PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Jane Austen
CHAPTER ONE

Everyone knows this to be true: that an unmarried man with a good fortune must need a wife.

However little people know about such a young man when he comes to live in a new neighbourhood, they all firmly believe that he will one day belong to one or another of their daughters.

'Have you heard, Mr Bennet?' said his wife to him one day. 'Someone has at last rented Netherfield Park.'

Mr Bennet made no reply.

'Do you not want to know who has taken it?' she went on impatiently. But she was going to tell him anyway. 'Mrs Long says that a rather wealthy young man from the north of England came down last Monday in a carriage with four horses to look at the place. He liked it so much that he agreed to take it immediately and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week.'

'What is his name?'

'Bingley, my dear. And he is single! And he has an income of four or five thousand a year. Most fortunate for our girls, is it not?'

'Is it? What difference can it possibly make to them?'

'My dear Mr Bennet,' replied his wife, 'how can you ask such a thing? Surely you know that I am thinking of him marrying one of them. And so you should go and call on him as soon as he comes.'
'I can see no good reason for that,' said Mr Bennet. 'But you and the girls may go, of course, although Mr Bingley will probably like you best of all.'

'Thank you, my dear. How kind. I certainly have been thought beautiful in my time, but when she has grown-up daughters, a woman should stop thinking of her own beauty and think of her daughters' future. And you must think of their future too. You must go and see Mr Bingley as soon as he arrives in the neighbourhood.'

'I cannot promise it,' said Mr Bennet, 'but I might ask you to take a letter to him, telling him I will happily agree to let him marry any of the girls he may choose; though I must put in a good word for my little Lizzy.'

'You will do no such thing. Lizzy is not any better than the others. She is not half as beautiful as Jane, nor half as good-natured as Lydia, but you always give her preference.'

'None of them have much to recommend them,' he replied.

'They are all as silly and empty-headed as other girls, but Lizzy is cleverer than her sisters.'

'Mr Bennet! How can you speak of your own children in such a way? You take pleasure in annoying me, I know. You do not think about my poor nerves when you say things like that!'

In the twenty-three years of their marriage, Mrs Bennet had not succeeded in understanding her husband's odd character. She was much easier to understand. She was a woman of limited intelligence, who knew little, who was often bad-tempered and who complained about her nerves whenever she was unhappy. Her main aim in life was to get her daughters married.
Mr Bennet was, in fact, one of the first people to call on Mr Bingley after his arrival at Netherfield Hall. He had always intended to visit him, though he continued to tell his wife that he would not, and it was not until the evening after his visit that he told his wife and daughters that he had seen their new neighbour. The ladies were amazed, just as he had hoped, and he was very pleased with his little joke.

'Oh, how good of you, my dear Mr Bennet!' cried his wife. 'I knew I would persuade you to go in the end. How pleased I am! And what a good joke, too, not saying a word to us about it till now. What an excellent father you have, girls,' she said as her husband retired from the room, exhausted by his wife's excitement. And the rest of the evening was spent wondering how soon Mr Bingley would come to call on them, in return, and whether they should ask him to dinner.

It was impossible for Mrs Bennet or any of her daughters to make Mr Bennet give a satisfactory description of Mr Bingley.

They tried in different ways, with no success, and eventually they heard from their friend Lady Lucas that her husband, Sir William, had been delighted with him. He was quite young, extremely handsome and very pleasant. What is more, he in tended to be at the next ball in the neighbourhood with a group of his friends.

A few days later, Mr Bingley returned Mr Bennet's visit and sat with him in his library for about ten minutes. He had hoped to meet the young ladies, of whose beauty he had heard a lot, but he saw only their father. The ladies were more fortunate, however, as they saw from an upstairs window that he wore a blue coat and rode a black horse.
Soon afterwards, an invitation to dinner was sent, but he was unable to come. He was very sorry etc., but had to be in town the next day. Mrs Bennet was most disappointed, of course, until news came that Mr Bingley had gone to town to bring back some friends to stay with him and come to the ball. Two of his sisters, one of their husbands and another young man eventually returned with Mr Bingley, and the whole group came together to the dance.

Mr Bingley was certainly good-looking and behaved in every way like a gentleman. His good manners were easy and natural. His sisters were fine-looking, too, and obviously followed the very latest fashions. But it was his friend, Mr Darcy, who soon attracted the attention of the whole room because of his tall figure, his handsome face and the fine expression on it. A report also went round, not five minutes after he had entered the room, that he had an income of ten thousand a year. The ladies all quickly decided he was much more handsome than Mr Bingley and looked at him with great admiration for half the evening until they also decided that he was a very proud-looking man, that nothing could please him and that he did not seem to be enjoying the dance. Not all his money and good looks could then save him from being unpleasant in their eyes, or from being very much less attractive than his friend.
Mr Bingley introduced himself to all the important people in the room; he was cheerful and friendly; he danced every dance and was angry that the evening ended so early, and talked about giving a ball for everyone at Netherfield, himself. What a contrast with his friend! Mr Darcy danced only once with each of Mr Bingley’s two sisters, did not want to be introduced to any other lady in the room and spoke only to people in his own group during the whole evening. His character was decided: he was the proudest, least agreeable man in the world, and everyone hoped that he would not come there again.

Because there were so few gentlemen at the dance, Elizabeth Bennet had had to sit down for two dances, and during some of that time Mr Darcy had stood quite near, but he had not wanted to dance with her, even when Mr Bingley had tried to persuade him to do so. She had been able to hear some of their conversation.

'Come, Darcy,' Bingley had said. 'You must dance. There are so many extremely pretty girls in the room. I have never seen so many in one room in my life!'

'You are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room,' said Mr Darcy, looking at the eldest Miss Bennet, Elizabeth’s sister, Jane.

'Oh yes!' cried Bingley. 'She is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen! But one of her sisters is sitting down just behind you. She is also very pretty, and I’m sure very agreeable too. Let me ask my companion to introduce you to her sister.'
Mr. Darcy looked at Elizabeth and then turned back to his friend with a cold expression on his face. ‘She is tolerable, I suppose, but not really handsome enough to tempt me. You had better return to your companion and enjoy her smiles; you are wasting your time here with me.’

Mr. Bingley went. Mr. Darcy walked off, and Elizabeth was left sitting there, not feeling very friendly towards him at all.

But she later laughed with her friends about what she had heard—she was a lively, playful person, who enjoyed laughing at anything silly.

The rest of the evening passed well. Mrs. Bennet was pleased that Mr. Bingley had danced twice with her eldest daughter.

Elizabeth was happy for Jane, too, and they all returned home to Longbourn, the village where they lived, in very good spirits.

Mrs. Bennet told her husband about the whole evening in great detail, but especially about how much Mr. Bingley had admired Jane, how she was the only girl in the room he had danced with twice, and about the shocking rudeness of Mr. Darcy to Elizabeth.

‘But Elizabeth does not lose much by not pleasing him,’ she said, ‘for he is such a horrible, disagreeable man, and not at all worth pleasing. So proud! He walked here and he walked there, thinking himself so great! I very much dislike the man.’

When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, Jane, who had not yet said much about Mr. Bingley, expressed to her sister her great admiration for him.
He is just what a young man ought to be,' she said, 'sensible, good-natured, lively; I never saw such good manners! So natural.'

'He is also handsome,' replied Elizabeth, laughing, 'which is what a young man ought to be, too, if he possibly can. So I give you my permission to like him.'

They spent some time discussing Mr Bingley and his sisters, who were to stay at Netherfield Hall and who Jane thought were both charming. Elizabeth was not so sure - Mr Bingley's sisters seemed to her to imagine that they were both so much better than everyone else, but she listened to her sister in silence.

Between Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy there was a strong friendship, despite their very different characters. Bingley relied on Darcy's powerful intelligence and on his firm and fair judgement of things, even though he was often shy and seemed stiff, proud and rather bad mannered with other people. This was where Bingley had the advantage: everyone immediately liked him, but Darcy very frequently offended people. The recent ball had showed up this difference between the two friends clearly, though Darcy did admit that the eldest of the Miss Bennets was pretty, even if she smiled too much. Mr Bingley's sisters agreed, but said they admired and liked her and that they thought she was a sweet girl, one they would like to know better. This was a good enough recommendation for Mr Bingley. He felt free to think of Miss Bennet as he wished.
The ladies of Longbourn soon visited those of Netherfield and their visit was returned. Mr Bingley's sisters found Miss Bennet's manners increasingly pleasing, though they found the mother intolerable and they felt the younger sisters were not worth speaking to. They were happy to know Jane and Elizabeth, however. It was obvious also that Mr Bingley himself was starting to admire Jane more and more and that Jane was on the way to being very much in love with him. Elizabeth's only worry on this point was that Mr Bingley might not realise how her sister was starting to feel about him. Jane was so sweet and gentle towards everyone, that Mr Bingley might not see that she felt quite differently about him.

Elizabeth was so concerned with watching the development of her sister's relationship with Mr Bingley that she failed to notice that she herself was becoming an object of some interest in the eyes of his friend. Mr Darcy had not at first thought her to be very pretty, and to his friends had called her only 'tolerable', but he soon began to see what a beautiful expression there was in her fine dark eyes, and how unusually intelligent they were. He also began to notice how light and pleasing her figure was and he was caught by the easy playfulness of her manner. She, of course, knew nothing of all this change in his feelings to her he was only a man who always seemed disagreeable and had not thought she was handsome enough to dance with. He began to wish to know her better and listened more closely to her conversation with others whenever they were in the same company. She noticed this and was
annoyed by it, thinking that he listened to her only to criticise what she was saying. She therefore took great pleasure in refusing to dance with him when he asked her to one evening at the house of Sir William and Lady Lucas. But her refusal did nothing to damage the way Mr Darcy had started to think of Elizabeth. Even Mr Bingley's younger sister began to notice the way he thought about her, and she was not pleased, since she had plans for herself where the wealthy and handsome Mr Darcy was concerned.
CHAPTER TWO

Mr Bennet's own wealth and modest income was from family money, which, unfortunately for his five daughters, would go to their nearest male relation after their father's death and not to them. This relation was a cousin, whom they had never met. On their mother's side of the family there was a small amount of money, but after her father's death the family's business had gone to her sister's husband, Mr Philips, and not to Mrs Bennet. Mr and Mrs Philips lived in the small town of Meryton, only about one mile from Longbourn, and so they saw their sister and her five daughters quite frequently.

Their recent visit to Meryton had been more and more interesting for the younger Miss Bennets, Lydia and Catherine especially, because some young army officers had come to spend several months in the town and were going to be there for the whole winter. At every visit to their aunt's house the younger girls knew more about the officers' names and who they were and where they were staying. They could talk about nothing but the officers - even Mr Bingley and his fortune, the thought of which made their mother so cheerful, were uninteresting to them compared with the young army officers in their red coats.

This was the subject of their conversation one day when a servant entered with a message for Jane from Mr Bingley's sisters at Netherfield Hall. Mrs Bennet's eyes lit up with pleasure and she could not wait to hear what was in the note. It was an invitation to Jane to go for dinner with the two ladies, as Mr Bingley and his friend were going to have dinner with the officers in Meryton and the ladies would therefore be alone.

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It was impossible for Jane to have use of the carriage to take her to Netherfield, and anyway Mrs Bennet wanted her to go on horseback. She thought it was likely to rain and she hoped that Jane would then have to stay at Netherfield for the night, and so would have a chance of being with Mr Bingley the following morning.

So Jane set off on horseback and it did indeed start to rain hard before very long. Her mother was delighted. The rain continued all evening without a break; Jane certainly could not come back. But the next morning, at breakfast, a servant arrived from Netherfield with a note for Elizabeth from Jane.

My dearest Lizzy,

I am very unwell this morning, after getting wet through in the rain yesterday. My kind friends here will not hear of me returning home until I am better and they have sent for the doctor. I have a sore throat and a headache, but it is nothing serious.

Yours, etc.

Elizabeth, feeling really worried about her sister, decided to go to her at Netherfield immediately after breakfast, though her mother was against the idea. But Elizabeth was determined to go, so she set off on foot as soon as she was ready. It was muddy after all the rain and when she at last arrived at Netherfield Hall the bottom of her skirt was dirty, but her face was glowing after the exercise of the walk.

The two ladies at Netherfield were amazed that she had walked three miles alone so early in the day, and in such bad weather, but Mr Darcy, though he said very little to her, thought how fine she looked after the fresh air of the walk.
Jane was delighted to see her. She was not at all well. Elizabeth quietly looked after her sister all day; the doctor came and examined her, said that she had caught a violent cold and advised her to stay in bed. At three o'clock, when Elizabeth was about to return to Longbourn, Jane seemed so upset that she was leaving that Miss Bingley offered a room for Elizabeth to stay in and sent a servant to Longbourn to fetch some more clothes for them both.

So Elizabeth stayed for a few days at Netherfield, slowly nursing her sister back to health. At mealtimes she was often in the company of Mr Bingley, his sisters and Mr Darcy and was able to observe Mr Darcy more closely and to see the attention that Mr Bingley's unmarried, younger sister so constantly and carefully paid to him. But she also noticed how often Mr Darcy's eyes were fixed on her, and was unable to understand why. She found it very strange, but it did nothing to change her view of him. She liked him too little to care whether he liked her or not. In fact the only person whose company she really enjoyed at Netherfield was Mr Bingley's. He was obviously truly concerned about Jane's illness and frequently asked most sincerely how she was progressing.

After a few days Jane was able to get up again and Elizabeth wrapped her warmly against the cold and walked down to the living room with her, to join the other two ladies. The gentlemen were not there at first, but when they came in it was easy to see how happy Mr Bingley was to see Jane well again, how careful he was to see that she was warm and comfortable in the best place by the fire and how he scarcely spoke to anyone else in the room. Elizabeth, working at her sewing in another corner of the room, was delighted to watch them together.
Now that Jane was well again, the subject of a ball at Netherfield Hall was discussed. Mr Bingley was enthusiastic about the idea, but Mr Darcy obviously was not. He had begun to feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention.

The next morning, as agreed by the two sisters, Elizabeth wrote to their mother asking for the carriage to be sent to fetch them the next day. Mr Bennet’s reply, however, was that they could not possibly have the carriage before Tuesday, so Elizabeth encouraged Jane to ask Mr Bingley if they might borrow his carriage to take them home. The master of the house was clearly sorry to hear that they were thinking of leaving Netherfield and tried several times to persuade Jane that she was not yet well enough to make the journey. But Jane was firm when she knew she was right, and on the Sunday, after church, they were driven home in Mr Bingley’s carriage. Mr Darcy, for one, was not sorry to hear that the two Miss Bennets were leaving—Elizabeth had been at Netherfield long enough. She attracted him more than he liked. He had scarcely spoken more than ten words to her in the whole of Saturday; even when they had been alone together for almost half an hour, he had kept his nose steadily in his book and would not even look at her.

Elizabeth was perfectly happy to leave Netherfield, and the two sisters’ arrival back at Longbourn on the Sunday morning was a surprise to their family. Their mother, of course, was not happy that her plan to keep Jane and Mr Bingley together as long as possible had not worked, and she did not welcome them at all heartily.
'I hope, my dear,' said Mr Bennet to his wife at breakfast the following morning, 'that you have ordered a good dinner today, because we are going to have a visitor.'

'Who do you mean, my dear? I know of no plans for anyone to visit us today.'

'The person I am talking about is a gentleman and a stranger.'

Mrs Bennet's eyes shone at the thought of a strange gentleman, a possible catch for one of her daughters.

'I have had a letter from my cousin, Mr Collins. He, as you know, my dear, is the person who will have this house and all the family money when I am dead.'

'Oh! My dear,' cried his wife, 'please do not even mention that horrible person to me. It is the most terrible thing that your own poor children will be left without a thing in the world because of that awful man.'

'It is certainly not a fortunate arrangement, I agree, but it is not the fault of the gentleman in question, my dear. And, if you will listen, you will perhaps agree that Mr Collins's letter to me is very polite and that he himself seems to be concerned about the future happiness of our daughters.'

The letter was long and very respectful. Mr Bennet read it out to them all. Mr Collins was a clergyman in the Church of England. His church was in the village of Hunsford.

In Kent, and Bourgh. She had kindly agreed that he could take some holiday to visit members of his family, and Mr Collins had decided that he should try to get to know his cousins, the Miss Bennets. He asked if he could come to stay for a week at Longbourn, and would arrive that very Monday, at four o'clock in the afternoon.
'At four o'clock, therefore,' said Mr Bennet, folding up the letter again, 'we must expect to welcome this gentleman into our house. He seems to be a very respectable young man and I am sure we will have pleasure getting to know him.'

Elizabeth did not like the style of the letter, however; it was too heavy and she did not think Mr Collins sounded a very sensible young man. To Lydia and Catherine the letter from this unknown cousin was not interesting in any way. Their heads were too full of the young army officers in Meryton. As for Mrs Bennet, Mr Collins's letter had made her feel better about him.

He may indeed be a possibility for one of her daughters, and she was more quickly willing to welcome him than her husband or daughters had expected her to be.

Mr Collins arrived exactly on time and was received most politely by the whole family. He was a tall, heavy looking young man of five and twenty years old. He behaved in a serious way and his manners were very careful and slow. He admired every room and everything he saw in the house, not least the five daughters of the family, whose beauty he had heard of many times before. It soon became clear that he had come to visit them with the idea of finding a wife, since his employer, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, had advised him to marry as soon as he possibly could. It seemed that he tried to follow Lady Catherine's advice in all things, to please her wherever he could. She was obviously an extremely important person.
It also quite soon became clear that Mr Collins was not, as Elizabeth had guessed, a very sensible young man. He was clearly not at all clever, and yet he seemed to think quite highly of himself. He was a peculiar mixture of pride and over-politeness, of self-importance and shyness. But having now a comfortable house very near Lady Catherine’s great house, Rosings Park, and having a good income from the church at Hunsford, Mr Collins had decided to marry. He intended to choose one of the Bennet daughters for his wife, and so at the same time to make the Bennet family feel better about the future loss of the Longbourn house and all the family money. This had been his plan in coming to stay and it did not change after meeting the young ladies in question.

He found the eldest Miss Bennet’s lovely face absolutely charming, and so it was Jane that he chose first. But the next morning before breakfast Mrs Bennet made it clear to him that her eldest daughter’s future interests lay elsewhere, so Mr Collins quickly changed his plans from Jane to Elizabeth, even while Mrs Bennet was putting some wood on the fire. Elizabeth, next to Jane in birth and beauty, was a natural second choice after Jane, of course. Mrs Bennet took note of the way Mr Collins seemed to be thinking and wondered if she would soon have two daughters married. The idea pleased her and she started to like this young man, whom she had not even liked to speak of the day before, very much indeed.
After breakfast the young ladies set off to walk into Meryton together to visit Mrs Philips, their aunt, and Mr Collins was invited to go with them. As they walked down the main street of Meryton, they met some of the young army officers who Lydia and Catherine had been getting to know. They were introduced to a new young officer who had just arrived in the town, a Mr Wickham, and the young ladies all thought he was very handsome and completely charming. He made such pleasing conversation as they walked on together down the street towards the Philip's house.

Just then they heard the sound of horses, and saw Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy riding along the street. Seeing the group of young ladies, the two gentlemen rode towards them and greeted them politely. Mr Darcy was trying hard not to look too much at Elizabeth, to look elsewhere, when his eyes fell on the new young officer. Mr Wickham. Elizabeth happened to be watching them both as they saw each other, so she saw the effect of the meeting. Both changed colour; one looked white and the other red. Mr Wickham touched his hat; Mr Darcy was just able to return the greeting, but most unwillingly. What could be the meaning of it? It was impossible to imagine; it was impossible not to want to know.

The next day Mr Collins and the five young ladies were invited to spend the evening at their aunt's, in Meryton. Some of the officers were to be there, and they were all pleased to hear too. When he came in, every female eye was on him, but Elizabeth was the happy woman he eventually sat down next to and with whom he began an agreeable conversation.
After some time she was able to bring the name of Mr Darcy into their conversation and asked Mr Wickham if he knew that gentleman well.

'Yes, indeed,' replied the young man, 'I have know Mr Darcy family all my life. Do you know Mr Darcy well yourself, may I ask?'

'As well as I would ever wish to,' answered Elizabeth. 'I have spent several days in the same house as him at Netherfield, and I find him very disagreeable. People do not much like him in this neighbourhood, you know. They find him bad-tempered and proud.

'I should not give my opinion of him. I have known him too well and too long,' replied Mr Wickham. 'But I cannot pretend to be sorry that people do not like him here. His behaviour towards me has been most unfair in the past, even though his father was always very good to me. His father wanted to leave me some money when he died, but this Mr Darcy, his son, made sure that the money did not all come to me-and his father's wishes were never put in writing, so I have no hope from the law. I never intended to join the army, but as you can see, I have had to. It is a very sad story and I cannot think well of Mr Darcy.'
Elizabeth was horrified to hear this awful story. She was amazed to think that a man as gentle and pleasant as Mr Bingley could have such a proud, hard friend, but Mr Wickham told her that Mr Darcy could be very agreeable and friendly towards people if he chose to be; that he could be a very interesting and pleasant companion if he wished, especially with people such as Mr Collins's employer, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who was as rich he was. Lady Catherine, it seemed, was Mr Darcy's aunt. It was likely that Mr Bingley simply did not know what sort of man his friend really was, Elizabeth thought, and she began to suspect that Lady Catherine herself might be as proud and disagreeable as her nephew, in spite of all the good things the foolish Mr Collins continually said about her. Elizabeth went away at the end of the evening with her head full of Mr Wickham's sad history, and could think of nothing else all the way home, though there was no time to mention anything of it to any of her sisters, because neither Lydia nor Mr Collins were silent once on the whole journey back to Longbourn House.
CHAPTER THREE

The following morning, just after Elizabeth had told Jane Mr Wickham's whole sad story, Mr Bingley and his sisters arrived to deliver their personal invitation to the ball at Netherfield Hall. It would take place the following Tuesday.

The news of the ball put all other ideas out of their heads for the next few days. They were all looking forward to it greatly. Even Mr Collins felt he would be able to accept Mr Bingley's invitation and that it would be suitable for a clergyman to appear at an event of that kind. He even asked Elizabeth if she would dance the first two dances with him, and though it was the last thing in the world she wanted, she felt that she could not refuse him without being extremely impolite. She was most disappointed. She had hoped to be able to dance those two dances with Mr Wickham, but there was nothing she could do to avoid Mr Collins's offer. She did now begin to wonder if he had plans for her to join him in his life at Hunsford, to appear by his side as his wife when he next was invited to Rosings Park by Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and the more she wondered about it the more she thought she was right. He was thinking of her as a possible wife. She was more horrified by this idea than pleased about it, and never had any intention of accepting such an offer, if he eventually made one to her.
The day of the ball at Netherfield Hall arrived. Till Elizabeth entered the ballroom and looked around for Mr Wickham, she had never considered that he might not be there. But it seemed he had suddenly had to go to town on business the day before, though Elizabeth knew that he must have gone in order to avoid Mr Darcy. So she suffered the first two dances with Mr Collins, who was not a good dancer, and the next with an officer who was a friend of Mr Wickham's. Then, suddenly, she found Mr Darcy standing in front of her, requesting the pleasure of her hand for the next dance. She was so surprised that she accepted him without thinking, and they took their place on the dance-floor. Conversation between them, as they danced, was difficult and uncomfortable and they both felt quite dissatisfied at the end of their dance, when they went their separate ways in silence.

In the end it was only Jane's happiness which saved the evening for Elizabeth. Mr Bingley danced several times with Jane and she seemed to be the only person in the room he truly wanted to be with that evening. Her mother noticed this too, and it was the only thing she could talk about to Lady Lucas or her other friends, though Elizabeth tried several times to make her mother change the subject, especially when she knew that Mr Darcy was near enough to listen to her mother's endless comments on the delights of the young couple's friendship. To Elizabeth it seemed that her mother had decided to appear as silly as possible during the evening, and she only hoped that Mr Bingley had been concentrating too much on Jane to have noticed their mother at all.
At last the evening came to an end they stood saying goodbye to Mr Bingley and sisters, waiting for their carriage, which was the last to leave. Mr Bingley and Jane were standing together and talked only to each other. Mr Bingley's sisters scarcely opened their mouths and refused to make any conversation with Mrs Bennet. Mr Darcy said nothing to anyone. But Mrs Bennet was still perfectly satisfied, and she left Netherfield feeling quite sure that she would soon see Jane happily settled there, and with a promise from Mr Bingley that he would come and have dinner with them at Longbourn immediately after his return from London, where he had to go on business the next day.

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It was the next day that Mr Collins made his offer to Elizabeth. He had decided to waste no more, since his holiday was only until the following Saturday. He spoke first to Mrs Bennet and made sure that she would not oppose any future marriage between himself and Elizabeth.

'Oh dear! -Yes-No, certainly. -I am sure Lizzy will be very happy. Come with me, Catherine, please, I want you upstairs now,' she said, and she quickly left the room with Catherine, leaving Elizabeth alone with Mr Collins.

Elizabeth decided that it would be best to get this business over as quietly and as firmly as possible. As soon as they were alone, Mr Collins began. He went on very seriously and carefully for some minutes and once or twice Elizabeth almost began to laugh at some of the things he said. At last, however, it was absolutely necessary to interrupt him and make it clear to him that she could never, under any circumstances, accept an offer from him to become his wife.
He would not, at first, take in the idea that she really was refusing his offer to her. He thought this might be a game that young women played when they secretly wanted to accept such an offer from a gentleman.

'Please believe me, sir,' said Elizabeth, 'that I have no intention of ever accepting your offer, and I would be happier if you would believe me sincere in saying so immediately. Can I speak more plainly? I speak from my heart.'

But it was only after Mr Collins had told Mrs Bennet that Lizzy had refused him, and only after Mrs Bennet had gone immediately to Mr Bennet to ask him to speak firmly to Elizabeth to make her accept this offer of marriage, and only after Mr Bennet had spoken to his daughter and told her that he would never speak to her again if she did agree to marry Mr Collins, and only after he had told his wife the same thing, that Mr Collins began to believe that Elizabeth really was refusing him. But he did not understand why his cousin was behaving like this, and though his pride was hurt a little, he suffered in no other way.

It was several uncomfortable days after this event before Mrs Bennet agreed to speak to Elizabeth again, but Mr Collins was soon almost his normal self again and discussion of Elizabeth's most ungrateful behaviour soon passed. He scarcely spoke to Elizabeth herself and turned his attentions instead to her friend, Charlotte Lucas, the daughter of Sir William and Lady Lucas.
During this time the surprising news came from Netherfield that Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley's sisters had decided to follow Mr Bingley to London, where he had gone on business, and that they were very unlikely to come back again to Netherfield Hall.

Jane read out the letter Mr Bingley's younger sister had written her just before they had all set off for London.

'But Mr Bingley himself will not be staying in London, I imagine,' said Elizabeth, after listening to the letter.

'His sister clearly says that none of their group will be returning this winter,' said Jane, 'It seems that Mr Darcy's younger sister is in town and Mr Bingley is impatient to see her again. Miss Bingley seems very happy at the idea that her brother should find Miss Darcy attractive, and it seems clear to me that she is happy, too, at the idea that I should not become her sister.' Jane fell silent and shook her head sadly.

'Miss Bingley sees that her brother is in love with you, but she wants him to marry Miss Darcy. That is the way I see it,' said Elizabeth. 'She has followed him to town in the hope of keeping him there and trying to persuade him that he does not care about you. Anyone who has seen you together cannot doubt that he is in Love with you. I cannot believe that he thinks any less of you today than he did when he said goodbye to you after the ball on Tuesday, and I cannot believe that his sister will find it easy to persuade him that he is in love with her friend instead of being very much in love with you.'
'I wish I could see it like that,' replied Jane. 'But, my dear sister, how can I be happy even thinking that his sisters and friends wish him to marry someone else?'

'You must decide for yourself,' replied Elizabeth. 'If you feel that not disappointing his sisters and friends is of greater importance than the happiness of being his wife, then you must, of course, refuse him.'

'How can you say such a thing?' said Jane, smiling sadly. 'You must know that I would never refuse him, but if he is not returning to Netherfield this winter, then my choice will never be necessary. A thousand things may happen in six months.'

Elizabeth did not, however, really believe this story that Mr Bingley would not be returning to Netherfield, and she said so with some force to her sister. She soon had the pleasure of seeing the effect of her beliefs on Jane. Her sister began to hope that every wish of her heart might one day, somehow, be answered.

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Mr Collins paid more and more attention to Elizabeth's friend, Charlotte Lucas, over the next day or two and Miss Lucas was kind enough to listen to him politely.

'I am most grateful to you, Charlotte,' said Elizabeth. 'It is keeping him in a good mood.'
Charlotte felt that she was being useful to her friend, and was quite happy to give up a little of her time for that purpose. But Elizabeth did not suspect her friend’s real purpose, which was to attract Mr Collins to herself, and Charlotte soon began to feel that she would certainly have some success, if only Mr Collins was not going to leave the neighbourhood so soon, at the end of his holiday. But she had misjudged the fire and independence of Mr Collins’s character, which led him to escape from Longbourn House very early and very quietly the next morning, and to hurry to the Lucas’s house to throw himself at her feet. He was concerned that none of his cousins should notice his early - morning departure or begin to guess what its purpose was, as he did not wish them even to know he had tried until he was certain that Charlotte would accept him. He was still feeling much less confident than usual after his unsuccessful adventure with Elizabeth on the Wednesday.

But Charlotte received him in a very encouraging way. From an upstairs window, she saw him approaching the house and immediately set out to meet him accidentally on the way. She had never dared to hope that she would find so much love and so many carefully prepared words ready for her. In the time that Mr Collins’s long speeches would allow, everything was settled between them and he asked her to name the day which would make him the happiest of men. Miss Lucas, who accepted him only because she had wanted to find a husband with a reasonable income as quickly as possible, did not care how soon their marriage took place. Sir William and Lady Lucas rapidly agreed to Mr Collins’s request for their daughter’s hand, as his present circumstances at Hunsford and hopes for future wealth after the death of Mr Bennet at Longbourn House made him a very respectable match for her.
Charlotte herself was satisfied. She was twenty-seven years old and not a very good-looking girl, but she would not now remain unmarried, even if Mr Collins was neither sensible nor agreeable, and even if his love for her must be quite imaginary. He would still be her husband. She did not think highly of either men or marriage, but getting married was the only way she could see of making a safe future for herself with enough money to live comfortably. Elizabeth would be extremely surprised, of course, and Charlotte decided that she would break the news to her friend herself, so she asked Mr Collins to make no mention of it when he returned to Longbourn to dinner.

It was soon after breakfast the next day that Charlotte called and told Elizabeth the news in private. The possibility of Mr Collins imagining himself to be in love with her friend had crossed Elizabeth's mind once or twice in the last day or two, but she was amazed that Charlotte had encouraged him and could not stop herself from crying out:

'Marry Mr Collins! My dear Charlotte, that's impossible!'

But Charlotte's serious face told her that it was not impossible and Elizabeth made a great effort to control her feelings and her words. She wished her friend all possible happiness, and Charlotte did not stay much longer that morning, leaving Elizabeth to think about this amazing piece of news. She could not help feeling that friend had not behaved quite properly, but worse than that, she felt worried that it would be impossible for her friend ever to be truly happy with the future she had chosen.
Mr Collins said his long goodbyes that morning and happily accepted Mrs Bennet's invitation to him to come and visit him again. Elizabeth was still the only one in the family who knew the news. The others were all surprised that he was thinking of accepting an invitation to return before very long, especially after the embarrassment of Elizabeth's refusal of his offer to her. But then, later in the day, Sir William Lucas called and told Mrs Bennet and her daughters that Charlotte had accepted Mr Collins's offer of marriage.

'Sir William! How can you tell such a story?' cried Mrs Bennet.

But he replied firmly and politely to her rudeness and Elizabeth and Jane both helped him in this unpleasant situation by offering their congratulations and by talking of the happiness that Sir William and Lady Lucas could expect for their daughter from this match, of the excellent character of Mr Collins and of the convenient distance of Hunsford from London.

When Sir William had gone, Mrs Bennet had a lot more to say on the subject, of course. Most of it was meant to remind Elizabeth that she had missed the chance of getting married to a man with a good income and that she was the cause of their friends' daughter getting married before herself or any of her sisters. It was a week before she was able to see Elizabeth without having something more of this sort to say to her and a month before could speak to Sir William and Lady Lucas without being rude. Elizabeth and Charlotte were careful not to talk to each other on the subject, and Elizabeth's disappointment in Charlotte made
her turn her affectionate concern more and more towards Jane's worries about Mr Bingley's continued absence from the neighbourhood and about the fact that nothing more had been heard about his intention to return. Day after day passed without news of him and Elizabeth began to fear, not that he no longer cared for Jane, but that his sisters would be successful keeping him away and that the attractions of London might finally be stronger than his attractions to Jane. Jane herself worried about this constantly, though she tried to hide her fears and never spoke about them, even to Elizabeth.

A letter came from Mr Collins, thanking them endlessly for having him to stay and telling them that Lady Catherine de Bourgh was pleased with the news that he was going to be married, and that she wished the marriage to take place as soon as possible. He therefore intended to return to Longbourn in two weeks' time to discuss and complete all the arrangements for his marriage to Charlotte. When he did arrive for that visit, he was received in a much less friendly manner by Mrs Bennet, and spent most of each day at the Lucas's house as a result. What was on Mrs Bennet's mind more than anything else was the fact that Charlotte Lucas, and not one of her own daughters, would now be the woman who would live in Longbourn House after Mr Bennet's death. 'Why should she have the family fortune and this house?' she repeatedly asked.
CHAPTER FOUR

A second letter arrived from Miss Bingley and put an end to any hopes Jane still had that she would see Mr Bingley again at Netherfield. The letter said that they now spent a lot of their time at Mr Darcy's London house and that they saw a lot of his sister, Miss Darcy. But Elizabeth, to whom Jane read the letter, doubted that Mr Bingley was becoming attracted to Miss Darcy or that he was any less in love with Jane. What made her angry was that he could so easily be persuaded by his interfering friends to give up all thought of continuing to see Jane, all thought of their possible happiness together. She began to wonder if Bingley had ever really realized how much Jane was in love with him. Perhaps Jane had never made it plain enough to him; perhaps he doubted it himself and had not enough confidence to argue the wishes and the opinions of his friends. She could think of nothing else. Whatever the truth was, she felt that Mr Bingley was not behaving well towards her sister, and her opinion of him went down as a result.

'I only wish our dear mother would control herself better and not talk about him so much to me,' said Jane herself one day to Elizabeth. 'She can have no idea of the pain it gives me. But it cannot continue like this for long. I will soon forget him and we shall be as happy as we were before.'

Elizabeth looked at her sister in amazement, but said nothing.
‘You doubt me’ cried Jane, going slightly red in the face, ‘but you have no reason to. I will always remember him as the most agreeable man I know, but that is all. It may take a little time, but I shall certainly get over my present feelings. I have the comfort of knowing that it has all just been a mistake of my own imagination and that it has hurt no one but myself.’

Elizabeth did not see it that way, however, and made it clear to Jane that she believed Mr Bingley’s friends - and especially Mr Darcy - to be responsible for his decision not to return to Netherfield. They were, she believed, more concerned to increase Mr Bingley’s wealth and social importance by a marriage to a girl who had money, a well-known family and pride, than to make sure of his happiness in life by a marriage to the woman he truly loved.

‘It does seem that they wish him to choose Miss Darcy,’ replied Jane, ‘but if he is truly in love with me, then they could not succeed in separating us. I am not ashamed of having made a mistake about his love, and I would prefer to think that than to think that he or his friends were not behaving well towards me. So let me continue to think of it and try to understand it like that, please, my dear sister.’

And from that time on Mr Bingley’s name was scarcely ever mentioned between them.
Mr Collins's second stay at Longbourn soon came to an end and he returned to his work at Hunsford, comforted by the thought that when he next returned to Longbourn it would be to fix the day when Charlotte would become his wife. Soon after his departure, Mrs Bennet's brother and his wife arrived from London to stay for Christmas. Mr Gardiner was a sensible, well-educated and gentlemanlike man, quite different from his sister in every way. His wife, who was several years younger than Mrs Bennet, was also a likeable, intelligent woman and a great friend of her nieces at Longbourn, but of the two eldest of them especially.

She was upset to hear the unhappy story of Jane's friendship with Mr Bingley and wondered if it might be good for Jane to go back to London with her and her husband after Christmas, to stay for some weeks and get away from home for a change of place and company. Elizabeth thought this was an excellent idea.

'But I hope,' said Mrs Gardiner, 'that she will not expect to meet this young man in London. We live in a very different part of town and have quite different friends. Anyway, as you know, we do not go out a lot, so it is very unlikely that they will meet, unless he comes to see her, of course.'

'That is almost impossible, my dear aunt,' cried Elizabeth in answer to this thought, 'as he is being well guarded by his friend and I am sure Mr Darcy would not wish him to call on Jane in such an unfashionable part of London!'

'That is good. I hope they will not meet at all, then.'
But Elizabeth secretly did hope that Mr Bingley might some-how meet Jane in London and that all his love for her would return. It was a possibility.

Jane accepted her aunt's invitation with great pleasure, and looked forward greatly to her stay in London, but she never mentioned Mr Bingley at all.

The Gardiners' week at Longbourn was very busy. Mrs Bennet arranged dinners and parties for them, and Mr Wickham and some of the other young officers were frequent guests. Mrs Gardiner was able to watch Elizabeth and Mr Wickham together, and saw that, without being seriously in love, they both came from the same part of Derbyshire and had many of the same friends there. Mrs Gardiner had known Mr Darcy's family home, Pemberley, and had always heard what a fine man Mr Darcy's father had been. They had a lot to talk about together, remembering places and people they had both known, and Mrs Gardiner was surprised by the story of the young Mr Darcy's unfair behavior towards Wickham, though she did remember that people had said Mr Darcy was a very proud young man.

Mrs Gardiner was not, however, happy to see Elizabeth being so friendly with a man such as Mr Wickham, with no money and an uncertain future, and she decided to speak to her niece about it before left Longbourn. When she did so, Elizabeth laughingly promised her aunt that she was not in love with Mr Wickham, even though she did find him one of the most pleasant men she had known.
'He is not usually here so often, you know,' said Elizabeth, laughing again. 'It is for your company, dear aunt, that he has been invited so often this week. But please do not worry about me. I will always remember to be sensible; and now I hope you are satisfied.'

Soon after this conversation, the Gardiners returned to London, taking Jane with them. Plans continued to be made for Charlotte Lucas's marriage to Mr. Collins and the day for their wedding was fixed.

The day before she was married, Charlotte came to call on Elizabeth and as she left she said to her, 'Will you promise to come and see me at Hunsford? My father and sister are coming to stay with us in March and I hope you will agree to come and stay at the same time.' Elizabeth could not refuse, though she had little hope of much pleasure from the visit.

The wedding took place and Mr. Collins and his new wife set off for Kent. Elizabeth soon had a letter from her friend, giving news of her life at Hunsford. She seemed quite content and wrote happily about the house, the furniture, the garden, and the neighbourhood. Lady Catherine de Bourgh had, she said, received her very kindly and politely at Rosings Park. Elizabeth knew that she would see the rest for herself when she went to stay with Mrs. Collins in March.

Letters also came from Jane in London, and weeks went by it was clear that she was giving up any hope of seeing Mr. Bingley or his sisters, who had been her good friends at Netherfield Hall. Elizabeth began to hope that Mr. Bingley would decide to marry Mr. Darcy's sister, since according to Mr. Wickham, he would live to regret heartily the happiness he might have known with Jane. Miss Darcy, Wickham said, was not the sort of girl who was likely to make a man happy.
Mr Wickham's attentions to Elizabeth herself were now almost at an end also. He was interested in someone with a larger future income, and Elizabeth realised that he had never been really interested in her because she did not have the important charm for him of being rich. Her sisters, Lydia and Catherine, were more disappointed than she was not to see quite so much of him, but they were younger in the ways of the world and had not yet realised that handsome young men need money to live on just as much as plain men do. The winter weeks passed and the time came for Elizabeth's visit to Charlotte at Hunsford. She now looked forward to seeing Charlotte again and to a change from Longbourn. The journey would also give her a chance to see Jane as they passed through London, a thought which pleased her greatly.

She set off early with Sir William Lucas and Charlotte's sister and arrived at the Gardiner's house in London by midday. Jane was watching for their arrival from a window and they were greeted happily by the whole family. In the evening Elizabeth had a chance to talk to her aunt alone about Jane, and she was worried to hear that, though Jane tried hard to appear cheerful, she was often quiet and depressed. Mrs Gardiner hoped that Jane would slowly begin to forget her unhappiness and to enjoy life more again.

Mrs Gardiner also invited Elizabeth to go with her and her husband on a tour they were planning to make in the summer, possibly to the Lakes. Elizabeth was delighted and accepted the offer immediately. So it was in a happy mood that she continued her journey to Hunsford with Sir William and his daughter the next day.
They drove along the wall of Rosings Park for quite a long way before they eventually arrived at the Collin's house, where Charlotte and her husband were waiting at the door. They were welcomed with great pleasure and Mr Collins immediately showed them all round the house and the garden, describing everything they saw in very great detail. Marriage had not changed him at all. He was just as dull and slow and full of words as he had been at Longbourn House. Charlotte, Elizabeth saw, paid very little attention to him and looked surprisingly cheerful after several months with such a husband. She could see that Charlotte was indeed comfortable in this place and that she enjoyed being there when she was able to forget all about Mr Collins, which must be quite often, Elizabeth supposed. She thought that Charlotte managed the whole situation very well, in fact.

At about midday the next day, when she was in her room getting ready to go for a walk, there was a sudden noise of great excitement downstairs, so she went down quickly to see what was happening. There, parked just outside the garden gate, was a low carriage with two ladies in it. One of the two was a thin, small girl who looked ill and bad-tempered. It was Lady Catherine's daughter, Miss Bourgh, who Lady Catherine intended one day to become her nephew, Mr Darcy's, wife. Elizabeth was pleased to think that he would have a wife like this.

'She looks just right for him,' she thought. 'Pale and bad-tempered.'
It seemed that Miss de Bourgh had stopped to give an invitation to Mr and Mrs Collins and their guests to dine at Rosings the next day. Mr Collins was extremely pleased to have been invited by the great Lady Catherine so soon, and talked of nothing else for the rest of the day, wishing to make sure that Elizabeth understood how lucky she was to be invited to the house of such an important person. He wanted them all to be fully prepared for the visit.

The weather was fine the next day, so they walked across the park of the great house and Mr Collins talked all the time as they went. When they arrived at the house, he continued to point out the fine architecture of the building until they were shown into the room where Lady Catherine and her daughter were waiting to receive them. Lady Catherine was a tall, large woman with a strong face which might once have been handsome. She left them in no doubt, however, that she felt them to be much less important people than she was and spent a lot of time advising them how they should carry on their lives. Nothing was beneath this great lady's attention and her advice. Elizabeth thought she could see quite a lot of the proud manner of Mr Darcy in his aunt.

They had a good dinner, though, and Elizabeth managed to answer all Lady Catherine's questions about her politely and patiently enough. At last the carriage was ordered to take them all home and they left after a long speech of thanks to Lady Catherine by Mr Collins. The first visit to Rosings Park was over.
Sir William stayed for only a week at Hunsford and after he left their life there settled into a pleasant daily routine, in which Elizabeth was thankful that they did not have to spend too much time with Mr Collins. He was often busy reading or writing or working in the garden. Very few days passed when he did not walk to Rosings to call on Lady Catherine and Charlotte often went with him. Elizabeth then walked on her own in the park of Rosings, discovering quiet paths which nobody except herself seemed to use. Now and then Lady Catherine came to visit them at their house and spent her time looking at whatever they been doing and advising them how they should do it differently. They went to dine with her at the great house about twice each week.
CHAPTER FIVE

The first two weeks of the visit to Hunsford had passed in this quiet way, when news came that Lady Catherine was expecting, a visit from her nephew, Mr Darcy, and a Colonel Fitzwilliam, a friend of his. Although Elizabeth did not like Mr Darcy, his arrival would make a change in the small social circle of their Rosings visits and behaviour with his aunt and with Miss de Bourgh would give her something new to observe and enjoy.

The news of his arrival soon reached them and the next morning Mr Collins hurried to Rosings to pay his respects to him. Elizabeth was most surprised when Mr Collins returned in the company of Mr Darcy and his friend, who both wished to pay their respects to the ladies. Mr Darcy looked just as he had at Netherfield Hall. He greeted Charlotte and Elizabeth politely and Elizabeth nodded her head to him without saying a word. Colonel Fitzwilliam talked pleasantly to Charlotte and her husband, but Mr Darcy sat for some time without saying anything, looking uncomfortable. At last, however, he forced himself to be polite enough to ask Elizabeth about her family. She was able to tell that Jane had been in London for the past three months.

'I wonder if you have ever seen her there?' she asked him innocently.
She knew quite well that he had not, but she wondered if his reaction would show her that he felt guilty for having so firmly separated his friend, Mr Bingley, from her sister. She thought he did indeed look a little confused as he answered that he had not been so fortunate as to meet Miss Bennet and the subject went no further before the two gentlemen, soon afterwards, went away. It was some days after this however, before they received their next invitation to dine at Rosings. The invitation was accepted, of course, and they joined the company in Lady Catherine's living - room the next evening. As Elizabeth sat talking to Colonel Fitzwilliam, enjoying his pleasant conversation and manners very much, she could feel Mr Darcy's eyes on her again and again. And when, after dinner, the Colonel persuaded Elizabeth to play the piano for them all, Mr Darcy came and stood near her in a position where he could watch her face as she played. She stopped playing, and with a little smile asked him:

'Do you wish to frighten me, Mr Darcy, by standing so importantly to listen to my playing? I cannot so easily be frightened, you know, even though I hear your sister, Miss Darcy, plays so well herself.'

'I have no intention of alarming you, Miss Bennet, and I have known you for long enough to know that you enjoy joking with other people in this way.'

Elizabeth just laughed at this picture of herself and started to play another tune.

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She was sitting by herself the next morning, writing a letter to Jane while Charlotte was away in the village, when she heard a ring on the doorbell. A visitor, though she had heard no carriage. She opened the door and was very surprised to see Mr Darcy standing there, alone. He seemed surprised to find her alone too, and apologized quickly, saying he had expected Mrs Collins to be at home.

They sat down, and after a few polite remarks, seemed to be in danger of sinking into total silence. She had to think of something to say, so she said:

'How suddenly you all left Netherfield last November, Mr Darcy! It must have been a very pleasant surprise for Mr Bingley to see you all in London so soon after he had left you behind. I think I have heard that Mr Bingley does not intend to return to Netherfield any more now. Can this be true?'

'I should not be surprised if he gave the place up,' replied the gentlemen, and seemed to have nothing more to say on the subject.

Just then Charlotte returned and Mr Darcy soon went away after explaining his mistake about thinking she had been at home. Charlotte began to wonder why Mr Darcy had come to visit them at all, but when Elizabeth told her how difficult conversation between them had been, she agreed it did not seem likely that it was because he found Elizabeth attractive. They finally decided that it must have been because he had had nothing better to do and had wanted to get out of the main house at Rosings, away from Lady Catherine for a while.
The visits were repeated, however, which was more difficult to understand. It could not be for the pleasure of their society, since he sometimes sat there for ten minutes or more without opening his lips and when he did speak it seemed to be only out of politeness, not for enjoyment. Charlotte began to wonder if he might be in love with her friend, and watched him very closely whenever they were together at Rosings and whenever he came to Hunsford, but without much success. He certainly often looked at Elizabeth with a serious, steady look, but there seemed to be no admiration for her on his face and sometimes he seemed simply to be deep in thought. Elizabeth just laughed at the idea of Mr Darcy being in love with her, whenever Charlotte suggested it, but Charlotte believed that all her friend’s prejudice against Mr Darcy would disappear if she knew without doubt that such a handsome, wealthy and important man was in her power.

More than once, when Elizabeth went for a quiet walk alone in the park, did she unexpectedly meet Mr Darcy there, walking where no one else ever seemed to walk, but where she now had the habit of walking quite frequently. How odd that the same thing should happen twice and then a third time, especially when he never made effort to say much to her when they met!
One day, instead of Mr Darcy, she met Colonel Fitzwilliam walking in the park and they fell into conversation about Mr Darcy and his sister. Elizabeth was surprised to hear the warm and respectful way the Colonel spoke of his friend's honest character and his strong sense of loyalty to his family and friends. But from other things the Colonel said it also became clear that Mr Darcy had been directly responsible for persuading his friend Mr Bingley to leave Netherfield and to try to forget about his love for Jane, since he had not believed that Jane was a suitable match for his friend. Elizabeth felt so angry to hear this, to know that it was Mr Darcy who had caused her beloved sister so much pain, that she was unable to face the thought of seeing him when the others went to have tea at Rosings that afternoon. She had a headache and stayed on her own at home instead.

She was re-reading some of Jane's letters to her from London, when she suddenly heard the doorbell and wondered if it might be Colonel Fitzwilliam, come to ask after her health. Imagine her amazement, therefore, when Mr Darcy walked into the room. He asked after her health and she answered him in a cold, polite way, not wishing to speak to him at all. He sat down for a moment and then suddenly stood up and began to walk about the room, saying nothing. Elizabeth was surprised, but said not a word. Suddenly he turned towards her and began:
'I have struggled with myself, but it is no use. I cannot oppose the power of my feelings. Please allow me to tell you how strongly I admire you and love you.'

Elizabeth was speechless. She stared at him, went red and was silent. He continued to tell her all that he had felt for her for a long time, but also about his fears about marrying someone from a family so much below his own in social importance. In spite of her deep dislike for him, she was pleased that such a man felt he could love her, but was at the same time angry to hear the proud way he thought of her family and of her low social position, which worried him so much. Not for a minute did she doubt what her answer to him would be, though she could easily see that he expected her to accept immediately his offer to make her his wife. She waited until he was silent and then answered him:

'I should, I believe, now thank you for the offer you have made. But I cannot. I have never wished you to have a good opinion of me, and you certainly seem to be very unwilling indeed to have one. I am sorry to cause you pain, but I hope it will not last long.'

Mr Darcy looked both annoyed and surprised at her answer. His face became pale but he did not attempt to interrupt her when she went on:

'I might also ask you why you took the trouble to tell me that it is so much against your willpower, your reason and your character to like me, in spite of my family's low position. To insult me, perhaps? But I have other reasons for never being able to accept your offer. You know I have. What could tempt me to accept a man who has destroyed the happiness of my beloved sister, possibly forever? You cannot deny that it was you who divided them from each other.'
Mr Darcy appeared to have no feeling of guilt as answered: 'I do not deny that I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your sister.'

'But that is not that makes me dislike you,' Elizabeth went on. 'I heard about your unfair behaviour towards Mr Wickham long before that. You have reduced him to his present unfortunate condition, taken away money that your own father wished him to have, taken away the best years of his life. What can you say about that? Do you dare to call your behaviour to Mr Wickham an act of friendship too?'

'So this is your opinion of me!' cried Darcy. 'Thank you for explaining it so fully. My faults are many, according to this judgement of me! Perhaps you would not have been so hard on me if I had not been so honest with you about my worries about your family's position, if I had tried to hide my struggles on all that from you? But I hate pretending and I am not ashamed of my feelings. Could you expect me to be delighted about your relations, whose position in society is so much below my own?'

'You are mistaken, Mr Darcy, if you believe that it was only the proud, ungentlemanly way you made your offer to me that made me refuse you. I would never have been tempted to accept any offer of marriage to you.'

His amazement was obvious. He looked at her with an expression of disbelief and shame.

'You have said quite enough, Miss Bennet. I understand your feelings very clearly and can only be ashamed of my own strong feelings towards you. Please forgive me for taking up so much of your time and accept my best wishes for your future happiness.'
And with these words he quickly left the room. Elizabeth heard the front door close as he left the house. She was alone with the storm of her feelings and thoughts, unable to believe what had just happened. Mr Darcy had made her an offer of marriage! Had been in love with her for many months! But his pride, his terrible pride, the way he openly admitted what he had done to Jane, and his obviously unkind behaviour towards Mr Wickham, which he had not even tried to deny—all these things soon helped Elizabeth to feel no regrets about the way she had refused him and the way she had told him what she thought about him. When she heard the sound of the carriage bringing the others back from Rosings Park, she hurried away to her room, unable to face Charlotte's questions about her afternoon.

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The same confusion of feelings and thoughts was with Elizabeth when she went out for a walk the next morning. Spring was coming and the trees were slowly turning green. The park looked more beautiful every day. As she walked she saw a gentleman coming her way, and, afraid that it was Mr Darcy, she turned back immediately. But the gentleman had seen her and he called her name. It was Mr Darcy. He stopped in the path in front her and held out a letter to her, which she took without thinking.

'I have been hoping to meet you in the park,' he said in a cool voice, 'I would be grateful if you would be kind enough to read that letter.'

Then he turned and walked away across the park. Elizabeth opened the letter, written at eight o'clock that morning, and this is what she read.
I hope you will excuse me, Miss Bennet, for feeling that my past behaviour needs some explanation to you. You have, I feel, formed a most inaccurate impression of me and accused me most unfairly of cruelty towards your sister and towards Mr Wickham. The two stories are very different.

Like others, I was able to see Mr Bingley's admiration for your sister and I gradually realised how strong and serious his feelings were. But as I observed your sister's attractive, open, cheerful manner I was able to see no sign in her of any special feelings towards my friend. I was clearly mistaken in this view, since your knowledge of your own sister cannot have been wrong. I am truly sorry that I have caused her pain. Your anger towards me has not been unreasonable. In advising my friend not to make an offer to your sister, to leave Netherfield and try to forget her, I was only hoping to save him from being hurt, although, so I said to you last night, I was also concerned that he would be marrying into a family considerably below him in social importance. I apologise if that offends you. Mr Bingley himself is such a shy, modest person, that he was unwilling to force his attentions on a young woman, who if believed my opinion, was not as equally in love with him as he was with her. He values my judgement and he did believe me. He decided to give up all hope of being loved by your sister and not to return to Netherfield. I must admit to you that I have never told him that your sister has been in London for the past three months, but I hid this fact from him only because I was afraid that he was still very much in love with your sister and that to see her again would hurt him. There is nothing more to explain; nothing more to apologise for than mistaken judgement. You now know the truth of it.
On the subject of Mr Wickham, there is quite a different story to the one you have been told by him. My father was always very fond of Wickham, who was the son of his favourite employee at Pemberley, our family house in Derbyshire. Before he died, my father asked me to give some money to Wickham and try to find him a good position, perhaps in the Church. But when my father died, Wickham was away and I heard nothing of him for two or three years. He had begun to live a shameful life; he was deeply in debt and had failed in his attempt to become a lawyer. I certainly could not help a man like that to get into the Church, but I did pay all his debts and I helped him with money as my father had wished. About a year ago he secretly began to turn his attention to my young sister, Georgiana, a very affectionate girl ten years younger than myself. Wickham can be a charming man, I realise, and soon Georgiana, who was only fifteen, believed that she was in love with him. Wickham secretly planned to persuade Georgiana to go away with him and marry him. But my sister feared that she would badly upset a brother who has cared for her in every way, and she told me the whole plan. Wickham's aim, it is clear, was to get his hands on my sister's fortune and on a good annual income. His revenge on me for not helping him to get into the Church would have been complete. I told Wickham that I had discovered his plan and he left the place immediately. I told no one anything about his behaviour and I did not again until that morning in Meryton, with you. I have only now told you the whole story of his relations with me so that you can judge for yourself whether my behaviour to him has been fair or not. It was clear to me that you had not been told the full, true story by Wickham himself.
If your dislike of me should make you disbelieve what I have written here about Wickham, then perhaps you would like ask Colonel Fitzwilliam about it, as he is the only other person in the world who knows the whole truth.

Elizabeth's feelings, on reading this letter, are not hard to imagine. First, she was amazed that Mr Darcy had apologized to her about his interference in Mr Bingley's friendship with Jane and for his own poor judgement, though she felt his expression of it in the letter was still of pride. And his criticisms of her family still made her angry, too. But when she read what he said about Wickham, his side of that story, she began to feel guilty and ashamed of her hard judgement of him. She did not wish to believe what she had read and put the letter away. But in half a minute she unfolded it to read it again and began to see that Mr Darcy's behaviour might have been completely blameless throughout, and that Mr Wickham might not be the man she had thought he was. How differently all Wickham's behaviour and his side of the story now appeared to her! She re-read, too, the first part of the letter, concerning Mr Bingley and Jane, and began to admit that perhaps Jane had not made her feelings for Mr Bingley clear enough to him, had not shown him her love quite enough. And when she read again the part about her family, her anger started to change into shame: she had to admit that the behaviour of her mother and her younger sisters was not always at all acceptable and that she herself often found it embarrassing.
She wandered in the park for two hours, thinking about the letter, struggling with her thoughts, reconsidering everything that had happened and been said, trying to accept the changes that were taking place in her opinion of Mr Darcy. At last she returned to the house and was told that Mr Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam had called to say goodbye. They had decided to return to London early the next day.

During the few days now remaining before she herself was to return to London and then to Longbourn, Elizabeth read Mr Darcy's letter again so many times, studied every sentence so carefully, that she soon almost knew it word for word. Her anger against him turned against herself and she began to feel sorry for the way she had behaved so unfairly towards him, though she still felt no regret that she had refused his offer. Mr Darcy's explanation of Mr Bingley's behaviour towards Jane also made Elizabeth think better of Mr Bingley and made her realise more painfully what Jane had lost. His affection for Jane had been shown to be sincere and his only doubts had been about himself and his own value to her. How terrible that Jane had lost her friendship with such a modest man, the possibility of such happiness with him, and partly because of the stupidity and bad manners of her own mother and sisters, too!

تحولت في المنتزه لساعاتين، مفكّرةً بالرسالة، مصارعة أفكارها، معيدة النظر بكل شيء حدث وقيل، محاولةً أن تقبل التغييرات التي تجري على السيد دارسي حسب رأيها. أخبراً عادت إلى البيت وأخبرت بأن السيد دارسي وعقيد فيتزويليم قاموا بالزيارة لتوديعها. كنا قد قررا العودة إلى لندن في وقت مبكر في اليوم التالي.

خلال الأيام القليلة الباقية قبل أن نعود هي نفسها إلى لندن ومن ثم إلى لونغبوري، قرأت إليزابيث رسالة دارسي ثمانية مرات عديدة، ودرست كل جملة بهدف فائقة، حتى أنها سرعان ما عرفت كلمة كلمة. اتجه غضبها ضده إلى غضبها ضد نفسها وبدأت تحس بالأسف للطريقة التي تصرفت بها على نحو غير منصف نحوه، مع أنها ظلت لا تشعر بأي ندم لأنها رفضت عرضه. حمل توضيح السيد دارسي عن سلوك السيد بنتلي نحو جاين أيضاً إليزابيث في أن تفكر على نحو أفضل في السيد بنتلي وجعلها تدرك على نحو أشد儿 ما فقدته جاين. ظهر أن حانه على جاين مخلص وأن شكوكه الوحيدة كانت حول نفسه وقيمته الخاصة بالنسبة إليها. كم هو رهيب أن تفقد جاين صداقتها لجل متواثعين كهذا، إمكانية سعادة كهذه معه، وذلك جزئياً بسبب غباء وسوء سلوك أمها وأخواتها أيضاً!
Elizabeth's thoughts continued in this confusing way until the day came for her to return to London. Mr Collins made a long speech, talked on and on about their good relations with Lady Catherine de Bourgh, asked Elizabeth to give good reports of their life at Hunsford to her family and finally invited her to visit them again. It was a pity to have to leave Charlotte in such company but though she seemed sad to see Elizabeth leave, Charlotte seemed happy enough with her house and the neighbourhood.

The carriage arrived, they said their goodbyes and the journey to the Gardiners' house in London passed quickly. Jane looked well and was ready to return to Longbourn with Elizabeth, and so it was early in May when they set off from their aunt's house in London, on their way home.
CHAPTER SIX

Their mother and father and younger sisters were pleased to see them home again, though Lydia, now sixteen, was herself soon to go away to stay with some friends at Brighton, it seemed. She was going with one of the army officers, Colonel Forster, and his wife who had become Lydia’s good friend. It seemed that all the officers, including Mr Wickham, were moving to live in Brighton and Lydia was delighted to be following them there for a few weeks. Elizabeth was not at all sure that it was wise to let Lydia go to Brighton, even with good friends like the Forsters, and she said so to her father. She felt that Lydia was already giving their family a bad name and was in danger of doing something very stupid indeed.

‘Do not worry, my love,’ her father said to her. ‘You know we would have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia did not go to Brighton, and Colonel Forster is a sensible man. Let her go then. She is too silly and too poor to be really interesting to any man. And in Brighton the officers are likely to find many more pleasing women than she is, which will teach her a lesson.’

Elizabeth was forced to be content with this answer, but her opinion of the danger of letting Lydia go to Brighton remained the same, and she left disappointed that her father was obviously going to do nothing to change the unacceptable behaviour of her younger sisters.

挨拶

الفصل السادس

سرتُ أمها وأبوها وأخواتها الصغيرات من رؤيتها انتقال مرة أخرى إلى البيت، مع أن ليديا، وهي الآن في السادسة عشر، كانت سرعان ما تستغفر لقيام بعض الأصدقاء في برايتون، كما بدا. كانت ستذهب مع واحد من ضباط الجيش، عقيد فورستر، وزوجته التي أصبحت صديقة ليديا المفضلة. بدا أن كل الضباط، بما فيهم ويكهام، ينتقلون ليعيشوا في برايتون وكانت ليديا مسرورة في أن يتبعهم إلى هناك لبضعة أسابيع. لم تكن إليزابيث متأكدة تماماً من أن من الحكمة أن يُسمح لليديا بالسفر إلى برايتون، حتى مع أصدقاء جيدين مثل عائلة فورستر، وقالت هذا لأبيها. أحسَت بأن ليديا سبق وأساءت إلى اسم عائلتها وكانت معرضة لخطر أن تزبَّك شيئاً غبياً جداً حقاً.

قال أبوها لها: "لا تقلقوا يا حبي. أنت تعرفون بأنه لن يحل علينا سلام في لونغبورن إذا لم تذهب ليديا إلى برايتون، وعقيد فورستر رجل عاقل. دعها تذهب إذن. إنها استخف وأفقر من أن تكون مشرعة لاحتمال أي رجل حقاً، ومن المحتمل أن يجد الضباط في برايتون نساءً أبهج إلى حد كبير منها هي، مما سيعملها درساً."

أجبرت إليزابيث على أن تقع بهذا الجواب، لكن رأيتها عن الخطر في ترك ليديا تسافر إلى برايتون بقي على حالها، وأحسَت بخبيرة الأمل لأن من الواضح أن أباها لن يفعل شيئا ليغيّر السلوك غير المقبول لأخواتها الأصغر سنًا.
After a day or two at home, Elizabeth found the opportunity to tell Jane about Mr Darcy’s offer to her and of her refusal. Jane was amazed, but did not blame her sister for refusing Mr Darcy if she did not love him. She also told Jane about the letter and about Mr Darcy’s story about Mr Wickham, though she was very careful not to mention the part of the letter about Mr Bingley. Jane never liked to believe anything bad about others and was sorry to think that Mr Wickham might not be quite the gentleman he wanted people to think he was.

‘Poor Wickham!’ said Jane. ‘He has such a gentle, charming manner. Maybe he is sorry for his past behaviour and is determined to lead a better life in the future. We must keep what we know to ourselves, of course.’

The day before the officers were due to leave Meryton, a group of them, including Mr Wickham, came to dine at Longbourn House. Elizabeth, despite what she now knew about his past behaviour, wanted to say goodbye to him in a friendly way, though when Mr Wickham that she had seen a lot of Mr Darcy at Hunsford, he looked suspicious and extremely uncomfortable about what Elizabeth might now know about him. He obviously had to make a great effort to be as cheerful and charming as usual for the rest of the evening. Lydia went back with the Forsters at the end of the evening, and Mrs Bennet said excited goodbyes to her daughter, hoping that she would enjoy herself as much as possible and making her promise to write often. The quieter goodbyes of the two elder sisters went almost unheard in all the noise.

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As spring turned into summer, Lydia's letters were not very frequent and were always very short. The time of the Gardiner's tour with Elizabeth was fast approaching, and she was looking forward to it enthusiastically, when a letter came from Mrs Gardiner saying that, as Mr Gardiner had to remain longer in London on business than expected, they had had to change their plans slightly. They would not be able to go on such a long tour, or travel as far as the Lakes, but they planned instead to visit Derbyshire, where Mrs Gardiner came from, and to see some of the people and places she had known there before she was married. Elizabeth was at first rather disappointed, but it was not in her nature to be upset for long and soon she was looking forward to seeing Derbyshire instead.

The Gardiners came, spent one night at Longbourn, and them set off with Elizabeth on their tour the next morning.

After visiting Oxford and Warwick and Birmingham on their way, they arrived a few days later at the little town of Lambleton in Derbyshire. Not five miles from Lambleton, Elizabeth was told, was Pemberley, the home of Mr Darcy.

'Would you like to see the place you have heard so much about from Mr Wickham, my dear?' asked her aunt. 'He spent all his young life there, you know. The park is beautiful and the house itself is extremely fine.'
Elizabeth was not at all happy with the idea. She felt she had no business at Pemberley, and the thought of possibly meeting Mr Darcy there worried her greatly. How terrible that would be! But she asked the hotel owner whether the family were yet at Pemberley for the summer, and when he told her that they were not, she felt able to agree to her aunt's plan to visit the house and walk in the park there. It was agreed, therefore, that they would drive to Pemberley the next day.

Elizabeth's mind was too full for conversation as they drove to Pemberley House the following morning, turned in at gates to the park and drove on through some beautiful woods towards the great house on the opposite side of a valley. It was a large, handsome, stone building with high wooded hills behind it and a stream running in front. She was delighted. It was such a natural, tasteful design. At that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley House might be something!

As they went up the steps to the front door of the house, all her fears about meeting its owner came back to her, and she hoped the hotel owner had not been mistaken. They were invited to look round the house by the housekeeper, a respectable-looking, elderly woman with a direct but polite manner. As they followed her round rooms which were much finer than those she had seen at Rosings Park, Elizabeth kept thinking:

'And I might have been mistress of this place! With these rooms I might now have been familiar, instead of viewing them as a stranger!'

In the carriage on the way back to the hotel, she told herself that she would never have become acquainted with Mr Darcy if she had been the owner of Pemberley. She might have had a thousand engagements with him which might have been avoided if she had been a lady of leisure instead of a common hotel customer. She felt satisfied that she had never married Mr Darcy, and was glad she was still free to believe in romantic love.

She was very pleased with the visit she had made to Pemberley, and determined that her aunt should visit it next year. She also determined that she would not dream of marrying Mr Darcy, for if she had, she would have been the one to lose by the marriage, and she had no wish to be the loser.
She wanted to find an opportunity to ask the housekeeper whether master really was absent, but it was her uncle who eventually asked the question, and received the reply that he was expected to arrive with a large group of friends the next day.

'Here is a picture of my master person,' she continued, showing them a fine small painting of Mr Darcy.

'I have heard he is a very fine person,' said Mrs Gardiner, 'but, Lizzy, you can tell us how good the picture is, I think.'

The housekeeper's respect for Elizabeth increased when she heard that she knew Mr Darcy.

'Do you not think he is a very fine gentleman?' she asked, and without waiting for an answer, she went on, 'I am sure I know no one so handsome. I wish he would marry, so that he might spend more time here with us, but I don't know anyone who will be good enough for him.'

Mr and Mrs Gardiner smiled. The housekeeper, who obviously enjoyed talking about her master, continued:

'I say no more than the truth, and everybody who knows him will agree. He has never spoken an angry word to me in his life, and I have known him since he was always such a good-tempered, generous child and has continued to be so now that he is grown up. I could not wish for a better, fairer master.'
Elizabeth thought this was going a bit far. This praise was opposite to all her ideas of him. She had had firm opinion that Mr Darcy was not a good-natured man.

'Can this really be Mr Darcy! What a pleasant impression this gives of him!' she thought, and was impatient to hear more.

The housekeeper was happy to continue with this subject as she showed them round the house. Elizabeth listened, wondered, doubted and accepted as this sensible woman, who had known him so well for most of his life, described his generosity to the poor, his total fairness to all those who worked for him, his constant care for his younger sister and this quiet intelligence.

'Some people may call him proud,' she said, showing them a pretty, newly decorated sitting-room which Mr Darcy had had specially prepared for his sister, 'but I never saw anything of it. I think it is just that he does not like to talk as much as other young men. And this room is typical of him, too—whatever can give his sister any pleasure is sure to be done in a moment. There is nothing he would not do for her.'

Everything that the housekeeper said about Mr Darcy, as a brother or as a master, showed him in a good light, and what praise is more valuable than that of an elderly servant, thought Elizabeth.

When they had seen all of the house that was open for public viewing, they were met outside by the gardener, who was going to show them the gardens and the park. They had just turned to walk with the old gardener down to the river, when Elizabeth was horrified suddenly to see the owner of Pemberley coming round the corner of the house.
They were only twenty yards from each other. Their eyes met and the cheeks of both were soon the deepest red. He stopped still with surprise and Elizabeth automatically turned to leave as quickly as possible, but Mr Darcy quickly remembered his manners and came forward to greet them in a polite, friendly way. Mr and Mrs Gardiner, having just seen a painting of him, knew immediately who he was, and stood waiting while he spoke to their niece, who was obviously confused and embarrassed, dared not lift her eyes to his face and did not know what answers she gave to his polite questions about her family. They were some of the most uncomfortable minutes of her life. But his whole manner with her had also changed since they last spoke; his voice had none of its usual confidence and clearly his mind was not on what he was saying at all. Finally, every idea seemed to leave his head and he stood for a few moments without saying a word, and she was relieved when he suddenly said goodbye and walked back towards the house.

The others then joined her and they walked on into the gardens, but Elizabeth heard not a word when her aunt said what a fine-looking man he was or admired the beautiful views of the park. She walked in silence, wrapped in her own thoughts and feelings. How strange it must seem to him that she had come to see Pemberley when she thought he was absent! Or maybe it seemed that she had thrown herself in his way again! Oh, if only he had not arrived sooner than he was expected, or if only they had left ten minutes earlier! But what could his remarkably
changed behaviour towards her mean? It was amazing that he could even speak to her, but to speak so kindly, so politely so considerate as on this unexpected meeting. Whether he had seen her with pain or pleasure, she did not know, though she could see that he had been very unsettled by their meeting.

She really did not know what to think at all about the thing.

Eventually, as they walked on through the woods with so many fine views, and by the beautiful small river, Mr and Mrs Gardiner began to comment on her absent-mindedness, and she forced herself to behave in her more usual, cheerful way. But as they walked back towards the house, Elizabeth was again amazed to see Mr Darcy walking towards them. He was soon there, with them.

This time, though she felt uncomfortable and embarrassed, Elizabeth remembered to introduce her aunt and uncle to Mr Darcy, and was surprised to see how pleasant and polite he was to them when she would have expected him to think they were too unimportant for him to be agreeable to. He began a conversation with Mr Gardiner about fishing, invited him to come and fish in the stream at Pemberley, and showed him where some of the best places in the stream were. Elizabeth kept asking herself:

'Why is he so changed? It cannot be for me that he is being so polite. It is impossible that my words to him at Hunsford should create such a change, or that he should still think well of me, even after that.'
في النهاية، أُتي السيد دايرسي مع أخته لزيارة إليزابيث وعائلة جاردنر في لامبتون وقرر وصول أخته، قبل يومين من اليوم الذي تُفقدهما عليه. دُفعت خاليتها وخالها، اللذان لم تشعرهما إليزابيث بهذه الزِّيارَة المكثكة، وسررت بزيارة السيد دارسي وأخته المكررة لابنها خالتها، وبدأ التنساء لما إذا كان هناك شيء أكثر من مجرد صداقته وراء اهتماماته المؤدية لها. لاحظت أن إليزابيث نفسها كانت مضطربة جدًا، على نحو واضح، لرؤية السيد دارسي وأخته يصلان في عربتهما الصغيرة المفتوحة أمام الفندق بهذه الطريقة غير المتوقعة. دُرطت الغرفة نهائياً وإياها، متمنيةً إياهما أن يدخل الفندق، محاولةً أن تسيطر على تشوُّش مشاعرها. رأت في النظرة المهمة في عيون خالها وخالتها، وجعل ذلك الأمر أسوأ لها فقط.
On this first meeting with Miss Darcy, and over the next few days when she was invited several times to Pemberley House with her uncle and aunt, Elizabeth found the younger girl to be shy and gentle - not at all proud, as she had expected. She began to enjoy being with her new friend, and she even enjoyed the company of Mr Bingley, who was one of the group staying at Pemberley with Mr Darcy. Elizabeth's anger against Mr Bingley had died away long before, and she found that she was just as pleasant, friendly person she had known at Netherfield Hall. He was so charming that it would have been impossible for her to be angry with him, even if she had wanted. He asked whether all her sisters were at Longbourn, and whether they were all well, and it was not his words but his manner which gave his questions their full meaning for Elizabeth. It was clear that his thoughts were still very much on Jane. Elizabeth was pleased.

Over those few days, seeing Mr Darcy among his friends at Pemberley several times, Elizabeth was forced to consider how her opinion of him had changed. She had certainly did not hate him; she even felt ashamed to think that she had disliked him. She began, at first unwillingly, to admit to herself that she respected certain things about him. But she was also grateful to him. Grateful not only that he had once loved her, but also that he had clearly been able to forgive her past unfair accusations. To her aunt and uncle it was obvious that he was very much in love with their niece, but to Elizabeth he seemed only to be kind and considerate, keen to continue their friendship, to have the good opinion of her aunt and uncle and to encourage the growing friendship between his own sister and herself.
After they had been at Lambton for a few days, a letter arrived for Elizabeth from Jane. It contained bad news.

Dearest Lizzy,

Something very serious and unexpected has happened, but do not be alarmed - we are all well. It concerns poor Lydia. We have had a letter from Colonel Forster in Brighton, telling us that Lydia has secretly run away to Scotland with one of his officers; with Wickham, in fact! What a terrible mistake for them both, though Wickham must know that Lydia has no money at all, so at least he has not taken her away with him because he wants her money. It seems they had thought of going to Gretna Green to be married, but we are not at all sure that they have gone together to London to try to find out which route Wickham and Lydia may have taken to Scotland. We all fear very much for Lydia's good name and for the good name of our family. Poor Mother is really ill and stays in her room. I am glad you have not been here to suffer all the worry with us, but I must admit that I look forward very much to your return. I do have one request to make, however, to my uncle. I know how valuable his sensible advice to Father would be at this time, and wonder if it would be possible for him to come and help us in this difficult time?

Your affectionate sister, etc.
Her uncle and aunt were out of the hotel, walking in the
town, and Elizabeth got up as soon as she had finished
reading this terrible news, intending to go out and find
them straight away. But as she went to the door, it was
opened by a servant, and Mr Darcy appeared. Her pale
face and excited manner made him stop and before
he could speak Elizabeth said:

'You must excuse me. I must go and find Mr Gardiner
this moment. I have not a moment to lose.'

'What is the matter?' cried Darcy. 'Please let me go or
let me send a servant to find Mr and Mrs Gardiner. You
are not well enough. You cannot go yourself.'

He called back the servant who had shown him in and
sent him off to look for Mr Gardiner. Elizabeth sat down,
looking unhappy and ill. It was impossible for Mr Darcy
to leave her; he offered to fetch her a glass of wine or call
someone else to look after her.

'No, thank you,' she replied. 'I am not ill. I have just had
some very bad news from Longbourn.'

She burst into tears as she said this, but then told him
the bad news about Lydia and Wickham. Darcy listened
carefully. He was shocked, of course, but wanted to know
what had been done to find the young couple and to bring
Lydia home again. He listened quietly as Elizabeth told
him that her father had gone. He listened quietly as Eliza-
beth told him that her father had gone to London and that
Mr Gardiner was requested to go and help also. Darcy
dwalked about the room, thinking gloomy thoughts, and
Elizabeth watched him, thinking how he would certainly
never wish to have anything more to do with her or her
family after this sad event. Never had she honestly felt that
she could have loved him as now, when all love would be
hopeless.
After a few minutes' silence Darcy spoke again, quietly and kindly. He offered to do what he could to help them return to Longbourn as soon as possible; he promised her his secrecy; he expressed his sympathy for her and soon left, sending his best wishes to the Gardiners. As he left the room, Elizabeth felt that it was most unlikely they would ever see each other again, and certainly not in the friendly way they had started to know each other in Derbyshire. Now, all she wished was to be at home again with Jane as quickly as possible, and it took no time at all to agree to after the Gardiners returned to the hotel for them all to agree to leave at once, for their bags to be packed, the hotel bill paid and for them to be on the road for Longbourn.

بعد بضع دقائق من الصمت تكلم دارسي ثانية، بهدوء ورقة عرض على أن يقوم بما يمكنه عمله ليساعدهم على العودة إلى لونغبورن بأسرع وقت ممكن؛ ووعدها بالحفاظ على السرية؛ وعبر عن تعاطفه معها وسرعان ما غادر، مرسلًا أفضل مهانيه إلى عائلة جاردنر. حالتا غادر الغرفة، شعرت إليزابيث أن من غير المحتمل إلى حد كبير بأنهما سيرى أحدهما الآخر مرة أخرى، ويفيده أن هذا لن يكون بالطريقة الودية التي بدأ يعرف كل منهما الآخر في ديربشير. الآن كل ما رغبت فيه هو أن تكون في البيت مع جاين بأسرع وقت ممكن، ولم يستغرقوا كلهم أي وقت على الإطلاق بعد أن عادت عائلة جاردنر إلى الفندق، في الاتفاق على المغادرة على الفور، وحزم حقائبهم، ودفع فاتورة الفندق والانطلاق على الطريق إلى لونغبورن.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Mr Gardiner did not believe that Wickham and Lydia had gone to Scotland, and so, after reaching Longbourn two days later and leaving his wife and Elizabeth there, he went on immediately to London, to join Mr Bennet there in trying to discover where the young couple had gone. Elizabeth blamed herself for not having told her father what she knew about Wickham’s past behaviour to Miss Darcy; she felt that she was partly responsible for the present difficulties. News also came from Mrs Philips in Meryton that Wickham had left large debts in the town when he went to Brighton, and everyone in Meryton now thought of him as a very unpleasant, unreliable young man. It became more and more clear how much damage Lydia was doing to herself and to all the family by running away with such a man.

Their aunt was a great help with Mrs Bennet, who stayed in her room and complained endlessly about the unfair, ungrateful behaviour of her thoughtless daughter, and they waited every day for a letter from Mr Gardiner, to tell them what was happening. Every day was a day of worry and waiting.

Mr Gardiner wrote two days later to say that he had found Mr Bennet and taken him back to the Gardiners’ house to stay with him. A few days later he wrote again to say that he had persuaded Mr Bennet to return to Longbourn and that he, Mr Gardiner, would himself continue to search in London for Wickham and Lydia. He had still found nothing to suggest that the young couple had gone to Scotland to be married, and he was sure that they were somewhere in London. He had also heard from Colonel Forster that Wickham had left debts behind him in Brighton, but there was still no more immediate news of the two young people.
Mrs Gardiner began to wish to be at home in London to help her husband if she could, so, when Mr Bennet returned to Longbourn, she said goodbye to them all and travelled back to London in the same carriage. Elizabeth was sorry to see her aunt go, and her aunt was very sorry to leave Elizabeth without knowing more clearly what her relations with Mr Darcy really were. His name had never been mentioned by her niece since their sudden departure from Derbyshire. Mrs Gardiner had hoped that a letter might follow them for Elizabeth from Derbyshire, but there had been none. It remained a puzzle to her. Elizabeth herself had by now realised clearly that, if she had never known Mr Darcy, she would not be feeling so depressed about the damage Lydia’s stupidity was now doing to herself and her other sisters.

Two days later another letter came from Mr Gardiner. Elizabeth took it from her father and read it out to whole family.

My dear brother,

At last I am able to send you news of my niece, and it is not as bad as you might have feared. Soon after you left here on Saturday, I was lucky enough to find out where they were staying, and I have now seen them both. They are not married, nor can I find there was any intention of being married, but I am hoping to persuade them that they should be. Wickham is demanding a certain amount of money - one hundred pounds a year - before he agrees to marry your daughter, and I have not hesitated to tell him that you will pay it. It does seem, however, that Wickham’s financial circumstances are not quite as hopeless as we had believed, even when he has paid all his debts.
You do not need to come to town again, but please send back your reply as soon as possible and I will make all the arrangements for the marriage. I believe it best that my niece should be married from this house. I hope you will agree. She is coming to live with us here from today.

Yours, etc.
Edw. Gardiner

'It is possible!' cried Elizabeth, when she had finished. 'He will marry her!' 'Wickham is not as bad as we have all thought him to be,' said Jane. 'We have been very unfair to him. Dear Father, I must congratulate you.'

The reply to Mr Gardiner was soon written, though Mr Bennet was worried that Mr Gardiner had had to pay much more money than he had told them, to make Wickham agree to marry Lydia. He did not like to think that he would be in debt to Mr Gardiner in this matter, but nothing else could be done. Lydia must be married as quickly as possible. The money must be paid.

They went to tell their mother the news and she was so excited at the thought of one of her daughters being married that she forgot all about the circumstances of the arrangement, and about what they all knew about Wickham's behaviour and began talking of Lydia as 'dear, dear Lydia', of Wickham as 'dear Wickham' and thinking about wedding clothes and going immediately to Meryton to tell all her friends the good news. Jane tried to remind her what people in Meryton thought of Wickham, and of the great debt they would owe to Mr Gardiner's kindness, but it was no use; she would not listen.

Elizabeth, sick of all this stupid talk, escaped to her room and had time to consider quietly how lucky they had
been to avoid so much damage to the family name, even though it was most unlikely that Lydia would ever enjoy much happiness or wealth in her married life as Mrs Wickham.

The news that Lydia was to be married spread quickly through the neighbourhood, where people received it philosophically and where it gave them something to talk about for a few days. Her future unhappiness was considered certain. Mrs Bennet, now out of bed again for the first time for two weeks, had no sense of shame about the fact that Lydia and Wickham had lived together for two weeks without being married. She began talking about their coming marriage freely to everyone she could. Mr Bennet did not share her view of the matter, and promised that he would never welcome Lydia and her husband into their house again and that he would not pay a penny for Lydia’s wedding clothes. Of course these decisions caused a long argument in the house. Mrs Bennet could not understand that his anger should make him go so far at all.

Elizabeth, now that the problems were over, was extremely sorry that she had ever mentioned them to Mr Darcy that first morning at the hotel in Lambton. It was not that she feared that he would tell anyone else. These was almost no one she would have trusted so completely with secrecy. But, on the other hand, there was no one she would have wished so much to remain without any knowledge of the whole shameful story. Her sister’s behaviour, as he had told her at Hunsford before all this happened, was not respectable. But he must now surely think it completely shameful, especially as Lydia would be the wife of

* * *

نشرت إليزابيث، وهي مريضة من كل هذا الكلام الغبيّ إلى غرفتها واستقبلت وقتاً في التفكير بهدوء مدى حظها في تجربة الكثير من الضرر الذي سيلحق باسم العائلة، مع أنه كان من غير المحتمل تماماً أن تستمتع ليديا بسعادة كبيرة أو ثروة في أي وقت من الأوقات في حياتها الزوجية كالسيدة ويكهام.

انتشرت بسرعة في الجوار حين أن ليديا كانت ستتزوج، حيث تلقى الناس هذا الخبر على نحو فلسف ويحترق أن هذا منحهم شيئاً يكسبهم عنهم لبضعة أيام. أعربت تعاساتها المستقبلية أسرّة مؤكّداً. لم تشعر السيدة بنيت، التي نُفِّضت من الفراق لأول مرة طيلة أسبوعين، بشعور خيّر حول حقيقة أن ليديا وويكهام عاشوا معًا لمدة أسبوعين دون أن يتزوجا. بدأت تتكلم عن زواجهما الفعلي بحرية لكل شخص يملك أن تكلم إليه. لم يشارك السيد بنيت وجهة نظرها حول الموضوع، ووعد بأنه لن يربح إبداً بـ ليديا وزوجها في منزلهم مرة أخرى وأنه لن يدفع بنسًا واحدًا للاِنسانية ليديا. من الطبيعي أن هذه القرارات أثارت جدلاً طولاً في المنزل. لم تفهم السيدة بنيت أن غضبه سمحله على أن يذهب إلى هذا الحد إلّا أن كانت بنيت، وقد انتهت المشاكل، أسفًا إلى حد مفرط لأنها ذكرت لها في وقت من الأوقات إلى السيد دارسي في أول الصباح ذلك في فندق لامبتون. لم يكن هذا لأنها خشيته أنه سيكره أي شخص آخر. فهذه أمور ما كان يتعين عليها أي شخص تقريباً بالكامل على هذا النحو. فسيّقت سراً. لكن، ومن جانب آخر، لم يكن هناك أحد آخر غيره ورغبته كثيراً جداً في أن يبقى دون أن يعرف بالفعل المخزينة. إن سلوك أختها، كما أخبرها في هانسفورد قبل أن يحدث كل هذا، لم
the one person who Mr Darcy so rightly mistrusted. He would obviously never wish to form any connection with such a family, and the continued interest in her which Elizabeth had begun to see in Derbyshire would certainly be at an end. She felt sad and hurt at the thought of this, and just when she could no longer hope that it could ever be, she began to wish that he might still wish to see her again, that they might meet, that she could have some news of him. What a victory for him, she often thought, if he knew that the offer that she had so proudly refused only four months ago, would now have been happily, gratefully accepted! She began to realise that he was the one man in the world whose character and views would exactly suit her. They would suit each other. His serious manner and judgements would be softened by her lively playfulness, and in return she would learn from his intelligence and understanding. But she could now never look forward to recovering his friendship and admiration; no such perfect marriage could ever take place.

Mr Gardiner soon wrote again to his brother to inform him that all Wickham's debts in Brighton had now been settled, and that Wickham had agreed to move with the army to a better position in the north of England. Lydia would go to live there with him soon after their marriage. Mrs Bennet was not pleased to think that Lydia would live in the North, such a long way away, but Mr Bennet and the others were not unhappy about the idea. Lydia's request to come and visit them all on her way from London to the North was at first firmly refused by Mr Bennet, but Jane
and Elizabeth persuaded him to change his mind, so he wrote to Mr Gardiner giving the young couple his permission to come. It was agreed that they would come to Longbourn immediately after their wedding in London.

The wedding day came, and the carriage was sent to bring Mr and Mrs Wickham back to the house for dinner. They came. Smiles covered the face of Mrs Bennet as the carriage stopped at the door. Mr Bennet was much cooler and he scarcely said a word. Lydia seemed not to realise at all how foolish her behaviour had been, and expected them all to congratulate her heartily. Wickham seemed to be unworried by the whole thing also. Elizabeth could not believe it, and felt so annoyed that she went to her room and stayed there until it was time for dinner.

It was after dinner, while the ladies were alone in the living-room waiting for the gentlemen to join them, that Lydia insisted on telling them all about the wedding, about how she had gone to the church with her uncle and aunt, who, she said, had not been very pleasant to her at all while she had stayed with them, and how her uncle had almost been late, though Mr Darcy had arrived exactly on time.

'Mr Darcy!' repeated Elizabeth, in amazement.

'Oh yes! He came there with Wickham, you know. But I quite forgot! I was not supposed to say that he had been there! I promised him. What will Wickham say? It was to be a big secret!'

They agreed not to mention to Wickham that they
knew about Mr Darcy being at the wedding, but Elizabeth's curiosity made her write a short letter to her aunt a day or two later, in which she asked why 'a person nothing to do with our family' had been at the wedding, and asked her aunt to write back and explain it to her immediately.

An answer quickly came from her aunt, in a long letter telling Elizabeth all about the wedding, and expressing her surprise that Elizabeth knew that Mr Darcy had been there, as it was supposed to have been a secret. But she did explain why he had been there: it was Mr Darcy, it seemed, who had found out where Lydia and Mr Wickham were staying in London, and who had told Mr Gardiner where he could find them. Mr Darcy had left his friends in Derbyshire the day after Elizabeth had left there, and had hurried to London to look for Wickham himself. He seemed to blame himself for Wickham's bad behaviour, believing that Wickham would not have acted as he had done if Mr Darcy had let the world know what a worthless character Wickham was, making it impossible for any girl ever to trust him or fall in love with him. He therefore felt it was his duty to find Wickham and make sure that he married Lydia, and behaved as a gentleman should towards her. He had found Wickham quite soon, since he knew the places where he was likely to be hiding, and, in order to persuade him to marry Lydia without delay, he had agreed to settle all Wickham's debts for him, in both Meryton and Brighton, and also to help him with a generous amount of money. All this was done before Mr Darcy came to the Gardiner's house to tell them where Wickham and Lydia could be found, and to tell Mr Gar-
diner what he had forced Wickham to agree to. Mr Darcy had, it seemed, been very firm that the responsibility of settling all Wickham's debts was to be his alone, and that the whole arrangement should be kept a secret between the Gardiners and himself alone also. Mrs Gardiner was worried that she was breaking Mr Darcy's trust by telling all this to Lizzy, but, she wrote, she felt sure that Lizzy herself was the one other person in the world who must already have been informed by Mr Darcy about what he intended to do, and she was certain that Mr Darcy had very good reasons for having acted in the very generous way he had. In fact, wrote Mrs Gardiner, it was only because Mr Gardiner had believed that Mr Darcy had his own strong personal reasons for acting that way that Mr Gardiner had agreed to the whole arrangement put forward by Mr Darcy. She finished by praising the whole way Mr Darcy had acted in the business, saying how polite he had been to them in every way, and saying what a likeable man she thought he was. Her last words were:

He only needs to be a little more lively, I think, but if he marries the right person, I am quite sure his wife would easily be able to make him less serious. I thought he was very clever, dear Lizzy - he never even mentioned your name once. I hope you will not think I am being a bit cheeky in saying this, and that you will not punish me for it by never inviting me to P. I shall never be quite happy until I have seen the whole of that beautiful park, but I must write no more now.

Your loving aunt,
M. Gardiner
This letter threw Elizabeth's mind into complete confusion, in which it was difficult to decide whether pleasure or pain came first. Her suspicions about what Mr Darcy might have been doing at the wedding were all true, beyond anything she had imagined! He had travelled all the way from Pemberley to London to find Wickham and to make sure that he married Lydia. It cannot have been a pleasant experience for him, having to find and talk to the man he always most wished to avoid, to persuade him and pay him to marry a young girl who Mr Darcy must have thought silly and selfish. Elizabeth's heart whispered that he had done it all for her, but she soon stopped this thought by telling herself that such a man was very unlike to have done all this for a woman who had so recently, so rudely refused to marry him! But he had saved Lydia; he had saved the good name of herself, her sisters and her family. It was painful to think that she owed so much to a man she could never repay - she felt ashamed of all her past prejudice against him, but very proud of his secret kindness towards her family.

She read her aunt's letter again and again, and was pleased to think that her aunt and Mr Gardiner, at least, believed that Mr Darcy might have done all this for her, because he still cared.
CHAPTER EIGHT

The day of Wickham's and Lydia's departure to the north of England soon came and they set off after loud, tearful goodbyes between Mrs Bennet and Lydia, and invitations to them all to visit the young couple as soon as possible. It was clear that Mr Bennet, at least, had no plans of ever going to visit his daughter and son-in-law in the North, and he was glad to see them go.

Mrs Bennet was very quite for a few days after they went, until news came from Mrs Philips in Meryton that the housekeeper at Netherfield Hall had received instructions to prepare the house for the arrival of her master and some guests. Mrs Bingley was coming down for some shooting for several weeks. Mrs Bennet looked at Jane and shook her head and played with her fingers and did not know what to think.

Jane had not been able to hear this news without changing colour. It was many months since she had mentioned Mr Bingley's name to Elizabeth, who also looked quite upset by the news.

'It is not that I am afraid of my own feelings any more,' Jane said to Elizabeth when they were alone later. 'The news does not cause me pleasure or pain, but I am afraid of what everyone else will have to say about it again. That is all.'
Elizabeth was not sure what to think. She had never told Jane that she had seen Mr Bingley again in Derbyshire and that he had asked about her in his own, shy way. She had not wanted to upset her sister with it all again. But she knew that he had not forgotten Jane. She could see, however, how Jane took the news of Mr Bingley’s expected arrival, how it was on her mind all the time, despite what she had said about it to Elizabeth.

Mrs Bennet wanted Mr Bennet to call on Mr Bingley again as soon as he arrived, but Mr Bennet refused, saying that his wife’s idea had made him look quite foolish enough last time, after Jane had been so badly disappointed.

'If he wants our company, he can come and call on us,' said Mr Bennet. 'He knows where we live. I will not go running around the neighbourhood every time a young gentleman goes away and comes back again.'

Mr Bingley arrived. Mrs Bennet, through the servants, heard about it quite soon. She planned to send him an invitation to dine in a few days’ time. But on the third morning after his arrival, she saw him from an upstairs window, riding through the gates, towards the house. She called all her daughters to the window from the table where they were sitting sewing, but Jan stayed firmly in her place. To satisfy her mother, Elizabeth went to look, and her heart turned over when she saw that, riding with Mr Bingley was Mr Darcy. She sat down again next to Jane.
'I wonder who that other gentleman is,' said Catherine, still looking out of the window. It looks rather like that gentleman who was with him at Netherfield before; Mr what's-his-name; that tall, proud man.'

'Mr Darcy! Goodness me! I believe it is!' cried Mrs Bennet. 'What can he want, coming here like this? I am sure that I have nothing to say to such a disagreeable man.'

Jane looked at Elizabeth with concern. Elizabeth had had time to tell her very little of their meeting in Derbyshire and Jane was worried that it would be difficult for her sister to meet Mr Darcy again for almost the first since he had given her his letter at Hunsford. But Elizabeth was uneasy for reasons Jane could not guess. Elizabeth had not shown Jane Mrs Gardiner's letter, and had not told her of her own very changed feelings towards Mr Darcy or let her know that Mr Darcy was the person to whom the whole family owed so much. Mrs Bennet talked on, of her dislike of Mr Darcy, of her intention to be polite to him only as Mr Bingley's friend. Neither sister listened; both were uncomfortable. Elizabeth was amazed Mr Darcy coming here at all, coming to find her again without need or invitation.

The colour, which had left her face, soon returned with an extra glow and a smile of delight was in her eyes as she thought, with growing hope, that his affection and wishes must still be unchanged. She sat trying to control herself, trying to concentrate on her sewing, without daring to lift her eyes until the door opened and a servant showed the two gentlemen into the room. Jane tried to look calm as

قالت كاثرين، وهي لا تزال تنظر من النافذة: "أنساق من ذلك السيد الماجد الآخر. يبدو أنه شبيه بذلك السيد الذي كان معه في ندرفليد من قبل. مسر متى أسمه؟ ذلك الرجل الطويل المتكرر".

صاحبت السيدات بينيت: "مستر دارسي! ويكي! أعتقد أنها ما الذي يريد، بيجيه إلى هنا على هذا النحو؟ أنا متأكد من أنه ليس لدي ما أقوله لرجل غير مقبول كهذا".

نظرت جاين إلى إليزابيث باهتمام. كانت لدى إليزابيث الوقت لتخبر قليلاً جداً عن لقاءهما في ديريشير وكتبت جاين قلتها على أنه سيكون من الصعب على أختها أن تلاقى السيد دارسي ثانية لأول مرة منذ أن أعطاها رسالة في هانسفورد. لكن إليزابيث كانت غير مرتاحة لأسباب لم تخبرها جاين. لم تكن إليزابيث قد أردت جاين رسالة السيدة جايندز، ولم تخبرها عن مشاعرها التي تغيرت تماماً نحو السيد دارسي أو تدعوا تعرف بأن السيد دارسي هو الشخص الذي تدين له العائلة كلها بهذا الكثير. تابعت السيدات بينت الكلام عن كراهيتها للسيد دارسي، عن بنيتها في أن تكون موبدة معه لكونه صديق السيد ينبغي فقط. لم تعلق أي من الأخوات؛ فقد كانت كلاهما غير مرتاحين. اندلعت إليزابيث من مجموء السيد دارسي إلى هنا إطلاقاً، مرجية ليعثر عليها ثانية بلا حاجة أو دعوة.

سرعان ما عاد اللون الذي انحسر من وجهها مع توجه إضافي وارتست بسمة إتهام في عينيها وهي تفكر، مع أمل متمام، في أن جبهة ورغباته لا بد أنها لا تزال بلا تغيير. جلست محاولة أن تسيطر على نفسها، محاولة أن تركز على خياليتها، دون أن تخترى على رفع عينيها حتى افتح الباب وأدخلت خادم السيدين الماجدين إلى الغرفة.
they came in, but her colour increased. Elizabeth said as little as politeness would allow and sat down again to her work. She looked up once quickly at Darcy and saw he looked as usual, more as he had looked before at Netherfield, she thought, than she had seen him at Pemberley. Bingley looked both pleased and embarrassed. Mrs Bennet received him pleasantly, but Elizabeth was ashamed to hear the way her mother greeted Mr Darcy so coolly, the man to whom she owed the continued good name of her favourite daughter.

After asking how Mr and Mrs Gardiner were, Mr Darcy sat silent for a few minutes. He was not seated near Elizabeth, and when she looked up again she found him often looking at Jane, or simply staring at the floor. She did not want to talk to anyone but him, but to him she scarcely had the courage to speak. She asked after his sister, but could do no more. To put a stop to her mother’s thoughtless and insulting comments, however, after a few minutes she asked Mr Bingley how long he thought he would stay in the neighbourhood. A few weeks, he said.

The embarrassment of her mother’s conversation was, however, relieved for Elizabeth when she observed how quickly the beauty of her sister had caused Mr Bingley’s open admiration of her to return. He had at first spoken to her very little, but every five minutes he seemed to be giving her more of his attention. He found her as handsome, as good-natured and as gentle as last year, though quieter. Jane thought she was talking as much as usual, but mind was working so busily that she did not always know when she was silent. As the gentlemen rose to go, Mrs Bennet invited them to dine at Longbourn in a few days time. They went.
They did not see the gentlemen until the following Tuesday, when they came to dinner. As they entered the room Jane happened to look round, happened to smile: it was decided. Mr Bingley placed himself by her, with an expression of half-laughing alarm in his eyes. During dinner, Mr Bingley's behaviour towards Jane showed such admiration that Elizabeth was sure that Jane's happiness and his own would soon be certain. It made her as happy as she possibly could be, with Mr Darcy seated at the opposite end of the table from her, and no chance of speaking to him at all for most of the evening. She could only hope that there would be some opportunity of being together during the evening, so that they could have at least some conversation.

"If he does not come to me when the gentlemen join us in the living-room after dinner," she thought, "then I will give him up for ever."

The gentlemen came, and at last he brought his coffee cup to where she was sitting and the had a stiff, difficult conversation about his sister for a few minutes. That was all. For Elizabeth the evening had no enjoyment after that, though she could see how Jane glowed with happiness all the time.

Mr Bingley called again a few days after this visit, and alone. Mr Darcy had had to go to London on business, but would return in a few days' time. Mr Bingley came again two or three times in the next few days, and one evening
he stayed to dinner with them again. Mrs Bennet was clever enough to make sure that Mr Bingley was left alone with Jane for a few minutes during the evening, and so it was then that he asked Jane to marry him. Elizabeth came in as they were standing close together near the fireplace and, with a smile, Mr Bingley quickly left the room. Jane could hide nothing from her sister and threw her arms around her; she was the happiest girl in the world.

The whole family was in delighted confusion for the rest of the evening and for the next few days. Wickham, Lydia, were all forgotten. Jane looked more beautiful than ever and Mrs Bennet could talk of nothing else. The whole neighbourhood very soon knew. Even their father was obviously very pleased, though he said little about it, except to wish his daughter all happiness.

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It was one morning a few days after this happy occasion that a carriage drove to the front door of Longbourn House. It was a strange carriage. None of the ladies recognized it. A servant showed their visitor in: Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

She entered the room and sat down without a word, without asking to be introduced. At first she spoke only to Elizabeth, and she seemed to be in a very angry mood. After a few minutes she got up and asked Elizabeth to take a walk with her in the garden. Elizabeth agreed, but decided to make no conversation with this woman, who was being more disagreeable than usual.
'You must know why I have come, Miss Bennet,' Lady Catherine began as soon as they walked into the garden. I am most displeased to find that you are likely soon to become the wife of my nephew, Mr Darcy. I hope that this may not be true, that he would not think of damaging his position in society by such a marriage, and I wish to hear you deny the report.'

Elizabeth listened in complete amazement, and answered that she herself had never heard such a report.

'And can you also tell me that such a report is quite untrue? Has my nephew made you an offer of marriage? I am afraid that you may have encouraged him, trapped him into such a foolish offer.'

'I would not tell you, Lady Catherine, even if he had made me such an offer.'

Lady Catherine, who was not used to being answered in this way by people she considered below her, was speechless with anger for a moment. But then she began to tell Elizabeth that she would do everything in her power to oppose such a marriage, that she intended her own daughter, the pale Miss de Bourgh, to become Mr Darcy's wife and that nothing would stop it.

'If there is no more important reason why I should not think of accepting any offer Mr Darcy may wish to make to me,' answered Elizabeth, 'then I would certainly not think of refusing him, Lady Catherine.'

'You should understand, Miss Bennet, that I did not come here to be disappointed. I wish you to promise never to accept any offer Mr Darcy may make to you.'
'And you should understand, Lady Catherine, that I will never make any promise of the sort and that you will not frighten me into doing so. You have badly mistaken my character if you think you can. You may believe that you can interfere in your nephew's private business, but you cannot interfere in mine. I have nothing more to say. You now know my feelings on the matter.'

'I hoped to find you reasonable,' replied Lady Catherine, as Elizabeth turned and began to walk firmly back towards the house, 'but now that I know your real opinion, believe me, you will not win! I am seriously displeased.'

Elizabeth made no answer, and without trying to persuade Lady Catherine to come back into the house, she went into it herself and heard Lady Catherine's carriage drive away as she went upstairs.

Elizabeth was extremely uneasy about the possible ways Lady Catherine might now try to put an end to any affections or plans Mr Darcy might still have for her. Again and again over the next few days she thought about Lady Catherine's strange visit, and what she had threatened. She did not know what Mr Darcy's view of his aunt was, but if he had been uncertain before, it was possible that Lady Catherine's strong, angry opinions about Elizabeth might persuade him to give up all thought of her.

'I shall know as soon as he comes back to Netherfield - if he comes back at all,' she thought.

But things did not happen that way. The next morning her father asked her to go into his library with him for a few minutes. He wanted to talk to her.
I have had a most surprising letter this morning,' he began. 'It is about you. I had no idea that I had two daughters about to be married. Let me congratulate you, my dear Lizzy.'

The colour rushed to Elizabeth's cheeks. It must be a letter from Mr Darcy!

'The letter is from your cousin, Mr Collins. He begins by congratulating me on Jane's future happiness, but then he goes on to warn me that Lady Catherine, his employer at Hunsford, seems most displeased about the possibility of a match which her nephew, Mr Darcy, is thinking of entering into with my second daughter! Mr Darcy, who never seems to look at a woman without criticizing her! It is a wonderful joke, is it not, my dear Lizzy?'

Mr Bennet laughed heartily at what he thought was a big joke, but Elizabeth could only manage a small smile. She could not find this amusing. She began to fear that it might really perhaps be a joke, that she might have imagined it all.

But Mr Darcy did come back to Netherfield a day or two later, and came to Longbourn House with Mr Bingley early the next morning. Bingley suggested a walk in the country, and all the young people set off. Bingley walked with Jane and Elizabeth was left to walk with Catherine and Mr Darcy. Catherine soon turned off to visit the Lucases, however, and Elizabeth walked on alone with Mr Darcy. Now was the moment for her to thank him privately for everything she knew he had done for Lydia and for her family, so she immediately said:

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Mr Darcy, I cannot be silent about your kindness to my poor sister. Ever since I have known about it, I have wished to thank you. The rest of family know nothing about it, or I am sure they would wish to thank you too.'

'I am extremely sorry,' said Mr Darcy in a surprised voice, 'that you even know about that. But since you do know, let me tell you that I did it for you, and not for your sister. I wished to give happiness to you alone. Your family owe me no thanks.'

Elizabeth was too embarrassed to say a word. Mr Darcy went on quickly:

'You are too kind to hurt me. If your feelings for me are still what they were last April, then please tell me at once. My feelings for you are unchanged, but one word from you will make me silent on this subject for ever.'

Elizabeth forced herself to speak and immediately, if not very clearly, let him understand that her feelings for her had not changed made her extremely happy.

He had probably never felt such happiness in his life before; he expressed his feelings to Elizabeth as openly and warmly as a man so violently in love would. Elizabeth, if she had felt able to look up at his face, would have seen a look of heartfelt delight on it, which made him more handsome than ever. They walked on, without knowing where they were going. There was too much to be thought and felt and said between them, to notice the world around them.

"سيد دارسي، لا يمكن أن أظل صامداً حبالاً لطفك نحو أخيتي المسكونة. منذ أن عرفت بهذا، رغبت في أن أشكرك. بقية العائلة لا تعرف شيئاً عن هذا، وإلا لكان من المؤكد لدي بأنهم سيرجعون في شكرك أيضاً.

قال السيد في صوت مفاجئ: "أنا أساف جداً لأنك حتى تعرفين عن ذلك. لكن، وحيث أنك تعرفين، لأشكرك وأنا فعلتها هذا من أجلك أنت، وليس من أجل أختك. أرغب في منح السعادة لك أنت وحدها، إن عائلتك ليست مدينة لي بأي شكر.

كانت إليزابيث أكثر ارتباكًا من أن تقول أي كلمة. تابع السيد دارسي بسرعة:

"أنت ألطف من أن تؤذني. إذا كنت مشاريعك نحو ما زالت كما كانت في شهر نيسان الماضي، إذن أخبروني من فضلك على الفور، إن مشاريعي نحوك لم تتحTimeZone، لكن كلمة واحدة منك ستحملني على أن أصمت فيما يتعلق بهذا الموضوع إلى الأبد."

أخبرت إليزابيث نفسها على الكلام وعلى الفور، إن لم يكن هذا بوضوح، فتدوّدته تفهم بأن مشاريعها نحوه كانت قد تغيرت بالكامل، وقد جعلتها معرفتها بأن مشاريعها نحوها لم تنغير سعيدة إلى حد مفرط. من المحتمل أنه لم يشعر سعادته كهذه في حياته من قبل؛ وقد عبر عن مشاريعه إلى إليزابيث بالانفتاح والشفاف الذي يعبر عنه رجل واقع في الحب إلى هذا الحد من العنف. كانت إليزابيث، لو شعرت بالقدرة على أن ترفع نظرة إليها، سترى نظرة قليلة ببهجة مرسمة عليه، وقد جعلته أكثر وسامة من السابق. تابعت السير، دون أن يعرفها إلى أن كانت يدتها، كان هناك الكثير جدًا ليفكر ويشعر بها وقالاها بينهما، فلم يلاحظوا العالم حولهما.
Elizabeth soon learned that they owed their present good understanding to Lady Catherine, who had called on Mr Darcy on her way back to Rosings through London, and who had told him all about her conversation with Elizabeth. Unluckily for Lady Catherine, this visit had done exactly the opposite of what she had hoped it would: it had shown Mr Darcy what Elizabeth now truly felt and had given him courage and hope.

They talked about all their past misunderstandings and laughed together about them, now that they were over. Mr Darcy told Elizabeth how much her criticisms of his proud opinions and manner had started to change him, and she told him how his letter to her at Hunsford had gradually made her start to see him in a different light. They talked of the shock of meeting again so unexpectedly at Pemberley and he told Elizabeth how much his sister, Georgiana, had immediately liked her and how disappointed she had been at Elizabeth's sudden departure from Lambton. So they walked all morning, and suddenly saw that it was long past the time they should have been at home again, and that Mr Bingley and Jane were nowhere in sight.

'Where have you been, my dear Lizzy?' Jane asked, when they got home.

Elizabeth coloured a little but Jane did not suspect the truth, and the evening passed quietly. That night, however, she told her sister everything.

'You are joking, Lizzy. This cannot be! Marry Mr Darcy! But I see you are serious. I must believe you. I do congratulate you, but are you quite certain that you can be happy with him?'
'There can be no doubt of that at all. We will be the happiest couple in the world. And I hope you are pleased, Jane? Will you like your new brother?'

'Very, very much,' answered Jane. 'And I know Bingley will be delighted too.'

Elizabeth told her the whole story of the slow change in her feeling, and the two sisters spent half the night in conversation.

The next morning Mr. Darcy came and walked again with Elizabeth and that evening he spoke to Mr. Bennet. Mr. Bennet was absolutely amazed and asked if he could speak to Elizabeth for few minutes. She went to him in the library. He was walking around the room, looking very serious. But after she had told him that she loved and respected Mr. Darcy, that all her views of him had changed, that he was not the proud, unpleasant man they thought him at all and that she was determined to become his wife, Mr. Bennet still looked amazed, but he agreed.

As Elizabeth left him he said:

'If any young men come for Catherine, my dear, send them straight in. I shall be happy to see them!'

It was later that evening that Elizabeth told her mother. It was several minutes before Mrs. Bennet could even begin to understand what Elizabeth was telling her. She sat quite still, unable to say a thing. She soon began to recover, however, and started to get up, sit down, walk around the room, and talk endlessly about the fine clothes, the carriages, the servants, the house in town that Elizabeth would have, and that was enough to show Elizabeth that her mother was happy with the arrangement.

- لا يمكن أن يوجد أي شك بذلك إطلاقاً. سنكون أسمع زوجين في العالم، وأمل أن تكوني مسورة بأنا جاين؟ هل ستحبين أهيك الجديد؟

أجابت جاين: 'كثيراً جداً جداً، وأعرف أن ينجلي سيُسْرَ أيضاً'. أخبرتها إليزابيث بالقصة كلهما عن التغيير البطيء في مشاعرها، وأمضيت الأخوات نصف الليل في الحديث.

في الصباح التالي جاء السيد دارسي ومستة مرة أخرى مع إليزابيث، وتكلم في ذلك المساء إلى السيد بنت. أخذ السيد بنت تمامً، والسؤال إن كان يستطيع أن يتكلم إلى إليزابيث لضع دقائق. ذهب إليه في المحكمة. كان يمشى حول الغرفة، وقد بدأ أخذ حمة جداً. لكن بعد أن أخبرته بأنها تحب وتحترم السيد دارسي وأن كل أثرها حوله قد تغيرت، وأنه لم يعد إطلاقاً الرجل الكبير غير الرجال الذي فكروا به كذلك وأنها قررت أن تصبح زوجته، ظل السيد بنت يبدو منذل، لكنه وافق. حاولت اللذة إليزابيث قال: '

- إذا أتي أي شاب من أنجل كاترين، أرسلهم مباشرة إلى الكعبة.'

يا عزيزتي، سأكون سعداءً لرؤيتكم؟

في وقت متأخر من ذلك المساء، أخبرت إليزابيث أمه. كانت قد انتهت أفراح عديدة قبل أن تستطيع السيد بنت حتى في البدء في فهم ما كانت إليزابيث تخبره بها، جلبت سناك تماماً، غير قادرة على أن تقول أي شيء، لكنها سرعان ما بدأت تستعيد وعدها، وبدأت تنهض، تجلس، تدور حول الغرفة، وتكلم على نحو لا ينتهي من الملايين الجميلة، العبارات، الخنازير، المنزل في البلدة الذي سيصبح ملك إليزابيث، وكان ذلك كافياً ليبين إليزابيث بأن أمه كانت سعيدة بهذا الترتيب.
The next day Elizabeth wrote happily to Mrs Gardiner, to give her the news and to invite the Gardiners to come to Pemberley at Christmas. Mr Darcy wrote in a rather different way to Lady Catherine; and his sister, Miss Darcy, wrote four pages to express to her brother her delight at the news when she heard it from him in another letter.

So it was that Mrs Bennet's two eldest daughters were married almost at the same time. With what pleasure and pride she afterwards spoke to her friends of Mrs Bingley and Mrs Darcy! Mr Bingley lived at Netherfield Hall for only a year after their marriage and then bought a good house not thirty miles from Pemberley, so Jane and Elizabeth had the pleasure of seeing each other quite often.

Lady Catherine was, of course, not at all pleased about her nephew's marriage, and for some time she would have nothing to do with him. Eventually, however, Elizabeth persuaded her husband to invite Lady Catherine to visit them at Pemberley, and she came, either out of affection for him or from curiosity to see how his wife behaved in her new situation.

But it was the Gardiners that Elizabeth and Darcy enjoyed seeing most at Pemberley. They both remembered with gratitude how it had been the Gardiners who had brought Elizabeth to Derbyshire and who had first brought the two of them together there.
Pride and Prejudice

Mr Bingley was certainly good-looking and behaved in every way like a gentleman. His good manners were easy and natural. But it was his friend, Mr Darcy, who soon attracted attention.

Mrs Bennet’s four unmarried daughters are beautiful. So it shouldn’t be very difficult for their ambitious mother to find them husbands. To begin with, there’s Mr Bingley. He has just moved into the neighbourhood and is young, handsome and, more importantly, rich. He would be perfect for Jane. And for the second daughter, Elizabeth, there’s Mr Collins. He’s a man of the Church and well-read - and will also have money in the future.

But daughters, having feelings, don’t always follow a mother’s wishes. Neither do rich young men - or their rich relations. There seems to be something between Jane and Mr Bingley but it is far from certain where it will end. Strong-minded, intelligent Elizabeth has her own opinion of Mr Collins. And then there’s Mr Darcy, Mr Bingley’s friend. Handsome, but proud and sometimes even rude, he has no place in Mrs Bennet’s plans. But there’s something about him, more than anyone, that seems capable of upsetting them...
Jane Austen is considered one of the greatest of all English novelists, and *Pride and Prejudice* is probably one of the best loved of all English novels.

She was born in 1775 in Hampshire, England, the seventh of a family of eight children. She went away to school between the ages of seven and nine but, other than this, she was educated at home by her father and brothers. She never married, although she is said to have had many admirers. In her lifetime, none of her novels appeared under her own name, although they were very popular. She died quite young in 1817.