

## Chapter 1

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"Pride," observed Mary, who piqued herself upon the solidity of her reflections, "is a very common failing I believe."  
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Though it may not be universally acknowledged, it is a truth that the creation of one man's pleasure is oft the reason for another's grief. Amongst others, this truth is well fixed.

On first coming into Hertfordshire, Mr Darcy was a single man, he possessed a large fortune and, although he may very well have overlooked the fact, these two defining features dictated that he was in want of nothing more than a wife.

When he married Elizabeth Bennet in the autumn of 1812, it was the cause of a great flow of feelings. The bride and groom were elated, the intricacies of both their natures entwined now so naturally that recollection of any past dislike of each other was avoided by the pair and discouraged in others. Oh, what a disagreeable and thoroughly inconvenient facility memory, particularly a good one, could be. Elizabeth often pondered on the sharpness and clarity with which acquaintances could summon up each detail of the past and, despite one's blushes and discomfort, warm up stale moments of embarrassment to be offered around for refreshment.

"To think Miss Eliza, how thoroughly objectionable you once found the fellow." remarked Sir William Lucas, the father of her dear friend Charlotte, on hearing news of Elizabeth's engagement. How she had tried to argue, struggled to affirm the faults as all her own and contrived to persuade all cynics of her true affection for Darcy. Her elevation in status from country girl to mistress of Pemberley did nothing to dampen her spirits but had the effect, she often felt, of giving others the idea that she had married first for money and second for love. That she should be so misunderstood! What mercenary, feeble minds could think that she could fall in love with fortune? Oh! Such blindness was unforgivable. They had only to look at Darcy to understand her better, for how could she not love him and had not she begun, just a little, to love him before she had found the good sense even to like him? It was unacceptable to her that others could make the mistake she once had in misunderstanding him. For in every way that his appearance was pleasing Fitzwilliam Darcy was in equal part a genuine spirit. Elizabeth could have designed him no better. He was as handsome as he was good, he stood as tall in stature as he did in sound judgment and his particular tenderness, of which she was the only recipient, astonished her, took her breath and warmed her heart. No one could think, if they only knew the value of his affection, that the price for her soul could have been paid in pounds. Even ten thousand of them a year was too small a fee for a heart that had proved so hard to win as Elizabeth's.

But think thus sceptical minds will and Mrs Darcy - *how strange and thrilling that new title* - wished sometimes that the only fortune she had gained was that of her husband's love. Oh, but how she adored Pemberley; the house so much a reflection of its master, the exact formality of its architecture and the natural freedom of its grounds in every way depicted him. The trees, the streams and the very earth were steeped in memories of the boy he had been, the air itself seemed to have soaked in the potent essence of his being so that even in his absence a sense of him could be felt. In his presence the house and the parkland came alive but appeared rested. Reassuringly safe under his governing eye. It was there, in the grounds that had formed the picturesque backdrop to his boyhood, that Fitzwilliam Darcy had introduced himself again as the man he had become. It was under the old oak that Pemberley first saw its master place a gentle kiss on his wife's cheek; by the stream she had coaxed his laughter from somewhere deep within and gradually Elizabeth's own ready laughter had filled the fine rooms. United they were, Elizabeth and Darcy, by love, undeniably, and by being, in equal part, complicated, intelligent creatures who, they both conceded, were well suited, if only because there was no one else who could tolerate either of them so well as they did each other!

It is, however, folly to assume that perfect ingredients make for pictures of perfection. Where the united couple was at first reserved and subtle in any outward shew of feeling, the fervour of the bride's mother provided ample compensation. Fervour of such enormity is best avoided if it

cannot be extinguished and in certain cases, where there appears that little would be gained by attempting to induce composure, evasion of the enthusiast is advised.

Mrs Bennet's fickleness was never more sharply evident than during this time of excitement. Fortunately the two faces of her nature never met head on for she might have been humiliated to be put in mind of her former uncharitable opinions of her daughter's new husband. Six weeks after the wedding had taken place she was still in the habit of regaling her acquaintances with every detail. How it was *she* who had first considered Mr Darcy to be a suitable match for her Lizzy although, as she said once in mixed company;

"Lizzy did not appear so fond of *him* in the first instance. I scarcely dare to mention it but I feel I can claim some small credit for maintaining his interest in her. You know, I have always had a genuine affection for the dear man. Indeed, my goodwill was always well received."

Twenty years and more of marriage had made Mr Bennet so accustomed to his wife's capricious tendencies as to respond with no thoughts other than to vex her and he countered his lady's assertions in his irrevocably distinct style,

"Indeed my dear, Mr Darcy's admiration and respect for you very near exceed his affection for our own dear Lizzy. Considering the intensity of his feelings for you I am incredulous of the fact that the entire winter has passed and you have as yet received no formal invitation to Pemberley while the Gardiners have the benefit of every luxury there."

Mrs Bennet's countenance was not so agreeable now. How loathsome the reminder of her exclusion from Darcy's estate was and how widely known it was that her brother and his wife *and* their four children had been most graciously favoured. Indeed, they had taken almost permanent residency at Pemberley upon the master's insistence. This was a blissful existence for Mrs Gardiner and her young family. She was a woman incapable of conceiving that even Heaven could be more beautiful than Derbyshire and, as had become her lifetime's habit, delighted in repeated sentimental reminiscences about the nearby village of Lambton where she had spent an idyllic childhood. She and her husband rarely returned to their address of Gracechurch Street in Cheapside, London, when they did it was in order to attend, firsthand, to Mr Gardiner's matters of business.

Mr Gardiner now had the chance of fishing to his contentment in the streams and lakes on the estate, a pastime that had always gladdened him when he had the opportunity of enjoying it. The Gardiners, in similarity to Mrs Bennet, also professed that their part in the romantic attachment of Elizabeth and Mr Darcy had been instrumental. There the similarity ended though for there was truth as a base for the aunt and uncle's proclamations. For had it not been entirely of their doing that their niece had been persuaded to visit Pemberley during their respite in Derbyshire? Mercifully the unflawed manners of Elizabeth's Aunt and Uncle Gardiner dictated that they were only ever boastful of their achievements in each other's company.

The youngest Bennet sister Lydia, whose own marriage to George Wickham had only recently preceded her two sisters' unions, was delighted, in the exterior sense only, that Lizzy should have secured so handsome a husband. But young Mrs George Wickham was inwardly rankled by an increasing awareness, despite her naivety, that her sister Elizabeth had indeed married extremely well. Lydia's own husband's expertly fashioned gentleman-like manners and good features were little recompense when compared to Darcy's recommendations in appearance, fortune and status. Of the latter two attributes George Wickham was noticeably bereft. Young Mrs Wickham's displeasure was further fuelled by the absolute belief, despite all history suggesting the opposite, that Elizabeth truly adored her love in a way that was only equalled by Darcy's undoubted worship, in turn, of her.

It was with reluctance that Lydia renounced her conceited declaration of being the only married Bennet sister so soon after her own nuptials had taken place. To have been obliged to relinquish the brief position of superiority that this afforded her over all four of her siblings was the cause of a good degree of dissatisfaction for her. Lydia's disposition was partially inherited from her mother and had in part been honed by the woman. Misdemeanours, her own, were quickly forgot and she made no reference, during reflection, to the scandals and improprieties that surrounded her alliance with George Wickham. She was, as ever, inconsistent in her beliefs and maintained her frivolous outlook on life. With her husband's regiment quartered in Newcastle she relied upon the post as a means to keep contact with her family, but she did not write often. Unless she could relate tales that would affirm her popularity and promote her hunger for enjoyment then she did not see fit to pick up a pen. She had made a couple of brief visits to both Netherfield and Pemberley whilst Wickham spent some leisure time in Brighton and London. He

was as audacious as ever he had been in his attitudes and thought nothing of encouraging his wife to appeal to Elizabeth and Darcy to suggest that their position might be used to the advantage of securing him a respected situation in society. Congenial though they were, neither Mr or Mrs Darcy saw fit to acknowledge his request.

It is disappointing but not at all surprising to learn that not everyone took pleasure in Elizabeth's ascent in status to mistress of Pemberley. It was particularly well accounted and widely known that Darcy's aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, was woeful and inconsolable about the union. It had meant the destruction of her hopes, and her dreams that her own daughter Anne would one day be united with Darcy. The enormity of Lady Catherine's fury remained constant and her undisguised disdain for Elizabeth and the Bennet family in general was unyielding. That the name of de Bourgh and her personal social standing might risk being marred by what she judged to be an afflicted connection was insupportable to her and she declared quite publicly never to visit Pemberley despite her nephew's attempt at reconciliation.

"That is if they should deem to insult me with another of their invitations, or intensify their offence with any expectation of being received at Rosings Park."

Poor Anne de Bourgh remained, by demand as much as by any real malady, as infirm physically as ever she had been, she displayed very credible symptoms of anguish over Darcy's being purloined from her by one so insignificant as Elizabeth Bennet, but the magnitude of her torment never once matched her mother's.

Felicitations from the Collins household were sent to Elizabeth and Darcy with more than a little misgiving. While Charlotte Collins was all gladness, and had no reason to be otherwise, her husband was not so easily persuaded to put forward any heartfelt and genuine blessings to the Darcys. Mr Collins could not comfortably accept that the previous November Elizabeth Bennet had refused, with untoward obstinacy, to become his wife. There was little recompense to be had after this violent rejection so he contented himself with drawing a picture of Elizabeth as a hardhearted and difficult girl. As a means to restore his own composure he became entirely persuaded that she would most certainly end a spinster. If he, Mr Collins a respectable clergyman, with all his well-contrived charms and affable ways, could not win her regard then it was a certainty, he decided, that no one would. He had also boasted the advantage of being the sole beneficiary of her family home of Longbourn. But even the glittering prizes of the entailment and the relief and stability the circumstances would have afforded her family were still not enticement enough for Elizabeth to betroth herself to him. It had taken Mr Collins a shockingly short time to steady himself, outwardly at least, from Elizabeth's rebuff and his former smugness was reinstated with astounding velocity once his offer of marriage to Charlotte Lucas had been accepted. The foundations of Charlotte's friendship with Lizzy had the required strength to withstand such a blow. It is true to say that Elizabeth found it an uncomfortable thought that she had no entitlement to her own home whilst her friend had acquired certain rights in connection with her husband. But, as was Lizzy's nature, she wished them well and what had once been the very important question of the entailment soon became a matter of little consequence to her after her own worthy marriage. Her concerns, indeed her astonishment, on hearing of Charlotte's engagement came from her own inability to see any desirability in Mr Collins herself. But she understood that Charlotte was practical before being sentimental and knew only too well that her friend could be satisfied with a marriage state that offered security and respectability even if there was very little else besides to recommend it. Charlotte Collins was devout to be sure, she made as honourable a wife to a clergyman as could ever be wished for. In addition she was able to enjoy Lady Catherine de Bourgh's patronage, though not quite so ardently as did her husband. She soon found herself resignedly content with life at the rectory at Hunsford and accepted, in the grateful way of a woman quite reconciled to *not* being in love, that the garden, ecclesiastical duties and their patroness's demands kept her husband fully occupied. They lived in reasonable style, savouring the social enhancements created by their connection to the high ranks of the de Bourgh family and had the reassurance that their future was by no means un-designed. Their contentment, however, was short-lived; for Lady Catherine's wrath was unbearable and all beneficent attentions to Mr Collins vanished once Elizabeth's engagement to Mr Darcy was made widely known. Lady Catherine's previous views of Mr Collins and his wife were dramatically altered by her rage. Her belief that the undesirable Bennet family, including those members of it so distantly associated as Mr Collins, posed a very real threat to all that was good and honourable became more fixed. William Collins and Charlotte fled Hunsford but as a result

of their hasty escape to Lucas Lodge in Hertfordshire an unusual friendship was born.

Familial loyalties dictated that it should fall to the Lucases and the Bennets to each play a part in assisting the rejected clergyman and his wife. Sir William Lucas arranged a carriage, Mr Collins's own much boasted of equipage being too modest for the task of his complete removal. Mrs Bennet sent Mary to help. Her choice was limited as she now had three daughters married and taken from Longbourn and, although fanciful in nature herself, she deemed Kitty too fragile in composure to be numb to Lady Catherine's vitriol and derision, so concluded that Mary's plain looks and predisposition for moralizing and reflection would be least likely to cause offence. And so it was that Mary Bennet, viewing the task as an important personal crusade, accompanied Sir William Lucas and his daughter Maria to Rosings Park.

Lady Catherine would agree to no conversation with either Mr or Mrs Collins. Mary, much to her own astonishment, was the appointed mediator, her first undertaking being the examination of an inventory, provided by Lady Catherine, stating quite clearly a brief list of items that were permitted to depart from Hunsford, and an extensive catalogue of those which must be seen to remain. By this means Mary Bennet had assisted in ridding Lady Catherine of the unwanted clergyman and his wife and had therefore inadvertently begun, tentatively at first, a process of redemption. Lady Catherine, finding herself noticeably afflicted with weakness due to the disagreeable nature of recent events, conceded, against her better judgement but in deference to her poor health, to permit Miss Mary Bennet and the inventory that had been put in her care to be brought to Rosings Park. Once informed of the invitation Mary Bennet, seeing the clear implications of such a privilege, set off on the short journey across the lane from the Hunsford Parsonage where she had thus far been accommodated. The completed inventory, which emphasised the importance of the Collinses leaving Hunsford exactly as they had found it was now complete and to be conveying it to Rosings Park when most everyone else in the world was denied access to the place allowed Mary to indulge in a good deal of self congratulation. But the girl's expanded mood was soon diminished by her finding Lady Catherine de Bourgh to be a most disconcerting woman to be face to face with. Her discomfort was not made easier when, having been subjected to a more prolonged inspection than the inventory, she was obliged to hear out the woman's misgivings.

"You can be under no misapprehension that I admit you here at Rosings by choice Mary Bennet. I am guardedly aware of the perils of acquainting myself so intimately with the likes of your family." A brief but distinctly unsettling silence followed then she went on, "I concede it goes in your favour that you have not the slightest sign of the arts of enticement that your contemptible sister displays. No, your un-garnished appearance is of encouragement to me now I take the trouble of observing it closer. It gives me pain to admit it, but my own daughter comes to mind. She has her own frailties, which, I dare say, render her a less desirable catch for a brutish type of man. You have little to boast of in the way of beauty, although in your case such an ill-favoured appearance can certainly be put down to your poor line of descent."

Mary's spirits were lifted by what she deemed to be inverse flattery, for rather than seize upon the offence intended by Lady Catherine's remarks she elected to view the opinions offered appreciatively. So long had Mary been accustomed to viewing herself as plain; she was wholly and miserably aware that her commonplace looks appeared more so in light of all her sisters' more becoming features. She always dressed modestly; for fear that highly fashioned garments would throw her plainness into stark relief. Indeed, now, in the light of what she chose to read into Lady Catherine's observations, she could consider her modest presentation to be a virtue, a quality that, at last, afforded her a measure of superiority over her sisters. To be plain was not necessarily a shortcoming.

Lady Catherine continued to address Mary in a patronising manner but her tone soon softened. She had, despite her dedication to finding anyone with the name of Bennet unbearable, found nothing significant to dislike about the unaffected demure young woman other than her unfortunate family.

That same afternoon Mary became acquainted with Anne de Bourgh who she had heard described as a 'cross, disagreeable looking thing' by Lizzy. Between Anne and Mary there appeared to be no underlying feelings of threat or unease as both could seem pallid and insipid, favouring the pursuit of serious reflection and theological debate. As a result of these and other common interests a firm rapport developed with a rapidity that astounded those who observed it; though quite why the swift development of a friendship should be thought astonishing in a world where the instantaneous nature of love affairs was readily accepted is a

question that may well remain unanswered.

Eventually, when Lady Catherine was unable to deny the delight Anne took in the friendship, she began to recognise the advantages of her daughter having a devoted companion who was near to her own age and gave her consent to the acquaintance with limited reluctance. Mrs Jenkinson, who had previously attended Anne and Lady Catherine, graciously obliged to let Mary take her place and it was settled that she would dedicate herself to Rosings Park and Lady Catherine in any way that would prove favourable to her mistress. Later, having suffered the indignity of making a formal request to Mr Bennet to propose that Mary attend her daughter's needs Lady Catherine managed, but not without being properly impressed by the humility she was showing, to swallow some of her pride. But this was not without a final and most definite assurance to Mary that she still thought very little of her family.

"Mary Bennet, I am not in the habit of expressing gratitude to those so far beneath me as yourself. There is rarely, if ever, an occasion when such indebtedness should arise. However, I am fair in my judgements and I have noted that my dear Anne takes a liking to your morals and company and I myself, if my unstinting devotion to my daughter is to be sustained, must acknowledge this. I am, as you must by now realise, inordinately attentive to Anne's every need. It is this consideration that leads me to accept you despite your low connections." Looking at Mary guardedly, she went on, "Although you probably would not bear detailed scrutiny, the examination I have made of your character thus far causes me less displeasure than I expected. I suppose I must be accepting of the relationship. I am prepared to take you on as a companion to Anne," she said, "should you prove so loyal to her as Mrs Jenkinson has to us I shall have no cause for regret." She observed Mary closely and continued, "Take heed of this advice though Miss Mary Bennet, should even a small inkling of resemblance to the improprieties of your family members ever manifest in your personality, you will feel the withdrawal of the benefit of my attentions most sharply."

Thus was Mary's position at Rosings Park settled upon and secured with none doubting the conditions which had been laid out so succinctly. She had scant contact with Longbourn and wrote more to Mr Collins than she did her own family, choosing to correspond with the clergyman with the purpose of her own religious advancement in mind. In every conceivable way Mary Bennet was loyal to Lady Catherine and intended, whole-heartedly, to shew that one Bennet girl at least could be trusted to employ her time in a worthwhile way. Mary was no reprobate; she was rarely tempted to break rules or conventions but her continuing contact with Mr Collins was a matter on which she chose to remain silent.

Jane and her dear Mr Bingley were as mesmerised with each other as ever. From their first moving to Netherfield Park after their marriage they decided to investigate the possibility of purchasing of a fine estate not thirty miles from Elizabeth and Darcy at Pemberley. They considered that the happy consequence of this would be the endurance of fewer visits from Mrs Bennet. The woman's manners and intrusions tested even Charles Bingley's placid nature. Mr Bingley's sister Caroline could do little to console her undisclosed grief at Darcy's marriage. How she had scorned Eliza Bennet. In keeping with young women of her kind she was quite comfortable with recollections of how she had asserted herself in her efforts to fuel dislike of Elizabeth in Darcy. That Caroline Bingley's social accomplishments were refined goes some way to explain how she could, while harbouring feelings of utter disdain and envy, adopt an attitude of sincerity towards Elizabeth. Few considered Caroline genuine but she gave such a convincing performance that she was accepted at Pemberley, occupying her time by paying a great deal of attention to Darcy's sister Georgiana who now resided there.

Bingley's other sister Mrs Hurst was no longer inseparable from Caroline as had been her previous form. This had little to do with choice, for she would much rather have engaged herself, with Caroline, in the shared entertainment of belittling Elizabeth. Mrs Hurst's absence from Pemberley had nothing to do with her not wanting to be there and everything to do with Mr Hurst's self-induced ailments. The results of his indulgence kept her retained at Netherfield where she felt, with acute bitterness, that an ill husband proved an insurmountable obstacle to the enjoyment of life and that the inevitable demise brought about by too much wine and too little fresh air did not seem to take effect rapidly enough to be thought convenient.

There are others to be considered here, pitied perhaps; although not bitter or jealous or shot through with malice like some poor creatures, there are those for whom the marriage of sisters brings an emptiness. Alone at Longbourn Kitty Bennet was obliged to take the full force of her

mother's excitability. This was gravely frustrating for her as she had already spent some weeks at Pemberley and knew too well that there was much to be missed. There, her manners and character had improved, this advance was partially accounted for by Kitty's being in such fine company although it must be acknowledged that her detachment from her wayward sister Lydia also played a part in this favourable development. So it was with true suffering that she returned to Longbourn in order that her mother could demand attention as and when she so desired it. Mr Bennet now imposed a strict and unsociable regime for Kitty who was stricken by the isolation she felt; the situation was worsened by his adamant convictions that the girl should enjoy no balls or assemblies until her responsibility in character had been proven. She felt overwhelmingly aggrieved that her character was forever to be judged by her sister Lydia's shocking conduct but could see no immediate way to appease her father. With the regiment gone from Meryton she no longer felt she had even the remotest chance of securing an officer for a husband, or even for an afternoon's distraction.

"God has been very good to us." Mrs Bennet said when three daughters were married the same year. Her boundless pride, gloating, and superiority consumed her. Jane and Lizzy's situations in marriage had long been her favourite talking point but of late her inclination was to elaborate upon Mary's acceptance at Rosings Park. Kitty was vexed to hear of Mary being so highly praised; although she had not married and Kitty privately believed that she never would, her residency at Rosings Park and the potential of such an association seemed to raise her to an unduly high pinnacle in her mother's estimations. Mrs Bennet, in keeping with her selective view of things, would not concede that the position of companion was generally considered very lowly indeed.

With happy feelings of release Mr Bennet took satisfaction from the situations of all his daughters. The relief on his finances that their positions occasioned was particularly valued. He had been no stranger to self reproach and had bitterly regretted not beginning, early in marriage, to make provisions for his family, but, as he so often recalled, in an attempt to justify his apathy, he had expected to have sons, or one son at least. That his wife had not obliged him in this expectation had not been his fault and he very kindly concluded that it was not entirely hers either. Bad fortune must be responsible for a house bursting with females. When daughters came swift and fast there was no real cause for regret on Mr Bennet's part for he loved all of them despite their silliness. It would be untrue to say that he loved them all equally, as he perhaps should have done; he did not, nor could he. His little Lizzy held the greater share of his affections. This unequalled love was due, not to defects in the father, but to merits in the child. However much Mr Bennet lacked sense he had sensibility in abundance. Oh the joy of having Lizzy settled and set so well. The relief! Enough to allow him the opportunity of journeys by carriage to Pemberley. There he enjoyed everything with full relish, but most particularly his wife's absence. Although they were not cruel, Elizabeth and Darcy were very properly impressed, in the early days of their union, by the fact that they had a considerable amount of recovering to do from the furore that had surrounded them. Tranquillity was impossible with Mrs Bennet near, she was not a woman most suited to inspiring calm in others. So, she awaited her invitation to Pemberley with a mix of conviction that it would come and anxiety for she feared that it would not.