was soon joined by Jane, who looked cheerful. "I am glad the first meeting is over," Jane said. "Now we can meet as indifferent acquaintances."

Elizabeth laughed, but Jane refused to see Bingley's interest in her. She insisted it was only his natural good manners that made him so pleasant toward her.

The two gentlemen came to visit again on Tuesday and Bingley chose a seat next to Jane. Darcy took the seat farthest from Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was determined not to be so foolish as to think Darcy would ever care for her again. She cringed every time her mother spoke coldly to him.

Bingley came to visit alone and then again alone, but no proposal grew out of it. The next day he came to go shooting with Mr. Bennet and stayed through dinner.

After dinner, Mrs. Bennet managed to leave the couple alone in the drawing room. This time the conversation was just what she hoped. When Bingley hurried off to talk to Mr. Bennet, Jane rushed to tell Elizabeth.

“’Tis too much,” she said. “I do not deserve it. Oh, that everybody could be as happy!”

Even their father was clearly happy with the turn of events. “Jane, I congratulate you,” he said later in the evening. “You will be a very happy woman. Though the generosity of you both will force you to always exceed your income.”

“Exceed their income,” Mrs. Bennet cried. “That’s not likely with his money! Oh, I am so happy!”

Later Jane told Elizabeth, “He said he never knew I was in London in the spring!”

“I thought as much,” Elizabeth said.

“His sisters hid it from him. They did not like his interest in me. But I believe they will become content when they see how happy their

brother is.” Then she squeezed Elizabeth’s arm and said, “Would you believe it? He believed I did not care for him. That is the only reason he was willing to leave last November!”

“He made a mistake, for sure,” Elizabeth said.

“Oh, Lizzy, I feel blessed above all,” she said. “If I could but see you so happy!”

Elizabeth laughed. “With very good luck, I may meet another Mr. Collins in time.”

News of the engagement spread quickly. Then about a week after the announcement, the family received a most unexpected visitor. It was Lady Catherine de Bourgh! She stormed into the house. Mrs. Bennet greeted her politely and invited her to sit in the drawing room.

Lady Catherine looked around the room stiffly. “This must be an unpleasant sitting room in the summer evenings. The windows are full west.”

Mrs. Bennet responded as civilly as she could in the face of Lady Catherine’s rudeness.



“Miss Bennet, would be you so kind as to walk with me?” Lady Catherine said.

So Elizabeth went. They walked in silence along the gravel walk until Lady Catherine said, “You must know why I have come. A report of a most alarming nature has reached me. I was told that you would soon be united with my own nephew, Mr. Darcy. I know it must be a scandalous falsehood.”

“If you know it untrue,” Elizabeth said, “I wonder that you took the trouble of coming so far.”

“Will you likewise declare there is no reason for it?” Lady Catherine asked coldly.

“I do not pretend to be as frank as you, your ladyship,” Elizabeth answered. “You may ask questions which I choose not to answer.”

“I insist you answer. Has my nephew made you an offer of marriage?”

“Your ladyship has declared it impossible.”

“It ought to be impossible,” Lady Catherine said. “Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter.

Now what do you have to say?"

"Only this," Elizabeth said calmly. "You can have no reason to suppose he would make an offer to me."

Lady Catherine hesitated then. "The engagement is one his mother and I planned while they were in their cradles. She would not want him to marry a young woman of inferior birth and no importance in the world. And that patched-up business of your sister's marriage. Is such a girl to be my nephew's sister? Our family cannot be thus polluted! Tell me at once, are you engaged to him?"

"I am not."

Lady Catherine finally seemed pleased. "And will you promise me never to enter into such an engagement?"

"I will make no such promise," Elizabeth said, her voice low with anger. "You have insulted me in every possible method. Our conversation is finished."



True Affections



The next morning, Mr. Bennet found Elizabeth. "I have received the most astonishing letter," he said with a smile. "It seems I have two daughters on the brink of marriage. I have this from an excellent source," her father said, waving the letter. "Mr. Collins himself congratulates me on the upcoming marriage of Jane to Mr. Bingley and you to Mr. Darcy!"

Elizabeth realized Mr. Collins was the source of Lady Catherine's rumor.

"He warns us that Lady Catherine does not approve," her father continued. "And he scolds us for allowing Lydia to be married."

After all of this, Elizabeth was very surprised when Bingley brought Darcy on the very next visit. Bingley invited Elizabeth and Jane to walk.

Bingley and Jane soon walked well ahead so that they might talk with some privacy. Elizabeth turned to Darcy and said, "I must thank you for your kindness to my poor sister."

"I am sorry you heard of it," Darcy said.

"It was Lydia's thoughtlessness that informed me. You would have the gratitude of the whole family if they knew."

"As much as I respect your family, I thought only of you," he said quietly. "If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged."

"My feelings have changed so much that I barely know them," Lizzy said.

Delight swept over Darcy's solemn face. "When I heard from my aunt, it taught me to hope as I had not dared to hope before. I knew enough of your nature that if you still disliked me, you would have told her," Darcy said.

"Yes, if I could be so horrible to your face," Elizabeth said, laughing, "I would certainly abuse you to all your relatives."

"I deserved what you said of me then," Darcy said. "How I have tortured myself over my words that evening." He hesitated a moment and then said, "Did my letter make you think better of me at all?"

She assured him that it did.

"You taught me a lesson and I am humbled," Darcy said. "You showed me how poor my pride and position were in pleasing a woman worthy of being pleased."

They talked and walked for quite a bit longer, eventually ending up back at the house. Elizabeth discovered they had gotten back considerably after Jane and Bingley.

Elizabeth took Jane to one side and told her of her engagement to Darcy. "This cannot be!" Jane said. "No, no, you are teasing me."

"If you don't believe me then no one will," Elizabeth said. "I am in earnest. Mr. Darcy loves me, and we are engaged."

"But Lizzy," Jane said, "you dislike him."

“Perhaps I did not always love him so well as I do now,” Lizzy said. “But a good memory is not helpful in this situation. This is the last time I shall remember my past feelings.”

“Do you really love him quite well enough?”

“Oh yes,” Elizabeth said, then smiled. “I must confess, I love him better than I do Bingley. I hope you are not angry.”

“Now be serious,” Jane scolded. “You must tell me everything.”

And so Elizabeth did. The secret remained with the sisters until Darcy came the next morning and spoke to Mr. Bennet.

When Darcy finally emerged from the library, he smiled slightly at Elizabeth. Then, she went in to speak with her father.

“Lizzy,” Mr. Bennet said, “are you out of your senses? Have you not always hated this man?”

She assured him of her attachment to Darcy, but she saw the doubt in her father’s eyes.

“Have you any objection to him other than your belief that I do not love him?” she asked.

“None at all,” her father said. “We know him to be proud and unpleasant. But this would be nothing if you really liked him.”

“I do, I do like him,” Elizabeth said with tears in her eyes. “I love him. He has no improper pride. You do not know him as he truly is.”

With this, she told her father what Darcy had done for Lydia. He was quite amazed and happy.

“Well, my dear,” her father said, “I have no more to say. I could not have parted with you, my Lizzy, for anyone unworthy. But if he has your regard, then he has mine. You may go to your Mr. Darcy now.”

Finally Elizabeth had only to tell her mother. Mrs. Bennet went completely still, her eyes wide. Then she began to recover. “Who would have thought it! How rich and great you will be! I am so pleased. What a charming man. I do apologize for ever having disliked him!”

Her father took pains to talk with Darcy and come to know him better. He later confided,

“I admire all three of my sons-in-law highly. Wickham, perhaps, is my favorite, but I think I shall like your husband quite as well as Jane’s.”

Elizabeth soon grew comfortable enough to tease Darcy some. “Whenever did you fall in love with me?” she asked. “We got along so charmingly from the beginning.”

“I was in the middle of loving you before I knew I had begun,” Darcy replied.

“But I treated you terribly,” she said. “Perhaps you were tired of so many well-behaved young women. So we owe our joy to Lady Catherine,



who showed us our true feelings,” she said, smiling. “Will you dare to tell her that we are engaged?”

“Give me a sheet of paper and it will be done directly,” he said.

“I could sit beside you and admire the evenness of your handwriting as another young lady once did,” Elizabeth said. “But I shall take this moment to write to my own aunt.”

So all of the families were told of the pending wedding. Mrs. Bennet was truly happy. Having only two daughters left to marry had an excellent effect on her nerves.

Bingley and Jane soon bought an estate near Derbyshire. Kitty spent as much time as she could with her older sisters. Mary happily stayed at home, and this arrangement worked well for all.

Elizabeth and Georgiana grew as close as two sisters could be, which delighted Mr. Darcy completely.