

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).

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

The quotation in Chapter 15 is from the June 26, 1815 edition of the *Observer*, which was quoted in a June 18, 2015 (i.e., two hundred years after the battle) article by Richard Nellson in *The Guardian* entitled [How the Observer Reported the Battle of Waterloo.](#)

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1. A Visit to the Parsonage: June 4, 1814

“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 curricule 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.

But to where it began. The morning after the two men's arrival, Mr. Collins hastened very early and very excitedly to the great house to pay his respects. He thereby 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. 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.

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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, though perhaps disappointed that it was him.

"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 endeavoured 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 the pompous gentleman.

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 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 leave?”

“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.”

“Don’t 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.”

And final goodbyes were exchanged as he left and in the event he did not meet Miss Elizabeth Bennet as he returned across the lawn to the great house.

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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 to her suddenly and, to her, inexplicably. And when she'd 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'd 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'd 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, Eliabeth 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.

2. Back to London: June 8, 1814

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 speak forthcomingly 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'd balanced on his lap as he watched his cousin, who'd 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 recognise *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 connexion when you stepped in to preserve him. How could she not understand how well that reflected on your character? Too many think you solipsistic and 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 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.

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'd 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.

3. Haverford House: Oct. 14, 1814

Colonel Fitzwilliam had enjoyed his cousin's hospitality in London for several weeks after they left Kent. He was also able to spend time with his brother's family in town. But it came to the time of the mass exodus, in his case to Haverford House in Lincolnshire. This was the Fitzwilliam family seat, situated some ten miles south of Lincoln, near the town of Waddington.

The estate itself was large, though not nearly as large as Pemberley, which stood some sixty miles to the northwest. The great house was, as the Colonel himself told Elizabeth, built over time, and it reflected it, being a hodgepodge of a place with a core from the sixteenth century and wings added about every century or so thereafter. It was notoriously uncomfortable, especially in that ancient core. Several parts were closed off for large swaths of the year, to be opened only on the occasion of the visits by multitudes of guests.

But it had been some years since any such occasion occurred. The Earl, the Lord Waddington himself, had taken to remaining at the estate for the most part with the Countess Waddington. His eldest son and heir, Lord Ashworth, preferred London. This was not because he particularly reveled in society there. Instead, he had become quite a fine and talented amateur geologist since his days at Cambridge.

Lord Ashworth was part of a vibrant society in town and was a member of several Royal Societies. He also funded a number of foreign expeditions. What was most significant as far as his brother was concerned, though, was that he was married to the daughter of one of his Cambridge dons and that she'd already borne him two sons (plus one daughter). In short, the Colonel was

slowly but inevitably dropping down in the chain of succession to the title and it was well that he had long since surrendered any hope let alone any expectation of acceding to it.

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Charles Bingley might have stayed in town, but he was convinced that a period in the north would do him good as well. He still rented an estate in Hertfordshire called Netherfield, some two miles from the village of Meryton, but he would rather be with his friend at Pemberley and so he and his sisters and his brother-in-law (Caroline Bingley and Mr. and Mrs. Hurst) joined Darcy and the Colonel in the caravan to Derbyshire.

For her part, his sister Caroline would have preferred to return to Netherfield in Hertfordshire. This was not for any particular liking of the neighbourhood, which she and her sister Mrs. Louisa Hurst found nearly intolerable what with families like the Bennets and the Lucases displaying such country manners and inappropriate airs. It was its proximity to town that would allow them to head back-and-forth as was their wont.

But especially with Fitzwilliam Darcy as the host, she was willing to suffer the interminable travel to the north and the isolation of Pemberley.

That settled, they all began the trek north and intermingled in the two chief carriages after most of the stops. When they reached Nottingham, the Colonel separated from the others and headed east, for his family's estate in Lincolnshire, where he could spend needed time with his parents and have the opportunity to assess his situation in a now peaceful world and contemplate such domestic prospects as he might have.

He bid his *adieux* to the others. He rented the first in a series of horses he lightly rode east to his own family's seat outside of Waddington.

The solo ride was a great comfort to the Colonel. He allowed his mount to dictate the pace and there was little traffic by the stables *en route*. He sat alone and content in the taverns along the way and again faced his own future. He was also at his leisure in reading. It was something he and many officers took up given the boredom of extended periods in Army camps. His tastes went to historical adventures and found *The Scottish Chiefs*, written by a woman of all people, particularly diverting.

As to what adventures lay in store for him in his future, he doubted there would be any. England had been at war virtually the entirety of his life. There was a brief peace in the years 2 and 3 but that couldn't and didn't last. There had since been campaigns on land and on sea constantly ever since. Nelson had his great triumph at Trafalgar in 1805, and the British Navy controlled the seas, allowing ambitious captains make their fortunes taking French prizes.

Colonel Fitzwilliam had his commission and was proud of it. He was proud of how he performed when he was brutally tested. He'd only been a major when he first arrived in Portugal but now was a full colonel and safe at home with Bonaparte sitting in exile on Elba in the Med. His thoughts turned to what he was to do as a civilian which could not help but lead him to dwell on whether there could be any prospect of finding a suitable bride.

Once he'd reached Haverford House, he was happy to be home with his father and mother, and he quickly was settled into his routine. He made sure to go for at least one ride, if not two, each day. He became again a familiar horseman around Waddington and the other nearby

towns and villages, making a point of stopping at an inn or tavern for his midday meal almost every day.

He also made a point of visiting a number of nearby families, including families whose children he'd grown up with and played with. At least once a week, he ventured into nearby Lincoln itself and stayed overnight several times after attending an entertainment in that city's emporium.

He was disappointed in one respect, however. Not a fortnight after arriving, he received a letter from Darcy. They'd agreed that he would venture to visit Pemberley for several days, it not being much of a strain getting to and from that great house in Derbyshire.

Darcy's letter was somewhat cryptic, saying little more than that due to an unexpected change in circumstances, he was forced to return immediately to London. He wrote that he could not say for how long it would be but that there was some sort of transaction that needed to be resolved, though he gave no inkling of what that might be.

It was, although the Colonel did not then know it, to do with the same Elizabeth Bennet who had so abruptly caused Darcy to change plans at Rosings Park many months earlier. You see, while she and the Gardiners—Mr. Gardiner being her mother's brother—were enjoying a stroll on the grounds of Pemberley itself as outsiders were permitted to do, she found herself suddenly and *very* unexpectedly face-to-face with the property's owner, who would be one equally startled Fitzwilliam Darcy. Which of the two was more discombobulated will never be known.

Soon after Elizabeth recovered from the shock of seeing him in his own home, a home she'd so viciously (as she sometimes thought it to have been) rejected. And just when her antipathy towards the man was seeping

away from her heart and she was introduced at her inn in Lambton to Georgiana Darcy and met Charles Bingley as well, the latter inquiring as to Jane Bennet's health and the condition of the rest of her family.

It was such a fine meeting that Elizabeth and the Gardiners were prevailed upon to visit Pemberley itself the next day, which they did and where Elizabeth had an uncomfortable reunion with Bingley's sisters.

It was not long after that, though, when everything was violently altered.

In the town of Lambton, Elizabeth received a pair of letters, sent days apart, from Jane. The earlier of those letters had been misdirected. That one expressed the family's concern about news regarding Lydia, her youngest sister. The second letter brought confirmation of a most horrible turn of events, of George Wickham having run off with her little sister to an uncertain fate.

Elizabeth's despair over the news was worsened what she told it to Darcy. He quickly disappeared from her and her life in a manner that was polite and no more, and she felt much the poorer for it.

Things happened very fast, and Elizabeth ended up hurrying back to Longbourn, where she found her mother in apoplexy and her father and uncle traveling to London trying valiantly to salvage at least some of the reputation of Lydia in particular and all the Bennets in general for her seduction by George Wickham. And somehow by the grace of God but more by the efforts of one Fitzwilliam Darcy matters were largely put to rights when Lydia and Wickham married. They moved to Newcastle so that Wickham could join a regiment of infantry with a commission secretly paid for by Darcy himself.

Colonel Fitzwilliam knew none of this while he was in Lincolnshire, although he would later hear the story

many times from many witnesses. All he knew was that Darcy had unexpectedly gone to London so that his own trip to Pemberley was jeopardized.

But Darcy's letter had a postscript that said that while most of the visitors would soon be heading back to town, his sister Georgiana would remain and perhaps he should come to spend some time with her. He was on the road heading west the next day.

He'd not given notice that he was coming, but Pemberley had long been like a second home to him, and he was greeted by Mrs. Reynolds, the housekeeper, with glee. The stablemaster could not wait to have him inspect the contents of the Pemberley stable of which he was justifiably proud with the discerning eye of a true cavalryman.

But nothing exceeded the enthusiasm of Georgiana herself. She insisted when she got word of the surprise arrival that he sit with her as soon as he was presentable and so began his weeklong stay in the height of country luxury.

They sat alone the first night for dinner, and both were pleased for the company. As courses were being changed, he asked her what she knew of her brother's sudden race to London.

"I cannot say for sure," she said as the meat course was being placed in front of her. "We had the most unusual visit by Elizabeth Bennet and—"

"Elizabeth Bennet?" asked the Colonel, with a sudden change of countenance. "The Elizabeth Bennet he met in Hertfordshire?"

For a moment, Georgiana was unnerved by the sudden change in her cousin's tone. She recovered. "I believe that is the one. I cannot imagine my brother knows more than one Elizabeth Bennet. Have you met her?"

Now, *she* was genuinely puzzled.

"I did. I was with your brother at your aunt's, Lady Catherine's, and we happened to meet her while she was visiting a family friend, married to the Hunsford parson." He paused considering whether to say more but felt compelled to. "He told me afterwards that this Miss Bennet had a strange effect on him."

"On my brother?" She almost laughed at the absurdity but then recovered. "Well, I will admit that he did mention her several times to me as a woman of, what did he call it?, a formidable disposition and very fine eyes. Now that I think of it," she said, as the meat on both of their plates was going cold, "I think she might have had a quite unusual effect on him."

"A pleasant effect?" suggested the officer.

"Indeed. Though I cannot say, frankly, whether I am fit to judge since I see him so rarely and I have never seen my dear brother ever glanced by Cupid's arrow."

The Colonel laughed and lifted his knife and fork to begin the course, and his cousin followed suit. They were largely silent at this point, but thoughts of Fitzwilliam Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet were foremost in both of their minds as they prattled on about gossip and memories and anything but Cupid and his arrow.

After dinner, the cousins adjourned to the drawing room. The Colonel had poured himself a glass of port, and Georgiana was happy with a sherry.

After some hesitation, the Colonel decide to ride straight in.

"What can you tell me about your brother and this Elizabeth Bennet?"

"After you left us in Nottingham," Georgiana said when she'd collected her thoughts, "he rode ahead to see to some estate business with the steward. Charles Bingley thought to go, but Caroline insisted that he

remain with us, and so he did. My brother got a sole horse the last morning and rode it and I imagine a replacement horse to get to the house.”

She continued. “I cannot imagine what he encountered when he got here. At dinner the evening when the rest of them arrived, though, he did mention that he’d come across Miss Bennet, visiting the house with her aunt and her uncle. Now that I think on it, Caroline Bingley seemed to go a bit pale when he said this, though with her fair skin it is not so easy to tell.”

This was of a good deal of interest to the Colonel, who’d been long starved of civilian tattle.

“In any case, he began talking about how fine a woman this Elizabeth Bennet was and he got downright cross when Miss Bingley said she was perhaps ‘passable as a country girl but not more.’

“He glared at her with a glare I am glad he directed on my direction only occasionally.”

“Well, you were a fairly well-behaved girl all in all,” the Colonel said.

“I was, yes. In any case, it was enough to silence her and the rest of the table as he exchanged comments about her with Charles Bingley, who had met her when he had a house near where the Bennets were.”

“That is what I’m led to understand, too. It’s the country house that Bingley rented.”

“He made this Miss Bennet sound like a likeable enough creature, so I asked whether I might meet her. ‘I cannot say how long she will be in Lambton,’ he said, ‘since she’d was just on a passing visit with her aunt and uncle from town,’ to which Caroline could not resist saying that her uncle was in trade, which even her sister thought was quite beyond the pale, giving her an ‘oh, Caroline,’ and my brother ignored this and said that he would go into Lambton early the next day and would

bring me to meet her, which I did, with something of a pleasant reunion with Bingley.

“She then came to the house and I must say things were very cold with Caroline Bingley. She promised to come again and I was very much looking forward to that but when my brother went to see her in Lambton that morning, she had just received some troubling news and was forced to head up to town without delay,

“He was very distraught and I, of course, was very disappointed, but he would not say what it was about. Instead, he came back to the house with us and before anyone knew it, he was off on his way, alone, to town. I don’t know what he said to Bingley, but the rest of them were running around packing and such and the next morning were gone back to town themselves, leaving me here and now so grateful for your coming to visit.”

The Colonel knew something was bubbling but could not fathom what it was. He would not imagine Darcy had tried another proposal, but that must be a possibility. He found he enjoyed Georgiana’s company. She was alone in the great house with several tutors from whom she still took lessons. She was proficient in all the skills some think an accomplished woman ought to have. Her French was good, but her Italian was just passable (though the Colonel had the capacity for neither). She and her tutors had long since accepted that at best she’d become adequate in Greek and Latin, and she’d come to relish that this particular shortcoming absolved her of having to delve into the ancients.

Her greatest accomplishment, though, was at the pianoforte. The Colonel had heard references to this long before, on the trip to Rosings Park when he met Elizabeth Bennet, the trip on which Lady Catherine seemed to have acquired a thesaurus of insults to fling at the innocent Bennet girl, not understanding that the gallant

Fitzwilliam Darcy easily and naturally stepped into the role of her guardian.

Of course both the Colonel and Darcy were Georgiana's guardians, an obligation accepted with the utmost seriousness. The Colonel was some ten years older than she was and the age and the life experience and the nearly filial obligations could mean nothing to either of them than the most cherished one of close family members.

So the Colonel enjoyed Georgiana's company at Pemberley as a true, if older, friend, both of them glad not to be on their own in the country.

He extended his stay to a fortnight, but at last it was time to return to Lincolnshire and his parents. They had seen relatively little of him during his service on the Peninsula and elsewhere, so he committed to remain at least through the Christmas holidays and his brother had promised to make the trip north with his own family into the new year.

That commitment, though, was tested when several weeks after he was back at Haverford House following that extended stay at Pemberley, he received the most remarkable letter.

Brook Street

November 22, 1814

My Dearest Richard,

Though you will be shocked, I daresay, to hear my most pleasant news, your reaction will be nothing compared to my own. For, you see, Miss Elizabeth Bennet has consented to become Mrs. Fitzwilliam Darcy.

The Colonel found this news quite interesting. He'd discovered the letter when he'd returned from a ride. It

sat on a silver tray on a table in the foyer. He recognized Darcy's hand and carried it to the sitting room and after receiving some coffee from a footman, sat in a favourite chair and before he could take a sip read:

I know you will consider me the luckiest of men seeing as you have met, though all too briefly as I recall you saying, Miss Bennet. And I must acknowledge that you have been proved right in your assurance that my retreat from Rosings Park after my first attempt at seizing that woman's heart was most likely a strategic one as part of a far longer campaign. And I, sir, have proved victorious.

I have not kept you informed of my goings on since you left us in Nottingham to go to Haverford House as we continued to Pemberley. I take full responsibility for that lapse and hope you will forgive me. I believe Georgiana may have told you some things but it is hardly the full story. When we spoke about the fact that Miss Elizabeth had rejected my initial, so ill-delivered offer, I did not explain her reasons. There were more than I would like to admit concerning my own defects—as she then saw them—but her specific attention was on two points. One concerned my own failure to allow my friend Charles Bingley to become aware that Miss Elizabeth's sister was in fact in London when he was. I insisted to her that I did so as a matter of friendship. On one of your turns with her, though, you characterized it as something of a triumph for me. You were not to know that when you spoke to her of saving my friend from an imprudent connexion you were talking about her own family. Instead of crediting me for what I had done, she condemned me for it.

I told her at the time that I believed my actions justified. I have come to understand that I was mistaken in my motive and have duly apologized to her as well as her sister Jane and Bingley and attempted to atone for it, which, you will understand, I have managed to do with some success.

The second reason she gave for rejecting me at first is one with which you will be familiar. George Wickham. She felt I treated him most deplorably when, she thought, I arbitrarily denied him the living my father expected he would have. You know the truth about that and about the incident with Georgiana that I will not repeat but that I felt I must tell Miss Elizabeth about so she might appreciate the true nature of George Wickham's character.

I did this in a letter I handed to her on the day before we left Rosings Park.

The Colonel recalled that letter well and was pleased to have at last learned its contents. His cousin continued.

I did not see Miss Elizabeth after we left Rosings Park for many months. I could not, though, alter my feelings towards her, much as I struggled to do. I was resigned to having lost the one woman with whom I felt tremendous admiration and affection and, more, love.

Life continued for me while you were in my company and I should have perhaps resigned myself to marrying our cousin Anne as Lady Catherine wished so greatly that I would had not perhaps the work of Providence intervened. By which I mean, through the most extraordinary of coincidences, I found myself face to face with the same Miss Elizabeth Bennet on the grounds of Pemberley

itself! I had only shortly before decided to hurry to the estate to address some issues with my steward and she happened to be nearby and, based upon the assurance that no one in the family would be present, visited with her aunt and uncle, the latter a man of trade living in Cheapside.

To them, it was merely another great house to tour on their trip to Derbyshire, but it turned out to be much more, at least to Miss Elizabeth and me.

I go on too long. Suffice it to say that in time Miss Elizabeth told me that her view of me had modified much in my favour since she had resisted my advances the first time. My feelings towards her had not changed, and somehow she agreed to become my wife.

The wedding will be at the Bennets' church in Meryton, and you will attend. Or so that is my great request. My bride and I, with perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Bingley (who are going to be married with us), will be traveling to Pemberley for our wedding trip.

*Yours, &c., &c,
Fitzwilliam Darcy*

The devil, you, the Colonel told himself. He was naturally surprised by these tidings from his cousin and was quite excited that Miss Elizabeth Bennet would be formally joining his family in some slight way.