

Chapter 3 ~ A Beginning



On gaining the house, Elizabeth quickly removed her things and handed them to the maid, requesting tea in the drawing room. She smiled brightly as she peered out of the front window and saw that Mr. Darcy had somehow regained the use of his limbs and had chosen to follow her. She made a dash for the drawing room and on opening it, found Jane sitting at the table covering a screen. She instantly felt selfish and ashamed. Here, all these last minutes, she had been thinking only of her own happiness, when not too far away, her own sister must be suffering.

Mr. Darcy was immediately forgot. “Jane!” cried Elizabeth. She quickly went to her sister taking both of her hands, saying, “Oh my dear, dear, Jane, I have been so worried. Are you quite well?” It was a ridiculous question for Jane sat there in full beauty.

“I am very well, Lizzy; thank you for asking,” said Jane softly.

“When you refused to see me, I thought--”

“I am so ashamed of my actions. Will you ever forgive me for being so tiresome over the last few days? I am well recovered now.”

“Oh Jane,” said Elizabeth, hugging her, “There is nothing to forgive. It was my fault. I should have told you all that I knew about--”

“Now Lizzy,” said Jane interrupting, “I need you to be very kind to me and not to speak on the subject again.” And with a resolve that showed plainly on her face, she turned back to her work and saying, as if causally asking about the weather, “I thought I understood from Mama and Papa that your visitor was to spend the afternoon with us? I hope my absence earlier has not frightened him away.”

Directly, Mr. Darcy was shown into the drawing room by Hill. Elizabeth turned around to watch him enter. She was certain that her sister now knew everything of his involvement in the matter and she was extremely concerned at what sort of greeting Jane would give him. If the meeting did not go well, Elizabeth did not know to whom her loyalty would now support. Fitzwilliam Darcy was now the love of her life; however, the love of her dearest sister was something she did not think she could ever do without. She held her breath, waited, and watched.

Jane looked up, smiled beautifully, and stood, extending her hand. “Mr. Darcy, how lovely it is to see you here at Longbourn once again. Forgive me for not greeting you properly earlier. Please know that you are very welcome, sir.”

Elizabeth let out her breath. Several emotions instantly coursed through her body at once: relief, joy, reassurance, and love.

Darcy did not know which way to look. Elizabeth, he desperately hoped, had somehow granted him his fondest wish through her earlier actions, and now, here Miss Bennet stood welcoming him most graciously into her home. He instantly stepped forward to take Jane’s hand, bowed, and kissed it in such a way as if he was asking for all the forgiveness she deemed fit to give. His face proved his remorse, yet being who he was, he stood tall, looked into Jane’s eyes, and said,

his voice betraying him, "My dear Miss Bennet, how can I ever hope to explain my actions. I know that I do not deserve--"

"Mr. Darcy, please," said Jane, gripping his fingers tighter, "your apology is not needed, and it pains me to hear it. I have searched my heart and have found that I can only act in a benevolent and Christian way; I can and have forgiven you."

Darcy's own sense of honour forbade him in every way from accepting forgiveness so easily. He knew he must atone, wanted desperately to atone, and knew his conscience must be clear of every burden to truly deserve Elizabeth.

"No, Miss Bennet, please hear me. I have some idea of what Charles has said to you about my involvement in your affairs. My judgement was in error and since your sister, Elizabeth, justly pointed out my faulty judgement, I will not rest until every false step I have taken is righted."

Jane had noted his use of her sister's Christian name and all she could do was smile.

"Mr. Darcy, you were only acting in a manner which you considered, at the time as protecting your friend; I would do no less for one of my own sisters. There; I have relieved you of the pain of having to account for it yourself."

His duty to Bingley weighed even more heavily on his heart.

"Then could you find it in your heart to somehow extend that forgiveness to Bingley. None of this is his fault. I assure you he feels your rejection acutely."

"Believe me when I say that I cannot stand here and not wish him a speedy end to his disappointment. I shall remember your friend, Mr. Bingley, with kindness always. However, in light of all we have both endured, it is perhaps best that we all carry on with our lives as if none of this unfortunate affair had ever happened."

"Then you will see him again?"

"Of course I will see him again." Jane then reached out and touched Darcy's arm as if to emphasize her sincerity. "I want you to assure Mr. Bingley that he is always welcome in this house and I will think of him with compassion from this day forward; any more than that, unfortunately, is now impossible."

Here Jane looked at him with a newfound confidence, effectively putting an end to the whole matter. Lizzy knew something important had changed in her sister and she knew that she would spend the evening after everyone had gone to bed endeavouring to find out just what had led her to this steadfast resolution.

Jane turned to take a seat on the settee and indicated that Mr. Darcy should follow. He hesitated for only a moment, but took the chair directly across from her, sitting at its edge, and looking at her with barely concealed curiosity. He desperately wanted to say more on his friend's behalf and only wished for a delicate way to speak more on the subject.

Jane, who uncharacteristically felt the need to tease him at that moment, forestalled him. "Mr. Darcy, I now understand what Lizzy meant when she accused you of staring at her. Please don't tell me you find a fault with me."

“Now that I know you better, I could never find fault with such a one as you.” He then added, “Forgive me.”

She smiled serenely, “For my part I never wish to speak on such topics again and I hope that you will understand me when I say: forgive you for what?”

Her sincere forgiveness stung at Fitzwilliam Darcy’s heart. He had never truly seen Jane Bennet until that time and it humbled him immensely at her generosity.

Yet, for Jane, the matter was closed and she casually asked, “Shall I ring for tea, Lizzy?”

“N-No,” said Elizabeth, startled back into reality after all she had heard. That Darcy should beg Jane’s pardon was absolutely correct and it warmed her heart to know he had done just as he should to receive it. “I have already asked for it. I shall go and see what keeps it so long.”

“No, Lizzy, let me, you remain with Mr. Darcy, I will see to it.”

Jane had tactfully left them on their own. Elizabeth had no idea where her parents had gotten to and briefly flirted with the idea of her father having barred her mother from the drawing room. She stood up from the table and came to sit across from Mr. Darcy. Here she hesitated for a few moments but when he held out his hands to her, she gladly took them.

He looked into her eyes and said, “Elizabeth, your sister’s forgiveness has humbled me beyond words. If I were somehow granted only two wishes in this world, my second wish in life is to be her brother so that I may do nothing to Miss Bennet that does not promote her continued happiness.”

“Lucky Jane,” said Elizabeth smilingly, “To have a brother so devoted to her. For my part, I need only one wish and that is to know what your first wish would be.” She held her breathe in joyful anticipation.

“It would be that you, Miss Elizabeth Bennet, would consent to be my wife.” Such a smile of delight spread over Elizabeth’s face; she could hardly contain her happiness. Seeing this, Darcy went on. “My feelings for you have never altered since the moment I knew I loved you. I pledge my life, body, and fortune to making you the happiest woman in the world. Please say yes to my offer of marriage and make me whole again.”

“Oh, Mr. Darcy; does not the joy in my face give you your answer. Do you need to hear me say it?”

A look of incredulity showed in his eyes, “Oh, my heavens, yes!”

“Then yes, yes, yes, a thousand times, yes!”

Elizabeth started to throw her arms around him, but she immediately checked herself at such a display. What would he think of her at such an exhibition?

However, Fitzwilliam Darcy, as he felt her pull away in embarrassment, drew her back down next to him and into his arms, kissing first her cheeks then her forehead as sweetly and as gently as he could.

He spoke softly, "My dearest, loveliest, Elizabeth, how I do love you; you have made me the happiest man alive."

"I hope that I continue to make you as happy as you've made me. I shall never dare ask for anything more and shall spend every day henceforth devoted to your contentment."

"Only me?" he gently teased. "I am very sorry, my love, but I fear I must share you with one other. I have it on good authority that your new sister would be very put out if I had not renewed my offer of marriage."

Elizabeth drew back in astonishment and marvelled that the taciturn gentleman would be so revealing of a failing to one so devoted and dependent upon his judgement. "Georgiana knows our history?"

"Well, I would not say she is privy to all of my *bad* behaviour, but of my first offer of marriage, yes, she does know of it. Since meeting you she has talked of nothing else in her letters. So, you see, you held not only my happiness in the palm of your hand, but hers as well."

"I am glad to be of use, sir; to you and your sister."

She looked up at him at that moment with such love and happiness that all he could think to do at that moment was to lay claim to her lips. When he finally drew back Elizabeth opened her eyes. It had been her first kiss and of its execution she had nothing to regret. He had somehow communicated in one exquisite act, all of his love, his pain, his joy, his trust, and his hope. She could not have been more delighted. He had shown her that he had given her everything within his power to give and when he opened his eyes all of his emotion was there for anyone to see. Here they smiled at each other and lost themselves in the glow of their own natural love.



Jane had seen their exchange upon the lawn: Mr. Darcy had reached out and touched her sister's cheek in such an intimate manner, that it left no doubt in her mind that Mr. Darcy was there to renew his suit. As to her sister's answer, she was still unsure, but she could plainly see that Elizabeth had warmed to the gentleman and it was at that very moment she knew she must find a way to forgive him.

It had been her first inclination to merely be civil, greeting him politely, asking after his health and his journey and nothing more. Yet, the more she looked at the scene before her and the more she thought everything over, she knew she must find a way inside herself to forgive him for Elizabeth's sake. She would do anything for her beloved sister and the thought of Lizzy feeling miserable for the rest of her days nearly caused Jane to be sick; she would not wish that sort of unhappiness on anyone.

For Jane, the last year had left her afraid, desperately unhappy, and believing herself incapable of giving another man any sign of affectionate again. Anyway, she thought, what did it bring her but misery and anguish? She would never be so weak as to fall in love again. It was now her solemn vow.

Now, she waited outside the door to the drawing room on purpose, giving the two inside a brief time alone hoping her mother would remain where she was for a few minutes more. However, to

her own delicate sensibilities, she knew that it was improper to leave them alone for much longer. Therefore, at that moment, Jane re-entered the room noisily on purpose, just in case the couple need a moment to compose themselves.

She instantly saw that it was not needed for Elizabeth and Darcy sat together talking quietly and their faces were covered in such smiles that when they both turned around to look at her upon her entrance, Jane's breathe nearly caught in her throat.

She saw it all in an instant, that there was now an understanding between them and a momentary pang of unhappiness pricked at her heart at the thought of losing her most beloved and cherished sister. However, those thoughts were instantly replaced by feelings of such joy.

Darcy leaned towards her sister and said in a low voice, "I shall go to your father now, if I may." Elizabeth nodded and Darcy squeezed her hand. Walking pass Jane by the door, he hesitated for a moment as if trying to decide something fairly important and suddenly he kissed her cheek, drawing from her a smile of pure delight. He then went away to meet his fate, closing the door behind him.

Elizabeth now ran to Jane and hugged her sister with much pleasure. "He still loves me, Jane, he still loves me!"

"Of course he does," replied Jane, who then took a little out of Elizabeth's book and continued, archly, "And how came you to say that you disliked him so?"

Elizabeth laughed, "I cannot recollect how I ever felt such a silly inclination. Oh Jane, there is so much to tell." She hugged her sister once more for Elizabeth could not contain all her joy. "He truly is the very best of men. I know I don't deserve him. To you I must now unburden myself, for you do not, as yet, know his generous nature."

"Generous; how so Lizzy?" asked Jane, a little perplexed.

"He did it Jane, he did it all. He was the one who spared our poor Lydia."

"How can that be?" said Jane clearly puzzled. "I thought it was my Uncle Gardiners doing."

"No, Jane, Mr. Darcy made the match, paid the money, and got Wickham his commission. And Jane, you will not believe it, but he told me he did it all for me." Elizabeth then went on to relate in detail everything that had gone on since her departure from Derbyshire.

Jane listened in astonishment. Notwithstanding his one misstep where she was involved, she did believe Mr. Darcy a good man, and to take so much upon himself must prove his goodness. She was now very glad she had chosen to forgive him in light of what was revealed. She was heartily ashamed that she had ever chosen to dislike him, no matter how brief, in light of all his current actions.

Elizabeth, having finished with the distressing part of her story, now returned to the subject of her delight. "How can I ever hope to be so deserving of such a man? And as to that other matter," said Elizabeth hinting around the subject of Mr. Bingley, "He is truly sorry, Jane; he has told me that your happiness is now so very important to him. So, you see, you will never have reason to regret my choice of brother for you."

“I would never be disappointed in your choice as to my brother. Mr. Darcy well deserves my dearest sister. Oh, how will I do without you, dearest Lizzy?” Jane embraced her sister again, but this time as if hanging on for dear life.

“Do without me?” cried Elizabeth incredulously, and leaning back, said, “This is all nonsense, for you shall be one of the very first guests we welcome to Pemberley. Please know that the invitation is always open for you to come as often and stay as long as you choose.” Elizabeth instantly felt giddy; to think, she had only just become engaged moments ago and here she was already issuing invitations to Pemberley.

“I think you get ahead of yourself,” laughed Jane. Perhaps you should get your mothers leave to marry such a gentleman first.”

Here they both giggled, yet Elizabeth now regretted having spoken of Mr. Darcy in the past with such vehemence. Mr. Bennet’s answer now weighed heavily upon her heart.



Little did she know that she had no reason to worry; Mr. Bennet gave his consent and told her so when he sent for her soon after. First, he wanted to be sure of his daughter’s heart.

“Are you absolutely certain you want to accept this man, Lizzy?”

“Yes indeed, Papa.”

“I have given him my consent. He is just such a man that I should never dare refuse him anything. If he wanted Longbourn for a guinea, I’d probably give him that as well.”

“Oh, Papa!” smiled Elizabeth.

“But that is how it feels, Lizzy; losing you will be as bad as losing one of my limbs. I hope he deserves you; I know you could never be truly happy if you did not feel a man was well worthy. Edward’s opinion has lately got me thinking that he is not so bad a fellow.”

Here, Elizabeth felt the need to improve upon the impression by relating to her father the situation concerning Mr. Wickham and Lydia and how it was Darcy who saved them all from ruin. Mr. Bennet listened with great interest and not a little relief.

“So, he did it all. Well, I hate to admit it, but this saves me a great deal of money and trouble. I’ll offer to pay him tomorrow morning when he comes to shoot with me,” he said with a flick of the hand, “and he’ll rant and rave like a young man so violently in love is known to do and then that will be an end to it. Now go to your Mr. Darcy, Lizzy. I am sure by now he is sick to death of the tedious conversation of your mother and sisters.”



Before exiting the library, it had been agreed between Elizabeth and her father that her good news not be shared until the gentleman had departed, both perfectly aware of the degree of Mrs. Bennet's happy reaction.

Mr. Darcy stayed to a late luncheon and more than once did Mr. Bennet stare in amazement at his daughter's choice. Darcy remained as reserved as ever, but seemed to be taking pains to become acquainted with his new family. He praised Mrs. Bennet on the meal, complimented Mary and Catherine on his satisfaction of his stroll through their gardens, and spoke softly to Jane with such obvious care that not just once or twice did Mr. Bennet look on in wonder.

Mr. Bennet also observed his two eldest daughters. Elizabeth sat across from her intended throughout the meal with a small smile playing about the edges of her mouth; her happiness was evident and it nearly broke his heart to know that she would soon be going away.

He next looked to Jane. Although she was polite and attentive to their guest, there was definitely some unhappiness there. Whether it extended from Mr. Bingley's absence and at the impending loss of her sister, he could not yet tell. He truly regretted at that moment not getting to know his eldest daughter better than he did, because in many ways with her gentle nature, she was very much a mystery to him. It now pained him somewhat to realize how truly unhappy she must be.

Darcy went away with invitations for him and his friend to dine the next day and Elizabeth waited until later that evening to inform her mother and younger sisters of her betrothal. She called to her sisters to attend her in their mother's sitting room so that she could tell them all her news together and have done with it. When the information was given, Mary and Kitty were equally amazed; that their sister Lizzy would be such a grand lady hereafter and married to the reserved Mr. Darcy caused no end to their surprise.

As to her mother's reaction, Mrs. Bennet sat in silence for a full ten minutes and then burst forth in such violence of emotions that Elizabeth was very grateful that her fiancé was not there to observe it. Mrs. Bennet blessed herself several times and made plans to call on all the neighbours, if not all of Hertfordshire, the next day to inform them of the happy news.

Elizabeth somehow extricated herself from her mother's tedious conversation and made her way back to her bedchamber only to have her mother follow her several minutes later to ask a number of questions.

"Mr. Darcy will forgive me, will he not, for disliking him so much in the past?"

"Mamma, I am sure it is all forgot?"

"And you must know I did not mean it when I called him disagreeable. He really is a handsome gentleman, is he not?"

"You find me in complete agreement."

"Tell me, my dearest girl," (here Elizabeth rolled her eyes) "are there any dishes that Mr. Darcy is particularly fond of?"

Elizabeth had no idea what he liked, but it did not prevent her from having a little fun at her mother's and fiancé's expense.

"I am sure that I do not know. He could like haggis for all I know!"

“Haggis?” Mrs. Bennet had no idea what that dish could be, but then, her future son-in-law probably had two or three French cooks at least and was probably accustomed to such fine dining every day of his life. “I shall ask cook if she knows what it is and we will have it tomorrow night,” she giggled. She had so many plans now to please her new son-in-law and cooking him all his favourite dishes was only the start of it.

Mrs. Bennet then came round to the side of the bed to kiss her now favourite child. “Oh, Lizzy, how sly you are. So this is the reason you refused Mr. Collins. It all makes perfect sense now. You were just biding your time. Clever, clever girl; your sisters have nothing on you. How splendid you shall be; what jewels and what pin money! You will be very grand, indeed. Imagine that, Lizzy, you will probably spend on finery what your father spends on running this entire household...”

As her mother went on and on, Elizabeth looked heavenward; this was going to be a very long engagement.



A little while later after preparing herself for the night, Elizabeth knocked on the door to Jane’s bedchamber. On entering, she found her sister sitting on the edge of her bed tying a ribbon at the end of her braid. She came in and sat next to Jane and asked, “Now Jane, tell me it all; tell me truly why you have decided to give up on Fitzwilliam’s friend.

“Lizzy,” said Jane quietly, “Why do you continue to press me on this subject so?”

“Jane, you must see that I cannot believe that you, so violently in love before, would now give up a love that is offered to you most willingly. Tell me this now and I promise never to speak on it again!”

Jane looked at her sister. She could see that she would never find any peace unless she told Elizabeth it all.

“Very well, but Lizzy, when I mean that this is the last I wish to speak of it, it is that last I wish to speak of it.”

Elizabeth squeezed her sister’s hand and nodded for her to continue.

“Tell me, Lizzy, why are you so happy that Mr. Darcy renewed his addresses?”

Elizabeth creased her brow slightly, wondering what Jane was getting at. “I guess, because he was so willing to give me a second chance and had the courage to face me again even after I abused him so abominably to his face.”

“Precisely, said Jane, “he had the courage.”

“But what does that have to do with Mr. Bingley?”

“Merely that he lacks courage.” Jane arose from the edge of her bed and went to sit in a chair by the fire, a chill having just rushed down her spine.

Elizabeth followed her sister with her eyes as she took her new seat, trying to figure her meaning out. Jane continued.

“Lizzy, when Mr. Bingley proposed to me, he told me several things, but two very important things stood out chiefly, the first being the influence of Mr. Darcy.”

“But Jane, you have forgiven Mr. Darcy for that; you have said so yourself.”

“Yes, I have forgiven Mr. Darcy for his role in the matter, but you must see that it does not excuse Mr. Bingley from his part.”

“And Mr. Bingley’s sisters; will you forgive them as well?”

“Yes, I find that can forgive his sisters roles simply because it does him credit that he listens to those closest to him just as I would listen to the advice of one of my sisters.

“But Jane,” cried Elizabeth, not totally agreeing with what Jane was saying, “Mr. Darcy is Mr. Bingley’s closest friend. Yes, Fitzwilliam was in error to give such terrible advice, but in the grand scheme of things I believe he thought he was protecting him.”

“Then let me put it all in another perspective. You yourself were highly put out when Charlotte married Mr. Collins and you are her closest friend. However, did she heed your advice? In the end she listened to her own heart and made her own decision based upon what was best for her in her *own* situation.”

“That is hardly the same thing!”

“It is exactly the same thing! Don’t you see, Lizzy, even though her closest friend questioned her choice, in the end she had the courage to dare your disapprobation, and to do what was best for her. How can you not plainly see that Mr. Bingley lacks the exact same courage to dare his closest friend’s disapproval? Forgive me, but should I have to live the rest of my life waiting for Mr. Darcy’s acquiescence?”

Elizabeth looked as if she was about to say something but paused for a moment and Jane knew she had her sister caught.

“But you must admit, Jane, you were, at first, very pleased by Mr. Bingley’s return into the neighbourhood.”

“Yes, I was well pleased. Mr. Bingley is a very amiable man and by his affable nature brings much happiness into the neighbourhood.” Jane turned away slightly and dropt her tone. “I will not sit here and say that my heart did not swell with joy upon his return, but the more I thought about it the more I realized that perhaps Mr. Bingley was not so deserving of my love. No woman wants to think that her admirer does not keep his own counsel when it comes to a decision that will affect him his entire life.”

“Can you not reconsider your...?”

“No, Lizzy, I am quiet decided,” said Jane, snappishly. Then, calming herself and sitting a little straighter in her chair, said, “I will always keep a place in my heart for Mr. Bingley as a valued acquaintance, but I require a much steadier character for anything more.”

Elizabeth felt as if she wanted to cry. Jane seemed so resolved and yet, no matter how much she tried to hide it, so unhappy.

“Jane, you spoke of two instances; what was the other reason you have put Mr. Bingley out of your heart?”

Jane, her posture so erect before, immediately slumped and her countenance took on such a look of anguish that Elizabeth wished that she had never asked the question. She rushed to her sister’s side and embraced her. “What is it, dearest; what has made you react in such a way?”

“Lizzy,” said Jane, fighting back her tears, “when he proposed to me he asked me to forgive and to forget. Forgiveness I can give most readily, but forgetting—oh how shall I ever forget a thing like that? I was so unhappy during that time when he was away that I sometimes felt that I would run mad. To give your heart so to a man, only to have him tread upon it as if you were held in no special regard. I would not wish that feeling on anyone. I never let on, not to you, not to anyone, but I suffered more during that time than any of you knew.”

Jane burst into tears at the remembrance and Elizabeth held on to her and let her have a good long cleansing cry. She felt so much for Jane and for the briefest of moments wished that Fitzwilliam Darcy could see her sister so aggrieved. However, what would that solve? She knew her fiancé felt terrible for his role in the matter, but it comforted her somewhat to know that Jane’s further happiness was now paramount in importance to him and she would endeavour to make sure that he kept that promise.

Soon after, Jane dried her face and composed her thoughts. “Lizzy, there is one thing more that troubles me and you may have observed it. Just before Mr. Bingley left that day, he whispered something into my ear and I tell you it does not sit well with me.”

“What was it, Jane?”

“He said that he would never love another.”

Elizabeth fought back an outburst of incredulity and said, “Because he does love you, Jane! Naturally he is hurt and upset, but you must allow him a little room to be disappointed and say things that his heart wants him to say.”

“That’s just it; I do not wish him to linger in regret and sadness. I know that I am to blame for it, but at the same time I have no remedy to offer him to ease his unhappiness.”

Elizabeth stared at her sister with something between astonishment and amusement. Only Jane would blame herself for giving Mr. Bingley anguish even after the necessity of inflicting it.

“Jane, what am I going to do with you?” Elizabeth hugged her sister once more, not knowing what she would have to do to wake Jane from this self-imposed torture.

Jane however had other thoughts; all her displays of melancholy could not go on, especially after such a day. Elizabeth’s perfect happiness should be celebrated and a snivelling creature for a sister would not do. After she refreshed her face with a damp cloth she once again sat on the bed with Elizabeth.

“There, I have had my cry out and I am done. We will never speak of it again. I want, from now on, only to speak of happy things. Tell me, Lizzy, have you given any thoughts to wedding clothes? What colour shall you wear on your wedding day?”

Elizabeth stared at Jane in utter amazement. Only moments ago, she had held her sister as she cried bitterly and now Jane wanted to talk of such a trivial thing as finery. Something was not right with Jane but her promise to her sister loomed large and she had made a vow not to break it. She obliged her sister in this instance even though her heart was not in it and Jane smiled and made many pretty comments as they talked throughout the night.