

*Gay Pride  
& Prejudice*

by Jane Austen

✧ Kate Christie



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## DEDICATION

To Anne Lister, Harriet Freke, and all the nameless  
men and women, real and imaginary, who  
came before. It truly *has* gotten better.

## CHAPTER ONE

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife—even if he does not particularly desire female companionship.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” said his lady to him one day, “have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?”

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

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

Mr. Bennet made no answer. The odds that the addition to the neighborhood would include a man of the right age and comportment were not strong, as he well knew.

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

“*You* want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.”

This was invitation enough.

“Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week.”

“What is his name?”

“Bingley.”

“Married or single?”

“Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!”

“How so? How can it affect them?”

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” replied his wife, “how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.”

“Is that his design in settling here?”

“Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he *may* fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes.”

“I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley may like you the best of the party.”

“My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown-up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty.”

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

“But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he comes into the neighbourhood.”

Mr. Bennet spoke with assumed diffidence: “It is more than I engage for, I assure you.”

“But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know, they visit no newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not.”

“You are over-scrupulous, surely. I dare say Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls; though I would expect the obvious choice to be my little Lizzy.”

“Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good-humoured as Lydia. But you are always giving *her* the preference.”

“They have none of them much to recommend them,” replied he; “they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters.”

In addition to other amiable qualities, his favourite daughter had lately appeared to be quite happily attached to her friend, Charlotte Lucas. No delicate way for a father to inquire after such matters, but if the friendship were indeed become romantic, as he suspected, he wished to see Elizabeth established in a manner that would allow her to pursue her material desires under the semblance of propriety. He had been fortunate enough to find a tolerable situation himself, and could not help but wish the same for the most capable of his daughters.

“Mr. Bennet, how *can* you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves.”

“You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these last twenty years at least.”

“Ah, you do not know what I suffer.”

“But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood.”

“It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them.”

“Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all.”

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. This, of course, was his intent, as his situation would have quickly turned intolerable had his wife discovered his preference for the company of other men. *Her* mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, scant information, uncertain temper, and little regard for the material duties of marriage—the ideal wife for someone such as himself. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.

The business of her husband’s life, on the other hand, had been to evade discovery in his often successful pursuit of pleasure; its solace was

his daughters, whom, despite his distaste for the method of their conception, he loved sincerely and delighted in almost daily. Except, perhaps, Mary, who had neither Jane's beauty, nor Lizzy's liveliness.

If this Bingley fellow proved to be unavoidably daft, perhaps he might be persuaded to agree to a match with Mary.

## CHAPTER TWO

Mr. Bennet was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bingley, and found their new neighbour to be an accommodating sort, handsome and with an appealing freshness to his countenance. When asked why he had left his original domicile, however, the young man coloured, and admitted only to being predisposed to a new beginning.

To the last, Mr. Bennet was always assuring his wife that he should not go; and till the evening after the visit was paid, she had no knowledge of it. It was then disclosed in the following manner. Observing his second daughter employed in trimming a hat, he suddenly addressed her: "I hope Mr. Bingley will like it, Lizzy."

"We are not in a way to know *what* Mr. Bingley likes," said Mrs. Bennet resentfully, "since we are not to visit."

"But you forget, Mamma," said Elizabeth, "that we shall meet him at the assemblies, and that Mrs. Long promised to introduce him."

"I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her."

"No more have I," said Mr. Bennet; "and I am glad to find that you do not depend on her serving you."

Mrs. Bennet deigned not to make any reply, but, unable to contain herself, began scolding one of her daughters.

"Don't keep coughing so, Kitty, for Heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces."

"Kitty has no discretion in her coughs," said her father; "she times them ill."

"I do not cough for my own amusement," replied Kitty fretfully. "When is your next ball to be, Lizzy?"

"Tomorrow fortnight."

“Aye, so it is,” cried her mother, “and Mrs. Long does not come back till the day before; so it will be impossible for her to introduce him, for she will not know him herself.”

“Then, my dear,” said Mr. Bennet, “you may have the advantage of your friend, and introduce Mr. Bingley to *her*.”

“Impossible, Mr. Bennet, impossible, when I am not acquainted with him myself; how can you be so teasing?”

“I honour your circumspection. A fortnight’s acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what a man really is by the end of a fortnight.” In the metaphysical sense, this was certainly true; but in the material sense, it often took only a minute to ascertain what a man truly was. Though not, perhaps, in Bingley’s case.

“But if *we* do not venture,” added Mr. Bennet, “somebody else will; and after all, Mrs. Long and her daughters must stand their chance; and, therefore, as she will think it an act of kindness, if you decline the office, I will take it on myself.”

The girls stared at their father. Mrs. Bennet said only, “Nonsense, nonsense!”

“What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?” said he. “Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you *there*. What say you, Mary? For you are a young lady of deep reflection, I know, and read great books and make extracts.”

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

“While Mary is adjusting her ideas,” he continued, “let us return to Mr. Bingley.”

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

“I am sorry to hear *that*; but why did not you tell me before? If I had known as much this morning I certainly would not have called on him. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now.”

The astonishment of the ladies was just what he wished; that of Mrs. Bennet perhaps surpassing the rest; though, when the first tumult of joy was over, she began to declare that it was what she had expected all the while.

“How good it was of you, my dear Mr. Bennet! But I knew I should persuade you at last. I was sure you loved your girls too well to neglect

such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! And it is such a good joke, too, that you should have gone this morning and never said a word about it till now.”

“Now, Kitty, you may cough as much as you choose,” said Mr. Bennet; and, as he spoke, he left the room, fatigued with the raptures of his wife but pleased with the events of the day. Though Bingley’s partiality toward one sex or the other might not be obvious upon first meeting, Mr. Bennet looked forward to forging a closer connection with their new neighbour.

“What an excellent father you have, girls!” said his wife, when the door was shut. “I do not know how you will ever make him amends for his kindness; or me, either, for that matter. At our time of life it is not so pleasant, I can tell you, to be making new acquaintances every day; but for your sakes, we would do anything. Lydia, my love, though you *are* the youngest, I dare say Mr. Bingley will dance with you at the next ball.”

“Oh!” said Lydia stoutly, “I am not afraid; for though I am the youngest, I’m also the tallest.”

The rest of the evening was spent in conjecturing how soon he would return Mr. Bennet’s visit, and determining when they should ask him to dinner. Even Elizabeth, whose interest in eligible young gentlemen did not approach that of her sisters, or even that of her mother, found herself drawn into the lively discussion.

## CHAPTER THREE

Not all that Mrs. Bennet, however, with the assistance of her five daughters, could ask on the subject, was sufficient to draw from her husband any satisfactory description of Mr. Bingley. They attacked him in various ways—with barefaced questions, ingenious suppositions, and distant surmises; but he eluded the skill of them all, and they were at last obliged to accept the second-hand intelligence of their neighbour, Lady Lucas. Her report was highly favourable. Sir William had been delighted with him. He was quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable, and, to crown the whole, he meant to be at the next assembly with a large party. Nothing could be more delightful! To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love; and very lively hopes of Mr. Bingley's heart were entertained.

“If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield,” said Mrs. Bennet to her husband, “and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for.”

In a few days Mr. Bingley returned Mr. Bennet's visit, and sat about ten minutes with him in his library. He had entertained hopes of being admitted to a sight of the young ladies, of whose beauty he had heard much; but he saw only the father. The ladies were somewhat more fortunate, for they had the advantage of ascertaining from an upper window that he wore a blue coat, and rode a black horse.

An invitation to dinner was soon afterwards dispatched; and already had Mrs. Bennet planned the courses that were to do credit to her housekeeping, when an answer arrived which deferred it all. Mr. Bingley was obliged to be in town the following day, and, consequently, unable to accept the honour of their invitation, etc. Mrs. Bennet was quite disconcerted. She could not imagine what business he could have in town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear that

he might be always flying about from one place to another, and never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be. Lady Lucas quieted her fears a little by starting the idea of his being gone to London only to get a large party for the ball; and a report soon followed that Mr. Bingley was to bring twelve ladies and seven gentlemen with him to the assembly. The girls grieved over such a number of ladies, but were comforted the day before the ball by hearing, that instead of twelve he brought only six with him from London—his five sisters and a cousin. And when the party entered the assembly room it consisted of only five altogether—Mr. Bingley, his two sisters, the husband of the eldest, and another young man.

Mr. Bingley was good-looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners. His sisters were fine women, with an air of decided fashion. Miss Bingley, the younger of the two, was tall for a woman, but striking in a gown of the latest style. Her brother-in-law, Mr. Hurst, merely looked the gentleman; but her brother's friend Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien, and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud; to be above his company and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend.

Mr. Bingley had soon made himself acquainted with all the principal people in the room; he was lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one himself at Netherfield. Such amiable qualities must speak for themselves. What a contrast between him and his friend! Mr. Darcy danced only once with Mrs. Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, declined being introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again.

Amongst the most violent against him was Mrs. Bennet, whose dislike of his general behaviour was sharpened into particular resentment by his having slighted one of her daughters.

Elizabeth had been obliged, by the scarcity of gentlemen, to sit down for two dances; and during part of that time, Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley had been standing near enough for her to hear a conversation between them and Mr. Bingley, who came from the dance for a few minutes to press his friend and younger sister to join it.

“Come, Caroline and Darcy,” said he, “I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about in this manner. You had much better dance.”

“I certainly shall not,” Mr. Darcy returned. “Your sister is in need of rest, and there is not another woman in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly as this it would be insupportable.”

“I would not be so fastidious as you are,” said Mr. Bingley, “for a kingdom! Upon my honour, I never met with so many pleasant girls in my life as I have this evening; and there are several of them you see uncommonly pretty.”

“Dear brother,” said Miss Bingley, “your admiration of the fairer sex is unaccountably obliging.”

“You, sir, are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room,” added Mr. Darcy, looking at the eldest Miss Bennet.

“Oh! She is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But there is one of her sisters sitting down just behind you, who is very pretty, and I dare say very agreeable. Do let me ask my partner to introduce you.”

“Which do you mean?” Darcy asked.

Miss Bingley looked round for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, she withdrew her own and said, “She is tolerable, but hardly the sort to tempt Mr. Darcy, I dare say.”

“Indeed,” said Darcy. “Besides, I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men. You had better return to your partner and enjoy her smiles, for you are wasting your time here.”

Mr. Bingley followed his advice. Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley walked off; and Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings toward either. She told the story, however, with great spirit among her friends, for she

had a lively, playful disposition that delighted in anything ridiculous. Still, she was careful to mark Mr. Darcy as the villain. Caroline Bingley had behaved if not warmly, then at the least politely to everyone else present; and Elizabeth was reluctant to call attention to the slight for fear it might reflect poorly on the lady's brother.

The evening altogether passed off pleasantly to the whole family. Mrs. Bennet had seen her eldest daughter much admired by the Netherfield party. Mr. Bingley had danced with Jane twice, and she had been distinguished by his sisters. Jane was as much gratified by this as her mother could be, though in a quieter way. Elizabeth felt Jane's pleasure, and had spent an enjoyable amount of time with Charlotte Lucas, her intimate friend, observing their friends and neighbours engaged in revelry. Mary had heard herself mentioned to Miss Bingley as the most accomplished girl in the neighbourhood; and Catherine and Lydia had been fortunate enough never to be without partners, which was all that they had yet learnt to care for at a ball. They returned, therefore, in good spirits to Longbourn, the village where they lived, and of which they were the principal inhabitants. They found Mr. Bennet still up. With a book he was regardless of time; and on the present occasion he had a good deal of curiosity as to the event of an evening which had raised such splendid expectations. He had rather hoped that his wife's views on the stranger would be disappointed; but he soon found out that he had a different story to hear.

"My dear Mr. Bennet," said his wife as she entered the room, "we have had a most delightful evening, a most excellent ball. I wish you had been there. Jane was so admired, nothing could be like it. Everybody said how well she looked; and Mr. Bingley thought her quite beautiful, and danced with her twice! Only think of *that*, my dear; he actually danced with her twice! And she was the only creature in the room that he asked a second time. First of all, he asked Miss Lucas. I was so vexed to see him stand up with her! But, however, he did not admire her at all; and he seemed quite struck with Jane as she was going down the dance. So he inquired who she was, and got introduced, and asked her for the two next. Then the two third he danced with Miss King, and the two fourth with Maria Lucas, and the two fifth with Jane again, and the two sixth with Lizzy, and the *Boulangier*—"

“If he had had any compassion for *me*,” said her husband, “he would not have danced half so much. For God’s sake, say no more of his partners. Oh, that he had sprained his ankle in the first dance!”

“My dear, I am quite delighted with him. He is so excessively handsome! And his sisters are charming women. I never in my life saw anything more elegant than their dresses. I dare say the lace upon Mrs. Hurst’s gown—”

Here she was interrupted again. Mr. Bennet protested against any description of female finery. She was therefore obliged to seek another branch of the subject, and related, with much bitterness of spirit and some exaggeration, the shocking rudeness of Mr. Darcy.

“But I can assure you,” she added, “that Lizzy does not lose much by not suiting *his* fancy; for he is a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing. He walked here, and he walked there, fancying himself so very great! Not handsome enough to dance with! I wish you had been there, my dear, to have given him one of your set-downs. I quite detest the man.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, the former, who had been cautious in her praise of Mr. Bingley before, expressed to her sister just how very much she admired him.

“He is just what a young man ought to be,” said she, “sensible, good-humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners—so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!”

“He is also handsome,” replied Elizabeth, “which a young man ought likewise to be, if he possibly can. His character is thereby complete.”

“I was very much flattered by his asking me to dance a second time. I did not expect such a compliment.”

“Did not you? I did for you. But that is one great difference between us. Compliments always take *you* by surprise, and *me* never. What could be more natural than his asking you again? He could not help seeing that you were about five times prettier than every other woman in the room. No thanks to his gallantry for that. Well, he certainly is very agreeable, and I give you leave to like him. You have liked many a stupider person.”

“Dear Lizzy!”

“You are a great deal too apt, you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in anybody. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in your life.”

“I would not wish to be hasty in censuring anyone; but I always speak what I think.”

“I know you do; and it is *that* which makes the wonder. With your good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough—one meets with it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design—to take the good of everybody’s character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone.” She paused. “And so you like this man’s

sisters, too, do you? Their manners are not equal to his.” She thought again of Miss Bingley’s disparaging eye turned upon her.

“Certainly not—at first. But they are very pleasing women when you converse with them. Miss Bingley is to live with her brother, and keep his house; and I am much mistaken if we shall not find a very charming neighbour in her.”

Elizabeth listened in silence, but was not convinced. Miss Bingley was certainly a handsome, distinguished woman, but her behaviour at the assembly had not been calculated to please. Elizabeth, with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister, and with a judgment too unassailed by any attention to herself, was very little disposed to approve either Bingley female. They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of making themselves agreeable when they chose it, but proud and conceited. They had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in England, had a fortune of thirty thousand pounds each, were in the habit of spending more than they ought and of associating with people of rank, and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves and meanly of others. They were of a respectable family in the north of England—a circumstance seemingly more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother’s fortune and their own had been acquired by trade.

Mr. Bingley had inherited property to the amount of nearly a hundred thousand pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do so. Mr. Bingley intended it likewise, and sometimes made choice of his county; but as he was now provided with a good house and the liberty of a manor, it was doubtful to many of those who best knew the easiness of his temper, whether he might not spend the remainder of his days at Netherfield, and leave the next generation to purchase.

His family was anxious for his having an estate of his own; but, though he was now only established as a tenant, Mrs. Hurst, who had married a man of more fashion than fortune, was not indisposed to consider his house as her home when it suited her. His younger sister, Miss Bingley, would have preferred to be in town among her particular group of friends for the season; but as this was not currently an option allowed her, thought Netherfield would probably do as well as any other

country house that was a favourable distance from their home county. For there, she would not—could not—return at any near point in time. Mr. Bingley, aware of his sister's forced estrangement from the north, had been on the lookout for a residence for them both, when he was tempted by an accidental recommendation to look at Netherfield House. He did look at it, and into it for half-an-hour—was pleased with the situation and the principal rooms, satisfied with what the owner said in its praise, and took it immediately.

Between him and Darcy there was a very steady friendship, in spite of great opposition of character. Bingley was endeared to Darcy by the easiness, openness, and ductility of his temper, though no disposition could offer a greater contrast to his own, and though with his own he never appeared dissatisfied. On the strength of Darcy's regard, Bingley had the firmest reliance, and of his judgment the highest opinion. In understanding, Darcy was the superior. Bingley was by no means deficient, but Darcy was clever. He was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his manners, though well-bred, were not inviting. In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was sure of being liked wherever he appeared, while Darcy was continually giving offense.

The manner in which they spoke of the Meryton assembly was sufficiently characteristic. Bingley had never met with more pleasant people or prettier girls in his life; everybody had been most kind and attentive to him; there had been no formality, no stiffness; he had soon felt acquainted with all the room; and, as to Miss Bennet, he could not conceive an angel more beautiful. Darcy, on the contrary, had seen a collection of people in whom there was little beauty and less fashion, for none of whom he had felt the smallest interest, and from none received either attention or pleasure. Miss Bennet he acknowledged to be pretty, but she smiled too much.

Miss Bingley owned that she seconded most of his opinions, except perhaps with regards to Miss Bennet, whom she had admired and liked; Mrs. Hurst agreed with her, and pronounced Miss Bennet to be a sweet girl, one whom she also would not object to knowing more of. Miss Bennet was therefore established as a sweet girl, and Bingley felt authorized by such commendation to think of her as he chose.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Within a short walk of Longbourn lived the Lucases, a family with whom the Bennets were particularly intimate. Sir William Lucas had been formerly in trade in Meryton, where he had made a tolerable fortune, and risen to the honour of knighthood by an address to the king during his mayoralty. The distinction had perhaps been felt too strongly. It had given him a disgust to his business, and to his residence in a small market town; and, in quitting them both, he had removed with his family to a house about a mile from Meryton, denominated from that period Lucas Lodge, where he could think with pleasure of his own importance, and, unshackled by business, occupy himself solely in being civil to all the world. For, though elated by his rank, it did not render him supercilious; on the contrary, he was all attention to everybody. By nature inoffensive, friendly, and obliging, his presentation at St. James's had made him courteous.

Lady Lucas was a very good kind of woman, not too clever to be a valuable neighbour to Mrs. Bennet. They had several children. The eldest of them, Charlotte, a sensible, intelligent young woman of twenty-five, had been Elizabeth's intimate friend for a number of years, and somewhat more these past two; though of late, they had appeared to look for fewer excuses to spend time in one another's company as they had once readily found.

That the Miss Lucases and the Miss Bennets should meet to talk over a ball was absolutely necessary; and the morning after the assembly brought the former to Longbourn to hear and to communicate.

"*You* began the evening well, Charlotte," said Mrs. Bennet with civil self-command to Miss Lucas. "You were Mr. Bingley's first choice."

"Yes; but he seemed to like his second better."

“You mean Jane, I suppose, because he danced with her twice. To be sure that *did* seem as if he admired her—indeed I rather believe he did—I heard something about it—but I hardly know what—something about Mr. Robinson.”

“Perhaps you mean what I overheard between him and Mr. Robinson; did not I mention it to you? Mr. Robinson’s asking him how he liked our Meryton assemblies, and whether he did not think there were a great many pretty women in the room, and which he thought the prettiest? And his answering immediately to the last question: ‘The eldest Miss Bennet, beyond a doubt; there cannot be two opinions on that point.’”

“Upon my word! Well, that is very decided indeed—that does seem as if—but, however, it may all come to nothing, you know.”

“My overhearings were more to the purpose than yours, Eliza,” said Charlotte. “Mr. Darcy is not so well worth listening to as his friend, is he? Poor Eliza—to be only just *tolerable*.”

To Charlotte alone had Elizabeth confessed Miss Bingley’s part in the rejection. She gazed upon her friend now, silently entreating her to maintain her vow of secrecy.

“I beg you would not put it into Lizzy’s head to be vexed by Mr. Darcy’s ill-treatment,” Mrs. Bennett said, “for he is such a disagreeable man, that it would be quite a misfortune to be liked by him. Mrs. Long told me last night that he sat close to her for half-an-hour without once opening his lips.”

“Are you quite sure, Ma’am? Is not there a little mistake?” said Jane. “I certainly saw Mr. Darcy speaking to her.”

“Aye—because she asked him at last how he liked Netherfield, and he could not help answering her; but she said he seemed quite angry at being spoke to.”

“Miss Bingley told me,” said Jane, “that he never speaks much, unless among his intimate acquaintances. With them he is remarkably agreeable.”

Miss Bingley certainly seemed to be among Mr. Darcy’s intimate acquaintances, Elizabeth acknowledged. Was there an agreement between them? No such arrangement had been mentioned at the assembly, but that did not preclude the existence of something of an informal nature.

“I do not believe a word of it,” her mother said. “If Mr. Darcy had been so very agreeable, he would have talked to Mrs. Long. But I can guess how it was; I dare say he had heard somehow that Mrs. Long does not keep a carriage, and had come to the ball in a hack chaise.”

“I do not mind his not talking to Mrs. Long,” said Miss Lucas, “but I wish he had danced with Eliza.”

“Another time, Lizzy,” said her mother. “I would not dance with him, if I were you.”

“I believe, Ma’am, I may safely promise you never to dance with him.” Nor to seek out Miss Bingley’s companionship, either.

“His pride,” said Miss Lucas, “does not offend me so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud.”

“That is very true,” replied Elizabeth, considering that these conditions applied equally well to the haughty Miss Bingley, “and I could easily forgive her—that is, *his* pride, if he had not mortified mine.”

“Pride,” observed Mary, who piqued herself upon the solidity of her reflections, “is a very common failing, I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other. Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us.”

“If I were as rich as Mr. Darcy,” cried a young Lucas, who had come with his sisters, “I should not care how proud I was. I would keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine a day.”

“Then you would drink a great deal more than you ought,” said Mrs. Bennet; “and if I were to see you at it, I should take away your bottle directly.”

The boy protested that she should not; she continued to declare that she would, and the argument ended only with the visit.

As Charlotte left with barely a glance back, Elizabeth pondered her part in the conversation. It seemed almost as if Charlotte had been pushing her toward Mr. Darcy, a bachelor with a fortune even superior to that of Mr. Bingley’s. Elizabeth thought she understood her friend’s

motivation—a disagreement had risen between them some weeks previous, occasioned by Charlotte insisting that marriage was the only option for women of their class and standing, despite their very real attachment to one another. When Elizabeth had protested that she should never marry a person whom she did not love, and would sooner run away with one she did, Charlotte had only smiled gently and said she did not believe Elizabeth possessed the coldness of heart such a course of action would require. She herself could never consider disappointing her family and friends so, she had declared; and believing her, Elizabeth had become aware of a rising sense of disillusionment. This pronouncement had ended their argument, and their visit, simultaneously; and the two had not found time to be alone together since.

## CHAPTER SIX

The ladies of Longbourn soon waited on those of Netherfield, and the visit was returned in due form. On each occasion, Elizabeth sat erect in her seat, hands folded primly, avoiding Miss Bingley's eye and speaking to her only when directly required. Miss Bennet's pleasing manners grew on the goodwill of Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and though the mother was found to be intolerable, and the three younger sisters not worth speaking to, a wish of being better acquainted with the two eldest was expressed. By Jane, this attention was received with the greatest pleasure, but Elizabeth still saw superciliousness in their treatment of everybody, hardly excepting even her sister, and could not like them; though their kindness to Jane, such as it was, had a value as arising in all probability from the influence of their brother's admiration. It was generally evident whenever they met that he *did* admire her, and to Elizabeth it was equally evident that Jane was yielding to the preference that she had begun to entertain for him from the first, and was in a way to be very much in love; but Elizabeth considered with pleasure that it was not likely to be discovered by the world in general, since Jane united, with great strength of feeling, a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner which would guard her from the suspicions of the impertinent. She mentioned this to her friend Miss Lucas the next time they met.

"It may perhaps be pleasant," replied Charlotte, "to be able to impose on the public in such a case; but it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark. There is so much of gratitude or vanity in almost every attachment, that it is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all *begin* freely—a slight

preference is natural enough; but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten a woman had better show more affection than she feels. Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on."

"But she does help him on, as much as her nature will allow. If I can perceive her regard for him, he must be a simpleton, indeed, not to discover it, too."

"Remember, Eliza, that he does not know Jane's disposition as you do."

"But if a woman is partial to someone, and does not endeavour to conceal it, the other must find it out. You, after all, found out my feelings easily enough," added she, smiling as she recalled the day in the park two summers past when Charlotte had kissed her as she had sought vainly for words with which to describe her recently discovered love for her friend.

Charlotte allowed a small smile, but did not meet her eyes. "Perhaps, if they see each other enough. But, though Bingley and Jane meet tolerably often, it is never for many hours together; and, as they always see each other in large mixed parties, it is impossible that every moment should be employed in conversing together. Jane should therefore make the most of every half-hour in which she can command his attention. When she is secure of him, there will be more leisure for falling in love as much as she chooses."

"Your plan is a good one," replied Elizabeth, "where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married, and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it. But these are not Jane's feelings; she is not acting by design. As yet, she cannot even be certain of the degree of her own regard nor of its reasonableness. She has known him only a fortnight. She danced four dances with him at Meryton; she saw him one morning at his own house, and has since dined with him in company four times. This is not quite enough to make her understand his character."

"Not as you represent it. Had she merely dined with him, she might only have discovered whether he had a good appetite; but you must remember that four evenings have also been spent together—and four evenings may do a great deal."

“Yes; these four evenings have enabled them to ascertain that they both like Blackjack better than the game of Commerce; but with respect to any other leading characteristic, I do not imagine that much has been unfolded.”

“Well,” said Charlotte, “I wish Jane success with all my heart; and if she were married to him tomorrow, I should think she had as good a chance of happiness as if she were to be studying his character for a twelvemonth. Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other or ever so similar beforehand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life.”

“You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself.”

Charlotte did not reply to this charge, and the conversation soon turned to another topic. Neither was anxious to revisit contested territory, as any talk of marriage would surely occasion.

Occupied in observing Mr. Bingley’s attentions to Jane, Elizabeth was far from suspecting that she was herself becoming an object of some interest in the eyes of the gentleman’s younger sister. Caroline Bingley had at first scarcely allowed the second eldest Miss Bennet to be pretty; she had looked at her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, looked at her only to criticize. But no sooner had she made it clear to herself that the younger Miss Bennet had hardly a good feature in her face, than she began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though she had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in Elizabeth’s form, Caroline was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of her asserting that Miss Bennet’s manners were not those of the fashionable world, she was caught by their easy playfulness. Of this Elizabeth was perfectly unaware; to her Miss Bingley was only the relation of her own sister’s object of affection, and the woman who had thought her not handsome enough for Mr. Darcy to dance with.

Caroline began to wish to know more of Elizabeth, and as a step towards conversing with her, attended to her conversation with others.

This practice drew Elizabeth's notice. It was at Sir William Lucas's, where a large party was assembled.

"What did Miss Bingley mean," said she to Charlotte, "by listening to my conversation with Colonel Forster?"

"That is a question which only Miss Bingley can answer."

"But if she does it any more I shall certainly let her know that I see what she is about. She has a very satirical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of her."

On Miss Bingley's approaching them soon afterwards, Miss Lucas defied her friend to mention such a subject to her; which immediately provoking Elizabeth to do it, she turned to the newly arrived Miss Bingley and said: "Did you not think that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now, when I was teasing Colonel Forster to give us a ball at Meryton?"

"With great energy; but it is always a subject which makes one energetic."

"You are severe on us."

"It will be your turn soon to be teased, Eliza," said Charlotte. "I am going to open the instrument, and you know what follows."

"You are a very strange creature by way of a friend—always wanting me to play and sing before anybody and everybody! If my vanity had taken a musical turn, you would have been invaluable; but as it is, I would really rather not sit down before those who must be in the habit of hearing the very best performers." On Miss Lucas's persevering, however, she added, "Very well, if it must be so, it must." And glancing at Miss Bingley, "There is a fine old saying, which everybody here is of course familiar with: 'Keep your breath to cool your porridge'; and I shall keep mine to swell my song."

Her performance was pleasing, though by no means capital. After a song or two, and before she could reply to the entreaties of several that she would sing again, she was eagerly succeeded at the instrument by her sister Mary, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display.

Mary had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than she

had reached. Elizabeth, easy and unaffected, had been listened to with much more pleasure, though not playing half so well; and Mary, at the end of a long concerto, was glad to purchase praise and gratitude by Scotch and Irish airs, at the request of her younger sisters, who, with some of the Lucases, and two or three officers, joined eagerly in dancing at one end of the room.

Mr. Darcy stood near them in morose contemplation of how he would have preferred to pass the evening. His thoughts were so engaged by a subject close to his heart but far from his person that he failed to perceive Sir William Lucas was his neighbour, till Sir William thus began: "What a charming amusement for young people this is, Mr. Darcy! There is nothing like dancing after all. I consider it as one of the first refinements of polished society."

"Certainly, sir; and it has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world. Every savage can dance."

Sir William only smiled. "Your friend performs delightfully," he continued after a pause, on seeing Bingley join the group; "and I doubt not that you are an adept in the science yourself, Mr. Darcy. Do you often dance at St. James's?"

"Never, sir."

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

"It is a compliment which I never pay to any place if I can avoid it."

At that instant Sir William spotted Elizabeth moving towards them, and was struck with the action of doing a very gallant thing. He called out to her: "My dear Miss Eliza, why are you not dancing? Mr. Darcy, you must allow me to present this young lady to you as a very desirable partner."

And, taking her hand, he would have given it to Mr. Darcy who, though surprised, was not altogether unwilling to receive it, when she instantly drew back, and said with some discomposure to Sir William: "Indeed, sir, I have not the least intention of dancing. I entreat you not to suppose that I moved this way in order to beg a partner."

"You excel so much in the dance, Miss Eliza," said Sir William, "that it is cruel to deny me the happiness of seeing you; and though this gentleman dislikes the amusement in general, he can have no objection, I am sure, to oblige us for one half-hour."

"Mr. Darcy is all politeness," said Elizabeth.

“He is, indeed; but, considering the inducement, my dear Miss Eliza, we cannot wonder at his complaisance—for who would object to such a partner?”

Elizabeth chose to excuse herself without answering Sir William’s question, but had only gone a few paces when Caroline Bingley intercepted her.

“Miss Bennet,” Caroline said, inclining her head. She was dressed, as ever, in a gown of the latest fashion, trimmed with blue fabric that highlighted the corresponding colour of her eyes.

“Miss Bingley,” Elizabeth said.

“I wished to compliment you on your performance. You play quite well—not that I am surprised by your accomplishment.”

“Why, because you are of the belief that we country girls have nothing else to do but work on our pianoforte-playing?”

“To the contrary. I only meant that it seems natural to me that someone as handsome as you would play well.”

“And here I believed I was only barely *tolerable* in your estimation.” Glancing around, she spotted Charlotte on the other side of the room. “Good evening, Miss Bingley.”

As Caroline watched Elizabeth’s retreating form, a slight frown marring her countenance, Mr. Darcy approached and said, “I believe I can guess the subject of your reverie.”

“I would be surprised if you could.”

“You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in this manner; and indeed I am quite of your opinion. The nothingness, and yet the self-importance of these people, is altogether distasteful.”

“Your conjecture is totally wrong, I assure you,” said Caroline. “I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a handsome woman can bestow.”

Mr. Darcy immediately fixed his eyes on her face, and desired she would tell him what lady had the credit of inspiring such reflections.

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet, of course.”

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet!” repeated Darcy. “I am all astonishment. How long has she been such a favourite? And pray, when exactly did you become such intimates?”

“That is exactly the question I would expect you to ask,” Caroline said. “A man’s imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to intimacy in a moment.”

“If you are serious about it, I shall consider the matter absolutely settled. Though I myself am immune to the Bennet sisters’ appeal, I cannot say I have missed their mother’s charm; and, of course, she will always be with her daughters, wherever they go.”

Caroline dismissed Darcy’s attempt at wit, and gave over to wondering when and how she might convince Elizabeth that her admiration was sincere. Though, if she were wise, she would in fact leave off pondering the younger Miss Bennet’s attractions. Darcy’s satire was not far off the mark; while the elder Bennet sisters had much to recommend them in temperament, bearing, and intelligence, their connections left rather more to be desired. Besides, on the last occasion Caroline had initiated a friendship with a lady, she had found herself forced to relocate merely to placate the lady’s jealous husband. Perhaps the longing to convince Elizabeth Bennet she found her much more than merely tolerable was an urge she had far better ignore.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Mr. Bennet's property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his daughters, was entailed, in default of heirs male, on a distant relation; and their mother's fortune, though ample for her situation in life, could but ill supply the deficiency of his. Her father had been an attorney in Meryton, and had left her four thousand pounds.

She had a sister married to a Mr. Phillips, who had been a clerk to their father and succeeded him in the business, and a brother settled in London in a respectable line of trade.

The village of Longbourn was only one mile from Meryton; a most convenient distance for the young ladies, who were usually tempted thither three or four times a week, to pay their duty to their aunt and to a milliner's shop just over the way. The two youngest of the family, Catherine and Lydia, were particularly frequent in these attentions; their minds were more vacant than their sisters', and when nothing better offered, a walk to Meryton was necessary to amuse their morning hours and furnish conversation for the evening; and however bare of news the country in general might be, they always contrived to learn some from their aunt. At present, indeed, they were well supplied both with news and happiness by the recent arrival of a militia regiment in the neighbourhood; it was to remain the whole winter, and Meryton was the headquarters.

Their visits to Mrs. Phillips were now productive of the most interesting intelligence. Every day added something to their knowledge of the officers' names and connections. Their lodgings were not long a secret, and at length they began to know the officers themselves. Mr. Phillips visited them all, and this opened to his nieces a store of felicity unknown before. They could talk of nothing but officers; and Mr.

Bingley's large fortune, the mention of which gave animation to their mother, was worthless in their eyes when opposed to the regimentals of an ensign.

After listening one morning to their effusions on this subject, Mr. Bennet coolly observed: "From all that I can collect by your manner of talking, you must be two of the silliest girls in the country. I have suspected it some time, but I am now convinced."

Catherine was disconcerted, and made no answer; but Lydia, with perfect indifference, continued to express her admiration of Captain Carter, and her hope of seeing him in the course of the day, as he was going the next morning to London.

"I am astonished, my dear," said Mrs. Bennet, "that you should be so ready to think your own children silly. If I wished to think slightly of anybody's children, it should not be of my own."

"If my children are silly, I must hope to be always sensible of it."

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

"This is the only point, I flatter myself, on which we do not agree. I had hoped that our sentiments coincided in every particular, but I must so far differ from you as to think our two youngest daughters uncommonly foolish."

"My dear Mr. Bennet, you must not expect such girls to have the sense of their father and mother. When they get to our age, I dare say they will not think about officers any more than we do. I remember the time when I liked a red coat myself very well—and, indeed, so I do still at my heart; and if a smart young colonel, with five or six thousand a year, should want one of my girls I shall not say nay to him; and I thought Colonel Forster looked very becoming the other night at Sir William's in his regimentals."

A few moments' recollection led Mr. Bennet to a certain uniformed gentleman who had once caught his own fancy, decades earlier; but unlike his daughters, he had not ever been free to publish his sentiments abroad. This, he could now admit, was rather a fortunate position in which he had found himself, than unfortunate; for else he might well have fawned and effused in a manner even surpassing that of Lydia, his silliest daughter by far.

"Mamma," cried Lydia, "my aunt says that Colonel Forster and Captain Carter do not go so often to Miss Watson's as they did when

they first came; she sees them now very often standing in Clarke's library."

Mrs. Bennet was prevented replying by the entrance of the footman with a note for Miss Bennet; it came from Netherfield, and the servant waited for an answer. Mrs. Bennet's eyes sparkled with pleasure, and she was eagerly calling out while her daughter read, "Well, Jane, who is it from? What is it about? What does he say? Well, Jane, make haste and tell us; make haste, my love."

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

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—

"If you would be so compassionate as to dine today with Louisa and me, I shall be indebted to you, for a whole day's tête-à-tête with just the two of us, alone together, is not likely to end well. Come as soon as you can on receipt of this. My brother and the gentlemen are to dine with the officers.—Yours ever,

"CAROLINE BINGLEY"

"With the officers!" cried Lydia. "I wonder my aunt did not tell us of *that*."

"Dining out," said Mrs. Bennet, "that is very unlucky."

"Can I have the carriage?" Jane asked.

"No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain; and then you must stay all night."

"That would be a good scheme," said Elizabeth, "if you were sure that they would not offer to send her home."

"The gentlemen will have Mr. Bingley's chaise to go to Meryton, and the Hursts have no horses to theirs."

"I had much rather go in the coach."

"But, my dear, your father cannot spare the horses, I am sure. They are wanted in the farm, Mr. Bennet, are they not?"

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

"But if you have got them today," said Elizabeth, "my mother's purpose will be answered."

She did at last extort from her father an acknowledgment that the horses were engaged. Jane was therefore obliged to go on horseback, and her mother attended her to the door with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day. Her hopes were answered; Jane had not been gone long before it rained hard. Her sisters were uneasy for her, but her mother was

delighted. The rain continued the whole evening without intermission; Jane certainly could not come back.

“This was a lucky idea of mine, indeed!” said Mrs. Bennet more than once, as if the credit of making it rain were all her own. Till the next morning, however, she was not aware of all the felicity of her contrivance. Breakfast was scarcely over when a servant from Netherfield brought the following note for Elizabeth:

“MY DEAREST LIZZY,—

“I find myself very unwell this morning, which, I suppose, is to be imputed to my getting wet through yesterday. My kind friends will not hear of my returning till I am better. They insist also on my seeing Mr. Jones—therefore do not be alarmed if you should hear of his having been to me—and, excepting a sore throat and headache, there is not much the matter with me.—Yours, etc.”

“Well, my dear,” said Mr. Bennet, when Elizabeth had read the note aloud, “if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of illness—if she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders.”

“I am not afraid of her dying. People do not die of little trifling colds. She will be taken good care of. As long as she stays there, it is all very well. I would go and see her if I could have the carriage.”

Elizabeth, feeling really anxious, was determined to go to Jane, though the carriage was not to be had; and as she was no horsewoman, walking was her only alternative. She declared her resolution.

“How can you be so silly,” cried her mother, “as to think of such a thing, in all this dirt! You will not be fit to be seen when you get there.”

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

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

“No, indeed, I do not wish to avoid the walk. The distance is nothing when one has a motive; only three miles. I shall be back by dinner.”

“I admire the activity of your benevolence,” observed Mary, “but every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason; and, in my opinion, exertion should always be in proportion to what is required.”

“We will go as far as Meryton with you,” said Catherine and Lydia. Elizabeth accepted their company, and the three young ladies set off together.

“If we make haste,” said Lydia, as they walked along, “perhaps we may see something of Captain Carter before he goes.”

In Meryton they parted; the two youngest repaired to the lodgings of one of the officers’ wives, and Elizabeth continued her walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise.

She was shown into the breakfast-parlour, where all but Jane were assembled, and where her appearance created a great deal of surprise. That she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible to Mrs. Hurst; and Elizabeth was convinced that both sisters held her in contempt for it. Caroline, in fact, was divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion’s justifying her coming so far on foot. In their brother’s manners, however, there was something better than politeness; there was good humour and kindness. Mr. Darcy said very little, and Mr. Hurst nothing at all. The former was thinking of a letter he had received from the continent that morning, and the latter was thinking only of his breakfast.

Her inquiries after her sister were not very favourably answered. Miss Bennet had slept ill, and though up, was very feverish, and not well enough to leave her room. Elizabeth was glad to be taken to her immediately; and Jane, who had only been withheld by the fear of giving alarm or inconvenience from expressing in her note how much she longed for such a visit, was delighted at her entrance. She was not equal, however, to much conversation, and when Miss Bingley left them together, could attempt little besides expressions of gratitude for the extraordinary kindness she was treated with. Elizabeth silently attended her.

When breakfast was over they were joined by the sisters; and Elizabeth began to like them a little better herself, when she saw how much affection and solicitude they showed Jane. Even Miss Bingley seemed to have lost her haughty air, pressing Elizabeth’s hand with her own and assuring her they would see Jane well very soon. Elizabeth let her fingers remain within the lady’s grasp for the briefest of moments,

more from surprise than any other sensation. She had not expected such attention from Miss Bingley.

The apothecary came, and having examined his patient, said, as might be supposed, that she had caught a violent cold, and that they must endeavour to get the better of it; advised her to return to bed, and promised her some draughts. The advice was followed readily, for the feverish symptoms increased, and her head ached acutely. Elizabeth did not quit her room for a moment; nor were the other ladies often absent; the gentlemen being out, they had, in fact, no need to be elsewhere.

Caroline took advantage of the opportunity to watch Elizabeth tend to her sister. The relationship between the two Bennets was clearly devoted, and quite mutual—as far different from her own filial bonds as was possible. Elizabeth sat beside her sister on the bed, rubbing her hands with fine, sensitive fingers and amusing her with stories of their younger sisters' adventures in Meryton among the gathered militia, while Jane smiled up at her in gratitude and what could only be genuine affection.

At length, Louisa, noticing Caroline's close attendance to the Bennets, fixed her with a knowing, ill-humoured look. She, along with Charles and Darcy, was intimately acquainted with the circumstances behind their hasty removal to Netherfield. In fact, Louisa knew better than anyone of Caroline's affection for members of their sex, for they had attended together Mrs. Betwee's School for Young Ladies in Derbyshire, where Caroline had first fallen under the spell of Lady Rosalind Emmett, the unmarried aunt of one of their classmates. Lady Rosalind had introduced Caroline to the pleasures of female companionship, and ever since, she had been in search of a situation that would allow her to be true to her heart without losing the good opinion of her connections. With Darcy, she believed she may have uncovered an ideal plan for achieving future happiness for both; but given his proud, somewhat obstinate nature, the idea would have to be planted and tended to subtly, until he believed it came from his own reasoning, and not another's.

For her part, Elizabeth was aware of Caroline's gaze, but strove to ignore it as she worked to amuse and soothe Jane. Her sister had long been prone to consumptive fits, and she castigated herself for not interfering the day before in her mother's scheme. Really, was securing a

husband worth dying for? Not that Jane was dying. Indeed, with Miss Bingley's and Mrs. Hurst's kind attentions, she would likely be well quite soon. *Kind*—Elizabeth had not anticipated invoking the word anywhere near Caroline Bingley.

When the clock struck three, Elizabeth felt that she must go, and very unwillingly said so.

"Of course," said Miss Bingley. "Please, take the carriage."

"I couldn't possibly."

"I insist. We cannot have you falling ill, too."

Elizabeth was about to accept, when Jane spoke hesitantly: "Truly, I would not part from you, Lizzy."

"In that case," said Miss Bingley, "perhaps, Miss Bennet, you ought to consider staying at Netherfield for the present."

Mrs. Hurst cleared her throat, but did not add materially to the discussion, while Elizabeth pictured Charlotte Lucas, and guiltily remembered their shared pleasure at savaging Miss Bingley's character.

"Do stay," said Jane, gazing up at her from the bed.

"I will," promised Elizabeth, holding her sister's hand. "I won't leave you."

"You are both welcome to remain with us for as long as you wish," added Caroline.

"Thank you," said Elizabeth. "Your hospitality is genuinely appreciated."

"You are quite welcome. I am sure you would do as much for Louisa and I, should our positions be reversed."

As a servant was dispatched to Longbourn to acquaint the family with her stay and bring back a supply of clothes, Elizabeth reflected that before today, she might not have done even half as much for Mr. Bingley's sisters.