

Darcy's World



Mark Mason

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Pride and Prejudice Retold from Darcy's Perspective

a novel by

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By Mark Mason

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A Note to the Reader:

Mark Mason's words are in this Calibri typeface.

Jane Austen's words are in this Times New Roman typeface.

Chapter 1

“It is a generally acknowledged truth that a man who has just inherited a substantial fortune must be in want of a house of his own. So, we’d better get going!”

“There is one particular house I want to look at, but I need your opinion—your advice.”

“That was part of our plan. I’ll be glad to be able to oblige you, Bingley,” They walked toward the door of the inn they were staying at in the little town of Meryton in Hertfordshire, about 30 miles north of London. Darcy had a house in London as well as Pemberley, a large estate in Derbyshire about 150 miles north from London, in the center of the country.

“I value your friendship, Darcy—I don’t know what I’d do without it. But weren’t you heading off to visit William Wilberforce today?”

“No, that’s tomorrow, and you’d be welcome to come with me if you’re interested.”

“I certainly admire him for ending the slave trade, but I’m not really up on what he’s doing now—education for the poor, is it not?”

“Yes, prison reform, public health and, as you say, providing some free education for poor children. And it’s free education, for both boys and girls, that I’m working on in the villages and towns around Pemberley. So I want to talk to Wilberforce about that.”

“Maybe when I’m settled I’ll take an interest in public health.”

“Oh, I hope you do! But here, your chase and four is ready.”

They climbed into the carriage, and Bingley called out, "Drive on!"

"It's a perfectly respectable, nice house, Bingley. What is it called again?"

"Netherfield."

"Thank you. And I think it's appropriate to be leasing at this time of your life. You're only three and twenty, and could hardly be sure yet where you want to build or buy."

"True. And I like this house prodigiously!"

"You might find the society a little confined here in the country. The closest town, Meryton, seems a bit of a backwater. But other than that, I don't see any problems."

"Then you'll visit me here?"

"Of course I will. As long as you don't drag me along to too many country dances."

"I think country manners are charming, and I love dances, but of course you can stay home or come to any balls as you please. That's if they even have any here. If they don't, I might host one myself."

"Well, go get it then! I think Netherfield will be perfect for you."

"Thank you, Darcy. I think I'll go into town right now and get the paperwork signed."

"I'll just explore these woods while you do that. I'll see you back at the inn for dinner."

"Indulging your love of botany?"

"Yes. I want to see what grows here, other than country bumpkins!"

That night they had the dining room at the inn to themselves.

"So guess what, Darcy? Mr. Morris invited me, and whomever I want to bring, to a ball in Meryton three weeks from tomorrow. I think I should be moved in by then. And once I'm in I'd like to invite you to visit me. Caroline will be there, and the Hursts."

"I certainly will visit you. And I'll decide about the ball later. It might be rather amusing to take it in, even if I just stay in the background and observe."

"You're such a serious person, Darcy. Interested in, and involved in, so many important things. Just the opposite of me! How did you get like that?"

"When I was just nine years old my mother could see that in me already. She said to me, 'Fitzwilliam, don't be a jack of all trades and a master of none.' And that's exactly what I've become: a jack of all trades. Hopefully I'll become a master of something one day."

"I'd say you were a master of just about everything you set your mind to. But it was a rather witty thing your mother said. I never thought of her as a wit, but then I only met her a couple of times."

"Actually she *was* quite a wit. One of the things she loved doing was to spin wool. She had a very elegant spinning wheel. I asked her once how she came to love spinning so much, and she said with a smile, 'I think I must have been descended from a long line of spinsters!'"

"Ha! She really said that then? That's pretty funny. *You* are rather witty about things—I enjoy that in you. Do you think you got that more from your mother than your father?"

“Oh yes, definitely more from my mother. I admired it in her, and learned it from her. My mother made me realize that women are every bit the equal of men in what matters—it’s just that they don’t have that equality under the law and in access to education. That will change in time—eventually. Meanwhile, I think I should rather have for a wife an intelligent, charming kind of woman who could think for herself, be at least a little witty, even if not so fully as my mother was, and be a true companion for me. But with so many women being held back from their potential by society’s expectations and their lack of opportunities for getting a good education, I know I might find it rather hard to find such a woman. There are quite a few accomplished women around, by accepted standards, but I see very few who are thoughtful in a profound way.”

“Darcy, you may never get married if you hold out for a profound thinker. You might end up being profoundly lonely! For myself, give me a beautiful, amiable woman—that’s all I need. Though I wouldn’t want my wife to be stupid or dull or anything. Being able to be an enjoyable companion *is* important—you are right about that!”

“Good thing for us, then, that there’s no rush for a man to get married, like there is for a woman, since a man may often be quite a bit older than his wife.”

“I hadn’t thought about it like that, but it’s true of course... I think my sister Caroline admires you.”

“I’ve noticed it, too. And I value her very much, like a sister. She’s intelligent, and quite a wit in her own way. But I don’t think I love her. That could change with time, of course.”

“Have you ever loved a woman yet?”

“I don’t think I really have. I think my mother set a standard no woman I’ve met has been able to live up to. I realize I might need to relax that standard, but until now there have been so many interesting things to do with my life that I’ve been happy to postpone any thought of marriage. Who needs marriage when there are adventures to be had?”

Darcy knew, though, that his Aunt Catherine was conspiring to marry him off to someone he had no attraction to at all. The thought of it filled him with revulsion, but he knew he would have to confront this situation in his upcoming visit to Rosings.

Chapter 2

“My dear Mr. Darcy, I’ve been so looking forward to meeting you!”

“As I have you, Mr. Wilberforce. It’s an honor to be invited here.”

“You are very welcome! And this is my wife, Barbara.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Wilberforce. I’ve heard so many things about how you helped your husband in his battle to end the slave trade.”

“Most of them no doubt untrue!” she responded. “What in particular did you hear?”

“Well, about bringing your husband back to health, of course. But the rumor has it that you were always quite the anti-slavery activist yourself.”

“Yes, and that is what isn’t true, of course, though I’ve heard some of those rumors myself.”

“So it’s not true that before you ever met Mr. Wilberforce you belonged to anti-slavery groups, collected signatures for his petition, stopped having sugar in your tea and helped spread the rumor that each lump of sugar contained actual slave blood?”

“Ha! The idea about slave blood in the sugar certainly was around, but I never spread it. I even remember saying to my father that even the tiniest amount of blood would make the sugar pink, and it was so white that it couldn’t possibly have blood in it! Still, I did stop having sugar in my tea, but that was all—no activism, no signature gathering, no meetings. I married the man, not the cause. I should say, though, that I’ve always admired and been proud of the

work Wilbur has done. It's his work, though, not mine, and that's as it should be, for it is a man's work, not a woman's."

"But you do believe that there are certain areas where it is appropriate for women to work, such as in teaching?"

"Oh yes, and I believe a woman should have an education similar to her husband's, or how else shall she be a good companion to him?"

"That is my view, as well, and I hope to be so lucky as to one day find a wife who is intelligent enough, and thoughtful enough, to be a companion I can share my deepest thoughts with."

"Let me just say, about that, that given the superficiality of the education served up to most upper-class women, you are just as likely to find such a woman amongst the ranks of the home educated, as from the graduates of the finest schools for young ladies in the land."

"An interesting observation. I will be sure to remember it. And yes, I have found even the best educated women of my acquaintance to be superficial thinkers, and have blamed it, at least in part, on their indifferent education. My mother, though, was a deep thinker, in spite of her meager education, so I know such women exist, and hope I may one day find one who would wish to be my wife."

"Well good luck with that Mr. Darcy, and now I will leave you to your discussion with my husband, which I believe is about educating the poor?"

"Yes... It has been a pleasure to meet and talk with you, Mrs. Wilberforce!"

"Good-bye Mr. Darcy."

"Good-bye."

“So I hear, Darcy, that you have started a couple of schools for the poor in Derbyshire, where you have your estate?”

“Yes, and I have heard of your work with Hannah More to found such schools, and would like to hear about what approaches have worked for her, and what have not.”

“Well, I will be happy to share whatever I can with you, especially as the stakes are so high. I believe an appropriate education for poor boys and girls is the right thing to do for two main reasons. Firstly, it will make them more productive workers, so they can earn more and get out of the poverty that is plaguing them. Secondly, and most importantly, this lifting of the poor out of poverty is the best thing we can do to prevent revolution in this country. And the threat of revolution is very real.”

“I agree with you about that! And who can blame starving people for thinking of revolution? I believe I would myself if I were in their situation. When told the poor could not afford bread, Marie Antoinette is quoted as saying, ‘Let them eat cake,’ and her insensitivity supposedly helped bring on the French Revolution. Our own prime minister, Mr. Pitt, recommended that the poor should eat meat if they couldn’t afford bread—which is hardly less insensitive!”

“Yes! Pitt was my lifelong friend, but that was certainly an unfortunate remark. But, to get back to education, the first principle of educating the poor must be to give them the knowledge they need to be more productive workers and to be able to keep themselves healthier by practicing good hygiene. To achieve this end they need to be able to read, follow simple accounts, and do basic arithmetic in their heads. They then need to practice their reading with

books on productive farming and good health and hygiene, as well as reading the Bible to give them a moral compass and help them feel happy with their place in the world.”

“Which is an important place,” Darcy chipped in. “Every level of society from farm laborers up to the highest gentry is equally important in the grand scheme of things. Without those who labor on farms, how would we get our food? And because of that the ‘sleep of the laborer’ should be ‘sweet,’ and not be ruined by hunger, poverty and perpetual illness. Of course it is equally important that the gentry do their job of thinking out and putting into place a better world for everyone. It is vital that there is a gentry class for this purpose, but it is scandalous that so many of the gentry forsake their duty and just waste their time hunting foxes, playing cards and digging their graves with their teeth.”

“Yes, of course, the gentry should fulfill their duty of leadership, as you say. And so many do not. Which is why I am glad to be talking to you. Those of us who understand our duty need to work together.”

“Exactly.”

“Which brings me to the second principle of educating the poor—that we not educate them too much and get them thinking and acting beyond their station in life.”

“So where do you draw the line?”

“Hannah More and I have discussed this and have determined that we should teach poor children how to read, but not how to write. In this way they can learn the things they need to know, but will not be able to write politically subversive tracts calling for revolution.”

“I have to admit that in my schools we teach writing as well as reading, so farmers and tradesmen can write

business letters, do their accounts and have the joy of writing to family and friends who have moved away.”

“I believe that is highly risky, but it will be interesting to see what comes of it,” Wilberforce responded. “One could see it as an experiment in sociology and education.”

“Yes, I think so!... One other thing, though. How does Hannah get poor children to attend her Sunday schools when they are so busy working on their farms, and might prefer a day of rest on Sundays?”

“That’s a very good question! We certainly can’t compel them to attend. And many don’t. What Hannah has found to work is to make lessons entertaining and varied, often using singing to restore students’ energy and attention. She has also found that you can get the best out of children if their affections are ‘engaged by kindness.’ She believes terror does not work in the classroom, though this is not because she believes children are innocent beings. Rather she believes they are beings of ‘a corrupt nature and evil dispositions’ who need to be gently but firmly reformed. Although I have mixed feelings about it, she even uses a little ‘bribery’ to get children’s cooperation. I have this tract of hers in my pocket. Let me get it out and read a part of it to you, on this point... She says: ‘I encourage them by little bribes of a penny a chapter to get by heart certain fundamental parts of Scripture... Those who attend four Sundays without intermission receive a penny. Once in every six to eight weeks I give a little gingerbread. Once a year I distribute little books according to merit. Those who deserve most get a Bible.’”

“Very interesting. Our experience in Derbyshire,” said Darcy, “has certainly been that kindness engages children.

One of my teachers says that 'Children don't care what you know until they know that you care.'"

Chapter 3

“I’m very glad to see you Darcy, even though you are only staying three days,” said Lady Catherine. “Why don’t you consider staying three weeks instead? The weather is so lovely in Kent, and Rosings Park, that I know you love riding around, is in full bloom.”

“My friend Bingley is taking a house in Hertfordshire, and has invited me to visit him when he moves in. And I have business in London before that.”

“And who is Bingley?”

“A childhood friend of mine, though he is quite a bit younger than me, only three and twenty. His father recently died and he inherited a fortune of one hundred thousand pounds. His father never established an estate. On my advice he is renting the house of Netherfield to see if he likes the area before actually buying a property.”

“Is this house worthy for you to be staying in? How many windows does it have? How big is its park?”

“Well, not as big as Rosings or Pemberley, to be sure. But definitely a gentleman’s estate.”

“We have to be careful, you know—families like ours—to keep up appearances, and preserve our superiority and wealth. That is why your mother and I made a pact, when Anne was born, that you and her should marry and unite our houses. The stronger the aristocracy is the better it is for every class who is dependent on their judgement and help, and together our houses would be formidable.”

Darcy had never heard his mother mention this pact, it was only ever Lady Catherine who, since his mother’s passing, had talked of it. No doubt his mother had said

something, perhaps along the lines of, 'Maybe our children will one day fall in love with each other and get married?' Rather, his mother had told him that he should choose a wife on the basis of her character, intelligence and amiability, and on his being in love with her. She had said that many poorer people amongst the gentry had a pressing need to marry for money, but that he would be wealthy enough not to have to consider it. 'Young Mr. Darcy,' she had said, 'You should marry for love.' He hadn't yet shared this advice of his mother's with his aunt, Lady Catherine, and probably never would. Instead he said:

"My dear aunt, I am far from being ready to marry yet. There are so many things I am involved in that occupy all my time. And I haven't fallen in love with any lady yet, including my cousin Anne. In time that could change of course, but for the time being..."

"Yes yes yes, I know! Just spend some time with Anne on this visit. She's rather lonely. But she's a young lady of sterling qualities and considerable charm, even if she is a little frail and sickly. If you just spend some time with her, I know she'll grow on you."

"And that I will be happy to do, madam." He agreed with her assessment of Anne being sickly, but not so much 'frail and sickly' but rather 'sickly, sour and cross' much of the time. But he also saw it as a family duty to try and cajole Anne into having a happier, kinder disposition and outlook on life. She had modeled herself too much on her mother, without having the energy and vivacity that was her mother's saving grace on many occasions.

So the next morning he rode out with Miss De Bourgh in her phaeton, as she visited the poor and handed out small amounts of money to them according not so much to their need, but rather to their virtue as determined by Lady Catherine. And that virtue consisted of a willingness to follow Lady Catherine's advice on all things.

"It's a beautiful day for a ride, don't you think, Anne?"

"Actually, Mr. Darcy, I think it is rather too hot. But not impossibly so, and we have our duty to the poor to attend to."

"Well, I am really enjoying the day."

"There's not much I enjoy. I do my duty and get some satisfaction from it. And I do get some pleasure from driving my phaeton—*that's* the greatest joy in my life."

"The flowers in the meadow look so happy. Stop for a moment. I'll gather you a bunch."

"All right."

Darcy jumped down, and picked a bunch of daisies, and climbed up and gave them to her.

"You're the first person to give me flowers. That's supposed to be a romantic thing!"

"With me it's not romantic. I just wanted you to enjoy them."

"And I do enjoy them, thank you. I'll just put them on the seat between us until we get back. Then I'll get my maid to put them in a vase."

"I'm glad you like them. It makes me happy to see you smile."

"Mother talks about how she and your mother planned for us to marry—that we were engaged in our infancy. What do you think about that?"

“Yes, Lady Catherine has spoken about that to me, too, but I don’t know about it. I kind of think it is taking away our choice in the matter—yours as well as mine. And I don’t feel like marrying anyone at the moment, although I may feel differently in the future.

“I’m a bit scared of it, too. Maybe I’ll feel differently in the future, as well.”

“When you meet the right person, I think you’ll stop being scared of it.”

“I think marriage is like every other part of life. You do it because it’s your duty. Then you have the agony of bearing children because it’s your duty. Enjoying it isn’t the point. You do your duty and then you die—quite possibly in childbirth. If I could choose, I think I’d have a marriage without children. Why would you want to bring them into this God-forsaken world anyway—they’d be better off staying up in heaven, or wherever they are before they become a baby. I wish I’d been left up there. It would have to have been better than being born into a sickly body like mine. I can’t play the pianoforte, because I’m not energetic enough to do it well, and one has to do it well. I can’t even go to balls, for the same reason. I never learned the steps to all the dances, because, as my mother pointed out, it’s better not to do it at all than to not excel at it.”

“Yes, as your mother says about not playing herself: ‘If ever I’d learned, I would have been a great proficient.’ Anne, I think your mother is wrong about this excelling thing. You could learn to play the pianoforte a little, and really enjoy it. You don’t need to play for others. You could just play for yourself.”

“Do you think so?” Darcy nodded. Tears came to her eyes. “I think I could get some happiness from that, even if I played really badly.”

“Just tell your mother you want to learn so you can play for your own enjoyment, that you don’t even want to be very good at it.”

“I’ll think about that.”

Meanwhile, they had arrived at the village where the housewives came out to greet her when she stopped outside their homes. She discussed their problems with them, and gave them advice and some coins to help them live on the unlivable wages their husbands earned. Some houses were passed by, however, their occupants being deemed ‘unworthy,’ mainly, Anne explained, because they hadn’t followed ‘the advice that Lady Catherine, in her great condescension, had offered them.’

Darcy knew it would be a hopeless task to question with Anne the wisdom of punishing the ‘unworthy’ who wished to figure out their own way in life, for he knew she was as set in this being part of the role of the aristocracy as her mother was. Instead he noted the houses passed by and determined to visit these people when out riding the next morning, and quietly give them some practical help, and offer a suggestion on how to get on the right side of Lady Catherine—in short to thank her for her advice and follow it where possible, and where this would involve too great a hardship, to at least appear to be following it. He was pretty sure that was what most of the ‘worthy’ were doing anyway, since people rarely appreciate unsolicited advice on how to run their lives.

Chapter 4

After spending a few days at his London house, taking care of business, Darcy drove off with Bingley to visit his friend's new house in Hertfordshire. The stress of the disfunction Darcy had found at Rosings, especially as it related to himself, was on his mind, clouding his days and nights. The concept of his being engaged at birth to his cousin Anne was preposterous, but how to get disentangled from it was much occupying his thoughts. The only thing he could think of at the moment was to put all thought of marrying out of his mind. Women were just a bother! And he had so much else to do that was more interesting. It crossed his mind that, being sickly, maybe Anne would conveniently die within a few years... He immediately checked this line of thought, however, as being unworthy of him, and reminded himself that he really could marry whomever he wanted. He was an independent gentleman, after all! Then there was Miss Bingley—Caroline—who since they had arrived at Netherfield had been plying him with banter that tried to be eloquent and witty but didn't quite succeed, to his ear, in being either. For now he couldn't give a damn for any woman. He was going to enjoy being a bachelor, and maybe he would die a bachelor!

He was still in this frame of mind when Bingley reminded him that the ball at Meryton was that very night, and just a few hours off, so he might want to start getting ready if he wished to go.

"I'm really not in a mood where I'll much enjoy it, but I'll come, anyway, and observe something of this society you have moved into. I can't see myself dancing much, though.

I'll be happy to stand up with your sisters, but I can't promise more than that."

"Very well, though I'm sure you'll get into the spirit of it once you are there."

Darcy arrived at the ball with the four others in his party: Bingley, Caroline, and Mr. and Mrs. Hurst. More eyes were upon him than he would have wished, since he wanted to be there more to observe than participate. It made him feel uncomfortable, and he wished he'd declined to come. Still, now he was here he couldn't just leave, so he decided to try to make it clear to all that his mind was elsewhere by appearing to be a little absent minded. He danced once with Mrs. Hurst and once with Caroline, but declined to be introduced to any other lady. He was happy to just walk around the room and occasionally talk to one of his own party and even more occasionally answer questions from people he didn't know, when he couldn't avoid it. He didn't feel up to making new friends at the moment, and didn't want to impose his current less than fully happy humor on anyone he didn't know—they could do better with others, as there was plenty of noise and rollicking behavior to go around. He would just wait it out, and spend his time observing human nature. He noticed Bingley danced every dance, and good for him, especially since he danced quite a few of them with the most beautiful woman in the room. At one point, Bingley came from the dance to talk to him for a moment.

"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 the them, you see, uncommonly pretty."

"*You* are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room," said 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 did go back to his partner, the most beautiful girl in the room, and a moment later Darcy realized, with a chill, that the younger Miss Bennet must have heard everything he had said about her, and was probably, quite rightly, feeling offended. He felt, however, that he had better not risk adding insult to injury by trying to stumble an apology, and walked away, berating himself for not being better aware of his surroundings before opening his mouth.

Later in the evening, just before the close, when he spoke to Bingley again, Darcy asked:

“What is the name of the girl you earlier suggested I dance with—the sister of your frequent partner?”

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet. Don’t tell me! You now think her a little bit more than just tolerable?”

“You could say that. Now I have had a chance to observe her for a while, I actually think she is quite pretty, and in a rather sophisticated way. It wouldn’t surprise me to find her to be uncommonly intelligent.”

“So you regret not asking her to dance?”

“Yes. But I regret even more what I said about her to you earlier, as I’m next to certain she overheard what I said, and I am sure she must have been offended.”

“Dance with her at the next ball, Darcy, and keep being nice to her, and you’ll win her over in the end. As my mother used to say to me, ‘faint heart ne’er won fair lady.’”

“I can see by your actions tonight that you took what your mother said to heart! But with regard to Miss Elizabeth Bennet, I don’t know whether I’m *that* interested in her, Bingley. She’s not of our class, at all. But I do wish I’d been nicer to her, and been gracious enough to ask her to dance.”

Chapter 5

Darcy kept thinking of Elizabeth on the way home and as he lay in bed before sleeping—perversely, he told himself, since she was impossibly below his class. It occurred to him, in an unguarded moment, that she might just be the intelligent, witty, deep-thinking woman he held up as an ideal. But he didn't know, of course, since he hadn't had a chance to talk to her yet. He was just judging from the alert, intelligent look on her face and her lively but well-bred manner.

Over the next few days the Miss Bennets and their mother waited on the ladies at Netherfield, the visit was returned, and the elder Miss Bennets, Jane and Elizabeth, again visited Netherfield. Darcy was out with Bingley on these occasions, but he heard a detailed report of the visits from Caroline. 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.

"So, would you say they are both well-educated, well-spoken, somewhat accomplished women?" Darcy asked.

"Somewhat, as you say...hardly really accomplished, I would guess, but interesting enough to be worth knowing," Caroline responded. "Miss Elizabeth Bennet apparently plays and sings, but I haven't heard her yet. The strange thing is that these two elder sisters are so relatively refined and well-mannered when their mother and younger sisters are so insufferably crude."

"They must have followed their father's example; I hear he is a gentleman, though one of rather modest means. And

even his small estate is entailed away from his daughters, leaving them effectively penniless.”

“The world is full of well-educated, pretty, penniless young ladies. Most of them are destined to become governesses or worse. It’s just the way the world is. Money is everything in our society.”

“Yes, apparently it is; whether it should be is another matter altogether.”

Darcy’s next opportunity to observe Elizabeth was at a large party at Sir William Lucas’s house, a few days later. He started by attending to her conversations with others, observer of human nature as he was. On his approaching her closer, Elizabeth turned to him and said:

“Did you not 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 any body and every body! 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 very fine old saying, which every body here is of course familiar with—

‘Keep your breath to cool your porridge,’—and I shall keep mine to swell my song.”

Darcy found her performance pleasing, if not technically brilliant, and would like to have heard more than the two songs she sang. One of her younger sisters eagerly took over the instrument, but her performance grated on Darcy’s ear, as it had neither genius nor taste, and had a pedantic air and a conceited manner, which would have ruined a higher degree of excellence than she had reached. Elizabeth, easy and unaffected, had been a much greater pleasure to listen to, though, technically, she didn’t play as well. This younger sister, 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.

Darcy stood near them in silence, feeling indignation at such a way of passing an evening, that made conversation difficult. Engrossed in his own thoughts, he didn’t notice that Sir William Lucas was by his side until he said:

“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 I never pay to any place if I can avoid it.”

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

Mr. Darcy bowed.

“I had 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 instance 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 you not 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 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 this 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 favorite? 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 shall always be 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 6

Bingley, Darcy and Mr. Hurst had no sooner returned to the house early one evening, after dining with officers in Meryton, than they were accosted by the two ladies:

“Who do you think is upstairs, sick in bed?” cried Mrs. Hurst.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Darcy. “The game keeper’s dog?”

“Don’t be so silly, Mr. Darcy!”

“Mr. Darcy is always silly,” said Caroline, with a smirk.

“Oh, I don’t know then. Who?” Darcy asked.

“Miss Bennet!” Mrs. Hurst revealed, with a conspiratorial air.

“Miss Jane Bennet?” inquired Bingley.

“Indeed.”

“What’s the matter with her? Is she all right?” Bingley was all anxiety.

“Just a cold,” Caroline offered, “But rather a severe one, I think.”

“How did she come to be here?—especially with a cold?”

“We invited her, Mr. Darcy, to dine with us,” Caroline explained, “Since you were all off eating with the officers. Such a long *tete-a-tete* between us two must certainly have ended in a quarrel. We had to have her over.”

“And she grew ill while she was here?”

“Not surprisingly,” Mrs. Hurst said, “Considering she came over on horseback, and was soaked to the skin. We gave her dry clothes, as she is about my size, but the damage was done.”

"Can you imagine her family not providing their carriage for her," said Caroline, "on a day of certain rain? She said the horses were needed on the farm!"

"And you don't believe that?" asked Darcy.

"No, she hardly seemed to believe herself that they were *really* needed on the farm. You could tell by the way she said it. You could see right through her! I think it was a plan by her mother to have her stay the night so she would still be here when my brother returned."

"In which case," replied Darcy, "It would seem like her plan worked rather well. I don't suppose we can send her home tonight."

"Not at all. She is far too sick for that. She might be here for a few days."

"I must go up and say hello and wish her well," said Bingley, turning to go up the stairs."

"I'll join you," Darcy added. "Will you come with us, Caroline, and ask her whether she is feeling well enough to see us?"

"Of course."

On receiving assurances through Caroline that they would be welcome, the two gentlemen came in to see Jane.

"I was so distressed to hear you were sick!" Bingley said. "Are you feeling comfortable?"

"I have been made to feel as comfortable as possible. Thank you for your kind enquiry."

"I'll send directly for the apothecary to attend to you."

"No, don't worry him this evening. If I'm worse tomorrow morning that will be soon enough to call him—and I have every intention of getting better."

“Well, we’ll leave you now and let you rest. I’m glad you are here, though I wish you were well. You soon will be, I am sure.”

“Take care of yourself, Miss Bennet,” said Darcy, “We hope to see you much better tomorrow after a good night’s sleep.”

“Thank you Mr. Darcy. And thank you Mr. Bingley! I feel so well looked after. Good night.”

Next morning, however, saw Jane somewhat worse—more in the grip of the cold. The apothecary was called for and Jane wrote a note to Lizzy, which was taken to Longbourn by a servant. About two hours later, Elizabeth arrived at Netherfield with dirty stockings, mud on the hem of her dress and a healthy glow on her face from the exercise of walking there.

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 Darcy 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.

Elizabeth’s inquiries 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 seemed glad to be taken to her immediately.

Caroline showed her upstairs, and spent much of the morning and early afternoon helping Elizabeth attend to Jane. Bingley went out straight away to call in Mr. Jones, the apothecary, and briefly said hello to Jane when he showed Jones into her room. He could see she was still certainly not well. On returning downstairs after the consultation, Jones told them she had caught a violent cold and that they must endeavor to get the better of it. He promised to return later in the day with some draughts for her. And that is all the group downstairs knew about Jane's situation until Caroline came down, just after three in the afternoon.

"What's the news?" asked Darcy.

"Can I go up and see her again?" asked Bingley.

"Just after the clock struck three, Elizabeth announced that she had better be on her way home. I offered her our carriage, which she refused at first but accepted after a little pressing. But it would not do. Jane expressed so much concern in parting with her that I felt I had to convert the offer of the chaise to an invitation to remain at Netherfield for the present. Elizabeth seemed most thankful for the offer. So here we are, inconvenienced by them both, but doing our duty. I said I would send a servant over to Longbourn to inform the family of their stay and bring back clothes for them both."

"I will organize that, my dear sister," said Bingley, turning to leave the room.

"I think you did very well to invite Miss Elizabeth Bennet to stay," added Darcy. "Nothing could be more healing for Miss Bennet than the tender solicitations of her sister."

Darcy also looked forward to the inevitability of some interaction with Elizabeth.

Chapter 7

At five o'clock the two ladies retired to dress, and at half-past six Elizabeth was summoned to dinner. As soon as she appeared she was overwhelmed with expressions of concern for, and questions about, the state of health of her sister. Darcy could see it was difficult enough for her to answer all the questions without adding his, so remained silent.

"We have been worried about poor Jane all afternoon. Is she any better?" asked Mrs. Hurst, to which Caroline added, "Have you been moistening her brow with the damp cloths I sent up?"

"No, I don't think she is much better yet, but I would not have expected such a rapid recovery."

"Of course not," said Bingley, "But is she comfortable, at least? I hate the thought of her suffering. And I'm glad you are here to cheer her up."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Bingley! I think she is in a good state of mind. She knows it will take time to get well."

"A bad cold is a shocking thing," Caroline said. "I excessively dislike being ill myself."

"As do I," added Mrs. Hurst. "There is nothing I detest more than a cold."

Dinner continued on like this. At one point when Darcy could extract himself from the attention of Miss Bingley, and was able to catch Elizabeth's eye, he said to her:

"Miss Elizabeth Bennet, I hope you have a pleasant stay here. If there is anything you need, and I happen to be the one who is nearby, please feel free to ask me for it."

"Thank you, Mr. Darcy," she replied. "You are kind."

When dinner was over, Elizabeth returned to Jane, and Darcy was appalled to find Miss Bingley beginning to abuse her

as soon as she had left the room. Elizabeth's manners were pronounced to be very bad indeed, a mixture of pride and impertinence; she had no conversation, no style, 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 returned 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. On entering the drawing-room she found the whole party at loo, and was immediately invited to join them; but evidently 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 be soon increased by seeing her quite well.” Elizabeth thanked him, in what seemed to Darcy to be a very heartfelt way, and then walked towards the table where a few books were lying. Bingley 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 with 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 anyone 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 not 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.

“Elizabeth 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 a 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 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 attention might be paid to the sick lady and her sister.

To Darcy, the observer of nature and human nature, this day had revealed much about the character of those about him. Overall, he had been well impressed with Elizabeth, and with his friend Bingley, but the best he could think about the other three of his party is that they had shown their true colors.

Chapter 8

“My dear Mr. Darcy,” said Miss Bingley as she entered the breakfast parlor, “I have some news for you!”

“And what is that? Whatever it is seems to greatly amuse you, and I get the feeling that you don’t think it will be quite as amusing to me.”

“Mr. Darcy, you are quite the cynic these days. But to the news...Miss Elizabeth Bennet, while reporting a slight improvement in her sister’s condition, has asked if she could send a note to Longbourn requesting that her mother visit Jane to make her own judgement about the situation. I could hardly refuse such a reasonable request, so we can expect a visit from Mrs. Bennet this morning—no doubt accompanied by her youngest and silliest daughters.”

“Well, thank you for warning me. Not that it will do me much good. I’ll have to endure their silliness. You, on the other hand, will delight in my distress and have great pleasure from it, before, during and after the visit, at my expense.”

“You must want a taste, beforehand, of what it will be like having her visit you at Pemberley five or six times a year for the rest of her life? Will one pair of *fine eyes* be worth that?”

Darcy decided to just ignore this last comment of Caroline’s, and go back to eating his breakfast.

Mrs. Bennet, accompanied by her two youngest girls, just as predicted by Miss Bingley, 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 will 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 have 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 the 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 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 a 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 it not, 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, Mamma, 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 the 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 eyes 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 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 man 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 visibly tremble, Darcy could see, no doubt lest her mother should be exposing herself again. She looked

like 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 attention 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 when 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*.

“I liked the way she came to my defense with the truth about what I was saying,” said Darcy, “when her mother misconstrued what I had said. It showed a fairness and a *fine* understanding on her part. She was also obviously highly embarrassed by her mother’s rude manners, and twice changed the subject on her to mitigate their effect.”

Chapter 9

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 seemed 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.

“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 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, wondering how he could extricate himself from the conversation so he could finish the letter, then perhaps have some back and forth with Elizabeth.

“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 prized much 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 upon 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 anyone 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 believe 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.”

Darcy was glad to have drawn Elizabeth into the conversation, and paused to consider her point.

“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 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 intentions 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."

Darcy smiled but was a little offended. He felt Elizabeth could sense his hurt because she 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 Darcy. "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."

Darcy took her advice, and did finish his letter.

When that business was over, he applied to Miss Bingley and Elizabeth for an indulgence of some music. Miss Bingley moved with some 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, Darcy's eyes were, for a while, fixed on Elizabeth, who was turning over some music-books that lay on the instrument. He soon sensed, however, that she was aware of his attention, and was rather taken aback by his admiration of her. He turned his eyes away. He did not sense that she at all admired him. This was most likely due to her overhearing him describe her as 'tolerable' at that recent dance; she was a woman of some pride. If she were from a sufficiently higher class than she was, that would permit of her being the object of his affection, he might have been more annoyed at himself for getting off to a bad start with her. As it was, however, it was good that she had little warmth of regard for him, as it would enable him to enjoy her company and witty conversation for at least a while without having her fall in love with him. And this was important to him, as the last thing he wanted to do was hurt her feelings by not being able, due to his position in society, to return her love.

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, who had clearly tried to affront him, seemed 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 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 Phillips 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 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 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, leaving Darcy feeling a great sense of loss at her departure.

Chapter 10

When the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing room after dinner, they saw that Jane was well enough to be there with them.

“Miss Bennet,” said Mr. Darcy, “Congratulations on recovering enough to be down with us. It is a pleasure to see you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Darcy. I *am* feeling much better.”

“I am very glad.” Mr. Hurst bowed.

“My dear Miss Bennet,” smiled Bingley, “I am so delighted to see you here! I never expected to see you so recovered so soon, though I hoped for it. You have made my day!”

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Bingley! I don’t think I’m totally well yet, but I am much improved.”

“We don’t want you to get cold in here. I am going directly to pile up the fire, and once I’ve done so, we must have you move to the other side of the fireplace, further away from the door, so you don’t catch the draught from it.” Once all this was done, he sat down by her, and talked scarcely to any one else.

Darcy noticed that Elizabeth, at needle work in the corner, but carefully observing what was going on, seemed delighted at all the attention being paid to Jane. He could see there was a strong affection between the two sisters.

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 inquiry, 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 seemed surprised, Darcy thought, but agreed to it immediately. Miss Bingley succeeded no less in the real object of her civility; Mr. Darcy looked up again. He was as much awake to the novelty of attention in that quarter as Elizabeth 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.” Darcy’s eyes sparkled, as if to disown such a preposterous statement, but say that this was what some people may think.

“*That* is a failing indeed!” cried Elizabeth with mirth, catching the sparkle in his eyes. “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 a propensity to hate every body.”

“And yours,” he replied, matching her 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 11

“Well, Mr. Darcy,” Caroline started, “The Miss Bennets asked to borrow Bingley’s carriage today to take them home. I, of course, out of concern for Jane, insisted they stay at least till the morrow. Now I’m sorry I proposed the delay, for they accepted it, and I have to put up with Elizabeth’s smug pertness for another day.”

Mr. Darcy said not a word to this, but it was, to him, 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 the next day when the Miss Bennets left, Darcy did not even go down to see them off. He left that to the Bingleys. He was reading a book on the natural philosophy of the heavens, sometimes referred to in the modern way as astronomy, and was engrossed. He planned to have built a rather large telescope at Pemberley for viewing the heavens, housed in an attractive dome. It would be used for his own pursuit of knowledge of the heavens, for the use of other scholars who could not afford their own telescope

and as an adjunct to the education he offered in his schools. He would travel to London the next day, for a few days, to talk to the astronomers and telescope makers at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich.

On returning from this trip to London, he joined Bingley one morning on a ride to Longbourn to enquire after Jane. On riding through Meryton, they saw the Miss Bennets and rode over to address them.

“We were just on our way to Longbourn to enquire after you,” Bingley said to Jane. 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 a most unwelcome sight. It was Mr. Wickham, who had apparently just been introduced to the Miss Bennets. What foul luck to run into him of all people, and for him to be acquainted with Elizabeth! He would no doubt spread around all sorts of lies about him, which since he had such charming ways, would quite possibly be believed. He felt his anger rise, and was sure his face was flushed. Wickham touched his hat to him, and he briefly returned the salutation before turning away. He began, slowly, to ride off, and within a minute Bingley rode on with him, not being aware, since he had never actually met him, that this was Wickham, the very Wickham who had caused him so much trouble in his life. After riding a suitable distance from the group, Darcy said to Bingley:

“That stranger, as he must have been to you, was George Wickham. You know, the same Wickham I grew up with and have had so much difficulty with in recent years.”

“My God, Darcy, what lousy luck to run into him here, of all places in England!”

“Indeed. And, of course, he’ll be spreading around lies about me. Fortunately, it will only be a matter of time before people experience his treacherous ways, and learn to be wary of him, and what he says.”

Still, in the time being, he found he could not bear the thought that Elizabeth Bennet might think ill of him as a result of what Wickham might say to her. This in turn made him realize how much this woman, who was so deeply below his station in life, had come to mean to him. He saw her as a *model* of the sort of woman, from his own class, whom he would like to marry. And he hoped to be her friend, always. Certainly, he had got off to a bad start with her by wounding her pride at the ball. She had been retaliating for that, as was her due, by being critical of him in a light-hearted, witty kind of way which he greatly enjoyed. It also kept an emotional distance between them which no doubt she, as well as him, could see was advisable due to their difference in station in life. It was only because she was emotionally unaffected that he could continue to enjoy some banter with her, and she must likewise see that there could be no chance of a romance with him, and didn’t seem at all unhappy about it.

There was a similar situation with Bingley and Elizabeth’s sister, Jane. Bingley was having a fine time with her, but at the same time did not seem especially attached to her, and she, like Elizabeth appeared not to assume there could be a romance between them. Anyone could see this by observing Jane’s serene detachment, at the same time as she was obviously enjoying the compliment of Bingley’s

attentions. She was clearly in no danger of losing her heart to Bingley. Propriety and class distinction would be maintained in both situations, as it should be. Nevertheless, he still couldn't abide the thought that Elizabeth might be thinking badly of him. But what could he do? Only realize that Wickham would soon reveal his true colors, and that Elizabeth would then discount his slanders and see *himself* as the honest, respectable, person he was.

Chapter 12

It was the evening of Bingley's ball at Netherfield, and Darcy waited and watched as the guests arrived, fearful of how he would deal with the presence of Wickham. He had agreed with Bingley that they couldn't invite all the other officers to the ball, but exclude Wickham. But as the officers arrived, it soon became clear that Wickham had stayed away. He even overheard an officer telling Elizabeth that Wickham sent his apologies for not being there—that he had business in London that prevented his attending. This was pleasing news to Darcy, and he gave Wickham credit for making a wise and selfless decision on this occasion.

So far he had at first declined to dance with Elizabeth, and she had the second and third time declined to dance with him. Much as he didn't want to encourage her in any romantic way, he felt it was incumbent upon him to offer to dance with her another time to put behind them the slightly hurt feelings of the previous three occasions. As a result, after he had sat out the first two sets of two dances, he walked over to Elizabeth and said:

"Will you do me the honor of dancing the next two dances with me?" She looked somewhat startled and embarrassed by his request, but, after a slight delay, accepted with thanks. To relieve her embarrassment, and especially as she was conversing with a friend, Darcy turned and left immediately, since the dancing would not resume for a few minutes. When the dancing commenced again, he returned to claim her hand. He could see as he approached that her young lady friend was whispering something in her ear. He wondered what it could be. He only heard the last

few words, "a man of ten times his consequence." They didn't tell him very much.

On joining the set, everyone seemed to look at him and Elizabeth with some amazement. This had happened to him before, and was one of the reasons why he didn't much like to dance. He suspected the reason was that seeing him actually stand up to dance, especially with someone outside his own party, was a wonder to behold, as he so rarely did so. It seemed to him that most people were far too interested in other people's affairs.

After dancing for some time without talking, Elizabeth said:

"Are you enjoying the dance? It is one of my favorites."

"Yes, I am enjoying it."

After a few more minutes she again broke the silence, 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 eclat 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, evidently unable to resist the temptation, added, “When you met us there the other day, we had just been forming a new acquaintance.”

Darcy knew, of course, whom she was talking about, and it was painful to be reminded of him. Initially he said not a word, and Elizabeth said nothing either. 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 struck him forcibly, and his eyes were directed with a very serious expression towards Bingley and Jane, who were dancing together. He could now see, for the first time, how smitten his friend Bingley was with Jane, and how people were noticing it and speculating about their imminent union. This would not do at all! Recovering himself, however, 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.

“Yes, always,” she replied, seeming a little lost in her thoughts. Then, a minute or so later she suddenly came out with, “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, evidently 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 to 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 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 tolerable powerful feeling towards her, which soon procured her pardon, and directed all his anger against another.

Darcy sat down, and some minutes later a man came up to him whom he recognized as having danced the first two dances with Elizabeth, during which he had shown himself to be very clumsy on his feet, to Elizabeth's obvious chagrin. Bowing down very low, he rose and said:

"Excuse me for bothering you, Mr. Darcy. I have just made an amazing discovery—that you are the nephew of my highly esteemed patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Please accept my apology for not having paid my respects to you earlier, but I have just become aware of the connection. I am pleased to be able to report to you that her ladyship was quite well yesterday se'nnight when I last saw her."

Thank you," Darcy replied. "And what is your name, sir? And your connection to my aunt?"

"Mr. Collins, sir. My name is Mr. Collins. I am the rector at the church at Hunsford, the living most generously bestowed by her ladyship, your aunt. I am most obliged to her for her infinite condescension in being my patroness in this position and taking a personal interest in my well-being, and even in condescending to invite me to dine with her at Rosings on more than one occasion. My parsonage at Hunsford is separated just by a lane way from the fence of Rosings Park."

"I am well convinced of Lady Catherine's discernment. I know she could never bestow such a favour unworthily. What brings you here, so far from Kent?"

"I am visiting my uncle, Mr. Bennet, and his five fine daughters, my cousins, who live near here."

“Oh yes, I have met the two eldest.” Then a thought occurred to Darcy. “Mr. Collins, you must be the relative the Bennet’s estate is entailed away to.”

“Yes, you are quite right, sir. Which is why I am prevailing upon their hospitality and visiting them. I hope to keep the estate in their family as well as inheriting it myself one day, by seeking the hand in marriage of one of my fair cousins.”

Since Mr. Collins had danced the first two dances with Elizabeth, Darcy drew the conclusion that it was toward her that he was directing his attentions. Poor Elizabeth! She may feel obliged to accept his offer to keep her sisters out of poverty once their father died. She could not possibly, however, welcome an alliance with such an obsequious, silly man. Though in station of life Mr. Collins was right for her, being intelligent and charming herself meant she deserved much better, and he hoped she would refuse him. To Mr. Collins he said:

“That is a thoughtful and considerate intention. I hope it is well received.” He then nodded to him and turned and walked away.

When they sat down to supper a little later, Darcy found himself seated across the table from Mrs. Bennet and Lady Lucas. Elizabeth, seated next to her mother, looked so embarrassed she was almost distressed, and when Mrs. Bennet started talking to Lady Lucas, he could see why—it was out of a fear of what her mother might say, and did say. Though the table was wide, and piled high with food dishes and jugs of wine and other drinks, he could clearly hear the whole conversation.

Mrs. Bennet was soon talking to Lady Lucas freely, openly, and of nothing else but her expectation that Jane would soon be married to Mr. Bingley. It was evidently an animating subject for her, 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-congratulation; 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. Darcy thought this would be very funny if it wasn't so alarming. He could imagine the scathing comment Caroline would make on it. Returning to Mrs. Bennet's monologue, however, Darcy heard that this alliance would be 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. 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.

Darcy saw in this speech of Elizabeth's mother a perfect illustration of why there should be a clear demarcation between people of different stations in life, and why, in matters of love and marriage, people should unequivocally adhere to their own station. His friend Bingley had been showing too much love and admiration for Jane, and while Jane herself, and her sister Elizabeth, did not appear to presume something could come of this, people such as Sir William Lucas and Mrs. Bennet were embarking on the most outrageous fortune hunting expeditions. It would have to be

nipped in the bud before it became an even more serious situation.

Darcy noticed that 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, as "Mr. Darcy might overhear us," 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 at him, Darcy noticed. He reflected to himself: 'What a mother-in-law she would be!' Caroline was right about that.

As if the Bennet family had not put on enough of a show of mediocrity already, within a few minutes, the most studious looking daughter, Darcy still knew not her name, though he had heard her perform before, went up to the pianoforte and started playing and singing in a pedantic and noticeably discordant way—her high notes, especially, were sung too low. Toward the end of the agonizingly long song, Darcy noticed Elizabeth glancing at her father in an apparent entreaty to do something about the situation. Then when she was finished, and placing the music on the stand for another song, Mr. Bennet went up to her and said:

"That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young ladies have time to exhibit."

As the Bennet girl departed the instrument, Darcy overheard Mr. Collins saying to everyone in general:

“If I 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.”

After concluding this speech, which had been spoken so loud as to be heard by half the room, he bowed to Mr. Darcy. There were many stares and smiles, 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.

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, but just waited patiently for them to leave, while quietly enjoying his observations of the foibles of human nature. Mr. Bennet, in equal silence, was also 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.

Darcy thought that it might be a good idea if Bingley stayed in London for a *long* time, perhaps a few months, to allow his passions to cool down for a while and to gain some perspective on the situation.

Chapter 13

Darcy woke up to the warm morning sun shining through his window. He felt happy to be alive. The birds were chirping gaily and a cock crowed in the far distance, almost out of hearing—which, for him, was the right distance for a rooster to be; he remembered his mother saying they sounded best when they were just out of hearing! Other than that all was peace and quiet. He sprung out of bed and went to the beautiful beaten copper basin and splashed some water over his face to wash the sleep out of his eyes. Then he remembered he wanted to talk to Bingley before he left for London. He pulled on some clothes and went downstairs to find him in the breakfast room drinking coffee.

“Can I join you, Bingley?”

“Of course!”

“I just love sunny mornings like this.”

“Me too! I’m glad I’ll be out in it today on my way to London.”

“Your ball went very well, I thought.”

“Yes. I believe a good time was had by all, in their various different ways... So, you finally got to dance with Elizabeth.”

“Yes, and you seem to be increasingly enchanted with Jane.”

“She *is* a gorgeous creature.”

“She *is*. It’s a pity both she and Elizabeth are so much beneath us socially. Not that it should matter in an enlightened world, but in the world we live in it would cause a lot of mischief. Think of having Mrs. Bennet as a mother in law, for instance.”

"That's a sobering thought. We'd have to get them to drown their mother!"

"Or take them to live in Ireland or America, perhaps, to make sure their mother never came to visit!"

They both laughed.

"Mr. Bennet is a wise old owl, though, I think."

"Yes. And intelligent and reasonably well-mannered, too. Though he didn't choose his wife very well! But we all make mistakes, and he seems cultured enough and even thoughtful and liberal-minded. It must have been his influence that molded his two eldest daughters."

After a few moments of quietness, Darcy spoke again.

"I'm thinking I'd like to come to town for a short while myself, if you'd be prepared to stay there a while. I'd follow you in a day or two, and bring the rest of our party with me as well."

"Sure! Of course I'd love to have you all join me in town. Sounds like an excellent plan."

"Well, it's all set up then. When are you leaving?"

"I've finished my coffee, so I'm off. My trunk is all packed and in the carriage."

After seeing Bingley off, Darcy walked down to the stream to look for some wildlife, before returning late morning to catch the others at breakfast.

"So my brother has left?" asked Caroline.

"Yes."

"Well, we are all still alive after the home invasion last night."

"Is that what you call the ball?"

“Yes, an army of the *hoi polloi*, breaking down the ramparts of our home, and feasting at our expense in celebration of their uncouth victory.”

“Well, it certainly gave us some insights into the dangers of getting too close to the lower classes. Fortunately it was just for a few hours.”

“Did you hear Mrs. Bennet say that Jane’s marrying so greatly must throw her other daughters in the way of rich men?”

“Yes, I did hear that, and it troubled me.”

“What Mrs. Bennet wasn’t aware of, of course, so didn’t say, is that *Elizabeth* marrying even more greatly would also throw her other daughters in the way of rich men. Pray, Mr. Darcy, after a certain happy event takes place, which rich man of the many of your acquaintance would you have in mind for that officer chaser, Miss Lydia Bennet? Or for that talented musician, Miss Mary Bennet?”

“You seem to forget, Caroline, that the prospect of this happy event you refer to exists only in your fevered imagination. But let’s wing it along with your flights of fancy for a moment, purely hypothetically of course. If I were to marry Miss Elizabeth Bennet, she would, because of her evident embarrassment with her mother, want to live a good distance from her family, which of course Pemberley is. As is my house in London, for that matter. We would, of course, visit the Bennets when we travel between Pemberley and London, and Longbourn would be a convenient stopover. We would, however, have no rich friends with us on these trips. Other than that we would rarely if ever see the Bennets, as the distances involved would be so great.”

“You seem to have your future life with Elizabeth quite worked out. You have evidently given it much thought! But I must point out one thing you seem to have overlooked. Mrs. Bennet and her daughters will be very keen to see the grandeur of Pemberley, and since it *is* such a long journey there from Hertfordshire, you won’t be able to send them home again within a month. Think of the joy of those month-long visits to Pemberley!”

“Perhaps that could happen once, and I would welcome it once, but I dare say it would never happen again after that... Anyway, this is all totally hypothetical as far as I’m concerned. It is less so for your brother. You observed last night, I am sure, how smitten he is with Miss Bennet. I noticed it then, for the first time, when Sir William Lucas pointed it out to me. And no doubt many others, in addition to him and Mrs. Bennet, noticed it, too. Jane, while obviously enjoying Bingley’s company, seemed less affected than Bingley.”

“Yes, I agree,” said Caroline soberly. “We need to do something about my brother before he makes a total fool of himself and brings degradation onto all of us. He’s already opening us up to ridicule.”

“Well, I talked to Bingley this morning before he left, and said that I would like to join him in town in a couple of days, if he could agree to stay there a little longer. I also said I could bring the rest of you with me. He happily agreed to that. My thought is that this will give us a chance to work on him and persuade him to stay in town for the winter to consider his situation.”

“Good! I’ll send a note to Jane saying we’re all going to town and are unlikely to come back any time soon. Then we

can leave tomorrow. And it will be good riddance to be out of here!"

"Indeed! Well, now we have got the serious business out of the way, let me tell you the news that's all around Meryton that Bingley's game keeper told me a few minutes ago on my way back from the stream."

"Oh, something about the ball, I suppose," said Mrs. Hurst.

"Somewhat related, I guess. Do you remember Mr. Collins last night?—who kept on collectively addressing everyone in the room as though we were his congregation within his church at Hunsford, the living bestowed by my Aunt Catherine, I'm afraid to say."

"How could we not remember him!"

"He accosted me last night by introducing himself and telling me about his connection with my aunt. In reply to me asking him how he came to be so far from home, he told me he was here as a guest of Mr. Bennet, who is his uncle. I then realized he must be the relative the Bennets' estate is entailed away to, and asked him about it. He confirmed it and said he hoped to both inherit the estate and not disinherit the Bennet girls by seeking the hand of one of them in marriage. Having noticed him stumble through the first two dances with Elizabeth, I assumed Elizabeth must be his object. How sorry I was for her! I felt she might feel obliged to accept him, in spite of his obsequiousness and silliness, and him being no match for her fine mind, in order to keep her sisters out of poverty."

"That would be a perfect resolution of the Bennet girls' problems!" said Caroline. "How lucky they are! And a perfect match for Elizabeth, too. It would be a life-long

lesson to her not to get above her station, as she does at the moment with her pert pronouncements and egotistical opinions.”

“Well, the game keeper told me Mr. Collins did propose to Elizabeth this morning, and that she flatly refused him, creating consternation in the Bennet household. Apparently it is all around Meryton that Mrs. Bennet tried to get Mr. Bennet to insist on Elizabeth marrying Mr. Collins, and said that if she didn’t she would never see her again. Mr. Bennet responded by saying, ‘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*.’”

“I think,” said Caroline, “that you are so tickled by this story of Elizabeth’s refusal of Mr. Collins because it keeps open the possibility that you might marry her yourself.”

“I like Elizabeth’s refusal of Mr. Collins because she is my friend, even if she is outside my social orbit, and I’m glad she has avoided the lifetime of misery being married to Mr. Collins would bring. And I’m inclined to like her father, more than I did before, for supporting her in her quest for happiness, and for doing so with such wit.”

“Well, her happiness depends on you, then, for otherwise she may never get another offer.”

“If I find her attractive, I’m sure many fine young men of her class, who are worthy of her, will too. And I’m sure there must be smart, witty, thoughtful women like her of my class that I will find when I’m ready to marry myself. Of course, at the moment I am happy to be living the bachelor life. There are so many things I want to do!

Chapter 14

You can imagine how easy it was for Darcy and Caroline to convince Bingley to stay in town through the winter. Darcy pointed out that Jane's serenity was evidence that her heart was not touched, and would not easily be. And Caroline confirmed it by saying Jane had never mentioned a regard for him during the various times that she and Mrs. Hurst were alone with her, and added that ladies always talked about these things if there was anything to them. Darcy followed up by saying that he would no doubt meet many beautiful girls of his own class in the months ahead, who would be the equal of Jane in looks and amiability, and who, since it would be appropriate to do so, would be open to giving their heart to him. Jane, he said, like her sister Elizabeth, could obviously see what evils would ensue from a match that was so unequal in station of life, and were not going to fall for it—and hence their coolness. Finally Darcy said:

“Just agree to stay in town through the winter to think about it, then the decision is yours.” And Bingley did agree to that. Darcy was, he knew, much wiser than he in just about everything, and could well be right about this. And, anyway, now he was in town, he was happy enough to stay here for a while.

After clearing this up, Darcy left Caroline and the Hursts with Bingley, and continued on the short carriage ride to his own city house. As he pulled into the gravel drive, he saw his sister Georgiana run out of the doorway and down the steps to greet him. He was so glad to see her!

"Brother, I didn't expect to see you so soon! I thought a few more weeks at least!"

"That is as I planned it, but plans change, as you can see!"

"Well, I'm very happy to see you."

"And I am very happy to see *you*! You'll have to tell me everything you've been up to."

"I've been playing the pianoforte, of course, and singing. But I've also found out about the latest dance that is at all the balls, and have been learning the steps. Will you practice them with me?"

"Yes, of course, although I rarely dance myself at balls. Bingley hosted a ball at Netherfield, just a couple of nights ago."

"And did you dance at it?"

"Actually I did, with Bingley's sisters, and one other young lady."

"She must have been very attractive to tempt *you* into dancing!"

"What a thing to say! But yes, I do think her attractive."

"What is her name?"

"If you are thinking I might marry her you are quite mistaken. She is way below my station, and I can tell from her coolness that she recognizes that herself. But we've had some fun verbally sparring with each other. Her name is Elizabeth, Miss Elizabeth Bennet."

"I would have thought her avoiding being a fortune hunter would have recommended her to you."

"It did, of course. But that's enough of your banter for now! Let's go inside. When I've washed and changed you can play some music for me, and we might even practice

some of those dances. So is Colonel Fitzwilliam in? Has he been taking good care of you?"

"He's upstairs in his room. He's been keeping me entertained in the evenings after Mrs. Annesley is finished with me."

"Well, good."

Darcy came down, clean and dressed, to find Fitzwilliam conversing with Georgiana.

"So Darcy, I've just been hearing you've been dancing up a storm at Bingley's ball. That's a bit unusual for you, isn't it?"

"I go to the trouble of learning all these dances. I like to think I can occasionally put those skills to use!"

"What absolute rubbish! I know how you hate dancing."

"That might depend on whom I'm dancing with."

"I think so! So who is this Miss Elizabeth Bennet? She must have won your heart!"

"She's way below my social class, but I did enjoy our conversations. That's all there is to it."

"Does she play or sing?" asked Georgiana.

"Yes, I heard her play and sing, and rarely have I enjoyed a performance so much. It's not that she was technically perfect, it's rather that she expressed the feelings of the songs so well, so that the singing lit up the room with joy. You do that at times, too, Georgiana, and you should keep striving for that quality."

"I will. If you like this Elizabeth so well, I think you should consider marrying her anyway, even if she's from a poorer family. She must be gentry at least, as she's obviously well-

educated and accomplished. I remember our mother saying, “Young Mr. Darcy, you should marry for love.”

“You do have a good memory, don’t you! But it’s true; she did say that. But maybe I’ll find a woman like Elizabeth who is in my own class and has a more acceptable family. Elizabeth’s father is a gentleman—just—but her mother is quite impossibly rude, opinionated and stupid, and very ill mannered. What a mother in law to have!”

“You could arrange to have her put in a mental asylum!” said Georgiana.

Everyone laughed.

“Bedlam, perhaps? Why, where are you getting such notions from? I can see I need to be here more to guide you. Fitzwilliam is obviously infecting you with his odd sense of humor.”

“I have to say,” Fitzwilliam replied, “that I’ve never discussed anything like that with her, and was as surprised as you to hear her say that. But I must say it was pretty funny.”

“And I must say,” said Darcy, “That it would be an excellent solution to the problem, if only we lived in a world where the rich could do whatever they wanted, and didn’t care about justice. I guess we’ve got the *Magna Carta* to blame for having to put up with women like Mrs. Bennet. But we can, at least, avoid marrying into their families. So many poorer families have problems like that, and some of the richer ones, too, for that matter!”

“But, really, embarrassing in-laws shouldn’t deter you from marrying someone you really love,” Georgiana persisted. “So, what’s the real problem?”

“Perhaps she doesn’t like *me* very much.”

“That’s impossible! You’re just being silly. You must be one of the most eligible bachelors in England!”

“Well, I’m glad that my sister, at least, thinks so highly of me.”

The next day, after together practicing the steps of the new dance Georgiana wanted to learn, they paused for a moment before going in to lunch.

“Brother, there is a book in your library I’d like to read, if I have your permission to borrow it.”

“You know you can read any of our books. Which one did you have in mind?”

“*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,” by Mary Wollstonecraft.”

“Well! Perhaps it is a good idea you asked me about that one! Mary Wollstonecraft is a highly controversial figure. Still, I kept the book after reading it because I thought it made a very good case for women being better educated and being treated more equally. The big stir she created was more about how she lived her life than the book, which has been widely read and is highly regarded by many. So, yes, you can read the book, if you don’t mind discussing it with me once you have read it.”

“I’d love to discuss it with you. I’ll even make notes and prepare a list of questions.”

“Perfect! Shall we go in to lunch then?”

“Certainly!” she said, and took Darcy’s arm.

Chapter 15

Two weeks later, Georgiana had read *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She brought the book and the notes she'd made into her brother's study.

"Can we talk about the book now?"

"Certainly! I'm not doing anything but reading. Take a seat."

"Thank you."

"Did you find Wollstonecraft a little difficult to read?"

"Yes! How did you know that? Because I'm only sixteen?"

"No, because I found it so myself."

"Well if *you* found it difficult, I feel better about myself for having to struggle to grasp her meaning."

"I'm pleased you got through it. So, what did you think of it?"

"I like the idea of women having the same rights and freedoms as men. I'd kind of assumed women were equally valuable, but just preferred to play a different role in society. Now I can see there's a lot of rights we don't have, but should have, that men have reserved for themselves."

"Yes, in general that's true in society, though in some families women are treated equally. You just said you assumed women were equal in value to men. That's because you've always been treated that way in this family. But it's not the case in many families."

"Well, I'm glad and grateful that I've been treated equally in my family. But I'd like to ask you about my opportunities for getting an education. Where did you get your education?"

“At Cambridge. The University of Cambridge.”

“Could I go there for my education?”

“No. None of the universities admit women. And, straight away, you’ve uncovered one of the biggest obstacles in our society to equality for women. I believe universities should enroll women, in the same way they do men.”

“Mary said in the book,” she read from her notes, “‘Let woman share the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man; for she must grow more perfect when emancipated.’ And she said, ‘Liberty is the mother of virtue.’ Don’t men want women to be more virtuous?”

“I’m not sure most men do—though they should, of course. And how can a man or a woman be truly virtuous without a good understanding about how the world works? I am in agreement with you.”

“Then there is the matter of true companionship in marriage. She talks about the possibility of a man experiencing ‘the calm satisfaction that refreshes the parched heart like the silent dew of heaven of being beloved by one who could understand him.’ Surely a man would want his wife to be well educated, if he is so himself, so they could understand each other?”

“Absolutely! That was one big thing I got out of reading the book myself. I already knew that from things our mother said, but it brought it front and center for me, and now my goal is to one day find a woman of true understanding for a wife, who I will be able to share my dreams with for a better future for mankind.”

“I think you’ve found her already!”

“You mean Elizabeth?”

“Yes. Mary Wollstonecraft believes that after the age of nine, working class children, girls and boys, should have a separate more limited education, except for the particularly bright, who should continue to be educated with the children of the middle and upper classes. In other words, she says there should be a path upward in society for gifted women, just as there is for gifted men, in the army and the professions, for instance. But as things are at the moment, since women can’t enter these professions, how is a particularly bright woman, like your Elizabeth, going to advance and be able to use her talents to serve society if she is unable to marry into the upper class?”

“That’s a very good and thoughtful comment. Your point I think is that while, in general, people should marry within their class, it is proper that an exception be made for a highly exceptional individual who could contribute substantially to the vital role of the upper class of steering society toward a better future.”

“Something like that.” She smiled.

“Yes, I guess the upper class needs an injection of such talent every now and then to help make up for all the lazy aristocrats who waste their lives hunting foxes, playing cards and eating themselves into an early grave.”

“Yes, Elizabeth might well help compensate for Mr. Hurst and people like him.”

“So you’ve noticed?”

“It’s hard not to.”

“Well, I’ll think about what you’ve said regarding Elizabeth.”

“I hope I get to meet her one day.”

“Well, time will tell. Anything else you have in your notes about the book?”

“Well, the next thing is, how can I get a good education if I can’t go to university?”

“I’ve hired the best governess I could find, and paid a premium to get her. There’s a lot you can learn from her. And I will help you delve into some interesting areas of ideas and research, and finally, you can read any or all of the books in our library. It’s not as good as being able to go to university, but it’s hugely better than sending you to one of the ‘Dame Schools’ or their like. William Wilberforce’s wife, Barbara, made the point to me that the best educated women these days are usually educated at home by their fathers. That’s how Elizabeth picked up her fine understanding and accomplishments.”

“So I’m getting the best education I possibly can?”

“I believe so.”

“Mary also writes in the book about how marriages should be based on mutual love and respect, rather than a woman marrying just to obtain someone to support her—marrying for money. She says that for women to ‘marry for a support’ is ‘legal prostitution...’ What is prostitution?”

“Hmm! How can I explain it?” Darcy blushed a little.

“Is that when a woman is ‘on the town’—a poor woman resorting to selling her body to men in order to make a living?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Mrs. Annesley says it’s a huge problem in London.”

“Yes, I’ve heard up to one woman in a hundred in London is a prostitute—at least 20,000 in London alone.”

“Isn’t that shocking? Don’t people care enough to save these women from that fate?”

“That is one of the challenges for the upper class—to improve conditions for the working class so they can have good jobs that lift them out of poverty and the need to make money from crime and prostitution. Education is the key to that. Educating the poor will give them skills to take into the workplace that will give them well-paying jobs. Their increased productivity will end poverty for them, make the whole country richer, and also ensure that we don’t have a revolution here like they had in France. That’s why I’m working on creating schools for the poor in the area around Pemberley. If you want to be involved in that work when you’re older, your help would be very welcome.”

“I’m sure I’d like to do something useful like that! I certainly don’t want to waste my life in idleness like I can see many in our class do. There’s so much that needs to be done! And women can help in getting it done. That’s the main thing I’ve learned from this book.”

Chapter 16

A few weeks later, Darcy happened upon Georgiana in the music room.

“Lady Catherine and our cousin Anne are coming to visit tomorrow, as you know. Lady Catherine will be traveling on to the Midlands, but Miss De Bourgh will stay with us for a few days until her mother returns to pick her up.”

“It will be nice to see my cousin,” Georgiana said, a little tentatively, “But...”

“But?”

“I’m not sure what I’ll do with her. It’s always ‘I don’t know how to do that,’ or ‘my sickly disposition means I don’t have the strength to do that,’ and there doesn’t seem much to talk about with her, either.”

“Yes, I know what you mean, but last time I was at Rosings I took a ride with her in her phaeton and had quite a long talk with her. I got the impression she really would like to learn to play the pianoforte a bit, even if she was never very good, and the same with dancing. Trouble is she doesn’t want to go against Lady Catherine’s idea that if you can’t excel at something it is better not to do it at all.”

“I would hate to have grown up with a mother like that! Without a lot of encouragement from Mama and Papa, and then from you, I’m sure I would have given up on playing many times.”

“Well here’s my idea. I’d like you to teach her how to play something simple on the pianoforte while she’s here, and then after that, if possible, teach her one of the simplest dances she might encounter at a ball.”

“What if it doesn’t work? She’ll just say she can’t do it!”

"I know you are right; she will say that. But just say 'Sit down at the instrument next to me and press some keys.' Have her sit on your right. Then show her the pattern of white and black notes with two black notes and three black notes repeating up and down the keyboard, then get her to play *Mary had a Little Lamb* by watching you play the first bit of it, and getting her to copy what you do an octave higher. Once she can play the whole tune, accompany her by adding a left hand harmony to it, so you are playing a duet. And don't accept no for an answer!"

"I'll try."

"Here, practice it with me. I never learned to play. I wish I had."

"All right! Come sit down beside me, brother!" She laughed and patted the stool to her right as she moved over to the left as much as possible. "I'm just going to figure out the easiest way to play *Mary had...*"

Darcy pressed a few keys to make them sound.

"Best to curve your fingers like mine." He did that, and she went on, "This note to the left of the two black keys is 'C' or note number one. This song actually starts with white note number three, 'E,' so play it with finger number three, your middle finger." He did that, and it made a sound. "Now play note number two with your second finger, then note number 1 with your thumb. Now play all three, one after another like I'm doing. That is 'Mare ry had.'" He did that. "Now play note two again, then play note number three three times like this." He did so. "Now put it all together like this. It is 'Mare ry had a lit tle lamb.'"

He put the notes together.

"Oh, excellent! I can play the pianoforte!"

“You can, you can!” smiled Georgiana. “Now, after I count to four start to play it again. One, two, three, four...” Georgiana sounded a C chord along with Darcy’s first note.”

“Oh, and now we are playing a duet!”

“I don’t believe it,” she laughed. “My brother who knows everything—I taught him something! Let’s go on and learn the rest of the song.” They did that, perfectly successfully, and were soon playing the whole song as a duet.”

Colonel Fitzwilliam stuck his nose into the room to see what was going on, and Darcy called out to him.

“Come on in Fitz, and listen to this. I’ve been learning how to play the pianoforte, and this will be my first performance to an audience.”

They played the full duet, and Colonel Fitzwilliam clapped loudly, and said. “Bravo, bravo! A star is born!”

Darcy put his left hand to his waist and took a bow. Meanwhile, Georgiana could not stop laughing.

“Very good,” she said, finally. “I think I’ve got the idea of what to do with Anne, though I’m sure she won’t be as good a student as you are, my dearest brother!”

“Lady Catherine De Bourgh and Miss Anne De Bourgh,” announced the housekeeper.

“It’s good to see you, Lady Catherine, and you too, Anne!” Darcy smiled. “I hope you had a pleasant journey here.”

“Satisfactory, satisfactory. But glad to be here at last. And thank you for offering to have Anne to stay with you for the next five days. I’m sure she’ll like it better than sitting endless hours with my elderly friends in the Midlands.”

"She's very welcome here, and we'll certainly do some interesting things. But take a seat, both of you, and we'll bring in the tea."

"Thank you, Darcy." Lady Catherine settled comfortably into her chair, and once Anne was seated beside her, said to her, "Be sure, Anne, while you are here, to do everything Mr. Darcy asks you to do, or that you know he wants you to do."

"Yes, Mama."

"Mr. Darcy," Lady Catherine continued. "I hear that you met the minister of my church recently at a ball at the house of that friend of yours in Hertfordshire. Mr. Collins is his name."

"Yes, I remember Mr. Collins. He introduced himself to me, and informed me that you were well when he last saw you."

"Well, some news for you, Darcy. Mr. Collins returned from that trip to Hertfordshire with a wife, who is a very nice, proper sort of woman."

"A wife!" exclaimed Darcy. Had Elizabeth changed her mind and accepted Mr. Collins after all? He found himself feeling greatly agitated at the thought that Elizabeth should be married. "I heard just before we left Netherfield, that Mr. Collins had made an offer to an Elizabeth Bennet, and was refused."

Darcy noticed Georgiana looking at him in a questioning way, as if to say, 'You never told me about that.'

"Oh, I did hear something," Lady Catherine responded, "about how he had made an offer to one of his cousins so that all his cousins might be in a better position when their father's estate is entailed away from his daughters to Mr. Collins, since Mr. Bennet has no son. Yes, I did hear he made

that offer, and was refused, but that, having done his duty to help the plight of his cousins, felt free to seek a wife elsewhere. Within a couple of days he was successful in obtaining the hand of Miss Charlotte Lucas, who is now Mrs. Collins. As it turns out, Miss Elizabeth Bennet, who refused Mr. Collins, is Mrs. Collins' best friend, and will be coming to visit her in March, along with Mrs. Collins' younger sister. Do you know Miss Elizabeth Bennet?"

Darcy was immensely relieved at hearing it was not Elizabeth whom Mr. Collins had married, and realized in that moment that his happiness depended on Elizabeth marrying no-one but himself!

"I remember meeting Miss Lucas, and I have met Miss Elizabeth Bennet a number of times, and found her to be accomplished, witty and charming."

"But well below your station in life, I gather, from what I've heard?"

"Yes, very much so. A thing which she was clearly conscious of herself, for she never sought to be the fortune hunter with me."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it, since our paths will cross in March. And you. You often come to Rosings in the spring. Are you going to come this spring?"

"I do plan to, if nothing should come up to prevent it."

"Nothing could be more important than visiting us at Rosings! Rich families like ours need to stick together, for the preservation of society. And, of course, just to enjoy superior company."

"Thank you, Lady Catherine."

The next morning, after breakfast, Georgiana suggested to Anne that they go to the music room. Darcy watched as they made their way there, and as the door to the music room was left ajar, he found he could hear what they were saying from where he was seated.

"Would you like me to teach you how to play something very simple and easy on the pianoforte?" asked Georgiana.

"Oh, I couldn't do that! I don't have the energy to concentrate on it."

"Oh, I'm talking about something really simple."

"And if I try something really simple and can't do it, how pathetic is that?"

"I've heard from my brother that you would like to learn to play a little, and if you don't even try, how pathetic is *that*?"

"But my mother wouldn't be pleased with me over-taxing myself like that. She's told me never to do it."

"I heard Lady Catherine say yesterday that you should do whatever Mr. Darcy asks or wants you to do."

"Does Mr. Darcy want me to learn the pianoforte?"

"Yes. He asked me to teach you something simple. He thought you'd enjoy it."

"Well, that's different then," said Anne. "My mother told me to do whatever Mr. Darcy wants, and since Mr. Darcy wants me to learn to play..."

"Sit down next to me then." He heard them settle on the seat together. "See how you have the white keys and the black keys? We'll just play the white ones to start with, but we'll use the two groups of black keys to find the white notes we want to play. See how there are two black keys

together here, then three here? And how this repeats up and down the keyboard?"

Darcy got up and walked away at this point. He felt like he was spying on them. He'd come back in half an hour and poke his head in and see what progress was being made.

Closer to an hour later he came back and put his head into the music room.

"Oh, I'm interrupting, I can see. I'll come back later."

"No, come on in, brother, and listen to the duet we can play together!"

He heard a performance of *Mary Had a Little Lamb* that was even more accomplished than his own.

"Bravo!" he called out, and clapped. Anne was doing something very rare for her—laughing. She seemed very happy with herself, and full of energy and enthusiasm.

Over the five days Anne was there she learned to play five very pretty pieces of music, and learned two basic ballroom dances. She said to Darcy just before her mother arrived back:

"I am over one and twenty now, so I've decided to stand up to my mother about some things I really want to do, and do them anyway."

"I think she'll respect that, as she does whatever she wants to do, herself. But you may have to be somewhat insistent and persistent to start with and not be discouraged if she opposes you for a while."

Chapter 17

Darcy's new discovery about himself occupied much of his thoughts during the next few weeks. The shock of it appearing, for a few moments, like Mr. Collins had married Elizabeth cut right through all the phony excuses he had been making for why he could never marry her himself. The most insidious of these was the idea that he would be able to find a woman who was her equal, and similar in disposition to her, among his own class. He had lived almost to the age of thirty, and met hundreds of women, and none of them had charmed him in the way Elizabeth had. What made him think this was going to change? Elizabeth was a unique person, and there may not be another like her in the whole world! The thought of losing her made him realize that at last. He knew she was the one, and that he'd have to claim her.

But in that case, what of the idea, that he most certainly subscribed to, that people should only marry within their own class? If it was right for him to marry Elizabeth, why was it not right for Bingley to marry Jane? There could, of course be, as his sister had pointed out when discussing Mary Wollstonecraft's book, on the rarest of occasions, an exemption for a highly exceptional individual. He agreed with her that the female equivalent of an exceptional man advancing to the upper classes through a career in the army or navy was for an exceptional woman to marry above her station. For how else could she advance, considering the lack of opportunities afforded women by society? He firmly believed Elizabeth was such a highly exceptional woman. Her sister, Jane, for instance was perfectly amiable and

intelligent, but lacked the sparkle and wit, the sharpness and charm, of Elizabeth.

His other main excuse was that Elizabeth didn't seem very interested in him. A part of this coolness on her part was no doubt due to her knowledge that a union between them was impossible. This would cause her to be guarded. Also, she didn't know him very well yet, and he knew he could be a hard person to get to know quickly—that he could seem rather cold and aloof until people knew him well. He was sure that if he made her an offer of marriage she would feel free to show her feelings, but would also consider herself lucky to receive an offer that would advance her so much. He remembered his sister saying he was one of the most eligible bachelors in the whole of England. From any objective measure it was true. He was sure Elizabeth would at least want to get to know him better, even if she felt she couldn't accept his offer straight away. And as she got to know him, he was sure she would value the good things about him, and would soon love him as much as he loved her. He was convinced they were intellectually and temperamentally a good match.

It only remained to wait until he saw her again in the spring at Rosings. It was over six months away, but as he was fond of saying, life was full of interesting things to do. He would read up on the latest discoveries of astronomy and visit professors at his *alma mater* to discuss them. He would take an active interest in Georgiana's education. He would visit as many schools as he could to get ideas on improving his own. Then he would go back to Pemberley to put some of the educational ideas he learned into practice in his schools, and to oversee the construction, during the

late autumn months, of his new and powerful telescope and dome observatory. Time would pass quickly enough.

Chapter 18

Darcy was riding with Colonel Fitzwilliam to Rosings, while his coach brought their luggage. It was late March already. Time had passed quickly. For most of the six months wait he had not thought much about the problems that would arise from his marrying Elizabeth. He was prone to procrastinate in dealing with intractable problems, and had done so with this one, telling himself there was plenty of time to think about it later. Meanwhile he had done all the things he had planned to do during the wait. It was not until about a week ago that he'd really started to address the problem of the way marrying deeply beneath his station would be received by many people who were important to him, including Elizabeth herself. How should he address her to make her an offer of marriage, in the light of these problems? He felt being direct and honest about his feelings and the obstacles they had had to overcome would be well received by her—that she would value his honesty. Another question was how long he should spend getting to know her before making his offer? He had heard from Lady Catherine that she would be staying at Hunsford, near Rosings, for about another three weeks.

And speaking of Lady Catherine, how furious she would be if he married Elizabeth! Not only would her plans for him marrying Anne be foiled, but he would also be 'polluting' the family line by marrying so scandalously below his class. And she would not be the only one to think that. Most of his gentleman friends, with the exception of Bingley, and all of his family, with the exception of his sister Georgiana, would think the same way. Even Bingley might think him hypo-

critical for wanting to marry Elizabeth but being opposed to his marrying Jane. The argument of Elizabeth being a rare exceptional person who deserved a ticket into the upper classes might not be convincing to him. He would likely think Jane just as exceptional, and even more beautiful! Well, Bingley could always decide for himself to return to Netherfield to court Jane, if his feelings, like his own, were powerful enough to overcome his better judgement and the advice of his friends. Unless and until such feelings overcame him, Bingley would be better off courting a woman of his own class...So many intractable problems! As they came on to a gentle downhill section of the road, the two men broke into a gallop. Darcy thought this might banish his worries for a while, but his tumult of thoughts just galloped along with him.

Upon arriving at Rosings and being greeted by Lady Catherine, they retired upstairs to wash and change into fresh clothes. Then they returned downstairs for tea with Lady Catherine and Miss De Bourgh.

"Darcy," announced Lady Catherine, "I've heard all about how you got Anne playing the pianoforte. At first I was quite annoyed, but playing appears to actually give her energy, rather than sapping it, so I have come to think of it as a fortunate turn of events. I am, of course, prodigiously proud of her achievement."

"I'm glad my suggestion worked out so well."

"I admit it has. We are keeping it a secret, though, as Anne does not want to play in public. It's for her own enjoyment, so she only plays for herself, or to us when we have no guests. Mrs. Jenkinson, who as you know lives with us, has been teaching her."

"I would like, however," said Anne, "To play you a piece I've learned this last month. Would you care to hear it? It's a Mozart minuet."

"I'd love to hear it," said Darcy.

"And I would, too!" added Fitzwilliam.

Although she was a little nervous, she played the piece nicely, and received a warm applause from the two men and Lady Catherine.

"You've got the feeling of the music very well," added Darcy, "And I think that's the most important thing."

Anne was all smiles, and even laughed a little.

"To preserve the secret," Anne said, "Mama still talks about how I, and her, would have been great proficient had we ever been able to learn."

"Well, you can rely on us to keep the secret, too," said Darcy.

"Absolutely!" added the colonel.

"Thank you. I'll appreciate that. There's Miss Elizabeth Bennet, visiting us two nights a week with Mr. And Mrs. Collins, who plays and sings so well. I'd hate her to know I'm just beginning to learn, and that I only know such simple pieces."

After that Lady Catherine settled into her normal mode of talking about herself, and what she had been doing around Rosings Park. After a polite amount of time listening to her, Darcy noticed his friend was looking rather bored, and said:

"Lady Catherine, I think Fitz and I would like to take a walk around your beautiful park."

"Of course you would! I pay all of five gardeners and six grounds men to keep Rosings the most exquisite park in all

of England. And I spend much time personally directing them.”

When out of the garden, and into the park, Fitzwilliam said:

“How far are we from the parsonage where your Elizabeth is staying?”

“Oh, not very far. Less than half a mile from here. Do you want to go visit them now?”

“Oh, I think tomorrow would be soon enough. I’m a little tired from the journey.”

“As I am myself.”

“But I am keen to meet Elizabeth, after all I’ve heard about her.”

The next morning after breakfast, Mr. Collins came to call on them. His obsequiousness even seemed to get on Lady Catherine’s nerves, her ‘condescension’ and ‘affability’ being praised too many times even for her liking. She interrupted him, saying:

“Yes yes! But listen to me. You should take Mr. Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam back with you to the parsonage to meet your wife and Miss Bennet. I can think of no better thing for you men to be doing.”

“It would be my distinct pleasure to have them come back to my humble parsonage with me, when, in the fullness of time, they are ready to visit us there. In the meanwhile...”

“I mean directly, Mr. Collins, directly. I have something I need to attend to, and this would, regardless of that, be the perfect time to visit them. I am very attentive to their

routines, so I know it would be a good time. Trust me on this."

"Your ladyship, thank you for your..."

"Yes yes! All three of you, just go away now and do it! I'll see you again for dinner."

Once outside, on the gravel drive, Mr. Collins bowed to Mr. Darcy and continued:

"Dear sir, what a great honor it is to have you come to my humble abode. I thank you for your great affability. My dear wife and Miss Bennet will be so pleased by your condescension. And yours too, Colonel Fitzwilliam."

"The pleasure will be all ours," said the Colonel. "Please lead the way."

As they entered the house, Darcy felt some trepidation. He had no idea what he was going to say to Elizabeth, and knew this meant he was likely to be his own somewhat silent self. He entered after the colonel, and paid his compliments, with his usual reserve, to Mrs. Collins, and directed a smile to Elizabeth, who merely curtsied to him, without saying a word.

After letting his cousin converse for a while with the ladies, in his easy, well-bread manner, Darcy said to Mrs. Collins:

"You have a very nice house and garden here."

"Thank you Mr. Darcy. We are very happy with the house, and Mr. Collins has much pleasure in the garden."

After that he was quiet for a while until he was able to catch Elizabeth's eye.

"Miss Bennet, are your mother and father and sisters well?"

“Very well, thank you.” She paused for a moment, then added:

“My eldest sister has been in town these three months. Have you never happened to see her there?”

Darcy felt confused for a moment. He had not seen her, but he had been told by Caroline that she had been there. He said:

“I have not had the pleasure of seeing your sister since the ball at Netherfield.”

Soon after this, Darcy caught his cousin’s eye, and saw in it the thought that perhaps they’d stayed long enough for a first visit.

“It has been a pleasure to visit your house, Mrs. Collins,” said Darcy. “And an equal pleasure to see you again Miss Bennet. Hopefully we shall see you at Rosings before long.”

“We have been dining there about twice a week,” said Mrs. Collins, “and if the invitations continue, we will, of course, visit.”

They said their good-byes and left. Darcy felt it was a reasonable start, though he did feel Elizabeth’s coolness toward him. Hopefully time and propinquity would cause her to regard him more warmly.

Chapter 19

After being there two days, Darcy suggested to Lady Catherine that she invite their friends at the Parsonage to dinner. She was reluctant to do so, however, and seemed happy enough to just have the company of her nephews. The thought crossed Darcy's mind that the Collins were only considered necessary by her when there were no other more interesting guests. Fitzwilliam called at the Parsonage a couple of times during the next week, but Darcy felt it would be awkward for him, and it would be better for him to wait until Elizabeth and her friends were invited to Rosings, which after about a week they finally were. After seeing them at church, they were invited to visit in the evening.

Darcy noticed, during the visit, that Lady Catherine was engrossed by her nephews, especially himself, and hardly ever spoke to the others in the room. Colonel Fitzwilliam, however, was really glad to see their guests, and this was hardly surprising considering how bored he was with Rosings. He seemed particularly charmed by Elizabeth, and got into a long and engrossing conversation with her. Darcy, who was monopolized by one of Lady Catherine's long monologues, envied his cousin. He couldn't help looking at them, and soon Lady Catherine did, too, and did not scruple to call out:

"What is it 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?”

“Very well, Lady Catherine. Georgiana loves playing the pianoforte and singing, and is getting to be a good performer. I am very proud of her progress in music, as well as of how mature, intelligent, and amiable she is becoming. She is quite a delight.”

“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.”

Darcy felt 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 Darcy. After a few moments he walked away from her, and making with his usual deliberation towards the pianoforte stationed himself so as to command a full view of Elizabeth's face. She 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 searchingly at Darcy, and he wondered what she was trying to discern. Was it possible she had heard Lady Catherine wished him to marry Anne, and she was looking to see how he reacted to her being praised to discover if he had feelings for Anne? And if so, why would she want to determine that if she were not interested in him herself? Darcy took some encouragement from this! Also, it should have become clear to Elizabeth from observing him that he had no peculiar regard for Anne, and he was glad he was able to demonstrate that.

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 him and the colonel, remained at the instrument till her ladyship's carriage was ready to take them all home.

Darcy felt quite satisfied with the evening. He looked forward to the inevitability of having more opportunities to draw Elizabeth into conversation with him, and for her to get to know him better.

Chapter 20

Darcy woke the next morning feeling happy, relaxed and well rested. After bathing and dressing he headed off to breakfast with a spring in his step. He would capitalize on his success the previous night by calling on the ladies at the Parsonage later on this morning. The better he got to know them all now, the more comfortable he would be talking to Elizabeth alone, when that might occur. He knew he was shy about conversing with people he didn't know well, especially young ladies, and needed to learn how to be better at it. He would start practicing it this morning, and thought of various things he could ask each of them.

Darcy rang the bell, then opened the door and entered. With some consternation he noticed that only Elizabeth was there.

"I'm sorry I have intruded on your privacy, Miss Bennet. I understood both the other ladies would also be present, or I wouldn't have called."

"Well, since you are here, take a seat, Mr. Darcy. How is Colonel Fitzwilliam and everyone else at Rosings?"

"All of them are well, thank you very much."

After that there was silence for about a minute, while he thought about what he could ask her. Fortunately Elizabeth broke it by observing:

"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."

“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, and he felt it must be his turn to break the silence, 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.”

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, “I suspect *you* would not always wish to live very close to Longbourn.”

Elizabeth looked surprised. Darcy experienced some change of feeling; he drew back his chair, took a newspaper from the table, and glancing over it, said, in a cooler voice:

“Are you pleased with Kent?”

A short dialogue on the subject of the county ensued, on either side calm and concise—and was soon put an end to by the entrance of Charlotte and her sister, just returned from her walk. The *tete-a-tete* 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.

As he walked back to Rosings, Darcy felt that despite a couple of embarrassing silences, the conversation with Elizabeth went quite well, especially considering he had to get over his astonishment at finding her there alone. He was pleased that she seemed open to living some distance from her family, so long as the cost of traveling to visit them was not a problem, as it obviously would not be if they were to marry and live at Pemberley. Yes, he felt some progress had been achieved, though he still felt anxious about getting to the point where a proposal could be made. She remained rather cool toward him, but that could just be her proving to him that she didn't presume his affection, and was not engaging in fortune hunting. It struck him that courting outside one's own class was fraught with many difficulties, including this one, that would not be a problem within his own station in life.

Chapter 21

Over the next week Darcy met Elizabeth three times while walking in the park. On the first two they just walked together for a while, and had very little to say to each other. When they last met, however, Darcy was determined to start a conversation.

“Good morning Miss Bennet. I hope you are well?”

“Very well, thank you. And you?”

“Very much so. It seems like going on solitary rambles in nature is something you like to do.”

“Yes.”

“And it is something I love, too. I’ve long been interested in botany.”

“Then you must be impressed, as I am, at how quickly the park is changing as spring advances.”

“Oh, indeed. I just love seeing all the new flowers blossoming. The crocuses and daffodils are so beautiful at the moment.”

“Yes, they are.”

“Mr. Collins loves his garden, I’ve noticed. It’s one of the few things you or I might have in common with him. And I’ve noticed his wife doesn’t even share that interest with him.”

“That could be said. Are you suggesting, then, that they don’t have enough in common to be happy together?”

“I do wonder about that. I think it is important for married couples to have interests in common and that there be a commonality of intelligence, education and taste that enables them to understand and support each other.”

“That is something I agree with you about, Mr. Darcy.”

"I heard Mr. Collins first asked *you* to marry him, and that you unceremoniously refused him."

"That is true." Elizabeth blushed.

"Well, I'm very glad you did."

"And why are you glad of that, Mr. Darcy?" She looked at him archly.

"Because I know he couldn't make you happy. His silly, subservient air and lack of true intelligence, would, I'm sure, soon make you miserable. And many of your clever and insightful comments would go right over his head, so he would not even begin to understand you."

"You are right, but I think few sensible people could be happy spending much time with him. Even Lady Catherine seems to be bothered by him at times."

"Yes, indeed, she is. I also like what your father is reported to have said to you after you refused Mr. Collins, about you having to become estranged to one or other of your parents."

"Yes! That story got as far as you then, and in less than one day! I loved my father for saying that, of course. I'm very close to him."

"It made me decide I rather like him, too. It would seem that to the extent that wit is inherited or learned, you got yours from your father."

"Rather than from my mother?"

"Yes. It was clear at the Netherfield ball that you are often embarrassed by things your mother says."

"I do own I more greatly admire my father!"

"Whereas in my family, it was my mother who had the sense of humor, and what small amount of wit I have comes from her. She was also an advocate of more rights for

women, and I agree with her about that, too. I'm making sure my sister Georgiana is getting the best possible education and is being treated equally within our family."

"I have to commend you on that, Mr. Darcy. Women in the gentry, like myself, don't even have the right to do useful work and make their own way in the world."

"That's true. Georgiana wants to do something to make the world a better place when she's older, and I've told her she has my blessing to do that, and that she can help with the free schools for the poor I'm establishing in the towns around Pemberley, if she wishes to."

"That's a fine thing to be doing, Mr. Darcy. It's not surprising, then, that even your severest critic says you can be liberal-minded and that there's much to admire in you."

"Did Mr. Wickham say that about me?"

"Yes, he did. I wonder if you ever said anything as nice about him?"

"I'm sorry, that's something I can't get into at the moment, though the time may come when you will be in a position to know all the details."

They fell into silence at this point, and after a few minutes Darcy said:

"I'll take the turn here and leave you to your solitary walk, which I know you enjoy so much."

"Thank you Mr. Darcy. Good-bye."

They nodded to each other and parted.

Chapter 22

Darcy set off after breakfast the next day, hoping to meet Elizabeth again in the park so he could propose to her. He hadn't planned on making an offer quite yet, but Colonel Fitzwilliam was unhappy about postponing their departure yet again, which meant they'd be leaving tomorrow or the next day. The colonel had been quite charmed by Elizabeth herself, but knew his future comfort and happiness depended on marrying into at least *some* money, and that Elizabeth would have virtually none. So he didn't want to stay and get even more attached to her, all the more so because Darcy had a previous and continuing interest in her. Darcy had spent much of the previous night awake, debating, yet again, the wisdom of attaching himself to a woman with such lowly connections. His principles and scruples told him, as always, that it was a bad idea, but his ardent feelings rebelled and would not be denied.

He returned from a walk of some hours, however, without seeing Elizabeth, and encountered the colonel seated near the house.

"Hello Fitz, what have you been up to?"

"Walking, like you. Did you meet Elizabeth?"

"No, I was hoping to, but didn't see her."

"I have to confess I did see her, and said something to her about you that I regret saying."

"What was it?"

"The topic of Bingley came up as a result of her mentioning his sisters. I said he was a great friend of yours, and she commented that you are uncommonly kind to him and take a prodigious deal of care of him. I agreed and said I

had reason to believe, without being absolutely sure of the person, that Bingley was very much indebted to him for saving him from the inconveniences of a very imprudent marriage. She said, ‘Did Mr. Darcy give you his reasons for this interference?’ I answered, ‘I understood there were some very strong objections against the lady.’ She came back with, ‘Your cousin’s conduct does not suit my feelings. Why was he to be the judge?’ You get the idea of the conversation. I couldn’t for the life of me figure out why she seemed so hurt by the story.”

“Well, thank you for telling me, Fitz. You couldn’t have known what you said to be anything other than praising of me. What you didn’t know is that the lady concerned is Elizabeth’s sister, Jane.”

“Oh my God, Darcy! I’m so sorry!”

“Don’t worry about it Fitz. You couldn’t have known. And I suspect she has for some time blamed me for separating Bingley and her sister. There’s nothing I can do about it.”

As they came in to dinner a couple of hours later, it became apparent that Elizabeth was absent from the party from the Parsonage. Darcy turned to the other two ladies from that house and asked:

“Mrs. Collins, is Miss Bennet unwell?”

“Just a headache, Mr. Darcy. Nothing too serious. She begs to be excused.”

Darcy realized he must see Elizabeth tonight—to help her if she be still unwell, or, if she proves to be much recovered, then... He went to Lady Catherine, and apologized for having some important business to attend to.

He rapidly walked down to the Parsonage, rang the doorbell and entered.

“How are you feeling, Miss Bennet? I heard you had a headache. I came in the hope of hearing from you that you are feeling better.”

“My headache is gone, thank you, Mr. Darcy. You mustn’t be concerned about me.”

Darcy sat down for a few moments, then got up and walked around the room. Should he or shouldn’t he? He had the opportunity now to address her, but she had so recently been unwell that perhaps he should postpone it and just sit with her a while and leave. But procrastination was so much a fault of his that he felt he could not give in to it. How then to proceed in this circumstance? Elizabeth’s complete silence didn’t help him. But if he was going to declare himself he had better get on with it, or else just give up on what might be his last opportunity to ask her to marry him, and just leave. He knew, though, that if he left without declaring himself he would always regret it. It was now or never, so he turned to her and 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.”

After thus declaring himself, he noticed Elizabeth looked quite astonished. Her face colored, but she was silent. He felt this was sufficient invitation to continue, and said:

“I have admired you since shortly after you were first pointed out to me at the Meryton ball, and I soon realized I was in love with you, and that you were the life companion I wanted. Shortly after I left Netherfield for London, Lady Catherine visited and assailed me with the news that Mr.

Collins had brought back a wife with him from his trip to visit his cousins. Since I knew he had proposed to you and had, at least initially, been rejected, it seemed that you must have accepted him after all, to provide a living for your other sisters after your father's death, I assumed. My agony at hearing this news was acute, and when I found out that Mr. Collins had married your friend Charlotte, I was filled with relief. I realized then that my happiness depended on it being *me* who married you, and no-one else!

"If you marry me, all that is mine will also be yours. I want you to be an equal partner with me, unlike what so many marriages are.

"I realize that a marriage like ours, made across such a large class difference, would be disapproved of, even seen as shocking, by many people, but I don't mind. I want to marry you anyway. Long have I battled against my judgement, my will, my reason, and my character, all of which told me what a mistake it would be to marry so deeply beneath my station. These parts of me told me such a marriage would lead to a degradation of my family, but there was another, more elevated part of me, my spirit perhaps, that told me that was all nonsense and that you would be the best thing that ever happened to me. That, and the ardency of the love I have for you, make me sure I should marry you despite the inferiority of your family. I have endeavored many times to conquer this attachment to you with scruples, reason and judgement, but have been unable to, and my fervent hope is that this indefatigable attachment will now be rewarded by your acceptance of my hand in marriage."

Darcy looked into her eyes for a sign of encouragement, but saw none. After a few moments of silence 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.”

Darcy, leaning against the mantle-piece, took in her words with surprise and resentment. He became angry and flushed. What had he done to deserve such a caustic response? He struggled for some composure, and would not open his lips, till he believed himself to have attained it. After a minute or so, in 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 inquire,” 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 he looked at her with a smile of affected incredulity.

"Can you deny that you have done it?" she repeated.

With assumed tranquility 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."

"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. He knew he could defend himself on this

count, but was not sure that the facts of the situation should be revealed.

“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?”

“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.”

He felt himself 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 he felt a great astonishment. He looked at her, feeling a mixture of 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, opened the front door and quit the house.

Chapter 23

As he rapidly walked back to Rosings, Darcy felt stunned and humiliated. He hadn't for a moment realized Elizabeth could have such a sharp tongue, but he reasoned it was the other side of the coin of her wit and humor. And he could see that from her point of view, with the knowledge she had, how she would intensely dislike him. The trouble was the knowledge she had of Wickham was totally wrong. As he had feared, Wickham had lied to her and poisoned the well of his relationship with her. He could have answered her to her face with the truth about Wickham, and referred her to Colonel Fitzwilliam for confirmation of it, but had stayed firm to his previous belief that the circumstances of Wickham's evil actions should not be revealed. The need to exonerate himself from such charges of cruelty, however, was leading him to begin to think he could reveal the truth to Elizabeth, while asking for her to keep the story to herself, and to Colonel Fitzwilliam if she needed confirmation. And it would be best, he thought, to write her a letter about this, and either put it into her hand tomorrow morning or send it in the post to her at Longbourn. And he could more thoroughly argue his case in a letter than in person, so he was glad he had held back on this during their conversation.

As for separating Bingley from her sister, he felt he could make a reasonable case that Jane, through her serenity, at least *appeared* not to have any strong feelings for Bingley, though as Elizabeth believed very differently, it now seemed he might have been mistaken about that. He could address his honest mistake in the letter, too. His hope in writing this letter would only be to defend himself, not to attempt to

change her feelings. He was shocked by her feelings, and highly embarrassed about his own, and had no wish to further discuss them. The facts, though—it was important to make them known to her.

On arriving back at Rosings, he quickly made his excuses to Lady Catherine and his cousin and retired to his room upstairs to write the letter. He began writing, as neatly as possible in his currently agitated state:

“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 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 24

It was approaching midnight when Darcy finished his letter, and because of all the thoughts racing through his mind, it was another hour at least before he slept. Some of Elizabeth's words kept recurring to him as he lay awake in bed. Particularly galling to him was her saying she would have had more concern about refusing him if he had 'behaved in a more gentleman-like manner.' He prided himself on living and behaving as a gentleman should, but as he said to her, he also abhorred disguise of every sort, so of course felt he should be honest and open about issues of concern in their potential marriage. Perhaps, though, he could have given her more credit for being aware of these issues, and realized that he didn't need to discuss them as a part of his marriage proposal. That certainly would have been kinder to her. He found himself imagining how he could have asked for her hand differently, so as to have been more of a gentleman. He would still have needed to write the letter to her to explain his actions, but perhaps then she would have been more open to the truth of what he said than she might now be.

Eventually he slept, and woke the next morning tired but somewhat refreshed. He quickly dressed and went down to breakfast. He had not eaten dinner the night before and was famished. After that he set off with his letter to try and find Elizabeth. He hoped she would, as usual after breakfast, be walking in the park. After some time he found her. She saw him and walked away, but he called out her name. She turned to face him and moved

forward to the gate that separated them. He held out the letter to her, and she instinctively took it.

"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?"

Acknowledging a nod of her head with a slight bow, he turned away and walked back into the plantation, perhaps never to see her again. He wondered what she was feeling this morning. She seemed a little low in spirits, but other than that he was unable to tell.

On nearing Rosings he saw Colonel Fitzwilliam sitting in the sunshine, and joined him.

"You'll be glad to hear we are free to leave tomorrow morning as planned."

"Have you decided, then, not to make an offer to Elizabeth for the time being?"

"I made my offer last night, and was refused."

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry to hear that, Darcy. I suppose her being upset by what I told her earlier about you tipped the scales against you. You've got no idea how sorry I am."

"I wouldn't worry about that. She certainly was upset with me for acting to separate Bingley from her sister, but that was not her only objection. George Wickham turned up in Meryton when he joined a militia stationed there. He was introduced to Elizabeth, and it seems they became friends. As a result of falsehoods he undoubtedly told her, she is convinced that I have acted cruelly and dishonorably toward him and have, against my father's wishes, destroyed all his prospects for prosperity and a good life."

"Why, that's preposterous, Darcy! Did you tell her the actual facts? But you have always wanted to keep them from public knowledge, so I guess you didn't"

"I didn't at the time of my declaration. But on my way home I decided to write a letter to her, detailing everything about my dealings with Wickham, including what related to Georgiana. I felt I had to defend myself, and I asked her to keep the knowledge to herself, which I'm sure she will."

"I don't blame you at all, Darcy. I think you are doing the right thing. Have you...?"

"Delivered the letter? Yes, I have just done so. After searching for a while I met her in the park and handed it to her. She took it, and I'm sure she'll read it. Fitz...?"

"Yes?"

"Since she may not be inclined to believe what I said, I referred her to you for confirmation of the facts. I hope that's all right with you?"

"Of course, man. Of course! It's the least I can do after the trouble I got you into with her."

"Well, thank you."

"We should go down and say goodbye to them all. Then I could offer to go for a turn about the park with her, so she'll have the opportunity to question me if she wants to."

"That would seem like a good idea. Let's give her some time to get back to the parsonage first, though."

After morning tea they walked down to the parsonage. They found everyone there except Elizabeth, and said they'd wait a while to say goodbye to her also, if it was all right with them. Darcy only stayed a few minutes, but Colonel Fitzwilliam was evidently prepared to stay as long as was needed to give Elizabeth the chance to question him if she

wished to. It was over an hour before he returned to Rosings.

"I stayed for an hour, and felt I could hardly impose on them longer. I asked them to pass on my goodbyes to Elizabeth, and to tell her that she would be welcome to come to Rosings this afternoon or evening if she wanted to say goodbye in person. Then I looked around the park for a while, but was unable to find her. Sorry about that, Darcy."

"Don't worry. The fact that she stayed so long in the park shows that she must have read my letter and taken it seriously enough to dwell on it for some time. And if she feels it necessary to consult you about it, she will take up your invitation to visit you."

Elizabeth did not visit Rosings that day, and Darcy and Fitzwilliam left for London early the next morning.

"So what are you going to do about Elizabeth, now?" asked Fitzwilliam.

"Nothing. All I can do is learn from it. Learn to be more chivalrous with ladies, and less unkindly honest. I feel I did err in that regard. I could have been more gentlemanly in my approach, and not pointed out our difference in station and the difficulties I had to overcome regarding the discrepancies of class. She was, of course, already aware of these problems, so I didn't actually need to mention them, and it would have been kinder if I hadn't. I was given good principles by my parents, but was allowed to grow up in unchecked pride and conceit, which I never realized until now, and I can see they have not served me well."

"That's always a good thing to learn. I wondered if you would ever change in that regard, but now it seems as if you

have, and that will, I think, be of great benefit to you in the future.”

“It’s an ill wind that blows no good.”

“But what if you see her again?”

“I might, I suppose, though I will not cause her discomfort by putting myself in her way. If I do see her I will just be as friendly as possible to her. I wish her all the best life can bring.”

“But you must feel terribly disappointed, don’t you?”

“Of course. But hopefully that will pass in time, as everyone says, though it doesn’t seem right now how it could. I’ve got plenty to do, and I’ll just get on with it.”

Chapter 25

Darcy realized that, once he returned to London, answering Georgiana's questions about Elizabeth would be his most difficult challenge, and indeed it was.

"Brother, did you see Elizabeth while you were at Rosings?"

"Yes."

"Did all go well with her?" She blushed. "Do you have anything to announce?"

"Things didn't go particularly well with her, and I don't have anything to announce."

"Did you make her an offer of marriage?"

"I did."

"She couldn't have refused you, surely?"

"She not only could have, but did, for reasons that were understandable, though one of her objections was based on incorrect information. I wrote her a letter, just before I left, giving her the facts of the situation, which hopefully, over time, will make her feel better about me. I certainly wish her well. She is a fine person."

"What was it she'd got wrong about you?"

"I can't really discuss that," Darcy answered. He, of course, didn't want to raise the topic of Wickham with her, as he knew it would distress her greatly.

"Well, I'm sorry you had problems with her. She can't be as deserving as I thought!"

"She is, my dear sister, as deserving as anyone could be. She is honest and forthright and has high principles. She only fell short in having some of her facts wrong due to being deceived by another, and I have informed her of the

truth about that. I, also, was inadvertently unkind to her in my words, so I, too, have learned something from what happened.”

“Well, it sounds like your relationship with her could improve with time.”

“Maybe.”

Over the next three months, Darcy spent much time in London researching schools and learning the latest about the science of astronomy. During this time the large telescope he was having constructed at Pemberley was finally completed, and he made a trip back there to receive instructions from the builder on its use and maintenance. He also devoted a considerable amount of time to helping Georgiana with her education, since he knew how important it was to her, and he wanted to compensate as fully as possible for her not, as a woman, being able to attend a university. He also put together a plan to take a group of family and friends to Pemberley for the months of August and September, when his country home would be at its best. This group included Georgiana, Bingley, Bingley’s sister Caroline, and the Hursts.

On the last day of July, Darcy set off with this group in three carriages, two for the party and one for servants. He rode his horse most of the way, joined by Bingley on the first day. They stopped for the night at an inn, about halfway there, and at dinner he announced a last minute decision to leave at daybreak the next day, to ride ahead of the party to Pemberley, so he could organize everything for the visit with his housekeeper and his steward. The rest of

the party would spend another night at an inn, and join him at Pemberley early the following day.

As he rode up to Pemberley the next day, he felt the joy of returning to his wonderful home, that had been many generations in the making, and which he was now custodian of for as long as he might be privileged to live. He was met by his groom, who had seen him coming, just the other side of the lake. The groom took his horse, and he walked around the lake to the house.

On the way he saw a young woman on the path ahead, with two others, who, when she heard his footfall, turned around to instantly reveal that she was none other than Miss Elizabeth Bennet. How could that be? What an amazing turn of events! He was flustered and flushed for a moment, and saw the embarrassment, too, in her face. He advanced toward her.

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet!”

“Mr. Darcy!”

“I’m so glad to see you here. Are your parents in good health? And your sisters? Are they...”

“They are all in very good health, thank you.”

Darcy could see that Elizabeth was as confused and astonished as he was. She could only briefly lift her eyes to his, before they were cast down again.

“Are you traveling in the area?”

“Yes.”

“When did you leave Longbourn?”

“About a week ago, and have been traveling about Derbyshire, where my Aunt was brought up.” She motioned toward Mrs. Gardiner.

“And where are you staying?”

“At the inn at Lambton.”

“Oh, good. I know it well.” Suddenly he realized he was presenting himself to her while still in his sweaty riding clothes. “Excuse me for a few minutes, please. I must go up and change out of my riding apparel.” He turned and left, glad of some respite from the embarrassing situation. He desperately needed to gather his thoughts, but hoped she would still be there when he returned. While changing himself, which he had to do since his valet was still with the party, he determined just to be as friendly as possible and to ask to be introduced to her friends. It was all he could think of in the short time he had. He walked briskly out to find her. He could see her and her party still in the garden, and walked toward her with a studied calmness. He started out with:

“I trust you are enjoying Pemberley’s gardens.”

“Oh, thank you, yes,” answered Elizabeth, “They are delightful—quite charming.” She looked as if she was going to say more, but didn’t, and she blushed a little, as if some thought had crossed her mind.

“Miss Bennet, would you do me the honor of introducing me to your friends?”

“Of course!”

The introduction was made, and Darcy realized this uncle and aunt of Elizabeth’s were among the lowly connections in trade that he had considered were obstacles to both Bingley and himself marrying into the family. They seemed nice people, though, and he was determined to be friendly to them. He had decided to abandon his pride in his position in society, and here was his first chance to show

that he really had. He saw Elizabeth glancing at him to see how he reacted to the introduction.

"Mr. Gardner, I'm glad you decided to travel to this part of the country. Have you been here before?"

"Mrs. Gardner grew up in Lambton."

Darcy looked at her with a smile, and she said:

"I think Derbyshire the most beautiful county in all of England."

"And I would have to agree," added her husband.

"Mr. Gardner, do you enjoy fishing?"

"I do indeed, when I get the chance of it."

"Well, you are very welcome to fish here as much as you like while you continue in the neighborhood. And I'd be happy to supply you with all the fishing tackle you need, and show you which parts of the stream usually have the most sport."

"Thank you, Mr. Darcy. I would enjoy that very much!"

Initially they walked with the two ladies in front and the two gentlemen behind, but 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 tomorrow; 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 tomorrow,” 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. Darcy blushed a little at the recollection of the time when Bingley’s name had last come up between them.

“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?”

Elizabeth seemed greatly surprised at this request, but pleasantly so, it appeared. After a short pause she said, “I would be very happy to meet your sister.”

They now walked on in silence, each of them deep in thought. 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. He 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 must have been nearly worn out before the *tête-à-tête* was over. On Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner’s coming up he pressed them all to go into the

house and take some refreshment; but this was declined, and they parted on each side with utmost politeness. Darcy handed the ladies into the carriage; and when it drove off, he saw Elizabeth had turned in her seat and was looking back over her shoulder at him. He smiled at her and saw her smile back. As she became hidden by trees, he turned and walked slowly towards the house, feeling much happier than he had been for months. Despite the awkward silences at times, he couldn't believe how well the meeting went. Georgiana would be pleased to meet Elizabeth! And he was very happy about the apparent change for the better in Elizabeth's feelings toward him, and that he would be seeing her again so soon.

Chapter 26

Next morning, after breakfast, Darcy saw the coaches of the rest of his party approach, and went down to the drive to meet them.

“Welcome to Pemberley, Bingley!”

“It’s so good to be here. Whenever I see it again after being away, I’m struck by what a lovely prospect you have from the front of your house.”

“Well, thank you. I’m glad you like it.” Darcy turned to the others, who had just emerged from their carriage. “And welcome to you, Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst. And, of course, my darling sister, did you have a good trip?”

“Yes, dear brother. And how about your horse ride? Did you make it by late morning yesterday, as planned?”

“I did, and I have some news for you, but we’ll get to that over tea when we are inside.”

“You always like to keep me in suspense! But I can wait, since it will only be a few minutes. I’ve got no idea what it could be!”

After they were seated, Georgiana said:

“So?”

“So, just as I arrived yesterday, I saw three people on the path some way ahead of me. I soon found out they were Miss Elizabeth Bennet and her uncle and aunt, the Gardiners, who were traveling in the area, and had applied to my housekeeper to see the house and then the grounds.”

“Wow! Brother, was she nice to you?”

“Yes, actually she was. Nicer than she ever was before. I’m thinking she must have read my letter and believed what I said in it, for such a dramatic change in her attitude

towards me to have taken place. She went out of her way to be kind and courteous to me.”

“That’s wonderful! When are you going to see her again?”

“I asked her if I could introduce you to her, and she said she would be very happy to meet you. We planned that I would take you, tomorrow, to the Inn at Lambton, where they are staying.”

“Oh, my my! I’ve so wanted to meet her! But I’m a little bit afraid! What will I say to her?”

“You have no reason to be afraid. I’ll be right there with you, and you can just say, ‘Miss Bennet, I’m very pleased to meet you.’ And smile. You can also, a little later, on my cue, invite her and the Gardiners to dinner with us at Pemberley. Something like, ‘My brother and I would be honored if you and Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner would join us for dinner, during your stay in the area.’ I will then discuss the timing with them.”

“I think I can do that. This will be an adventure!”

Miss Bingley finally found a pause in the conversation that allowed her to enter with:

“My dear Mr. Darcy, I suppose you are aware that Mr. and Mrs. Gardner are the uncle and aunt who are in trade and live in Cheapside?”

“I did figure that out for myself, actually, but it was of no consequence to me. I asked to be introduced to them, and I found them to be very well-spoken, polite, intelligent and kind sorts of people. And Mrs. Gardiner grew up in Lambton, so we are neighbors, or would have been if I had had the privilege of knowing her back then.”

"I'm astonished! Next you'll be telling me you have joined the land reform movement and will be giving your estate away to your tenant farmers!"

"Not quite! But I did invite Mr. Gardiner to come and fish in my stream one day while he's in the area."

"This is a sort of long-term problem you seem to have, Mr. Darcy. I recall there was a boy about your age who you spent much time with in your youth, despite him being from the working class, and look where that friendship ended up."

Darcy was annoyed that Caroline should refer to Wickham, when Georgiana was present, and didn't know what to say. Georgiana, however, replied with:

"If you are referring to Mr. Wickham, even my father and mother were sadly deceived about him. He was so charming to us all as a child."

"But..."

"Miss Bingley, enough!" Darcy insisted. I think Georgiana has summed up that sad story perfectly, so let's just leave it at that."

"Oh, my Lord!" Miss Bingley responded under her breath.

Darcy looked toward his friend, and said, "Bingley my dear chap, would you like to come with us tomorrow when we go to meet Elizabeth?"

"Darcy, I would love to! It's been such a long time since I last saw her and her sister. In fact, I've got an idea. Why don't we escape from the hot and poisonous air in this room at the moment, and go over to Lambton right now, and see if she's at the inn. If not then the drive will allow us to cool off, anyway."

“I think that’s an excellent idea, Bingley! We’re all even dressed up suitably for a visit. I’ll order my carriage.”

Upon arrival at Lambton, after Georgiana had stepped down from the carriage, Darcy said to Bingley, “Do you mind coming up about five minutes after us? Georgiana is rather shy, and withdraws when other people are present. I’d like to give her five minutes to interact with Elizabeth before you get there. Is that all right?”

“Oh, absolutely, Darcy. I know exactly how she is, and how that would be good for her.”

After being announced, Darcy said:

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet, I would like to introduce you to my sister, Georgiana.”

“How lovely to meet you!” Elizabeth responded. “I’ve heard so many nice things about you.”

“And I about you! My brother says you play and sing very well, and that he has never enjoyed any performance as well as yours.”

“Your brother has hugely exaggerated my talent. He says, however, that *you* love music and play and sing beautifully.”

“It’s true that I love music, but his praise of how I perform is just a brother’s kindness.”

“Can I leave you two to talk,” said Darcy, “while I go and get Bingley? I’ll just be a minute.”

The two young women nodded to him, and he left to go back down the stairs. What they said during his two or three minute absence he did not know, only that as he ascended the stairs with Bingley, Georgiana was saying:

“Even then, my brother told me that he considered you to be honest, forthright and high-principled. And I hope to be that way myself.”

Darcy saw Elizabeth blush a little with a smile, and say:

“Forthright I certainly was! I wish now I had been a little less so.”

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet!” cried Bingley. “How perfectly wonderful it is to see you again!”

“And how wonderful to see you, too, Mr. Bingley!”

“How are your family? Your mother and father, and your sisters?”

“They are all well, thank you.”

“And Jane. How is Jane doing these days?”

“Very well! She, and all of us, have been missing you.”

“And I have missed you all. It is a very long time since I’ve had the pleasure of seeing you. It is above eight months. We have not met since the 26th of November, when we were all dancing together at Netherfield.”

“You have a vivid memory of those times!”

“Yes, they were very enjoyable times. Are all your sisters still at Longbourn?”

“Yes, all. Though Jane was in London for some weeks during the winter.”

“Oh really! I didn’t know.”

After about half an hour, when the Gardiners had joined them, and at a hint from Mr. Darcy, Georgiana said to Elizabeth, “My brother and I would be honored if you and Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner would join us for dinner at Pemberley, before you leave the area.”

“Thank you, Georgiana! I would be very happy to dine with you, and as for Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner...”

“We would be very happy to come, too,” Mrs. Gardiner responded after catching a look of approval in her husband’s eye.”

“Then, what about the day after tomorrow in the evening, about six o’clock?” Darcy suggested. All were in agreement, and it was settled.

“I will have great pleasure,” said Bingley to Elizabeth, “in the certainty of seeing you again, as I’ve got so much to say to you, and so much to ask you about all our Hertfordshire friends.” Elizabeth smiled on hearing this.

Darcy, who was talking to Mr. Gardiner, said, “Will you come to Pemberley tomorrow morning to do some fishing with me?”

“I would like that very much.”

“About noon? Will that work for you?”

“It will work very well. Noon it shall be!”

Chapter 27

After breakfast, Miss Darcy, Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley, retired to an elegant north-facing living room, which was very comfortable in the summer heat. 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.

Darcy and Bingley left at the same time to prepare the fishing tackle ahead of Mr. Gardiner's visit. Darcy spent over an hour fishing with Mr. Gardiner, who told him that Elizabeth and Mrs. Gardiner had called on the ladies of the house. After landing quite a few trout, Darcy said:

"I have a mind to drop in on the ladies. Can I leave you here with Bingley to fish a little more, or would you like to join me?"

"Can I fish for another hour and then join you at the house?"

"Absolutely! I'll see you then."

Darcy arrived in the saloon to see on the table cold meat, cake, and a variety of all the finest fruits of the season. Beautiful pyramids of grapes, nectarines, and peaches had collected the ladies around the table. Elizabeth smiled at him and seemed calm and collected. Georgiana, likewise seemed at ease, but Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley looked ill at ease and suspicious. He suspected Caroline was quite simply jealous. She said with a sneering civility:

"Pray, Miss Eliza, are not the 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 he instantly comprehended that Wickham was uppermost in her thoughts. He looked at Elizabeth to see what her response might be to this ill-natured attack. She colored slightly, but was able to say with reasonable composure:

"They are no loss to me at all."

Darcy felt the subject could be safely dropped, and said nothing. Caroline looked disappointed that she had been unable to get more of a reaction from Elizabeth, but evidently didn't dare to continue the subject. Darcy felt reassured from Elizabeth's response that she was no longer fond of Wickham—no doubt the change had come from reading and considering his letter to her. He had, of course, never told Caroline, Bingley, or anyone other than Elizabeth and Colonel Fitzwilliam, about Georgiana's connection with Wickham, and he was very glad of that now.

After this exchange, the visit was soon over. As he was attending them to their carriage, however, he heard Miss Bingley venting her feelings in criticisms on Elizabeth's person, behaviour, and dress. Elizabeth and her aunt, must also have heard it. He noticed, with pleasure, though, that Georgiana did not join her in this. He had always spoken of Elizabeth to Georgiana as being lovely and amiable, and it was clear she had warmed to Elizabeth herself when she first met her yesterday, so this, while being gratifying, was hardly surprising.

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 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.

As for Darcy, he felt cautiously optimistic that Elizabeth might now be open to his advances. It seemed rather miraculous that her opinion should have changed so much, but his heart whispered to him, when observing her, that it might just have. The day after tomorrow she was coming for dinner, but he was thinking of also calling on her tomorrow morning, so that he might have a one-on-one conversation with her.

Then it occurred to him—Mr. Gardiner would probably still be fishing at his stream! He would go down and fish with him some more, then offer him one of his coaches to take him and his catch back to the inn.

Chapter 28

Darcy set off on his horse the next morning, thinking yet again about what to say to Elizabeth. Although feeling a little nervous about it, he wanted, if the opportunity presented itself, to tell Elizabeth that he agreed with her that he had been ungentlemanly in his proposal to her. He'd said, in the name of honesty, things that must have been obvious to her, so hadn't needed to be said. Out of kindness, they would have much better been left unsaid. He wanted to apologize and ask her forgiveness. He also wanted to say that although given good principles as a child, he had been allowed to grow up in pride and conceit, and to thank her for helping him make a start in getting over these problems. These were the key things he wished to say. What other conversation might unfold, he would leave up to the spontaneity of the moment. Events, however, overtook his intentions. After a servant showed him up to Elizabeth's rooms and opened the door, he could see she was very distressed.

Her pale face and impetuous manner made him start, and before he could recover himself to speak, she 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 it seemed like she could see 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 scarcely heard her, and was walking up and down the room in earnest meditation, his brow contracted, his air gloomy.

Covering her face with her handkerchief, Elizabeth seemed 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 today."

"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 one serious, parting look, went away.

What could he do to help? This thought, arising out of the compassion he felt for her, filled his being as he mounted his horse and rode away. He quickly realized he must find Wickham and use every measure within his power to make sure he married Lydia. He knew he had to do this for two reasons: to help Elizabeth and because it was at least partly his fault that this scandalous situation had arisen. If he had not so carefully concealed Wickham's misdeeds, and his character had been more generally known, Wickham could not have been an officer in the army, let alone been in a position of trust that would have allowed this seduction to have taken place. He had also, in his letter to her, asked for Elizabeth's secrecy in the matter, which had prevented her warning her father about Wickham, which would most likely have saved the daughter. He blamed himself. It had been his pride, wishing to protect his family name, rather than being concerned that Wickham might damage the lives of others. It was his fault, so it was his responsibility to rectify the damage. At the same time, he needed to protect Georgiana. She was only fifteen when she agreed to elope with Wickham, and she deserved a

fresh start, and to be able to have that, very few people must know what happened. But the secrecy had, very clearly, allowed Wickham to strike again and bring scandal to the Bennet family. Elizabeth was quite obviously convinced that Lydia running off with Wickham would forever disgrace her family, and forever ruin the prospects of her sister and herself of making a good marriage, and her distress was extreme, as of course it would be. It was up to him to make sure things didn't turn out that way, and he had little time to lose in finding Wickham and persuading him to marry Lydia.

The first step would be to call on Mrs. Younge in London, Georgiana's former governess who had helped Wickham in his attempted elopement with Georgiana. He was confident she would know something of their whereabouts. Then, once he found them he would no doubt have to bribe Wickham into marrying Lydia, although he would try first to persuade her to abandon Wickham and return to her family. Then he would call on Mr. Gardiner in Cheapside, and get him to inform the Bennets that the problem was resolved. He remembered noticing that Mr. Gardiner had signed Pemberley's guest book when he had visited the house, and that he had filled in his address. Finding him would be easy.

His most immediate problem, however, would be what to say to the Bingleys and Georgiana about why he needed to rush off, so shortly after Elizabeth had needed to do the same. They would surely connect the two if he didn't have a very good story. But again, he had an idea.

Darcy simply told the Bingleys and Georgiana the truth that Elizabeth and the Gardiners had to urgently return

home to deal with a situation that had arisen, and that he was leaving for London the next day because there was something he could do to help them. He didn't go into details, though, saying the situation was confidential.

"You can't just leave us in suspense like that," said Caroline. "What sort of situation is it?"

"I can, and I will, keep you in suspense because I don't want anyone to know about the little thing I'm going to do to help, because I don't want the beneficiaries to feel beholden to me. The less anyone knows about it the better, and I'm afraid that includes you, too. You at least know who is involved, which is more than many will know, so I ask you to keep quiet about it, for my sake. Can you do that for me?"

"Of course, brother! I know you only act for the good of people, and quite often do so, so I wish you well. When will you be back?"

"I think I'll be back in about a week, and I hope you'll all be able to stay here and enjoy yourselves.

"I'm sure this must involve Elizabeth or one of her dreadful younger sisters," said Caroline, perplexed to the point of extreme irritation.

"I'm sorry, I can't tell you any more than I already have."

Next morning, Darcy left after breakfast in his carriage for Edward Street in London, where Mrs. Younge lived by taking in boarders. It was possible Wickham and Lydia were even staying with her. He would spend one night at an inn on the way, then visit her the next evening before going on to his own London house.

Chapter 29

Darcy rang the bell at the house in Edward Street with some trepidation. What if she slammed the door in his face?

The door opened to reveal a smile quickly fade to a suspicious look.

“Hello Mrs. Younge. I’m sorry to disturb you. I come because our mutual friend, Mr. Wickham, is in some trouble I wish to help him out with, and I’m hoping you know where he is staying in London.”

“I think I know where he is. I’ll write the address out for you. Wait just a minute, please.” She shut the door and came back a few minutes later. “This is where he might be, but I’m not sure.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Younge. Many people, including Mr. Wickham will be helped by your kindness. Goodbye.”

Darcy quickly left for the address given him, which was quite some distance away, nearer to his own London house. He arrived there just before nightfall, only to find the owner of the house didn’t even know Wickham, let alone where he was. What was he to do? He had no other leads. He was sure Mrs. Younge did know Wickham’s whereabouts, but felt she was being loyal to her friend by not revealing it. He would just have to bribe her into disclosing it! So, the next day found him ringing Mrs. Younge’s doorbell again.

“I’m sure that if he wasn’t there, I don’t know where he might be,” answered Mrs. Young.

“I accept what you are saying, but it is very important that I discover him in time to help him out of the trouble he’s in.”

“What kind of trouble might that be?”

“Confidentiality prevents me revealing that.”

“Well I’d like to help out, of course, but I don’t see what I can do.”

“I have an idea that someone of your acquaintance might know of his whereabouts. Of course, if you were to go to the trouble of tracking him down, it would only be reasonable that you be compensated for your trouble. I would be prepared to pay you forty pounds for your efforts. But if you take this on, be sure you’ve got the right address, or if you can’t find it, let me know, and give me half the money back, or I’ll put the matter into the hands of my solicitor. Do you understand?”

“I do. Come back the same time tomorrow, and I’ll see what I can dig up.”

Darcy got the right address this way, and on the third day of his search, as he approached the house in question, he saw Wickham looking out of an upstairs window. Soon he was knocking on the door to their room.

“Mr. Darcy!” exclaimed Wickham, “What are you doing here?”

“Attempting to help you and Lydia get out of the bind you are in. Can I come in?”

“I guess so.” He opened the door more widely and stood back.”

“So, you and Lydia Bennet are in quite a situation? Where is she, by the way?”

“Out shopping for food.”

“What plans have you and Lydia made? Have you set a wedding date?”

“We haven’t, and I’m not sure we will. You must see that we can’t afford to get married, unless something turns

up. I have to hope for a better match than Lydia can provide, even if I've got to go to America to do so."

"Lydia has one thousand pounds, I gather, and her father would no doubt provide a yearly amount to supplement your military pay."

"Not nearly enough, Darcy. How would you like to live on such an amount?"

"So you are just taking advantage of Lydia to satisfy your carnal lust, while leading her to believe you will soon be married?"

"I wouldn't put it quite like that! I have told her we can't get married until our financial situation has improved, and that I'm working on it."

"What exactly is it that you are working on?"

"Since I had to resign my commission, due to being unable to pay my debts, I'm writing to some people in the north of England about getting a commission in the regulars there. That might allow me to stay in England if certain other things break my way as well."

At this point the door opened and Lydia came in.

Darcy stepped aside and greeted her.

"Mr. Darcy! What do you want from us?"

"Lydia, let me get straight to the point. You can avoid the worst of the damage to your reputation, if you allow me to take you back to your family, who are all very worried about you."

"But I'm going to marry Wicki, that's what I want, and I'm *not* going to give it up! Why should I?"

"What is your wedding date?"

Asking this brought a miserable look to Lydia's face. She was obviously worried about how far off a wedding may be. He turned to Wickham, who said:

"As I've been saying to you: all in good time, all in good time. Look, you can hardly accuse me of fortune hunting this time! Give us time, and we'll make a life together."

"Yes we will, Mr. Darcy!" Lydia chimed in. "If you want to help us, you could offer to pay some of Wicki's bills. That would help speed up our progress toward a wedding. And they would be nothing to you."

Darcy knew this was true, but decided to make one more pitch for letting him take her home to her family. It was not successful, though, and Darcy said:

"Perhaps I can help you get married," he said to Lydia, "Since that seems to be what you really want. George, how much do you owe? If we can get your debts paid off, I think I can buy you that commission in the regulars in the north. I know they're in need of officers up there."

"Would you do that for Wicki and me? Thank you thank you thank you!" Lydia threw herself at him and hugged him.

"All right, all right! You can let me go now!" He moved away from her. "Yes, I would do that for you both, providing you do your very best to live within your means and not get into further debt. You can't rely on me to pay off any of your future debts."

"Of course," replied Lydia, "All that wild living is in the past for Wicki, now he has the stabilizing influence of a good woman in his life."

"I hope so. And one more thing. You must promise to keep every detail of my help to you a secret. That's important to me. Can you promise that?"

They both promised, then Darcy steered the conversation to the details of paying off Wickham's debts and planning the wedding. He also offered them a generous annual amount, starting on their wedding day, so long as they stayed together and avoided any major scandal. Wickham tried to negotiate the amount higher, but in the end agreed to the proposal. Darcy was resigned to having to bribe Wickham like this. He knew if he didn't Wickham would leave Lydia in the lurch and Elizabeth and the Bennet family mired in scandal.

Next day Darcy called on Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, to let them know he had found Lydia and to authorize them to tell the Bennets about what had been done for her, but not that he had any hand in it. At the door the butler told them Mr. Gardiner was with Mr. Bennet, who was leaving later that day to return home to his family. Darcy thought it wise to just deal with Mr. Gardiner, and decided to return the following day. When he did, he recounted the whole story and his wish to anonymously take full responsibility for rectifying the situation.

"But you are asking me to take all the credit for saving Lydia, without any of the effort, and without bearing any of the expense!" complained Mr. Gardiner.

"That's because the responsibility is all mine, and so must the remedy be! If it hadn't been for my mistaken pride Mr. Wickham's worthlessness would have been widely enough known that no young woman from a good family could have loved or trusted him. My pride led me to believe that it was beneath me to let my family problems be known to the world. I had hoped his character would speak for

itself, but I was mistaken in this. His engaging manner means he can do all sorts of ill to trusting people before they become aware that he is not to be trusted. It is my fault that this is not known more widely, so it must be my job to rectify the damage done in this case, and to get him settled in such a way that he has little opportunity to do more damage.”

“But why can’t you take the credit for your good actions now. I’m sure the Bennet family, and Elizabeth in particular, would be very grateful to you for your crucial help in this matter. No one else could have accomplished it!”

“There are two reasons why I think it’s important to keep my role in this matter a secret. The first is that I don’t want anyone in the Bennet family to feel beholden to me. The second is that I don’t want the story of Mr. Wickham’s deplorable actions getting back to my sister Georgiana, since, as I mentioned to you earlier, she was the innocent target of his past seduction attempt, and I feel her frail but growing confidence in herself would be badly shaken by it. She could well feel some mistaken responsibility for him being the way is. She is at a very vulnerable age.”

“Those are certainly two very good reasons. So, you want me to write to Mr. Bennet that I have discovered their whereabouts, and persuaded Wickham to marry Lydia, and that this was possible because Wickham’s situation is not so bad as it seemed, and that her thousand pounds and one hundred pounds a year from him will be all that Wickham insisted on in the end?”

“That sounds good.”

“Not very believable, though, in that he’ll assume I paid out at least ten thousand pounds to prevail upon Wickham, and will be wondering how he can ever pay me back.”

“But it will have to do! We will have to write the letter as soon as possible and get it sent off by express. We could work on it together if you’d like?”

“Thank you, yes. Fabrications are more easily done by collaborators!”

“Ha!” They both laughed then got down to work.

Chapter 30

Darcy decided to return to Pemberley for a week or so, since Wickham and Lydia's wedding was still two weeks away. Lydia would stay with the Gardiners until the wedding, although she was openly resentful about having to do so.

All through the carriage journey he was wondering what he would say to Georgiana, Bingley and Caroline about the substance of his trip. As little as possible, hopefully, though in point of fact it had been quite the adventure. He hadn't thought he was going to like it. Rather he looked forward to it as an onerous duty to be fulfilled, but in the end he had found it quite exciting. He imagined it to be the kind of work a clergyman might often be called upon to perform. Perhaps he had missed his vocation? As a wealthy gentleman, however, his vocations could be many!

Happy is the man who knows his own self! Darcy now felt like he knew himself a whole lot better than he had previously. He realized helping people would be a big part of his life. It was what made him feel contented. And he knew who was the next person whom he would help. It was Bingley. Elizabeth's accusation that he had ruined the happiness of her sister Jane, and of Bingley, had ever so gradually gathered weight with him, to the point that by now he was thinking he owed Bingley an apology and that he would offer to help in determining whether Jane was still in love with him. If she was, then her's was certainly the sort of enduring love that any man would wish for.

You can imagine the warm welcome Darcy received from Georgiana and Bingley when he arrived home at Pemberley, and the number and tone of the questions he was plied with by Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst. He managed to weather

these questions without revealing his secret, much to the disgust of Carolyn, who ended up by saying:

"Since we can have no satisfaction of our curiosity here, I am going to propose to Mrs. Hurst that we take a trip to Scarborough for the rest of the summer. There, at least we will have a tolerable amount of news of society to discuss."

"What an excellent idea!" replied Mrs. Hurst. I could be ready to leave in about a week."

"How perfect!" thought Darcy. They will be gone just before he needed to announce his return to London in two weeks for Wickham's wedding. It would be perfect for keeping them in the dark.

Later, Darcy went for a walk in the woods around Pemberley with Bingley, during which he told him, in the strictest confidence, all about what had been happening.

"Hey! You *have* been having a grand adventure! No wonder you have been trying so hard to keep it a secret from the gossip machine soon to be off to Scarborough."

"And from Georgiana, who would be devastated by this news of Wickham, believing she had influenced his character by her encouragement of him just a year ago."

"Yes, of course, I won't let a thing slip with her. You have my word."

"Thank you, Bingley." He was quiet for a moment. "Tell me, are you still in love with Jane Bennet?"

"Yes, I believe I am. Meeting her sister recently brought it all back. But is she interested in me any more? It has been a long time, Darcy."

"A couple of months ago, when I was at Rosings, Elizabeth told me that her sister Jane had very strong feelings for you, that had not waned over the months during which she had not seen you."

"What a thing to... Why didn't you tell me that at the time?"

"A good question! I didn't think she was right for you, and, strange as it seems to me now, I thought you needed looking after. I'm very sorry Bingley; it was very wrong of me. I realize it now. I've gradually been changing my view of the matter over the past few months."

"Well, thank you for your apology. What is your view of the matter now?"

"That you can look after yourself perfectly well, and choose your partner in life for yourself. And that if you want and need my help you will ask for it."

"Well, I'm asking for it now! Will you come down to Netherfield with me and join me in visiting the Bennets? Then we can both see whether it seems like Jane is still interested in me. Two sets of eyes and ears will be better than one."

"Certainly, I'll do that! But can we wait until three weeks after Wickham's wedding—about a month from now? The reason I ask is that I happen to know the Wickhams will be visiting the Bennets for three weeks immediately after their wedding, and I wouldn't want to run into Wickham there."

"Of course not! Should we leave it another week after that, to make sure he's gone?"

"A couple of days after he leaves would be enough, I think. I know when he has to report to his regiment in Newcastle, so to be there on time he'll have to only stay three weeks with the Bennets."

"You certainly have it all figured out!"

"Long carriage rides by one's self give you plenty of time to plan things."

"You mean you'd planned it all already—that we'd go together to Netherfield and visit the Bennets together?"

“Yes! How else could we do it? I was going to suggest it to you, but you beat me to it. Great minds think alike!

“I think you just read me like a book.”

“Never! You’re more like a brook than a book—always changing but always the same true friend.”

So it was, that just over three weeks after Wickham’s wedding, Darcy found himself riding down the Bennet’s gravel drive with Bingley. Just before dismounting, Darcy saw a face at a window, so knew they were recognized. On being shown in he allowed Bingley to say his greetings first, then added:

“Good morning to you all.” He caught Elizabeth’s eye and smiled. “I hope you are well?”

“Quite well, thank you,” Elizabeth responded, with a smile, herself, and some heightened color in her face. She looked as if she wanted to say more, but was too embarrassed to. He smiled again, then turned to look at how Bingley and Jane were interacting, as the mission of this visit was, after all, to help Bingley determine whether Jane still loved him. Initially there were embarrassed smiles on both sides, but she did seem pleased that he had come to visit. On the way past her to a chair Mrs. Bennet offered him, he said to Elizabeth, “How are Mr. And Mrs. Gardiner doing?”

“Well, I think. I’ve had one letter from my aunt, a couple of weeks ago, and she did not mention any illness, so I assume they are well.”

There was an agitation in her reply that made Darcy suspect that she knew something of his business with them, but maybe not. His chair was at a sufficient distance from hers to make conversation difficult, so he concentrated mostly on observing Jane and Bingley, with just occasional

looks at her, to catch her eye, and to try and gauge her feelings for him. On once catching her eye, she said, across that space of two chairs, "Mr. Darcy, how is your sister Georgiana?"

"She is well. She often mentions how much she enjoyed meeting you. She is at Pemberley at the moment with her governess."

"I very much enjoyed meeting her, too. I hope I have the privilege of..." And then other conversation cut her off.

"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. Darcy saw that Elizabeth's eyes were cast down in embarrassment and mortification. She certainly didn't share her mother's feelings!

"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 local regiment, and of his being gone into the regulars. Thank Heaven! he has *some* friends, though perhaps not so many as he deserves.”

Elizabeth, Darcy could see, 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, Darcy could see, at such unnecessary, such officious attention.

When he and Bingley 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.

On their ride home they were quiet at first, then Darcy broke the silence.

“It seems to me Jane still cares about you—very much, I would say.”

“I agree! But I’m glad you got that impression, too. It makes me feel confident in asking for her hand. I think I’ll

visit again by myself a couple of days after the dinner we have both been invited to.”

“Very good. I’m sure she will accept you.”

“I wish I could be sure, but I’m hopeful!”

Darcy reflected that he felt exactly the same way about Elizabeth, but said nothing.

At the dinner at the Bennets Darcy again found he had little opportunity to talk to Elizabeth, but that was all right, as this was Bingley and Jane’s time to draw closer. On bringing back his coffee cup to near where she was, however, Elizabeth said:

“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.”

Darcy couldn’t think of anything more to say, so just basked silently in her presence for a few minutes, catching her eyes and exchanging a smile with her at one point. At last, on the young lady’s whispering to Elizabeth again, he walked away.

Riding back to Netherfield, Darcy said to Bingley:

“I’m going to London tomorrow, to give you some space to court Jane and ask for her hand.”

“Thank you, Darcy, having some space will be helpful for that—I’m determined to propose to her within a few days.”

“I’m counting on it!”

“Why are you counting on it?”

“Because I want to see you happy.” He knew that was only a part of the reason, but didn’t want to distract Bingley from his purpose with Jane by talking about his own hopes with Elizabeth. He knew his chances of winning Elizabeth over would be greatly increased if her sister and Bingley

were engaged, since his previously discouraging the match was one of her professed reasons for turning down his first proposal. “Will you send me an express when you are engaged?”

“Oh, if you like! It means a lot to you, doesn’t it?”

“I guess it does.”

When, on his fourth day in London, Darcy received that express, his heart whispered to him that it was likely all would go well with Elizabeth. He felt happy, but still wished he could be more certain.

On his second-last day in London a most unusual event gave him all the certainty he could ever hope to expect. His aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, called on him.

“Darcy, I will get straight to the point. A report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago. I was told that not only was your friend Bingley on the point of being married most deeply below his class, to Miss Bennet, but that you, Mr. Darcy, my nephew, would, in all likelihood, be soon afterwards united to Miss Elizabeth Bennet! I called on Elizabeth this morning to get her categorical denial of there being any truth in the rumor. Now I am seeking such a denial from *you*, to set my mind at ease about your engagement to my daughter.”

“My dear aunt, I have never heard of this rumor, but what did Elizabeth say?”

“After much obstinacy from her, in which she tried to defend her right to marry you if you wished to have her, I said to her, ‘Tell me once for all, are you engaged to him?’ After deliberating for a moment she said, ‘I am not.’ I followed this up with, ‘And will you promise me never to enter into such an engagement?’ To this her reply was, ‘I will make no promise of the kind.’”

Darcy responded to this news by throwing his arms around his aunt and saying:

“Thank you thank you thank you, for being the bearer of such good news!”

“Stop it Darcy, stop it! I implore you. Let go of me! We are not living in France!”

When Darcy stood back from her, she continued:

“It seems like you welcome her attachment to you; how can this be?”

“I don’t know quite how it happened, but it is true.”

“Really Darcy, have you lost your mind? Think of the degradation of being attached to such a family! If they were not low enough in society already, consider the recent scandalous elopement of Elizabeth’s youngest sister with Mr. Wickham! Her father and uncle eventually bribed them into marrying, but they were living together for weeks before their marriage. Are you to be the brother to such a woman? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?”

“I know about Miss Lydia Bennet’s infamous elopement, but Elizabeth is so different. And with all my wealth I am able to marry whom I choose. My mother said to me, before she died, that many poorer people amongst the gentry have a pressing need to marry for money, but that I would be wealthy enough not to have to consider it. ‘Young Mr. Darcy,’ she said, ‘You should marry for love.’ And I intend to do that if I possibly can.”

“I know you are a headstrong young man, Mr. Darcy, so I’m going to leave you now to think about what I have said, and realize the folly of marrying so deeply below your station in life. I’m sure time will have a salutary effect on you.”

Chapter 31

A week and a day after Bingley's engagement to Jane, when Darcy was two days back from London, he and his friend set off together to visit the Bennets. Darcy was determined to take the first chance he could to renew his offer of marriage to Elizabeth.

They arrived early, and Bingley, who wanted to be alone with Jane, proposed their all walking out. It was agreed to. Mrs. Bennet, it was announced, was not in the habit of walking; Mary, apparently, 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 seemed to be brooding on something, and he was certainly doing the same.

They walked towards the Lucases, because Kitty wished to call upon Maria; and as Elizabeth, apparently, saw no occasion for making it a general concern, when Kitty left them she went boldly on with him alone. She seemed to be gathering the courage to say something, then ventured:

"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 seemed too much embarrassed to say a word. After a short pause, Darcy 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 looked awkward for a moment, then spoke:

“*My* feelings have changed so much since that time you referred to, that it is with very great pleasure and gratitude that I hear you say your feelings haven’t changed. I have been so much hoping, desperately hoping, that I would have a second chance with you.”

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 said he was delighted with their engagement, and that 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.

"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.

“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, seemed agitated and confused.

On the ride home, Bingley observed:

“Darcy, you seem uncommonly happy!”

“I am! And the reason is that I’m engaged to Elizabeth. It happened today, on our walk, which is why we were so late back from it. We had so much to talk about!”

“Didn’t she turn you down once before?”

“Yes, but everything had changed for the better, and she was hoping for a second chance with me.”

“Well, congratulations, Darcy!”

“Thank you!”

“Jane and I were hoping you two might get together, but didn’t think it was possible. When was it that you first felt attracted to her?”

“I’m not exactly sure when I was first in love with her—it came on so gradually, but I think I was attracted to her quite early. Do you remember, at that first ball at Meryton, I said, ‘*You* are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room,’ and you replied, ‘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.’”

“I looked at her and said to you, ‘She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*.’ Well, soon afterward, I realized she must have overheard me say that, and was filled with remorse. I observed her a number of times after that, and could see she had a very lively and intelligent look about her. That, I believe, is when I first felt attracted to her!”

“Yes, I remember, at the end of the evening, you asked me what her name was.”

“And you gave me her name then said, ‘Don’t tell me! You now think her a little bit more than just tolerable?’ And I did, already, think her a lot more than just tolerable!”

“And I never knew you cared for her anything like that early—you have been very sly, Darcy, very sly!”

Chapter 32

Darcy and Bingley arrived at Longbourn early the next morning. As soon as they entered, Bingley looked at Elizabeth so expressively, and shook hands with her with such warmth, as can have 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, in a voice Darcy could just make out:

“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.

“My dear Mr. Darcy, I told my sister Jane last night about us being engaged. At first she refused to believe me. She said, ‘You are joking, Lizzy. This cannot be!—engaged to

Mr. Darcy! No, no, you shall not deceive me. I know it to be impossible.”

“But you convinced her in the end?”

“Yes, but it took a while. In the end, though, she was very happy for me, and said she would like you better than anyone other than Mr. Bingley and myself.”

“That was very kind of her, but she seems to be the kindest of creatures.”

“Yes, kinder than me, I’m afraid!”

“But you have other qualities, and are in no way deficient in kindness.”

“What other qualities are they?”

“Intelligence and wit, just to name two. And courage and character, to name a couple more.”

That’s kind of you! You see, kindness is one of *your* qualities, too.

“I believe you are more than just intelligent,” said Darcy. “You are a deep thinker, which in my experience is rare in a man or a woman. And it’s a quality I admire and greatly value.”

“That’s because you have that quality yourself, and you would feel lonely with a life companion who didn’t have some measure of it herself.”

“Yes. I want to have a marriage of equals, and I know with you I can. I will encourage you to work toward goals you want to achieve, whether they involve being creative or helping the world to be a better place, or both. Of course, there will be time for us to enjoy life, and travel to amazing places, and have wonderful adventures.”

“I *would* like to have a purpose in life! So many women amongst the gentry have no purpose other than being

mothers and the lady of the house. I have long looked around me and supposed there was nothing I could do to avoid that trap, other than perhaps writing a novel or two! So, I'm excited about helping you in your various projects to 'make the world a better place.'"

"You could contribute some time to my schools if you wish to, though I'd be happy to see you conceive and implement your own projects."

"I would love to help with your schools—they're a wonderful idea, but I also greatly value the freedom you are allowing me to explore what else I may want to do. As for travel, though I wish to do some of it, I like Pemberley so much that I believe there is no place in the world I would rather be!"

"I'm glad you like Pemberley!"

"Very much! You know when I visited, and your housekeeper showed me the vista from one of the windows, I wistfully said to myself, 'Of all this I could have been mistress!'"

"And now you *will* be mistress of all of it. And very happy I am about it!"

In the evening, soon after Mr. Bennet withdrew to the library, Darcy rose and followed him. He cast a look at Elizabeth on the way, and she seemed rather agitated. He gave her a smile, which she returned as best she could. At the door of the library, which was open, he asked:

"Mr. Bennet, can I have a few words with you?"

"Certainly, Mr. Darcy. What can I do for you? Close the door if you wish."

Darcy closed the door, then began:

“Your daughter Elizabeth and I have come to an understanding that we want to be married to each other, so I’ve come to ask your permission.” Mr. Bennet had a look of total bewilderment on his face, and was unable to say a word, so Darcy continued. “I have had a very deep love for her for many months, and after getting off on the wrong foot with her to start with, she has come to love me, too—a turn around that I don’t know I deserve, but that I do know I am very happy about.”

“Mr.Darcy,” said Mr. Bennet, finally finding his voice. “Please excuse me; this turn of events takes me so much by surprise that I don’t know where to begin! I must say you’ve both been very sly about concealing your affection from those around you.”

“Yes, perhaps we have. Until Bingley made his offer to Jane, I wanted to take a back seat to him. And as for Elizabeth, it was only yesterday that we...”

“Yes yes yes. That makes sense. Well, you have my permission, of course. You are one of the most eligible bachelors in the land. I rather wonder at your being willing to marry so far beneath your station. Of course Elizabeth is a remarkable young woman, and I congratulate you on being able to figure that out!”

“Thank you! Yes, I did figure that out. And I have more than enough money for both of us. It is character, liveliness, wit and depth of thought that are important to me in a life partner.”

“And Elizabeth has all those qualities in spades. Yes yes. I think you do appreciate her many good qualities, and that is

a good start. But she is my favorite daughter, so if I'm going to give her up to you, you have to promise me you'll make her happy."

"We've decided already that we're going to be the happiest couple in the world! But I do promise I'll do everything I can to promote her happiness."

"Very good."

"Mr. Bennet, we have something in common: Elizabeth is my favorite of your daughters, too!" They both laughed. "In fact, she is my favorite of all the women I've ever met!"

"Well, I'm very glad to hear it." You have my permission, so get along with you, and go and put Lizzy out of her misery. And tell her, if you don't mind, to come in and see me."

"I will, and thank you very much Mr. Bennet." He nodded his head to him then left the study.

It was a long time that Elizabeth was in with her father, and that made Darcy somewhat nervous, so it was a relief when she finally emerged with a smile on her face.

Chapter 33

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 more 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 34

Darcy and Bingley were married on the same day in a double wedding, and on the next day he and Elizabeth and Georgiana departed in two carriages for Pemberley, where they settled down very happily.

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.

One evening, early in their marriage, Elizabeth asked Darcy if she could come with him when he went up to his telescope. They climbed up into the attic, and then out beside one of the house's parapets to where Darcy had built his observatory.

"This is more exciting than I thought it would be!" she said.

Once inside the domed structure, Darcy lit a candle. This revealed the telescope which was about two feet in diameter and about twelve feet long, with a type of step ladder to get up to where you looked through.

"And where exactly do you look through?" She asked.

He pointed up to the side of the telescope, near the top end, and said, "You look through the eyepiece, which is that thing up there that looks a bit like a microscope."

“Oh, I see it! But how can you see the stars with the dome covering the telescope?”

“A good question! We can open up a wide slit in the dome, and also rotate the dome, so the telescope can see any part of the sky.” He proceeded to pull locking pins out of the dome, and slid its slit open to either side of the center.

They looked at a largish crescent moon first, with stunning views of craters and mountains, then Darcy moved the telescope to point at a bright yellow star.

“This is the planet Jupiter.” He adjusted the telescope and changed eyepieces, focusing carefully. “Come and have a look.”

Elizabeth climbed the stairs and peered into the eyepiece.

“Wow! How beautiful! The planet has these streaks and swirls of the most beautiful colors! And there are these four silver white stars, hanging around it like a string of pearls! One is very close to the planet, like it’s resting on her breast!”

“They are Jupiter’s four brightest moons, that revolve around Jupiter like our moon revolves around the Earth.”

“Amazing!”

“They’re called the “Galilean Moons, because Galileo discovered them when he became the first person to ever look at the night sky with a telescope. He looked at the moon and Jupiter on that night of discovery, just like we did tonight.”

“So we’ve been re-living history,” said Elizabeth.

“Yes, indeed!”

“Let me take another look!” She climbed up the ladder and looked again, soaking it in. After looking for a couple of minutes, she exclaimed:

“Darcy! That moon that was resting next to the planet suddenly faded out and disappeared! Where did it go to?”

“It must have disappeared behind the planet. In a few hours it will reappear on the other side of Jupiter.”

“Of course, the moons are moving in circles around the planet. That’s called their orbits, right?”

“Yes. And when a moon’s orbit takes it behind its planet like that, and the moon suddenly fades out like you saw, that’s called an occultation. I’ve never seen one myself—they’re very easy to miss.”

“Lucky me! But then I’ve been very lucky lately, getting to marry you.”

“It’s been my luck, too. I bless my good fortune in having you in my life, every night before I go to sleep with you in my arms.”

“Really? Thank you for telling me that! We *are* the happiest couple in the world, aren’t we?”

“Yes, we are!” He took her hand and squeezed it. After a few seconds of quiet, he continued. “You know, astronomers have used the occultations of Jupiter’s moons, like you just saw, as a kind of clock to figure out how fast light travels.”

“Doesn’t light get where it’s going in no time at all? When I light a candle, I see it’s lit immediately. It’s not like an express rider who takes ten hours to get here from London.”

“Light travels very fast, but as it turns out it doesn’t travel instantaneously. Each orbit of a moon of Jupiter, from occultation to occultation takes exactly the same amount of time—it’s like a clock. But as the Earth moves around the sun from being at its closest to Jupiter, to the other side of the sun where it is furthest from Jupiter, this clock seems to run slow, and this can only be because of the extra time light takes to get here from Jupiter when we are further away from it.”

“I see. It takes the express rider longer to get here than it takes to get to Meryton, because we are further away.”

“Yes, exactly.”

“So, can we figure out how fast light travels when coming from Jupiter?”

“Yes, we can. We know the Earth is 93 million miles from the sun, so when we move from being closest to Jupiter to being the furthest from it at the other side of our orbit around the sun, we are two times 93 million miles, that is 186 million miles, further away, so the light from Jupiter and its moons has to travel 186 million miles further to get here.”

“So that’s the extra distance. How much extra time does it take the light to get here?”

“The occultations when furthest away, are just under 17 minutes later than they would be if they were a clock. This means light travels 186 million miles in 17 minutes. Since there are close to 1,000 seconds in 17 minutes, this means light travels 186 million miles in 1,000 seconds, or 186 *thousand* miles in *one* second—that’s over seven times around the Earth in a second!”

“It’s extremely, incredibly, fast, but, as you say, not quite infinitely fast. It takes 17 minutes to cross the Earth’s orbit.”

“Yes. And you saw one of the occultations that they use to figure it!”

“I did, indeed! You know, my dear Mr. Darcy, you are so good at explaining natural philosophy. You should teach some classes in it at your schools.”

“You think so? Thank you! I’ll give it some thought. You know, you picked this stuff up very quickly, tonight, so you would be good at teaching, too. I hope you try your hand at it. You have that awe of the beauty of nature and the love of big ideas that are necessary to inspire children to learn.”

“Why, thank you! I will give teaching a try at one of your schools.”

“We can then share with each other what works with our classes.”

“Yes...Meanwhile, Mr. Darcy, I’m feeling cold. Will you give me a hug to warm me up?”

THE END