

\*This PDF is a simplified English version of the source text below. It has been rewritten by ChatGPT for intermediate English learners.

Source text:

The Project Gutenberg eBook of *Pride and Prejudice*

Available at Project Gutenberg:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/42671/pg42671.txt>

## Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Simplified Edition by ChatGPT)

### Part 1

It is a truth that many people believe. When a rich single man comes to live in a new place, families around him soon begin to think of him as a future husband for one of their daughters. Even if they know nothing about his real thoughts, they are sure that he must be looking for a wife. This idea is fixed so strongly in their minds that they speak of him as if he already belongs to one young lady or another.

One morning Mrs. Bennet said to her husband, “My dear Mr. Bennet, have you heard that Netherfield Park has been rented at last?”

Mr. Bennet answered, “No, I have not heard.”

“But it has,” she said quickly. “Mrs. Long was here just now, and she told me everything.”

Mr. Bennet said nothing.

Mrs. Bennet cried, “Do you not want to know who has taken it?”

Mr. Bennet replied, “You want to tell me, and I have no problem listening.”

That was all the invitation she needed.

She said, “Mrs. Long says that Netherfield has been taken by a young man with a large fortune from the north of England. He came down on Monday with four horses to see the house. He liked it so much that he agreed at once with Mr. Morris. He will move in before Michaelmas, and some of his servants will be there by the end of next week.”

Mr. Bennet asked, “What is his name?”

“Bingley,” she answered.

“Is he married or single?”

“Single, of course!” cried Mrs. Bennet. “A single man with four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!”

Mr. Bennet looked at her calmly and said, “How can it affect them?”

She replied, “My dear Mr. Bennet, how can you be so tiresome? I am thinking that he may marry one of them.”

Mr. Bennet said, “Is that his reason for coming here?”

“Reason? Nonsense!” she cried. “But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them. So you must visit him as soon as he arrives.”

Mr. Bennet answered, “I see no need for that. You and the girls may go. Or you may send them alone. That may be even better. You are as handsome as any of them. Perhaps Mr. Bingley will like you best.”

Mrs. Bennet said, “You flatter me. I had my share of beauty once, but I do not pretend to be anything special now. When a woman has five grown daughters, she should stop thinking about her own looks.”

Mr. Bennet replied, “In such cases, there is not often much beauty to think about.”

Mrs. Bennet ignored this and said again, “You must go and see Mr. Bingley.”

“I promise nothing,” said Mr. Bennet.

She went on, “Think of your daughters. Only imagine what a good marriage it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are going to visit him. They usually do not visit new people. You must go, because we cannot visit him if you do not.”

Mr. Bennet answered, “You are too careful. I am sure Mr. Bingley will be glad to see you. I will send a note with you to tell him that I fully agree to his marrying whichever of the girls he chooses. Though I will say a good word for my little Lizzy.”

Mrs. Bennet cried, “I will not allow that. Lizzy is not better than the others. She is not half so beautiful as Jane, nor half so good-humored as Lydia. You are always giving her the preference.”

Mr. Bennet said, "They are all foolish and ignorant like other girls. But Lizzy has something more quick in her mind than her sisters."

Mrs. Bennet said angrily, "How can you speak so about your own children? You enjoy making me unhappy. You have no care for my poor nerves."

Mr. Bennet replied calmly, "You misunderstand me. I respect your nerves. They are old friends of mine. I have heard you speak of them for at least twenty years."

She said, "You do not know how much I suffer."

He answered, "I hope you will live long enough to see many young men with four thousand a year come into the neighborhood."

"It will be useless," she said, "if you refuse to visit them."

Mr. Bennet replied, "When there are twenty such men, I will visit them all."

Mr. Bennet was a strange mix of sharp mind, dry humor, quiet reserve, and sudden change. Even after three and twenty years of marriage, his wife did not fully understand him. Her own mind was easier to know. She had little understanding and little knowledge. When she was unhappy, she believed she was ill. The purpose of her life was to see her daughters married. Her comfort was visiting and sharing news.

A few days later, Mr. Bennet was among the first to visit Mr. Bingley. He had always meant to do it, though he had told his wife many times that he would not go. She did not know of his visit until the evening after it happened. Then he showed it in a sudden way.

Seeing his second daughter trimming a hat, he said, "I hope Mr. Bingley will like it, Lizzy."

Mrs. Bennet said at once, "We have no way of knowing what Mr. Bingley likes, since we are not to visit him."

Elizabeth replied, "But Mama, we will meet him at the dances. Mrs. Long has promised to introduce him."

Mrs. Bennet said sharply, "I do not believe Mrs. Long will do that. She has two nieces of her own. She is selfish and false. I have no good opinion of her."

Mr. Bennet said, "Nor do I. I am glad you do not depend on her help."

Mrs. Bennet did not answer him. Instead, she turned to her daughter Kitty and

said, "Do not cough so much, Kitty. Have some care for my nerves. You tear them apart."

Mr. Bennet said, "Kitty has no sense in her cough. She coughs at the wrong time."

Kitty answered, "I do not cough for fun."

Mr. Bennet then asked, "When is your next dance, Lizzy?"

"In two weeks," said Elizabeth.

Mrs. Bennet cried, "And Mrs. Long will not return until the day before. She will not know Mr. Bingley herself. So she cannot introduce him."

Mr. Bennet replied, "Then you may introduce him to her."

Mrs. Bennet said, "Impossible. I do not know him. How can you tease me so?"

Mr. Bennet smiled and said, "Since I have already visited him, we cannot avoid knowing him now."

The girls stared at their father. Mrs. Bennet cried out in surprise and joy. She said, "How good you are, my dear Mr. Bennet. I knew you would go at last. I knew you loved your girls too much to neglect such a chance."

Mr. Bennet rose and said, "Now Kitty, you may cough as much as you like." Then he left the room, tired of his wife's excitement.

Mrs. Bennet turned to her daughters and said, "What an excellent father you have. We must thank him. Lydia, though you are the youngest, I am sure Mr. Bingley will dance with you."

Lydia answered boldly, "I am not afraid. Though I am the youngest, I am the tallest."

The evening passed in guessing how soon Mr. Bingley would return the visit, and when he would be invited to dinner.

## Part 2

The news of Mr. Bennet's visit soon spread through the house. Mrs. Bennet could speak of nothing else. She told the story again and again, each time with more pleasure. The girls listened with growing interest, and even those who had

seemed calm began to feel the importance of the new neighbor. A dance was expected soon at Meryton, and they all hoped that Mr. Bingley would attend.

When the evening of the dance arrived, the family set out in high spirits. The room was bright with light and full of people. Every face seemed eager. Before long, Mr. Bingley entered with his party. He brought his two sisters, his brother-in-law Mr. Hurst, and his friend Mr. Darcy. The arrival caused a stir. Many eyes turned toward them at once.

Mr. Bingley was good-looking and friendly in his manner. He smiled easily and spoke with openness. His sisters were fine in dress and carried themselves with an air of fashion. Mr. Hurst looked polite but said little. Mr. Darcy was tall and handsome, with a serious face and proud air. Within minutes, the room was filled with talk of his great income. Some admired him greatly, but others soon felt less pleased.

Mr. Bingley quickly joined the dancing. He asked for partners with warmth and showed no reserve. He danced every dance and seemed sorry when the music stopped. Mr. Darcy, however, stood apart for much of the evening. He danced only twice and refused other introductions. Many felt that he looked down on them. His manner appeared proud, and the early admiration faded.

Elizabeth Bennet had the misfortune to sit down for two dances because there were not enough gentlemen. While she was seated, she stood near enough to hear Mr. Bingley speaking to Mr. Darcy.

Mr. Bingley said, "Come, Darcy, you must dance. I hate to see you standing alone. You will enjoy yourself more if you join us."

Mr. Darcy answered, "I will not dance. I do not like it unless I know my partner well. At such a dance as this, it would be a burden. Your sisters are engaged, and there is not another woman here with whom I wish to stand up."

Mr. Bingley laughed and said, "I would not be so hard to please for anything. I have never seen so many pleasant girls in my life. Several of them are very pretty."

Mr. Darcy looked toward the room and said, "You are dancing with the only truly beautiful one."

Mr. Bingley replied warmly, "She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

But her sister sitting just behind you is also very pretty and agreeable. Let me ask my partner to introduce you.”

Mr. Darcy turned, and for a moment his eyes met Elizabeth’s. Then he looked away and said, “She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me. I am in no mood to give importance to young ladies who are passed over by other men. Return to your partner and enjoy her smiles. You waste your time with me.”

Mr. Bingley did as he was advised. Mr. Darcy walked away. Elizabeth felt no warmth toward him after hearing his words. Yet she told the story later with spirit among her friends. Her lively nature allowed her to find humor even in insult.

The evening passed happily for most of the family. Jane had danced twice with Mr. Bingley. His sisters had spoken kindly to her. Mrs. Bennet was delighted beyond measure. Elizabeth shared Jane’s pleasure but with quieter feeling. Mary had been called accomplished. Kitty and Lydia had danced often and were satisfied. They returned home in good humor.

Mr. Bennet was still awake when they came in. He had waited with curiosity. Mrs. Bennet entered with excitement and said, “Oh, my dear Mr. Bennet, we have had a most delightful evening. I wish you had been there. Jane was so admired. Mr. Bingley thought her very beautiful and danced with her twice. Only imagine that. He asked her a second time when he asked no other woman twice.”

Mr. Bennet said dryly, “If he had any pity for me, he would not have danced so much. I wish he had injured his ankle in the first dance.”

Mrs. Bennet continued without pause. “He is extremely handsome, and his sisters are charming. Their dresses were elegant beyond words. I have never seen anything finer.”

Mr. Bennet interrupted, “I beg you not to describe their dresses.”

She then spoke of Mr. Darcy. “He is the most disagreeable man I ever met. So proud and conceited. He walked about as if he owned the room. Not handsome enough to dance with Lizzy. I detest him.”

Later, when Jane and Elizabeth were alone, Jane spoke softly. “He is just what a young man should be,” she said of Mr. Bingley. “Sensible, good-humored, lively. I have never seen such easy manners.”

Elizabeth replied, "He is also handsome, which completes the picture."

Jane added, "I was very much pleased when he asked me to dance again. I did not expect it."

Elizabeth smiled and said, "I did. Compliments surprise you, but they never surprise me. It was only natural. You were far prettier than any other woman there."

Jane said gently, "Dear Lizzy."

Elizabeth continued, "You are too ready to think well of everyone. You never see faults."

Jane answered, "I try not to judge quickly. I speak what I truly think."

Elizabeth said, "That is what makes it strange. With your good sense, you choose not to see foolishness. You find good in every person."

The next morning, the Lucases came to speak of the dance. Mrs. Bennet said to Charlotte Lucas, "You began the evening well. You were Mr. Bingley's first choice."

Charlotte replied, "Yes, but he liked his second better."

Mrs. Bennet said, "You mean Jane. He danced with her twice."

Charlotte said, "I heard Mr. Robinson ask him which lady he thought the prettiest. He answered at once, 'The eldest Miss Bennet, without doubt.'"

Mrs. Bennet looked pleased but cautious. "That sounds promising, though it may come to nothing."

Charlotte turned to Elizabeth and said, "Mr. Darcy is not worth listening to. Poor Lizzy, to be called only tolerable."

Elizabeth laughed lightly and said, "I could forgive his pride if he had not wounded mine."

Mary spoke in a serious tone. "Pride is common. Many people feel it. Pride and vanity are not the same. Pride is about our opinion of ourselves. Vanity is about what we wish others to think."

A younger Lucas boy said, "If I were as rich as Mr. Darcy, I would not care how proud I was. I would keep hounds and drink wine every day."

Mrs. Bennet replied quickly, "You would drink too much, and I would take your bottle away."

The talk ended in cheerful noise, but the feelings left by the dance remained. Mr. Bingley's kindness had made a deep impression. Mr. Darcy's words had made another. Both men would continue to be spoken of often in the days that followed.

### Part 3

Within a short walk from Longbourn lived the Lucas family. Sir William Lucas had once worked in trade in Meryton. He had made enough money to rise in the world, and during the time when he served as mayor, he had been presented to the King and received a title. After that honor, he felt less pleased with business and with living in a small town. He moved his family to a house about a mile from Meryton. The house was called Lucas Lodge. There he could think of his own importance and spend his days being polite to everyone.

Sir William was a gentle and friendly man. Though he liked his title, he was not proud in his behavior. He was ready to speak kindly to all. Lady Lucas was a good-natured woman. She was not very clever, but she was a comfortable neighbor for Mrs. Bennet. They both enjoyed visits and talk. The Lucas family had several children. The eldest daughter, Charlotte, was about twenty-seven years old. She was sensible and thoughtful, and she was Elizabeth's close friend.

After the dance at Meryton, it was certain that the Miss Lucases and the Miss Bennets would meet to speak of it. The next morning Charlotte and her sister came to Longbourn. They were eager to share news and to hear more.

Mrs. Bennet said with polite calm, "You began the evening well, Charlotte. You were Mr. Bingley's first choice."

Charlotte answered with a small smile, "Yes, but he seemed to like his second better."

Mrs. Bennet replied, "You mean Jane. He danced with her twice. It did look as if he admired her. I heard something about it, though I am not sure of the details."

Charlotte said, "I heard him speak to Mr. Robinson. Mr. Robinson asked him which lady he thought the prettiest. Mr. Bingley answered at once, 'The eldest Miss Bennet, without doubt.'"

Mrs. Bennet looked pleased and said, "That was very decided indeed. Still, it may all come to nothing."

Charlotte turned toward Elizabeth and said in a playful tone, "My hearing was more useful than yours, Eliza. Mr. Darcy is not so worth listening to as his friend. Poor Eliza, to be called only tolerable."

Mrs. Bennet spoke quickly, "I beg you do not put such thoughts in Lizzy's head. It would be no loss to her not to please such a disagreeable man. Mrs. Long told me that he sat near her for half an hour without saying a word."

Jane said gently, "Are you quite sure? I thought I saw him speak to her."

Mrs. Bennet answered, "She asked him how he liked Netherfield, and he had to reply. But she said he looked angry at being spoken to."

Jane said, "Miss Bingley told me that he speaks little unless he is with close friends. With them he is agreeable."

Mrs. Bennet replied, "I do not believe it. If he were agreeable, he would have spoken to Mrs. Long. I am sure he is full of pride. Perhaps he heard that Mrs. Long does not keep a carriage and came in a hired one."

Charlotte said, "I do not mind his silence to Mrs. Long. But I wish he had danced with Eliza."

Mrs. Bennet said firmly, "Another time, Lizzy, I would not dance with him if I were you."

Elizabeth replied calmly, "I promise I will never dance with him."

Charlotte said, "His pride does not offend me so much as it might, because he has reason for it. He is handsome, rich, and from a good family. If I may say so, he has a right to be proud."

Elizabeth answered with spirit, "That may be true, but I could forgive his pride if he had not hurt mine."

Mary, who liked to speak with seriousness, said, "Pride is very common. Many people feel it. Pride is our opinion of ourselves. Vanity is what we wish others to think of us."

One of the younger Lucas boys said loudly, "If I were as rich as Mr. Darcy, I would not care how proud I was. I would keep dogs and drink wine every day."

Mrs. Bennet replied at once, "You would drink too much, and I would take the bottle away."

The talk soon moved to other subjects, but Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy were not forgotten.

Before long, the Bennet sisters returned the visit to Netherfield. The Bingley sisters received them politely. Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst showed special attention to Jane. They seemed pleased with her gentle manners. Mrs. Bennet's behavior, however, did not win their favor. They thought her too eager and too open in her hopes for her daughters. The younger Bennet sisters did not interest them at all. Still, because of their brother's clear admiration for Jane, they wished to know the two eldest sisters better.

Jane was happy with their kindness. Elizabeth was less ready to approve. She saw in them a certain pride. They were polite, but they carried themselves as if they expected to be admired. They had been educated in town and were used to society of higher rank. Their fortune was large, and they were used to spending freely. They thought well of themselves and less well of others.

Mr. Bingley, however, was very different. He was easy in temper and ready to like people. He depended greatly on Mr. Darcy's judgment. Between the two men there was a steady friendship. Mr. Darcy was more serious and thoughtful. He was clever and firm in his opinions. He could also be proud and reserved. Mr. Bingley was sure to be liked wherever he went. Mr. Darcy often gave offense without meaning to.

When they spoke of the dance at Meryton, their different views were clear.

Mr. Bingley said, "I never met with pleasanter people or prettier girls. Everyone was kind and attentive. Miss Bennet is like an angel."

Mr. Darcy answered, "I saw little beauty and no fashion. I felt no interest in the people. Miss Bennet is pretty, but she smiles too much."

Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst agreed that Jane was sweet. They said they would not object to knowing her better. Mr. Bingley felt free to admire her as he pleased.

Not long after, a regiment of soldiers arrived in the neighborhood for the winter. Meryton became lively with their presence. Catherine and Lydia Bennet were full

of excitement. They visited their aunt Mrs. Philips often, hoping for news of the officers. They soon learned the names of many of them and spoke of nothing else.

One morning, after listening to their talk, Mr. Bennet said calmly, "From the way you speak, you must be the two silliest girls in the country. I suspected it before, but now I am sure."

Kitty was silent and ashamed. Lydia said without care, "I hope to see Captain Carter today. He goes to London tomorrow."

Mrs. Bennet said sharply, "I am surprised that you speak so of your own children. If I think badly of anyone's children, it will not be my own."

Mr. Bennet answered, "If they are foolish, I must at least know it."

She said, "They are clever girls."

He replied, "On this point we do not agree. Our two youngest are uncommonly foolish."

Mrs. Bennet said, "When they are older, they will not think of officers more than we do."

Lydia cried out, "Mama, my aunt says that Colonel Forster and Captain Carter are often seen in Clarke's library now."

At that moment a servant entered with a letter for Jane. It was from Netherfield. Mrs. Bennet watched eagerly as Jane opened it.

Jane said, "It is from Miss Bingley."

She read aloud, "My dear friend, if you do not dine with us today, Louisa and I shall quarrel. My brother and the gentlemen dine with the officers. Come as soon as you can."

Lydia cried, "Dining with the officers! Why did my aunt not tell us?"

Jane asked, "May I have the carriage?"

Mrs. Bennet said quickly, "No, my dear, go on horseback. It looks like rain. If it rains, you will have to stay the night."

Elizabeth said, "That is a good plan if they do not send her home."

Jane said quietly, "I would rather go in the carriage."

Mrs. Bennet insisted, "Your father cannot spare the horses."

Mr. Bennet said calmly, "They are needed in the farm more often than I can get

them.”

At last it was settled. Jane went on horseback. Soon after she left, the rain began and fell heavily all evening. Mrs. Bennet said more than once, “What a clever idea I had.”

The next morning a letter came from Jane. She wrote that she felt unwell after being caught in the rain. Her friends would not let her return home. She mentioned a sore throat and headache.

Mr. Bennet said dryly, “If she dies, it will be under your orders.”

Mrs. Bennet replied, “People do not die of small colds.”

Elizabeth felt real worry. She said, “I will go to Jane.”

Mrs. Bennet cried, “In all this dirt? You will not be fit to be seen.”

Elizabeth answered, “I wish only to see Jane.”

Mr. Bennet asked, “Do you want me to send for the horses?”

She replied, “No. The distance is only three miles. I will walk.”

Mary said seriously, “Feeling should be guided by reason.”

Lydia and Kitty offered to walk part of the way. In Meryton they left her. Elizabeth walked alone, crossing fields and jumping over puddles. By the time she reached Netherfield, her shoes were wet and her face warm from the walk.

She was shown into the breakfast room. Mr. Bingley received her kindly. Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst looked surprised at her appearance. Mr. Darcy said little. Elizabeth soon went to Jane’s room and found her feverish and tired.

Jane was glad to see her. Elizabeth stayed with her through the morning. When the doctor came, he said Jane had caught a bad cold and must rest.

Elizabeth did not leave her sister’s side. That evening, when Jane slept, Elizabeth went downstairs. The others were playing cards.

Mr. Hurst said with surprise, “Do you prefer reading to cards?”

Elizabeth answered, “I enjoy many things.”

Mr. Bingley said warmly, “I hope you will soon enjoy seeing your sister well.”

Elizabeth thanked him sincerely. She took up a book, but her attention soon wandered to the talk around her.

Miss Bingley spoke of accomplishments. She said, “A woman must know

music, drawing, dancing, and languages. She must have a certain air and manner.”

Mr. Darcy added, “She must also improve her mind by reading.”

Elizabeth said with a smile, “I am no longer surprised that you know only six such women.”

The evening ended with polite words, but feelings beneath them were not all kind. Elizabeth knew that some judged her harshly. Still, she cared little for their opinion while Jane remained ill.

#### Part 4

Elizabeth spent most of the night beside Jane. From time to time she rose to feel her sister’s hand and listen to her breathing. In the morning Jane seemed a little easier, and Elizabeth was glad to give that small comfort to Mr. Bingley when he sent to ask for news. His concern was clear. Soon after, his sisters also came to inquire, though their faces showed more form than feeling.

Elizabeth thought it right to send a note to Longbourn and ask her mother to come and judge Jane’s condition for herself. The note was sent at once. Before long Mrs. Bennet arrived, with Kitty and Lydia at her side. She entered the room with loud expressions of concern.

Mrs. Bennet said, “My poor Jane! I knew she would catch cold. Riding in such rain was enough to make anyone ill.”

Elizabeth answered quietly, “She has a fever, but the doctor says rest will help her.”

Mrs. Bennet declared, “I am sure she must not be moved. She will stay here until she is quite well.”

Miss Bingley replied with polite calm, “Of course, she must not attempt to leave while she is so unwell.”

Mrs. Bennet said warmly, “You are very kind, I am sure. It is a comfort to know that she is among friends.”

Kitty and Lydia soon grew restless. They were eager to speak of officers and news from Meryton. Lydia whispered to her mother, “Mama, we saw Captain

Carter on the way. He bowed to us.”

Mrs. Bennet answered in a low voice, “Do not speak so loud.”

After a short visit, Kitty and Lydia were glad to leave the sick room and find amusement downstairs. Mrs. Bennet remained a little longer, then prepared to return home. Before she went, she said to Elizabeth, “You must stay with Jane. I cannot have her brought home in this state.”

Elizabeth replied, “I will remain as long as she needs me.”

When Mrs. Bennet and the two younger girls had gone, the house grew quieter. Jane slept again. Elizabeth sat by the window and looked out across the fields. Though she had felt some discomfort at the cold reception of Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, she was grateful for Mr. Bingley’s kindness.

Later in the day the gentlemen returned. Mr. Bingley went directly to ask after Jane. Elizabeth met him in the hall.

He said earnestly, “I hope Miss Bennet is no worse.”

Elizabeth answered, “She is still feverish, but there is some improvement.”

He said, “I am relieved to hear even that. Pray tell her that we all wish her speedy recovery.”

Elizabeth thanked him and went back upstairs.

That evening, at dinner, Elizabeth joined the party only for a short time. The sisters spoke again of illness with words of regret, but soon turned the talk to other matters. They discussed dress, balls, and friends in town. Mr. Hurst spoke only of food and wine. Mr. Darcy remained mostly silent.

At one moment Miss Bingley looked toward Elizabeth and said with a slight smile, “I cannot imagine what pleasure there is in walking three miles through mud.”

Elizabeth answered calmly, “The pleasure was in seeing my sister.”

Mr. Bingley said warmly, “It was a proof of great affection.”

Miss Bingley replied, “Affection is well enough, but there are limits to what one should do.”

Mr. Darcy spoke at last. “There is something pleasing in such devotion.”

Miss Bingley looked at him quickly, as if she did not expect such agreement.

When the meal ended, Elizabeth returned to Jane. The fever had not increased, but neither had it gone. Elizabeth read softly to her, and Jane listened with closed eyes.

The next morning the doctor came again. He said, "The cold is strong, but she will recover with care."

Elizabeth felt lighter at these words. She sent another note home to give the news.

During the day, Miss Bingley attempted to engage Elizabeth in conversation. She said, "I hope you do not find Netherfield dull."

Elizabeth answered, "My sister's company is enough for me."

Miss Bingley replied, "You must miss your own home."

Elizabeth said simply, "I am content where I am useful."

Mr. Darcy observed this exchange from across the room. He seemed thoughtful.

In the afternoon the party gathered in the drawing-room. Miss Bingley began to speak again of accomplishments.

She said, "A truly accomplished woman must improve her mind by reading and by study."

Mr. Darcy nodded. "Yes. She must add knowledge to natural talents."

Elizabeth said lightly, "I never saw such a woman as you describe."

Miss Bingley cried, "Surely you have seen many."

Elizabeth replied, "I have seen many women who play music, draw, and speak languages. But to unite all these qualities with sense and taste is rare."

Mr. Darcy looked at her more closely than before. There was something in her tone that was firm but not rude.

Later, when Elizabeth rose to return to Jane, Miss Bingley said in a low voice to Mr. Darcy, "She seeks to recommend herself by undervaluing her own sex."

Mr. Darcy answered calmly, "There is meanness in all attempts at false charm."

Miss Bingley seemed uncertain how to respond.

That night Elizabeth remained again in Jane's room. The fever at last began to lessen. By morning Jane was clearly better. Her voice was weaker, but her eyes were brighter.

Jane said softly, "You have been too kind to me, Lizzy."

Elizabeth answered, "I could not be anywhere else."

Downstairs, Mr. Bingley expressed real pleasure when he heard the improvement.

He said, "This is good news indeed."

His sisters also declared their happiness, though Elizabeth felt that their concern was less deep than his.

Over the next two days Jane grew stronger. She was able to sit up and speak more freely. Elizabeth began to think of returning home. Yet there was a small part of her that wondered whether Mr. Darcy's quiet attention meant something more than she first believed.

She did not allow herself to dwell on that thought. Her chief wish was to see Jane well again and to return to Longbourn.

At last, when Jane was declared fit to travel, the carriage was sent from home. Mr. Bingley insisted on seeing them safely to the door.

He said, "I hope Miss Bennet will soon visit us again, but under happier circumstances."

Jane replied gently, "I am very grateful for all your kindness."

Elizabeth added, "We thank you sincerely."

Miss Bingley said with formal politeness, "We shall expect you at Netherfield when your sister is quite recovered."

Mr. Darcy bowed but said nothing.

The sisters returned home. Mrs. Bennet received them with many expressions of satisfaction.

She said, "I am sure your stay has been of the greatest use. Mr. Bingley must have been much concerned."

Jane answered modestly, "He was very kind."

Elizabeth smiled but did not speak of Mr. Darcy. She was not yet certain what she thought of him. She knew only that his first words at the dance still lingered in her memory.

Thus ended Jane's illness and Elizabeth's stay at Netherfield. Yet the events of

those days had begun to shape feelings and opinions that would not easily change.

## Part 5

Jane's return to Longbourn brought comfort to the whole family. Mrs. Bennet spoke often of the attention shown to her eldest daughter at Netherfield. She repeated every small act of kindness, especially those of Mr. Bingley. Each retelling grew warmer than the last.

Mrs. Bennet said, "I am sure he was deeply concerned. It is plain to see how much he admires Jane."

Jane answered gently, "He was very kind, Mama."

Elizabeth observed her sister's quiet happiness. Jane never spoke too strongly of her own feelings, yet her calm joy was clear enough to one who knew her well.

A few days passed peacefully. Jane continued to improve, though she was not yet ready for long walks. During this time, the talk in the house turned again to neighbors and news. Soon another matter arose that would affect the whole family.

One morning Mr. Bennet received a letter. He read it carefully and then announced, "I have news for you all. A gentleman will soon visit us. He is our cousin, Mr. Collins."

Mrs. Bennet looked surprised. "Mr. Collins? I do not know the name."

Mr. Bennet replied, "He is the son of the man who will inherit this estate when I am gone."

Mrs. Bennet's face changed at once. "That young man! The one who will turn my daughters out of this house?"

Mr. Bennet said calmly, "The same. He writes that he wishes to make peace for past troubles and to visit us soon."

Mrs. Bennet cried, "It is very hard that the estate should pass away from my children."

Elizabeth said quietly, "It is not his fault, Mama."

Mrs. Bennet replied, "I know it is not his fault, but it is very unfair."

Mr. Bennet added, "He is a clergyman and has recently received a living. He

writes in a very polite style.”

Lydia said eagerly, “Is he young?”

Mr. Bennet answered, “He does not say his age, but he appears to be serious and respectful.”

Kitty asked, “Will he stay long?”

Mr. Bennet replied, “He plans to come on Monday and remain until Saturday.”

Mrs. Bennet said firmly, “We must receive him well, whatever I feel about the estate.”

On Monday Mr. Collins arrived. He was a tall young man with formal manners. His speech was long and careful. As soon as he entered the house, he bowed deeply to Mrs. Bennet.

He said, “My dear Madam, I am most happy to present myself at Longbourn and to assure you of my wish for peace.”

Mrs. Bennet answered stiffly, “You are welcome, sir.”

Mr. Collins turned to Mr. Bennet and said, “I feel deeply the injustice of the entail, though I had no hand in arranging it. I wish to make amends by every means in my power.”

Mr. Bennet replied, “Your visit is quite enough.”

Mr. Collins then addressed the daughters with solemn courtesy.

He said, “I am delighted to make the acquaintance of my fair cousins.”

Lydia whispered to Kitty, “He speaks as if he were reading from a book.”

Elizabeth tried not to smile.

At dinner Mr. Collins praised everything. He admired the house, the food, and the arrangement of the table.

He said, “This dinner does great credit to your management, Madam.”

Mrs. Bennet replied with pleasure, “I am glad you are satisfied.”

After the meal, Mr. Collins spoke at length about his patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

He said proudly, “Lady Catherine is most gracious. She has condescended to advise me in all matters. She is the daughter of an earl and lives in great style.”

Elizabeth asked, “Does she take much interest in your parish?”

Mr. Collins answered, "She delights in advising me. She has even suggested improvements to my home."

Mr. Bennet listened with quiet amusement.

The next morning Mr. Collins declared his intention.

He said, "I am sensible that the estate of Longbourn must one day be mine. It is my wish to make amends by choosing a wife from among my cousins."

Mrs. Bennet started in surprise and joy.

She said, "You are very kind, sir."

Mr. Collins continued, "My reasons for marriage are clear. First, it is right for a clergyman to set an example. Second, I believe it will add to my happiness. Third, I am advised by Lady Catherine to marry."

Elizabeth looked at Jane with wide eyes.

Mr. Collins went on, "My choice has been made. I have selected Miss Elizabeth Bennet."

Elizabeth was taken by surprise. She rose and said firmly, "Sir, I am grateful for the honor you intend, but I must decline."

Mr. Collins smiled as if amused.

He said, "Young ladies often refuse at first. I understand such modesty."

Elizabeth replied clearly, "I am not acting from modesty. I cannot accept you."

Mr. Collins answered, "Your refusal only increases my regard."

Elizabeth said with more force, "You mistake me. I do not feel what is necessary for happiness in marriage."

Mrs. Bennet cried out, "Lizzy, consider what you are doing!"

Mr. Bennet, who had been silent, spoke calmly. "Let her choose for herself."

Mr. Collins still persisted. "I am convinced that you will change your mind."

Elizabeth replied, "You are mistaken. My answer will not change."

At last Mr. Collins withdrew, though he appeared offended. Mrs. Bennet was greatly distressed.

She said, "Lizzy will be sorry for this."

Mr. Bennet answered quietly, "I would rather see her unhappy in refusing than miserable in accepting."

In the days that followed, Mr. Collins transferred his attentions to Charlotte Lucas. Charlotte listened with calm seriousness. She was older than Elizabeth and had fewer expectations.

After a short time, Charlotte accepted him.

Elizabeth was surprised when Charlotte told her.

Charlotte said, "I am not romantic. I ask only for comfort and security."

Elizabeth replied, "I wish you happiness."

Charlotte answered gently, "I am content with my choice."

Soon Mr. Collins returned to his home with his future bride promised to him. The house at Longbourn grew quieter once more.

Yet many changes had begun. Jane's feelings for Mr. Bingley were growing. Elizabeth's opinion of Mr. Darcy was uncertain. And Charlotte's engagement showed that each woman must choose her own path.

The calm of Longbourn would not last long, for new events were already near.

## Part 6

Not long after Mr. Collins left Longbourn, another change took place in the neighborhood. The officers were still in Meryton, and their presence continued to excite Kitty and Lydia. Yet among them there appeared a new face that soon drew attention.

One afternoon Elizabeth was walking to Meryton with Lydia and Kitty when they met a young officer whom they had not seen before. He was of pleasing appearance and easy manners. Another officer introduced him.

The officer said, "Miss Bennet, may I present Mr. Wickham?"

Mr. Wickham bowed and said, "I am happy to make your acquaintance."

Elizabeth found his manner open and agreeable. He spoke with readiness and seemed at ease in conversation.

Lydia whispered, "He is far more handsome than Captain Carter."

Soon after, Mr. Darcy appeared on the street. The moment Mr. Wickham saw him, his expression changed slightly. Mr. Darcy also looked surprised, though he

quickly recovered his composure.

Elizabeth noticed the exchange of looks between the two men.

Later, when they were gathered at Mrs. Philips's house, Mr. Wickham sat near Elizabeth and began to speak of his past.

He said, "You know Mr. Darcy, I believe."

Elizabeth answered carefully, "I have met him."

Mr. Wickham said in a lowered voice, "His father was a kind and generous man. He treated me almost as a son."

Elizabeth listened closely.

Mr. Wickham continued, "It was his wish that I should have a good position in the church. But when he died, Mr. Darcy refused to honor that wish."

Elizabeth felt surprise. "You mean he denied you what was promised?"

Mr. Wickham nodded. "He gave the living to another. I was left with nothing."

Elizabeth said, "That must have been unjust."

Mr. Wickham replied, "I have tried to forgive him, but I cannot forget."

His tone was gentle and wounded. Elizabeth felt her dislike of Mr. Darcy grow stronger.

At the next gathering in Meryton, Elizabeth watched Mr. Darcy carefully. His manner was as reserved as before. She wondered how he could appear so calm if Mr. Wickham's story were true.

Meanwhile, Jane's happiness received a small blow. Mrs. Bennet had expected that Mr. Bingley would visit soon after her illness. Yet days passed without his appearance.

Mrs. Bennet said, "It is very strange. I am sure he cannot have forgotten us."

At last a letter arrived from Miss Bingley. Jane read it aloud.

She said softly, "Miss Bingley writes that they have gone to London. She speaks of staying there for some time."

Mrs. Bennet cried out, "Gone to London! Without even saying goodbye?"

Jane's face grew pale, though she tried to smile.

She said, "Perhaps they were called away suddenly."

Elizabeth read the letter more closely. She saw that Miss Bingley praised Mr.

Darcy's sister and spoke warmly of her. There was no mention of Mr. Bingley's intention to return soon.

Elizabeth said quietly to Jane, "I do not think this removal was entirely his own idea."

Jane replied, "We must not judge harshly."

Elizabeth answered, "I suspect that his sisters wished it."

Jane shook her head gently. "I cannot believe they would wish to separate friends."

Elizabeth felt certain that Miss Bingley hoped for a different marriage for her brother. Yet she did not wish to add to Jane's sorrow.

Some days later, Mr. Collins returned briefly to announce his engagement to Charlotte. Mrs. Bennet received the news with mixed feelings.

She said, "Charlotte Lucas! Well, I suppose she is satisfied."

Elizabeth visited Charlotte before her departure to her new home.

Charlotte said calmly, "You must not think me unhappy. I ask for comfort and a home. Mr. Collins can give me both."

Elizabeth replied, "I hope you will be content."

Charlotte smiled faintly. "Contentment is enough."

The winter advanced. The officers remained in Meryton, and Mr. Wickham became a frequent guest at Mrs. Philips's gatherings. Elizabeth found pleasure in speaking with him. His manner was lively and attentive.

One evening, as they sat together, he said, "I once thought Mr. Darcy capable of generosity. But pride rules him."

Elizabeth answered, "I have seen something of that pride."

Mr. Wickham added, "His friend Mr. Bingley is of a softer nature. I fear he is too easily led."

Elizabeth remembered the sudden departure to London and wondered whether Mr. Darcy had influenced it.

Soon a ball was announced at Netherfield. Mrs. Bennet rejoiced, hoping that Mr. Bingley would return in time to attend. Yet word came that he remained in London.

At the ball, Elizabeth danced several times with Mr. Wickham. She felt her spirits rise in his company.

She said to him, "You must tell me more of your early life."

He replied with a sigh, "There is little to tell that does not cause pain."

Later in the evening Mr. Darcy approached her.

He said formally, "May I have the honor of this dance?"

Elizabeth hesitated but accepted.

During the dance he spoke little. At last he said, "You and your family are well, I hope."

Elizabeth answered coolly, "Quite well, sir."

After a pause she said, "I have lately heard a story concerning you. I should like to know whether it is true."

Mr. Darcy looked at her with surprise. "What story?"

Elizabeth replied, "That you deprived a gentleman of a position promised by your father."

Mr. Darcy's expression grew firm. "If you refer to Mr. Wickham, I will not discuss private matters in such a place."

Elizabeth said, "Very well."

The rest of the dance passed in silence.

When she returned home, Elizabeth thought deeply on what had passed. Mr. Darcy's refusal to explain seemed to confirm her opinion. Yet there was something in his manner that suggested more than simple pride.

As winter continued, Charlotte married Mr. Collins and went to live near Lady Catherine. Jane remained gentle but quieter than before. Elizabeth felt both concern for her sister and curiosity about the truth of Mr. Wickham's tale.

Though she did not know it yet, these questions would soon demand clearer answers.

## Part 7

After the Netherfield ball, the winter passed slowly at Longbourn. Jane tried to

appear cheerful, but Elizabeth could see that her sister still thought often of Mr. Bingley. No letter came from him. Only Miss Bingley wrote, and her letters spoke much of London society and of Mr. Darcy's sister, but little of Jane.

One morning Mrs. Gardiner, Mrs. Bennet's sister, arrived from London with her husband. They were sensible and kind people, and Elizabeth felt great pleasure in their company. Mrs. Gardiner soon observed Jane's quiet sadness.

She said gently to Elizabeth, "Your sister has suffered a disappointment."

Elizabeth answered, "Yes. I fear she has been treated with little consideration."

Mrs. Gardiner replied, "It is best not to form too quick a judgment. Time may show more clearly what has happened."

During their stay, the Gardiners invited Jane to spend some weeks with them in London. Mrs. Bennet hoped that this would place her again near Mr. Bingley.

Jane said softly, "It will be pleasant to see my aunt."

Elizabeth understood her true hope but said nothing.

Jane went to London. Elizabeth missed her deeply. Without Jane's gentle presence, the house felt different. Kitty and Lydia continued to speak of officers. Mr. Wickham was often at Mrs. Philips's house, and Elizabeth still enjoyed his conversation.

One evening Mrs. Gardiner returned from London and brought news.

She said to Elizabeth in private, "Jane has seen Miss Bingley. The meeting was polite but distant. There was no sign that Mr. Bingley was expected soon."

Elizabeth felt anger rise within her.

She said, "I am certain now that he was persuaded to leave."

Mrs. Gardiner answered, "It is possible that his friend advised him."

Elizabeth thought at once of Mr. Darcy. Her dislike strengthened.

In the spring, Elizabeth received an invitation from Charlotte to visit her at her new home near Lady Catherine's estate. Though she felt sadness at Charlotte's marriage, she wished to see her friend.

Mr. Bennet said, "You may go. A visit will do you good."

Mrs. Bennet added, "Take care that you do not come home married."

Elizabeth smiled faintly and set out with Sir William Lucas and his daughter

Maria.

When she arrived at Charlotte's home, she saw that Charlotte had arranged her life with care. The house was comfortable, though plain. Mr. Collins welcomed Elizabeth with formal warmth.

He said, "My dear cousin, I am honored by your presence. Lady Catherine herself has been pleased to inquire after you."

Elizabeth replied politely, "I am grateful for her interest."

Soon after her arrival, they were invited to dine at Lady Catherine's home. Elizabeth observed the grand house with calm attention. Lady Catherine was tall and imposing. She spoke in a commanding voice.

During dinner Lady Catherine questioned Elizabeth closely.

She said, "How many sisters have you?"

Elizabeth answered, "Five."

Lady Catherine said, "All out in society?"

Elizabeth replied, "Yes."

Lady Catherine shook her head. "That is not proper. The younger should wait until the elder are married."

Elizabeth answered quietly, "I see no reason why they should."

Lady Catherine continued her questions.

She asked, "Are any of your sisters accomplished?"

Elizabeth replied, "We all have had some education."

Lady Catherine said, "I suppose your mother has not taught you music and drawing in the proper manner."

Elizabeth answered with steady voice, "We have learned as well as we were able."

Mr. Collins watched with anxious expression, fearing that Elizabeth might offend his patroness. Yet Elizabeth remained calm and respectful.

Some days later, Mr. Darcy arrived at Lady Catherine's estate. Elizabeth was surprised to see him again. He greeted her with formality but not coldness.

He said, "I hope you have been well."

Elizabeth replied, "Quite well, thank you."

During the following days, he called several times at Charlotte's house. At first his visits seemed directed toward Colonel Fitzwilliam, his cousin, who was also staying nearby. Yet Elizabeth felt that his attention often rested on her.

One afternoon, as she walked alone, Mr. Darcy joined her.

He said, "I trust your family is in good health."

Elizabeth answered, "They are."

There was a pause. Then he said, "I understand that your sister is in London."

Elizabeth replied, "Yes."

His expression grew thoughtful.

Some days later, Colonel Fitzwilliam spoke with Elizabeth in a friendly tone.

He said, "My cousin Darcy has lately saved a friend from an imprudent marriage."

Elizabeth's heart beat faster.

She asked, "From whom?"

The colonel answered, "I cannot give names, but it was done from motives of prudence."

Elizabeth thought at once of Jane and Mr. Bingley. Her anger returned with force. She believed now that Mr. Darcy had separated them.

That evening, as she sat alone at Charlotte's house, Mr. Darcy entered unexpectedly. His face was serious.

He said with effort, "I have struggled in vain. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."

Elizabeth was astonished.

He continued, "In spite of my wishes and my family's objections, I offer you my hand."

Elizabeth's surprise turned to indignation.

She said firmly, "I cannot accept you."

Mr. Darcy looked shocked. "May I ask why?"

Elizabeth answered with emotion, "You have acted unjustly toward Mr. Wickham. And you have separated my sister from Mr. Bingley."

Mr. Darcy's face grew pale.

He said, "I acted as I believed was right."

Elizabeth replied, "You have been proud and ungenerous."

Mr. Darcy spoke with wounded tone, "This is your opinion of me."

Elizabeth said, "It is."

He stood silent for a moment, then bowed stiffly and left the room.

Elizabeth felt shaken. Though she had rejected him, his words had stirred her deeply. Yet her anger against him seemed justified in her mind.

The next morning she received a letter from Mr. Darcy. In it he explained his actions. He wrote that he had indeed advised Mr. Bingley to leave because he believed Jane indifferent. He also wrote that Mr. Wickham had not been wronged, but had refused the church position and later acted dishonorably.

Elizabeth read the letter slowly. With each page, her certainty weakened. She recalled moments she had overlooked. She began to see that she might have judged too quickly.

She said softly to herself, "Till this moment I never knew myself."

The visit at Charlotte's soon ended. Elizabeth returned home thoughtful and quieter than before. Her feelings toward Mr. Darcy were no longer simple dislike. They had become uncertain and troubled.

She did not yet know how greatly her understanding of him would continue to change.

## Part 8

Elizabeth kept Mr. Darcy's letter with great care. During the journey back to Longbourn, she read it again and again. Each reading softened her former anger. She saw clearly that she had trusted Mr. Wickham too easily. She remembered his easy smile and ready stories. Now she began to question them.

When she reached home, Jane greeted her with warmth.

Jane said, "You look thoughtful, Lizzy. Has anything troubled you?"

Elizabeth answered, "Nothing that I cannot understand better in time."

She did not yet speak of the proposal or the letter. She wished first to be certain

of her own feelings.

Days passed quietly. Then the Gardiners invited Elizabeth to travel with them during the summer to the north of England. She accepted gladly. The change of scene, she hoped, would clear her mind.

They set out in fine weather. Elizabeth enjoyed the journey greatly. The hills, rivers, and green fields delighted her. She felt lighter in spirit with every mile.

At last they reached Derbyshire. Mrs. Gardiner proposed that they visit Pemberley, Mr. Darcy's estate.

Elizabeth started at the suggestion.

She said, "Is he at home?"

Mrs. Gardiner replied, "We are told that he is away."

After a moment's thought, Elizabeth agreed. She wished to see the place described in the letter.

When they arrived at Pemberley, Elizabeth admired the house at once. It stood in a beautiful valley with a stream running before it. The grounds were natural and well cared for. Nothing seemed forced or artificial.

She said softly, "To be mistress of Pemberley might be something."

Inside the house, the housekeeper received them. She spoke warmly of her master.

She said, "There is not a better landlord or kinder master in the world than Mr. Darcy."

Elizabeth listened with surprise.

The housekeeper continued, "He is generous to the poor and tender to his sister."

Elizabeth thought of Mr. Wickham's story and felt shame for her former belief.

As they walked through the rooms, Elizabeth saw a portrait of Mr. Darcy. The expression was gentle and thoughtful.

Suddenly a servant entered and announced that Mr. Darcy himself had arrived.

Elizabeth felt her heart beat fast.

A moment later he appeared. He looked surprised but composed.

He said with courtesy, "Miss Bennet, this is an unexpected pleasure."

Elizabeth replied, "We believed you absent, sir."

Mr. Darcy answered, "I returned sooner than planned."

His manner was polite and without pride. He introduced her to his sister, Georgiana Darcy, who was shy but sweet in expression.

Mr. Darcy said, "I hope you will allow my sister to make your acquaintance."

Elizabeth bowed kindly. She saw at once that Georgiana was gentle and modest.

During the next day Mr. Darcy called again and invited the Gardiners to dine at Pemberley. Elizabeth was struck by his attention to her aunt and uncle. He treated them with respect and warmth.

Mrs. Gardiner said later, "He is not the man you once described."

Elizabeth answered quietly, "I begin to believe that I did not know him."

Soon after, another visitor arrived at Pemberley—Mr. Bingley.

Elizabeth was surprised to see him.

He greeted her with friendly pleasure.

He said, "Miss Bennet, I trust your sister is well."

Elizabeth replied, "She is quite well."

His expression showed relief.

During his stay at Pemberley, Mr. Bingley spoke often of Jane. Elizabeth observed him carefully. She saw no sign of indifference.

She thought, "If he still loves her, all may yet be well."

The happy days in Derbyshire were suddenly disturbed by the arrival of a letter from home. It was from Jane.

Elizabeth read it with growing alarm.

Jane wrote that Lydia had gone to Brighton with the regiment. Soon after, she had left with Mr. Wickham. They had not married.

Elizabeth cried out, "Lydia gone! And with Mr. Wickham!"

She felt horror and fear. Such an action would bring shame upon the whole family.

Mr. Darcy entered the room at that moment and saw her distress.

He said, "What has happened?"

Elizabeth answered with tears in her eyes, "My youngest sister has run away with Mr. Wickham. They are not married."

Mr. Darcy's face grew grave.

He said quietly, "This is serious."

Elizabeth added, "It is all my fault. I should have spoken sooner."

Mr. Darcy replied, "Do not blame yourself."

He left the house shortly after, and Elizabeth believed she would never see him again.

She returned home at once. The scene at Longbourn was full of anxiety. Mrs. Bennet lay in bed, overcome by distress. Mr. Bennet had gone to London in search of Lydia.

Jane tried to remain calm.

She said, "We must hope that they will marry."

Elizabeth answered, "If they do not, we are ruined."

Days passed without clear news. At last a letter arrived from Mr. Gardiner. He wrote that Mr. Wickham had agreed to marry Lydia. The marriage would take place soon.

Mrs. Bennet cried with joy.

She said, "My dear Lydia will be married!"

Elizabeth felt relief but also confusion. She wondered how such an agreement had been reached, since Mr. Wickham had little money.

When Lydia returned as a married woman, she showed no shame.

She said laughing, "I am married before any of you!"

Elizabeth watched her with concern.

Later she learned the truth. Mr. Darcy had gone secretly to London. He had found Wickham and persuaded him to marry Lydia. He had paid his debts and arranged the settlement.

Elizabeth was overcome with gratitude.

She said to Jane, "He has done this for us. For me."

Jane replied gently, "Then he must truly care for you."

Soon after, Mr. Bingley returned to Netherfield. He visited Longbourn frequently.

One evening he spoke with Jane alone. The next morning she told Elizabeth

with shining eyes, “He has asked me to marry him.”

Elizabeth embraced her warmly.

She said, “I am very happy for you.”

Not long after, Mr. Darcy came again to Longbourn. His manner was serious but hopeful.

He said to Elizabeth, “My feelings have not changed. If your sentiments are now what they were before, tell me so at once.”

Elizabeth looked at him with gratitude and new understanding.

She answered softly, “My feelings are very different now.”

His face brightened.

Elizabeth added, “I was blind and unjust. I thank you for your kindness to my family.”

Mr. Darcy replied, “You are too generous.”

Soon after, their engagement was known. Mrs. Bennet was delighted beyond measure.

She said, “Two daughters married so well! What a happy day!”

Mr. Bennet spoke quietly to Elizabeth.

He said, “You are happy?”

Elizabeth answered, “Yes, father.”

He smiled gently. “Then I am satisfied.”

Thus the troubles that had begun with pride and misunderstanding ended in greater understanding and happiness. Jane married Mr. Bingley and lived near Longbourn. Elizabeth married Mr. Darcy and went to Pemberley, where she found not only beauty of place but also growth of heart.

And so the story closed, not with perfect people, but with people who had learned to see more clearly, to judge less quickly, and to love more wisely.