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Opening extract from

Lizzy Bennet's Diary

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Published by

Walker Books Ltd

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Tuesday 24th

My dear Diary,

It is as I thought – Mrs Gardiner understands everything. She has already prevailed upon Jane to return to London with them after Christmas. We hope that Mr Bingley will hear she is in town and call upon her. At the very least it will give Jane a break from Mama.

Mrs Gardiner is the dearest of aunts. She brought us all the most delightful Christmas presents. I received an array of gorgeous coloured silks for Papa's waistcoat, and she also gave us each a dress length. She tells us that our short-sleeved gowns are sadly out of fashion.





Was there ever such a generous reviver of spirits?



Monday 30th

Dearest Diary,

Christmas has flown by in a flurry of social engagements. We have dined and danced, danced and dined! Mr Wickham has been present on each occasion and I sense that he prefers me to every other young lady in Meryton. I continue to find him utterly captivating.



My aunt used to live near Pemberley and knew Mr Darcy's father, so she had much in common with Mr Wickham. She did warn me against getting too fond of him as he lacks an income, but love takes no account of such details. I promised only that I would not insist Mama include him in every invitation. I think I can rely on Lydia to do that! Besides, I am in no hurry to tie myself to one gentleman – there is much to be gained by enjoying one's independence.

Sadly, my aunt has returned to London today, taking Jane with her. My only comfort is that I may soon hear that Jane has been reunited with Mr Bingley. I shall watch for the post daily.



Mr Collins and Charlotte are to be married on Thursday 9 January. I had hoped the ceremony would be in Kent, but it is to be at Meryton Church. Mr Collins is even now arriving at Lucas Lodge to prepare for the event. Mama, who has been in good spirits during my aunt and uncle's visit, has had a return of her nerves.

HERE ENDETH 1811

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1812

flap 7, p44

JANUARY

Wednesday 8th

Charlotte paid us a farewell visit. Mama was so ill-natured that I made an effort to be friendlier than I felt. Charlotte made me promise to visit her in Kent this March, but I take no pleasure in the thought. Although the comfort of intimacy is over between us, I shall miss her company, for there is little enough hereabouts.

Thursday 9th

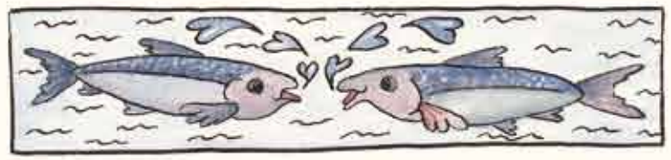


THE WEDDING DAY OF CHARLOTTE AND MR COLLINS

What can I say? Charlotte is now Mrs Collins and everything went as expected. The bride wore a white gown adorned with bows and the groom hardly uttered a word without referring to his most illustrious patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. She did not do him the honour of attending, which was one blessing! It snowed.

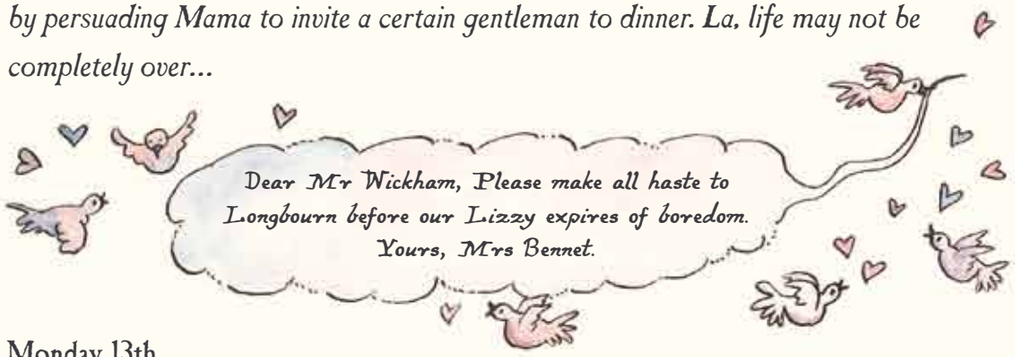
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Friday 10th



My dear Diary,

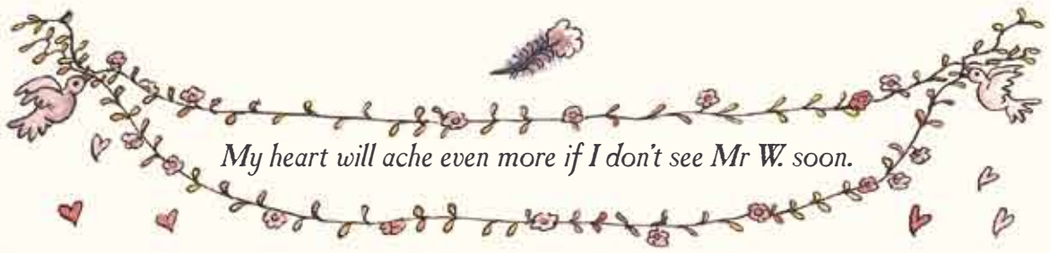
Lord, what a strange mood I am in. My best friend married to a gentleman who knows as little about love as a herring and my dearest sister gone away to nurse a broken heart. I shall have to cheer myself up by persuading Mama to invite a certain gentleman to dinner. La, life may not be completely over...



Monday 13th



Truly, thirteen is an unlucky number. I have received a letter from Jane, which convinces me that Caroline Bingley is determined not to let her brother know that Jane is in London. When she called on Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst they were most unfriendly, and made a point of telling her that Mr Bingley was always with Mr Darcy and his sister, Georgiana. My heart aches for my lovely sister.



Tuesday 14th

My dear Diary,

I am most concerned by Lydia's behaviour. She is spending too much time flirting with the young officers and encouraging Kitty to do likewise. I wonder Papa does not warn her that her conduct is unbecoming to a young lady of her age, or indeed any age.



"La, Kitty, which officer shall we declare the most handsome?"

Jane is ever in my thoughts. Her unhappiness and the cruelty of the Bingley sisters even mars my enjoyment of Mr Wickham's company. Not that I have seen much of him recently. Between you and me, dearest Diary, there are rumours that he has turned his attention elsewhere, but I am quite persuaded of his loyalty to me! Just imagine, though: if I had married Mr Collins I would not even have the luxury of speculating about such matters.

I shall wear my new long-sleeved dress and a feather in my hair when next I see him – that will surely stop his gaze wandering!



My new gown



This is the border for the back of Papa's waistcoat. The last winter berries that I painted were picked for my dear Jane by Mr Bingley. How long ago that seems!

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FEBRUARY

Saturday 1st

My dearest Diary,

Almost a month has elapsed since I wrote last. During that time my expectations and my pride have taken a knock. The rumours were all true and Mr Wickham has cast me aside for another. Her name is Miss King, a quite unremarkable person by all accounts. However, she recently inherited a fortune, and if anyone is in need of a fortune, it is Mr Wickham.

In truth, I have found it impossible to write about this until now. At first I was very shocked, but I am slowly starting to feel free of hurt. After the terrible disappointments Mr Wickham has suffered at the hands of Mr Darcy, I find his pursuit of financial security hurtful but understandable.

Naturally, Mama takes Mr Wickham's new interest as a personal slight. Her nerves and her dislike of me seem to be boundless. I do miss Jane, for Papa is certainly not interested in discussing affairs of the heart. I also miss weaving my nightly dreams of Mr W. but I am determined to remain optimistic. I do believe that another young gentleman will one day come riding my way!

I will write nothing further on this page.
I leave it blank, in memory of a very
dear friend, Mr Wickham!

***PS** – I must remember to tell my aunt that not even long-sleeved gowns always have the desired result!*

Tuesday 4th

My dear Diary,

I have received the most distressing letter from Jane. She has not seen Mr Bingley and Caroline Bingley has only just returned her call, briefly and without warmth.

flap 8



I read bits of Jane's letter to Papa. He believes Jane is too good for the Bingley family!

My only comfort is that Jane at last knows Charlotte Bingley's true nature. As for Mr Bingley, I can no longer hold him in high regard. If Mr Wickham's account of Miss Darcy is correct, I trust she will make him as unhappy as he has made my good sister. I am rapidly going off all men. I find my heart is still bruised, although I maintain a cheerful countenance!

Saturday 15th

Dear Diary,

I have not been paying you the attention you deserve. I fear that life at Longbourn is again disturbed only by domestic inconveniences and Mama's nerves! I even begin to look forward to my visit to Charlotte, especially as it now includes a night with Jane on the way. I shall be sorry to leave Papa, but that is all.

I think that I will walk into Meryton next week to take my farewell of Mr Wickham. I just need to be certain that he is still bent on seeking a fortune instead of love!



A fox got into the hen house this morning. It ate all the egg layers. How did it know?!

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