



The Colonel and Miss Bennet



A Pride and
Prejudice
Variation

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Introduction

This is a *Pride and Prejudice* Sequel. I have attempted to retain everything contained in Miss Austen's novel other than moving the story later than in the book (although there is a debate as to when the story in the book takes place).

Although I call it a *sequel*, the first part of the book covers territory in the original, that being from when Darcy and Col. Fitzwilliam went to Rosings Park through the Darcy and Bingley weddings.

Where I have erred with regard to the original, please feel free to inform me of this villainous act. Each is the result of my error, for which I peremptorily apologize.

Joseph P. Garland

“Am I right to suppose that Miss Elizabeth Bennet is the reason for our sudden visit to the insufferable parson so soon after our arrival?”

“I do not understand your meaning.”

“You are so inept at shielding your feelings, at least to an old cousin like me, Darcy. The parson is a dullard, and his wife is overly dutiful to him. Her father and sister are ciphers. That leaves only the fifth. Do you deny that Miss Bennet was the attraction?”

There were few people in the world who could speak to Fitzwilliam Darcy in such a manner. One of them was walking beside him as they crossed the slightly rising lawn to the great house at Rosings Park. That was Colonel Richard Fitzwilliam. He and Darcy were cousins—the colonel’s titled father was Darcy’s late mother’s brother—and they were nearly the same age.

Both were tall, though the colonel was not handsome and Darcy was and the colonel was comfortable with the social graces and Darcy was not.

They had arrived at Rosings Park, the estate of their aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the day before. Indeed, as their carriage passed the Hunsford Parsonage en route, the clergyman had given the moving carriage a deep bow before rushing inside to provide his wife and their visitors (that is, Mrs. Collins’s father and younger sister Maria and the aforementioned Miss Bennet) with the news that Lady Catherine’s nephew Darcy had arrived, as had long been expected.

Elizabeth had met that gentleman before, when she was home at Longbourn in Hertfordshire. There, she had come to the widely shared opinion that he was a most proud and disagreeable man. Now, in Kent, she happened herself to be visiting her great friend Charlotte, née Lucas, who had married Elizabeth’s own cousin, William Collins. The couple resided at the Parsonage.

Though Elizabeth had not been with the Collinses for long, the appearance of someone new, even someone as disagreeable as Fitzwilliam Darcy, could not help but enliven the staleness that had quickly descended on her.

And it was on the morning after the two men's arrival that the two cousins had their discussion about Miss Bennet. On that morning, Mr. Collins had hastened very early and very excitedly to the great house to pay his respects. When he got there, he had discovered that Darcy had been joined on his visit by a second of Lady Catherine's nephews, this Colonel Fitzwilliam. Mr. Collins carried the bone to Lady Catherine's that Miss Elizabeth Bennet was visiting. With that tidbit, Darcy spontaneously and, it must be said, quite out of character insisted that the colonel join him in returning to the Parsonage with Mr. Collins. And that is how Colonel Fitzwilliam came to meet Elizabeth Bennet and how the officer came to suspect his cousin's particular...interest in that fine woman after they sat for tea and cakes offered by their hosts.

And the officer displayed the quality of his breeding by easily falling into conversation with Elizabeth and the Collinses and even with Charlotte's father and sister.

Elizabeth saw at once the contrast between the cousins. For other than inquiring about the state of Miss Bennet's family, Darcy sat mute until being slightly unsettled when she asked whether he had met her sister Jane in town. For some months, Jane had been staying in London, at their aunt and uncle's house in Cheapside.

He averred that he had not had the pleasure of seeing Jane Bennet in town, and it was not long after that that the two gentlemen left and took their walk back to the house. During which the colonel challenged Darcy about the attractions of Miss Elizabeth Bennet.

As they neared the house, Darcy relented.

"I cannot say what it is, Richard. But it is something. She is so...so...inappropriate and perhaps I take some strange, bizarre enjoyment from simply being with her."

"At least I will say that she does seem to have an effect on you. But why were you so...unsociable with her?"

"It is my way. You know that full well."

"Indeed, I do. Perhaps you will do better when you are again with her. She strikes me as the type of woman who will improve with familiarity."

"I have found her to be so."

With that the two had reached the house and after an inquiry and being told that neither Lady Catherine nor her daughter Anne was downstairs, they went to their rooms to prepare to go for a late morning ride about the grounds.

* * * *

The charms of Miss Elizabeth Bennet could not help but extend to Colonel Richard Fitzwilliam. He found the lady's presence could work wonders to what he feared would become a tedious stretch at Rosings Park. As a result, after that first, spontaneous visit, he began to stop by the Parsonage regularly without Darcy. He did not conceal the fact and was surprised that his friend expressed no interest in joining him. And on each of his visits, the officer enjoyed sitting with his tea and cakes and conversed easily with Miss Elizabeth and Mrs. Collins and even, when he was there, with Mr. Collins himself.

He found neither Sir William nor Maria Lucas was capable of participating in any but the most staccato fashion. They were perfectly content to eat, drink, and observe with quite a measure, thought the colonel, of idiocy.

He found, too, that Elizabeth Bennet was worlds apart from all the others, as he discovered a fair amount about her, expressed in a natural and always matter-of-fact style, quite at odds with the normal course of conversation of women in the colonel's experience.

Early on, when they were seated at the Parsonage near one another, unlikely to be overheard, she spoke of the difficulties of her family's situation, what with her father's estate being entailed

to the closest male relation, he and his wife having only girls and five of them (of which Elizabeth was the second), and of Mr. Collins himself being that closest male relation thus destined to inherit the family's estate in Hertfordshire.

"So you see, Colonel, I am hardly a catch and with my aunt's husband a country lawyer and my uncle a tradesman in Cheapside my shortcomings will be hard for a man to overlook."

"A lesser man, perhaps." He smiled and leaned in the slightest bit closer to her. "In any case, I can assure you, Miss Bennet, that being a son is not as lucrative as one might hope. You see, I am a second son. My brother will inherit the estate and my father's title and I was fortunate to have been given the means of acquiring a commission."

"So you have done well, Colonel," interjected Charlotte.

"Ah, Mrs. Collins," he said, as he directed his attention to her, "it is not all parading, I'm afraid. We look quite resplendent in our regimentals, I grant you, with our men marching or riding in step beside us. But we are a nation that has long been at war. We may be done with Bonaparte, but the war in America continues."

"And have you been in the wars? What about the militia?" asked Maria, displaying a sudden interest in the talk. "They came to Meryton."

He turned to the naïve girl. "Well, the militia is meant to provide some protection while we real soldiers are off doing our soldiering. While I may have been easily enough able to myself avoid serving as, well, a *real* soldier and remained a martinet as others have, I decided to do my duty. So, yes, I was on the Peninsula for quite a while and saw more action as a soldier than I ever wish to, thank you."

"But," Elizabeth asked as her eyes inspected his body, "were you injured? It must have been horrible."

His attention shifted back. "Miss Bennet, ladies, Sir William, it is something for us and you should set your minds at ease. We are in the service of King and Country, and we do so willingly. I have been fortunate. And I hope to remain so."

He took a final sip of his tea. The others remained silent until their guest stood, and they followed. He bid them all a *good day* with a tight bow. And soon they watched him cross to the gate that opened to the path that led back to the great house, and Elizabeth gave a thought to what it would be like to be married to a soldier.

For his part, as he reached the lawn, the colonel recognised not for the first time that the visit to his aunt was greatly enhanced by the fortuitous presence at Rosings of Miss Bennet.

In the following days, Elizabeth continued to cherish the solitude of her exploration of the many varied paths in Rosings Park. She was slightly rattled on one of the first of these turns, though, when she happened upon Mr. Darcy himself. It came as quite a surprise, then, when she found being alone with him for the first time was not entirely unpleasant. Or at least not nearly as unpleasant as she would have imagined it would be had she ever thought it might take place, which she assuredly had not. Nothing of consequence was said by either. Elizabeth thought little of it except that only a few days later, she was on a different path when they came upon one another again. And again they walked, albeit a little longer, and again little of substance was said.

Any doubt that these rendezvouses were not a coincidental consequence of their both apparently being fond of walking in the Kentish air was erased when it happened for a third time in yet another part of the Park. Elizabeth did not know why but for some reason this unsettled her. It seemed that her pleasure in walking alone on the beautiful, verdant paths was somehow affected by these encounters. She mentioned it to Charlotte when she was back at the Parsonage. Her friend left no doubt as to Mr. Darcy's obvious attentions to Miss Bennet. Though Elizabeth firmly disagreed *to her friend*, insisting that there was not the slightest thing suspicious about it all, to herself, she was not so certain. She would not, either way, allow whatever was motivating Mr. Darcy

to alter what had become a most pleasant diversion to her for this extended visit to the Collinses’.

Her resolve was soon tested. On yet another path, Then, on the next day but one, during her walk she espied a lone figure, a gentleman, nearing her. She quickly recognized the jaunty step as not being Darcy’s and surmised, correctly, that it was his cousin’s.

As the colonel approached, he lifted his hat and waved his switch and appeared genuinely pleased about seeing her on what, he would tell her, was an annual survey of his aunt’s estate. She, too, was happy and redirected her own steps towards him, matching his smile.

“I am most pleased to see you,” he said, receiving the truthful “And I you” in response.

The two fell into a relaxed conversation, one quite different from the strained exchanges that she and Darcy tended to have, especially during their recent walks.

Elizabeth and the colonel found their words drifting inevitably to Darcy. The colonel admitted his envy of his cousin in his ability, thanks to his *money*, to do what he wished to do when he wished to do it and with whom.

“But you will admit that you have put yourself in a position in which you have made yourself dependent upon him to live the pleasant life you find yourself living,” she pointed out.

“Save for my time in the wars. Yes, it is my fate and perhaps even my choice that has placed me where I find myself. But to be honest, Miss Bennet, for me to be taken off Darcy’s hands, I should need a woman with at least forty thousand if I am to marry her. Perhaps even fifty.”

She smiled. “Indeed, though I have not acquired such expensive tastes as you appear to have, I too cannot afford to marry anything that is not at least a small fortune.”

He placed his arm through hers. “Then, I fear, we are never fated to be husband and wife.”

“I fear that you are correct.”

"So, nature and fate force each of us in the end to fend for ourselves."

"If," she responded, "we cannot rely on the kindness of Fitzwilliam Darcy or a similarly generous patron."

"Indeed, Miss Bennet. Indeed. And I assure you that he is among the finest gentlemen of my acquaintance."

She found his statement, albeit one made with far longer knowledge and kinship, quite at odds with her own view of the man. "That is not my experience with him, but that has been quite brief and far from intimate. I would like to know what you can mean." She would allow herself to hear what evidence the officer would present to establish his claim.

And he endeavored to provide it. He spoke of seeing his cousin often when they were both young, with him at Pemberley in Derbyshire and he not so far away at his father's estate of Haverford Hall in Lincolnshire. "I will concede," he told her, "that Pemberley is the superior of my family's run-down place, built in the reign of who-cares-who and altered rather poorly in the centuries since."

They might have taken a more direct route to the Parsonage, but they veered off several times to extend their enjoyment of each other's company.

"You may not know that his mother, who was my father's and Lady Catherine's sister, died many years ago leaving his father to raise both Darcy and Georgiana, a girl much younger than he and I. It was quite difficult for her, being without a mother. Then when their father died some five years ago, he and I became her guardian, though Darcy much more than me."

She had heard this sister mentioned at Netherfield, especially by Caroline Bingley, as being quite an accomplished girl. "What can you tell me of this Georgiana?"

"She is a tall girl, a woman really, though, she is not yet eighteen, and is very shy owing, I think, to the circumstance of losing her mother when she was very young and spending much time in the country and I think being doted on."

"Does she not go to town?"

"There was a time, Miss Bennet, when we arranged for her to be established in London with a governess but...but that did not prove agreeable and thus she resumed her residency at Pemberley with several governesses and tutors to educate her."

Elizabeth had a sudden interest in this stranger.

"And how was she educated?"

"I expect it was the way all such well-off daughters are educated. But in one respect, though I believe for different reasons, she appears quite like her brother, in having great difficulty with the social graces."

"He admitted as much about himself when we were recently at Lady Catherine's fine pianoforte."

"He did indeed, Miss Bennet, and if memory serves, you chided him for it and I believe your words pained and perhaps even cut him, though I do not think it was too deep for a stubborn old soul like Fitzwilliam Darcy and"—he put up his hand to quiet Elizabeth—"it was surely not unwarranted."

"Though perhaps in some small degree." She well recalled it, when he claimed his awkwardness was a defense and she did no more than observe that it was more his own failure to attempt to overcome it. She was surprised that the colonel said her remark had some impact on his pompous cousin.

As the walk eventually found the tired pair nearing the Parsonage, the colonel played his final card in support of his cousin and gave her proof of how faithful he was as a friend, in saving Charles Bingley from a most inappropriate match with a woman of questionable relations, to which proof she listened silently.

"So, you see, Miss Bennet, that Darcy is not entirely the stiff, unfeeling figure I believe you to have taken him for."

They were approaching the opening in Rosings Park that took them to the Hunsford Road and the Parsonage.

As they reached the house, she removed her arm from her guide and turned to him.

"Colonel Fitzwilliam, I am most obliged by your observations. Mr. Darcy surely is well served by his friends."

With that, they exchanged courtesies, and she was inside and he was back through the gate and pleased with himself for the course of their conversation as he headed to Lady Catherine's great house. He even began to regret that he and Darcy had planned to leave Rosings Park in three days' time and would thereby lose the company of this fine, if unattainable (for him), woman.

It was even more painful, then, when the very next evening, Lady Catherine's two guests sat after dinner in a pair of comfortable chairs in the house's fine library after dinner, Darcy said he at least was leaving a day early.

"Good God, man. Why this sudden need to go?"

"I will not impose on you, Richard. You may stay if you wish. Lady Catherine and Anne will, I'm sure, be most pleased by your continued presence. As for me, though, there is some pressing business I must attend to."

"Pressing business? Have you received some sort of dispatch calling you to town? To Pemberley?"

"I do not wish to talk about it. It must suffice to you that I say I must leave, and I must leave without any further delay. I have waited too long as it is. But, again, you may remain."

"Do not be absurd. You know I rely on you and, worse, that I would be far worse off being left here alone. You are at least a buffer with our aunt. So, I will leave, but I wish you would confide in me as to why we go so soon."

Darcy reached over as they were preparing to go to their rooms.

"I cannot tell you, my friend. But you must believe me when I say it cannot be helped. It is a matter of a possible entanglement that I perhaps someday will be able to explain to you. Just not yet."

With that, he left the colonel alone and went to his aunt's room to inform her of the change in intentions.

After a somber dinner and evening, the colonel happened to see his friend leave the house early the next morning, heading in the general direction of the Parsonage and appearing to have some type of letter gripped in his right hand. His stride was purposeful, the colonel thought, and he wondered whether that letter had anything to do with the sudden decision to leave and he speculated that it likely did.

About an hour later, the colonel visited the Parsonage. When he arrived, Mrs. Collins said that Mr. Darcy had already been there and had told them that he and the colonel would be leaving the next morning. Asked about Miss Bennet, Charlotte said she had gone out early herself and since she was gone for quite a while, even more than usual, she must soon be coming back.

But after waiting for well over half an hour in a high degree of awkwardness, the colonel stood and gave his own goodbyes and expressed his own disappointment about not being able to do so personally to Miss Bennet herself.

"Alas," he said as he reached the gate with Mr. and Mrs. Collins. "Time waits for no man, especially for an old soldier such as myself, and I must be off. Perhaps I will stumble upon Miss Bennet on my way to the house but if I do not, please be sure to express my great disappointment about not having the opportunity to say goodbye to her myself."

Final goodbyes were exchanged as he left. In the event, he did not meet Miss Elizabeth Bennet as he returned across the lawn to the great house.

* * * *

So, with neither gentleman having seen the object of both of their interests (at least at the Parsonage), they were gone the next morning, riding in the fine curricle in which they had arrived, which would convey them the twenty miles or so to Darcy's house on Brook Street in London. Their departure was witnessed by Mr. Collins much as their arrival had been and he hurried to the

Parsonage to spread the news before rushing to the great house to console Lady Catherine and Miss Anne on their great loss.

It happened that the day before the two left for London, Elizabeth Bennet had indeed been wandering for some time on various of Rosings Park's paths reading that letter that Darcy had indeed written to her, and carried delicately and deliberately from the great house, and delivered to her when he came upon her on one of the estate's paths, delivered in a very formal and hurried manner by its author. She spent quite a while contemplating what the correspondence meant. It was written in a harsh, confident hand filling two pages and attempting to justify certain conduct that Elizabeth had cited to in the end impugn Darcy's character when he had proposed marriage to her suddenly and, to her, inexplicably. And when she had finished her third or fourth read as she sat on an old tree stump, with increased but ill-defined emotions each time and its specifics nearly burned into her, she could not help but chastise herself for *some* of the judgments she had made about Darcy.

But softened as her view of Fitzwilliam Darcy might have been in some respects, particularly as it concerned one George Wickham, whose integrity was more suspect than he made it appear when he was paying her attention from shortly after he had arrived at Meryton as part of the militia, it did not signify. Darcy had proposed to her in a most unappealing manner, protesting that he loved her and wished to marry her against all reason and regard for his and his family's will and reputation. To Miss Bennet, that deficiency in his character remained unaltered, even as her critical view of him in other respects was now suspect thanks to his letter. It hardly mattered. She had rejected him, and he would soon be gone from Rosings, and she thought it unlikely that she would see him or his cousin ever again.

Which would be for the best.

When she returned to the Parsonage after her walk with the letter safely stored in one of her pockets and was told of the gentlemen's changed plans and even more when the next day

brought the news from Mr. Collins that the two gentlemen had left Lady Catherine's estate for London, she said "good riddance" to herself and expected that memories of the two would be quickly banished.

About a week later, on the morning after a final dinner at the great house, Elizabeth and the Lucases said their own goodbyes to Lady Catherine and to Mr. and Mrs. Collins and returned to Meryton and Longbourn. And when they reached their homes, matters resumed largely as they always had been, particularly when Jane returned from Cheapside barely a week later. Elizabeth thought it best to say nothing to her sister about what she had spoken of and learned from Darcy. It being for the best.

Darcy had sent an express to London the day before. When he and the colonel reached his house in the late morning, the servants were ready for them. After the gentlemen made themselves presentable, they were famished and dug into a buffet that had been set up in the sitting room on a server with breads and meats and cheeses. The two were left alone to make their meals as they would, with a healthy pair of tankards with a fine Yorkshire ale. They moved a pair of table chairs near the window with a small, scalloped table between them so they could watch a bit of Mayfair pass while they ate and drank at their leisure.

Once settled, Darcy said, "I owe you a bit of an explanation."

"You owe me nothing, Darcy."

Darcy ignored this. As they rode to town, he had firmly resolved to be forthcoming, speak to his friend and admit the cause of their fleeing Kent.

"I have proposed to Miss Elizabeth Bennet."

The colonel stopped mid-chew and used a napkin to shield his surprise. He made no reply.

Darcy stood.

"It did not go well. Hence our sudden evacuation."

"What do you mean, *it did not go well*?" The colonel put his fork on the plate that he had balanced on his lap as he watched his cousin, who had begun pacing, as was his wont when his natural equilibrium was upset. He stopped and looked at the colonel.

"I will actually say that it went far worse than *not well*." He resumed his seat. "Proposing to a woman is not something, you understand, with which I have any experience. It was made worse by my being somewhat...undiplomatic in my words."

"Your frankness generally does you credit, Darcy, but there are moments when a bit of tact would help rather than hinder your cause."

"Of course, I *know* that. But in such a moment, I truly felt I could not be false to a lady who I have come to deeply admire as a woman."

"You are confessing that you have discovered a deep love for Elizabeth Bennet?"

"And only with her, yes." He again was on his legs. "I fought it because all spoke against it as did her circumstances. Only Bingley would have had an encouraging word had I spoken to him about it, which I did not."

"Her lack of a fortune? It happens that she and I spoke of *that*."

This surprised the host, and he turned sharply to the colonel.

"What does that mean? What did you speak of?"

"Her charms were not entirely lost on me, Darcy. I am not a fool, you know." The colonel had moved his own plate to the side table. "Really, any man of good sense could not help admiring her. And I must confess that knowing you as a man of quite good sense, it does not entirely surprise me that you too were affected by those charms she has."

"But what did you *speak* of?"

"Reality, Darcy. Reality."

"I am in no mood for riddles, Richard. What do you mean?"

"Surely you know that you have luxuries that many a gentleman could not dream of. I admit enjoying the benefit of your largesse, as I conceded to Miss Elizabeth."

"But did you...did you suggest something *more*?"

"Oh, Darcy. *You* can be a fool. The reality is that she being somewhat poor in relative terms and me being...not rich and dependent on the drippings—I do not mean it unkindly and I say it without recrimination—of those who are."

"Such as me?"

"Such as you and perhaps somewhat Lady Catherine and even my father. No, the reality is that we both, Miss Elizabeth and I, knew that there was no possibility for the two of us."

"You spoke of such a thing?"

"We did not need to *speak* of it. But we both well understood it. That is all. It was a pleasant walk when we happened on each other. Indeed, I did what I could to bolster you to her. I was not so blind not to recognize *something* between the two of you while we were at Lady Catherine's pianoforte although, frankly, I think you both were and are too blind to have seen it."

"Bolster me?"

"I told her the story of you and that friend of yours, Bingley. How you came to his rescue. How it showed your true strength of character."

"Came to his rescue?"

"Darcy, you must stop repeating me. Yes, how he was tending towards a most inappropriate connection when you stepped in to preserve him. How could she not understand how well that reflected on your character? Too many think you devoted entirely to Fitzwilliam Darcy of Pemberley. I wanted her to know that you have true and genuine consideration for your friends."

"It is one of your great strengths, although you do try to hide it."

Darcy turned to the window. There. The wound felt regarding Jane was fresh in Miss Elizabeth's heart from his oblivious but well-meaning cousin. And he himself had twisted the knife! What he had done for Bingley *was* appropriate. He had no doubts about that, as he said in the letter he had written and given to her the morning after his disastrous offer. Now, at least, he understood how she knew of his intervention between Bingley and Jane.

The words from his cousin were cutting too deep. What happened was between him and her. He looked back at his friend.

"Thank you, Richard. In any case, for reasons I cannot share, she declined my offer, and I did not wish her to be uncomfortable with my continued presence at Rosings so I'm afraid I pressed you into fleeing with me."

"Well, Darcy. As a cavalryman, I will say it was a strategic retreat of the sort Wellington would have come up with. You will allow your wounds to heal and if she is that to you, you will

develop your strategy and marshal your forces to make another effort to pierce her heart.”

Darcy laughed at the attempted bravado as he turned back to look again out to Brook Street.

“Indeed,” continued the colonel. “And now you stand at your fine window in your fine room after your own, devastating defeat.”

He stood and approached his friend.

“I will leave it at that.” He patted Darcy’s shoulder. “Whatever I can do for you with that fine lady—and in the few days I have known her I understand her to be the sort of woman who would tempt any man—”

“Any man of good sense?”

“Indeed. Any such man, of which you truly are.”

He touched Darcy on the shoulder a second time and with a wan smile removed himself to his room.

* * * *

For his part, while back in town, the colonel regularly appeared at the War Office and even more at his regiment’s club. But there was little to say or do with the peace having come. Events in America were droning on, but no further troops were thought necessary. With the end of the Peninsula War, a sizeable number of its veterans were shipped across the Atlantic, but it was felt that there was no need for more. He and his fellows were free to savor the hard-won peace and consider what was to become of them in what they hoped would be an extended period of peace.

As to the continent, matters had calmed since the downfall of Bonaparte, and England was content to see if the continentals could work matters out without the expenditure of more British blood or treasure.

These were thus pleasant days for the colonel as they were for Darcy (save for the lingering wound about which he could do nothing) and for his great friend Charles Bingley. The colonel thought Bingley a fine enough if in no way exceptional man and

his lack of breeding—his wealth being the product of trade—was evident. This, too, was clear from his sisters, particularly the younger, insufferable, and unmarried one, a Miss Caroline Bingley. That she had her sights set on Darcy was evident from the first moment the colonel saw her when they were back in London after the abbreviated visit to Kent. He wondered whether his friend had disclosed the fact that his true love went in a far different direction. Darcy surely had not revealed that he had proposed to Elizabeth Bennet and been rejected. He doubted whether anyone but he and, perhaps, Bingley knew of *that*.

It was not for him, the colonel, to say anything, and he had not breached Darcy's confidence. Yet he was acutely aware that Darcy's attachment for the absent Miss Bennet still consumed a part of him, however well he fought to keep it hidden. But they did not speak of it, or of her, again.