

Elizabeth felt ashamed of her cousin, and turned her attention to the more pleasing subject of Jane's future. Her mother's thoughts were plainly of the same kind, and when they sat down to supper, Elizabeth was deeply annoyed to find that Mrs Bennet was talking loudly to Lady Lucas of nothing else but her expectations that Jane would soon be married to Mr Bingley. Elizabeth tried without success to control her mother's words, because she could see that they were heard by Mr Darcy, who sat opposite them. Nothing she could say had any effect. Elizabeth reddened with shame.

When supper was over, singing was mentioned, and Elizabeth had the added discomfort of seeing Mary getting ready to entertain the company. Mary was the least pretty of the five sisters, so she had tried to make herself more attractive by becoming more able than the others, and was always eager to bring her musical skill to notice. But her powers were by no means fitted for this kind of performance. Her voice was weak, and her manner unnatural. Elizabeth listened with impatience. Mary sang twice, and Elizabeth could see Mr Bingley's sisters exchanging scornful smiles. She looked at her father, who understood and gently stopped his daughter.

The rest of the evening brought Elizabeth little amusement. Mr Collins continued at her side and would not leave her alone. Mr Darcy took no more notice of her, even when he was standing near her.

But Mrs Bennet left Netherfield perfectly satisfied. She was fully confident that she would see Jane married in the course of three or four months. She thought with equal certainty of having another daughter married to Mr Collins. She loved Elizabeth less than her other daughters, and she thought Mr Collins quite good enough for her.

Chapter 7

Mr Collins Makes a Proposal of Marriage

The next day opened a new scene at Longbourn: Mr Collins made a formal proposal of marriage. Having decided to do it without delay, and having no lack of self-confidence, he began in a very orderly manner with all the ceremony which he supposed to be a regular part of the business. On finding Mrs Bennet, Elizabeth and one of the younger girls together soon after breakfast, he addressed the mother in these words:

'May I hope, madam, to speak privately with your lovely daughter Elizabeth?'

Before Elizabeth had time to express her surprise, Mrs Bennet immediately answered:

'Oh, yes, certainly. I am sure that Lizzy can have no objection. Come, Kitty, I want you upstairs.' And picking up her sewing, she was hurrying away, when Elizabeth called out:

'I beg you not to go. Mr Collins must excuse me. He can have nothing to say to me that anybody need not hear. I am going away myself.'

'No, no, nonsense, Lizzy. I desire you to stay where you are.' And when Elizabeth seemed about to escape, she added, 'Lizzy, you must stay and hear Mr Collins.'

Elizabeth could not oppose such a command, and a moment's consideration made her realize that it would be better to get the matter settled, so she sat down again. Mrs Bennet and Kitty walked off, and as soon as they were gone, Mr Collins began:

'Believe me, my dear Miss Elizabeth, your behaviour only adds to your other perfections. You would have been less pleasing in my eyes if there had *not* been this little unwillingness, but allow me to inform you that I have your respected mother's permission for this address. Almost as soon as I entered this house, I made you my choice as the companion of my future life. My reasons