



# Timing Her Love Very III (A Surfeit of Sisterly Affection #2)

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**Category:** Historical

**Description:** The Milestones of Kitty Bennets life could be measured in ballrooms.

When Kitty thought about marriage at all, she expected to follow Lydia in marrying an officer. Sir Jasper Longbottom was a surprise, but a welcome one.

In the wake of Janes marriage to Mr Bingley, the Bennet family faces changes. With three daughters travelling, Catherine is forced to find something to fill her days, and for want of conversation, Mr Bennet is moved to pay more attention to his younger daughters.

Timing Her Love Very III explores the challenges that spur the growth of Catherine Bennets character, and the love that inspires the woman she will become.

**Total Pages (Source):** 16

## Page 1

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

The milestones of Catherine Prudence Bennet's life could be measured in Ballrooms.

There had been her disastrous first ball at Wrenhill Lodge, shortly after her fifteenth birthday, and before Old Mr. Prince, Mary King's wealthy grandfather, found his health beginning to fail. The first three dances had been two extremely lively jigs with John Lucas and Edward Bond, and an energetic reel with Uncle Phillips's clerk, Mr. Dawes. Kitty had never had a very strong constitution, and by the end of the third set, Kitty had been coughing so badly she began to wheeze, and had to sit out the rest of the night.

The rest of her partners had been trusted family friends around her papa's age, who were more than happy to sit and converse while she recovered her ability to breathe, and after that Ball, Kitty had learned to pace herself and sit out the faster dances.

Of course, that newfound knowledge hadn't stopped all Meryton from talking of little else but speculation on her ill health for a week entire. To hear the gossips talk, Kitty should have been the subject of an entire medical journal, being at once the survivor of a rare tropical disease from the West Indies (despite having never left Hertfordshire), dying from Consumption, and a repeat sufferer of the pox.

By the end of the week, Mr. McKnight had noticed how unhappy Mary was at hearing such gossip. By the following Sunday, he had persuaded Mr. Harris to join him in a very detailed sermon on the harmful effects of slander and gossip, and how it was the providence of all good Christians to be kind to those less fortunate, both in terms of fortune and health. Lizzy had taken the more direct route of speculating on the well-being of the loudest gossipers, parroting their excuses of concern back at them while Jane did her best to be comforting, and Mama had pointedly stopped

being at home to those gossips, or including them in her invitations.

Whether attributed to a singular cause, or by their combined efforts, Kitty had abruptly lost her popularity as a source of gossip, and stayed that way. Sometimes she came up when Lydia had been the ringleader of some outrageous prank, but for the most part, she was ignored. Some young ladies might be upset at such a phenomenon, but Catherine preferred the near-anonymity.

Well, Kitty was fortunate in her sisters, if not in her health.

At least no one questioned her sitting out a set for each one she danced. The Bennet sisters were much in demand as dance partners, even if such attention never progressed beyond dances to courtship, so Kitty could even frame only dancing half the sets as a kindness to other young ladies.

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Then there was the First Netherfield Ball, where Kitty spent half the night watching Jane and Mr. Bingley, amid the sudden realisation that Longbourn might soon be possessed of only four daughters. The other half was spent trying to ignore Mr. Collins and the mortification he brought about every time he opened his mouth. Then Kitty had seen some of the matrons looking at him with the same exasperation that was often directed at her and Lydia.

The sudden revelation of the very fine line between youthful spirits and unchecked foolishness had been a harsh one. Jane would say that every thundercloud had a silver lining, but to Kitty, it felt more like a lightning strike. She had never paid much attention to Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst's pointed remarks, but what if Mr. Bingley decided that he didn't want to add to his supply of unmanageable sisters?

Jane and Elizabeth always had some correction or other to give; Kitty resolved to pay

better attention in the future.

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Then there was the Second Netherfield Ball, a week before Jane's wedding, where Sir Jasper requested her First and Supper sets, and sat out her sets with her, debating art and describing the horses he bred at his estate, Snowsdale, in such an engaging manner that Kitty barely noticed the passage of time.

Sir Jasper rarely spoke in company, unless Mr. Bingley drew him out in conversation, but he spoke to her. Papa might tease Kitty for her newfound interest in the sciences, but Sir Jasper had a way of making the bloodlines of horses and the care necessary when interbreeding them, sound as fascinating as the latest magazine. "... many complain about the documentation required for a stud farm, but it is quite essential."

Kitty had been making mental notes of several words to look up later, but it was not hard to follow where he was leading. "To prevent inbreeding, I suppose. Even the most dedicated herdsman cannot remember it all, year to year, and animals cannot be expected to inquire of each other's families over tea... or grass, I suppose."

Sir Jasper laughed, and smiled at her. He was not as handsome as Mr. Bingley, but his eyes were kind, and very expressive. Papa's laughter always had an edge of mockery to it, but Sir Jasper never did. "Indeed, and some traits do not mix well, like trying to have both milk and lemon in one's tea."

The nursery maid had allowed Kitty and Lydia to try that combination once, mostly so that Lydia would stop complaining that she wanted both. Even at eight years old, Lydia had a strong will and the kind of stubborn determination that bent the world to her will. That was not always a good thing, even if Lydia thought it was.

Sir Jasper's analogy was a very good one. The result wasn't poisonous, but it certainly

wasn't very drinkable, either. Nor was it quite butter or cheese, just semi-solid, tea-flavoured lumps floating in what had been tea.

The music changed, and Sir Jasper held out his hand. "Are you recovered enough for the next set? I do not object to sitting it out, if you prefer."

The next set was a promenade, slow and stately. Kitty accepted the offered hand. "I believe I shall be quite capable, but forgive me if I do not talk over- much while we dance."

They took up their positions on the dance floor, next to Mary and Mr. McKnight, and two couples down from Jane and Mr. Bingley. "I believe we shall be a quiet section of the dance, with so many of our neighbours lost in each other's eyes."

Catherine - Kitty was an endearment and a childhood nickname that she was trying to leave behind - giggled, and nearly missed the opening notes of the dance, having to skip double-time to catch up.

It did not signify. She was too busy falling head over heels in love.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

Sir Jasper stayed at Netherfield only a week after Jane married Mr. Bingley.

He was clearly reluctant to leave, but it was unavoidable. He had his own estate to administer, after all, and while his Steward was well able to manage the day to day matters, Sir Jasper would trust no one else with his horses during the Stud Season. He was firmly set on the idea that if he must be a landlord, he would at least be an involved one.

Having been witness to her own father's indifference toward his estate, Catherine found his attitude to be most admirable. Sir Jasper might not have been born into the Gentry, but he was obviously determined to rise to its challenges.

Sir Jasper called on Longbourn before his departure, along with a bouquet of snowdrops and early bluebells. He had taken leave of the other families in the area before arriving at Longbourn, so there was no great rush for him to depart until the Cartwright finished swapping out the runners on the sleigh for carriage wheels.

Mama poured the tea, the tiered platter laden with all of Sir Jasper's favourites. "Such a cunning idea, adapting the sleigh like that!"

Sir Jasper looked bashful. "We have yet to come up with a way to make it cost-effective, as one does still have to pay for the wheels and the labor of changing them, but it does save on needing a second carriage for the summer months."

Mama nodded sagely, as if she had understood more than Kitty, and changed the subject. "I wonder if your mother would find it an imposition to begin a correspondence? We ladies with grown children must have something to fill our days,

and letter-writing is as good an occupation as any."

Catherine finished a quick sketch of Sir Jasper's face and wondered if she could get a good enough angle from the hallway mirror to do a self-portrait. If she could, would it be too forward to offer it to Sir Jasper to take with him? She did not believe for a moment that those letters would not quickly progress to matchmaking their children, but Mama was good at contriving opportunities, and Catherine would hardly object to seeing Sir Jasper again.

Sir Jasper nodded, "My mother does often complain about the lack of female company, and many of her peers look down on her for having been a Tradesman's wife. I would be happy to give her your letter."

Mama beamed, "Well, I was a Tradesman's daughter, so I am sure we will be friends in no time."

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Sir Jasper's comments about the necessity of hiring a Cartwright to change out the sleigh skids remained at the back of Kitty's mind, and on her next walk to Meryton with Lydia, she found herself looking at the carts and carriages that trundled through any market town.

Handcarts needed only two wheels, but the horse-pulled ones could need two or four, the size of the wheel seeming to depend on how heavily-laden the cart typically was. Perhaps the terrain and distance they needed to move was also a factor. The mobile stalls that came out on fair days certainly did not need wheels as big as a farm cart, but they were only moving short distances over cobblestones, not loose earth or grass.

Lydia chattered away, all anticipation for her upcoming journey with Jane and Mr. Bingley, still more than a month away. "Jane does not have my love of dancing, but I

am sure we will have some society... are you listening to me?"

Kitty pulled her attention away from eyeing the nearest carriage. "Of course, you were wondering if Jane and our brother Bingley would take you to any balls during the wedding tour."

Satisfied, Lydia continued her speculations, and Catherine ventured a caution. "Everyone in Meryton has known you from a babe, Lydia, but you will not have such indulgence from strangers."

Lydia pouted. "You need not scold me. Jane and our brother have already said that they will send me home and continue the tour unchaperoned, if I cannot behave like the young lady I am. I am quite resolved to be on my finest manners."

Catherine would believe that when she saw it, but for all her whimsy, Lydia knew how her bread was buttered, and Mr. Bingley was not as indulgent as Papa. Not after dealing with Miss Bingley. Perhaps this adventure would be good for Lydia.

She turned her attention back to the nearby shop. The Cartwright used a system of ropes and gears to hoist whatever he was working on into the air, which certainly explained why a sleigh needed to be taken to his shop to be worked on. It did seem rather precarious, though.

Rather like the hack carriages in London, a sleigh had rather less space for luggage, being more of a vehicle for short day trips. There was room under the seats for food hampers or a small trunk or valise, though. Wheels would be rather cumbersome to attach, and might throw off the balance, but there was no reason they could not be brought along in a secondary luggage cart for longer journeys during changing weather, like the cart Sir William and Lady Lucas used when they took their family on a holiday.



Catherine decided that she needed more information, similar to when she read art books about how light and movement changed the perception of an object. Luckily, she had access to a very well-stocked library, when the lending library came up short.

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Catherine knocked on the door to her father's book room, heretofore the nearest thing to forbidden ground. "Papa, do you have any books on mechanical drawings?"

Papa looked at her as though she were a stranger, but honoured her by giving the request actual consideration, rather than dismissing it as a foolish and fleeting fancy. "I believe I have an art book on the techniques, and a new study of Da Vinci's works. Neither one is quite what you are asking for, but together they should give you a starting point."

That had gone better than Kitty had expected. "Thank you, Papa."

He nodded, a trifle awkwardly. Perhaps he felt as wrong-footed as she did. "You might also ask your Uncle Phillips to look at some of the planning applications he and Mr. Morris handle for the estates hereabouts. They often have sketches attached. Mostly architectural, but there are some for mills and other such things, and there have been a number of advances in harvesting machinery in recent years."

That was an excellent idea, and Uncle Phillips tended to indulge his nieces in their requests. Papa paused a moment, before rustling his newspaper. "Should you have questions, you may come in here to discuss them. I cannot promise to have the answers, but we can seek them together."

The offer was as unexpected as it was welcome. Well, with Lizzy departing to Kent in a month or so, and Jane leaving on her wedding tour a little before that, perhaps Papa was desirous of someone to talk to. Mary had stopped seeking his approbation

years ago, and soon they would be the only daughters still at home.

The possibility that he might be trying to address his past indifferent parenting crossed her mind as she settled in her room and began to read, but Catherine dismissed it as a little too far-fetched. He and Mama might be getting along better, even if their reactions were a little stilted when Papa stopped himself from voicing a tease that was a touch too pointed, but it was early days, yet.

If Papa did commit to his change in behaviour, she would be grateful for it, and for whatever knowledge he saw fit to pass on. But Catherine, a fourth daughter born after the loss of a hoped-for son, had been disappointed too many times in that regard to hope without evidence.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

Calling Catherine's newfound understanding of physics imperfect would be extremely generous.

'Mediocre' might be more fitting, or 'Pitiable'. but Catherine was trying to compliment herself more. The philosophical discussion between Papa and Lizzy about masks and how one separated a facade from the true self might have mostly flown over her head, but some of their points were valid. Why should anyone think highly of Kitty, if she could not think highly of herself?

She had a working understanding of how pieces of a machine fit together, and their individual functions, at least. The next step, as Kitty understood the process, would be to build a working model in miniature. The version she'd attempted with sticks, pebbles and riverbank clay had come together, but crumbled as soon as she tried to make it work. Clearly, a model needed the proper materials, but there was no way Mama would let her near a wood saw. How would she even begin to ask the blacksmith for tiny gears?

Refining the sketches would have to do for now, and perhaps Sir Jasper would have ideas on how to gather the needed components when she saw him again.

There was a chance that the sticks and pebbles would work, if she found a way to properly tie them together, but that would mean putting up with more of the neighbourhood boys taunting her and knocking over her efforts just as she got them positioned correctly. Scolding or shouting at them did nothing but send her into a coughing fit, which only drew more mocking laughter.

The Kitty of last year might have shoved them into the creek; too shallow to drown

in, but assurance of a wretched afternoon as they walked home and changed clothes. Lydia would have thrown a tantrum and gone crying to Mama. Kitty vaguely remembered one tenant's grown son making a vulgar comment about Jane, some years back, and the charity basket for that family had been much lighter for the next several months, until a particularly harsh winter set in.

But removing a tenant family was not something done lightly. It could be hard for them to find another farm to rent, especially if word spread about why they were removed, and Catherine did not wish to punish an entire family because their sons were fools.

Besides, Lydia was taking her promise of better behaviour seriously, and part of that was spending less time walking, except on their regular excursions to Meryton. She didn't stop Kitty from going, but neither did she inquire what Kitty was doing.

Well, if she did not have a working model yet, at least the design was sound, and Kitty was sure that she had a reason to be proud of herself.

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The design Kitty came up with was part lever, part device from the Ottomans that she couldn't begin translating, though the diagrams had been clear enough. In theory, one worked the lever like a crossbow handle, and it raised the device by increments, raising the cart it was wedged beneath up until one could remove and replace the wheels, without needing a complicated pulley system to hold it suspended.

In theory. It would need to be placed just right, so that the cart did not topple over entirely, and Catherine did not know enough about such things to be able to tell where that spot would be. If it worked, however, it would be far more portable than the current system the Cartwright used.

Not that the Cartwright was likely to thank her for upsetting the way he did things, even if it did prove to be more efficient.

Kitty wondered if she would ever get to see it come to reality.

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Catherine had never known her mother to be such a diligent correspondent.

With Lizzy and Lydia both absent and unable to take up as much of Mama's attention as they had, perhaps she needed a new activity to fill her days.

Mrs. Longbottom did, indeed, welcome the new acquaintance, and while Mama did not read all her letters aloud, she did share the parts pertaining to Sir Jasper. But listening to Mama read a letter was very different to reading it yourself. Mama had a very nice reading voice, measured and engaging, but one had to concentrate to determine what was the letter and what was Mama's opinion on it.

"The Bingleys and youngest Miss Bennet dined with us when they visited Scarborough on the way to Scotland ' - how lovely, I am sure Jane and Lydia will expound upon it when they write to us next - ' They were all quite well when they left us, though Miss Bingley has been most vocal in her displeasure at not receiving an invitation. ' - I wonder if she is aware of how far an apology might convey her, as it did Mrs. Hurst... oh, Mrs. Longbottom agrees with me!"

It was good to hear that Jane and Lydia had arrived safely on the first leg of the Wedding Tour safely. Lydia was an infrequent correspondent at the best of times, and Mama had euphemistically claimed that married women had other things to do than spend all day at the writing desk. What those other things were, no one was willing to elaborate upon, though the Matrons were happy to exchange knowing glances among each other.

Mr. Bingley did have a house in Scarborough; perhaps it had to do with Jane establishing herself as Mistress, as she had at Netherfield?

Mama continued reading, “‘ I believe they plan to remain in Scarborough some days, before continuing up to the Scottish border by way of the Lake District.’ - well, at least Jane will know what Lizzy rhapsodises about when she goes with my brother Gardiner later in the year! Someone must, to enlighten the others.”

Papa emerged from his book room, listening with interest. "I should have you read the political columns from the newspaper, my dear. You might make them a little less dry."

It certainly sounded like a sincere, if backhanded, compliment, and Mama took it as one. "Oh, you know that I have no head for government, my dear Mr. Bennet, but as you do not like it either, I suppose we can muddle along."

Papa sat down, refilling Mama's teacup and pouring himself one. "Has your new friend anything to say about her sons?"

Mama turned her attention back to the letter, "She anticipates seeing far more of Sir Jasper once the Stud Fair is over. Her younger sons have been making lists about lectures they wish to attend during their visit to London this year. ' Ladies must sit in the upper gallery, so I despair of them meeting anyone there, but I am determined to coax them to at least one Ball, and perhaps the Museums and Art Galleries will provide more opportunities. ' Well, she is right about that, at least. I wonder... London is not so far as Scarborough, and my brother Gardiner did promise some fine fabrics for Mary's trousseau..."

She trailed off in thought, no doubt thinking of ways to convince Papa and Mary that a trip to London was in order, and how to fish out the dates of the Longbottom family's visit. Kitty finished the sketch she had been working on, and rose to add the

failed attempts to the fire. "Mama, when you write back, may I include a sketch for Sir Jasper?"

Mama considered it, then nodded. "You may add a few lines to my letter, and Mrs. Longbottom can pass it on if she chooses. It would be quite improper to actually write a letter yourself, but a gentlemen might add a few lines to their sisters' letters, so I see no reason why you cannot do the same."

Catherine folded her sketch carefully, to ensure that there were no smudges. "There are some hours before dinner, Mama, and the post leaves tomorrow. May we write it now?"

Mama sighed, but waved a hand. "Oh, very well, I suppose there is nothing wrong with that. Come along, Kitty, I shall think of something to say to my friend."

Mama sat at the writing desk and dipped her quill, a small, contented smile hovering around her mouth. She smiled like that when writing to Aunt Gardiner or Aunt Phillips, but not when writing to Mrs. Bond, who rarely left her house unless there was a social gathering to attend, or Lady Lucas, or Mrs. Long or any of the other twenty-odd families the Bennet's dined with. Aunts Gardiner and Phillips were Mama's sisters, though.

The other ladies, though they proclaimed themselves dear friends, were at odds as often as not, over whose daughters married best, or at all, or any of a dozen other things. Mama had grown up as one of them, but outranked them as soon as she married Papa... until Sir William was knighted and the Mayor's wife became Lady Lucas. Was it possible that Mama was lonely, amid all the social scuffling? What an odd realisation.

While her camaraderie between Mama and Mrs. Longbottom had undoubtably started as a matchmaking endeavour, perhaps it was a good thing for Mama to have friends

that she was not in competition with.



## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

Mother's thoughtful hum, as she read her latest letter from Mrs. Bennet, did not bode well for Sir Jasper's hopes of a quiet evening.

Snowsdale consisted of a manor house surrounded by fields; home farm on one side, stables and stud paddocks on the other, the whole of it encircled by wooded hills. They were connected to the main road into Scarborough by a long and winding road that discouraged all but the most determined visitors. That was a feature Sir Jasper appreciated, but Mother complained of whenever she was minded to host a dinner.

It was nice for her to have a friend, of course, but all four Longbottom brothers wished for a friendship that caused the gleam in their mother's eye to appear with less frequency. Still, there was no other way for Sir Jasper to receive news from Hertfordshire without multiple breaches of propriety, so he endured. One did not propose marriage just to be able to exchange letters with an interesting young lady.

Well, if Sir Jasper did not ask, someone else would. "What has Mrs. Bennet to say, mother?"

Mother's smile was reassurance that all was well in Hertfordshire, but unsettling in a number of other ways. Likely there would be another conversation about wanting grandchildren before she was too old to enjoy them in the near future. "Oh, the usual updates about life in the south of the Kingdom. Miss Catherine appears to be exploring a new direction for her artistic talents, and Mrs. Bennet included a sketch."

She handed over a folded piece of paper, which Sir Jasper dutifully unfolded. His eyes lingered on the familiar signature of C Bennet, ending in a flourish that put one a little in mind of a cat in repose, without actually being one. Then he looked more

closely at the sketch.

It was very clearly amateur work, but not unskilled, and the intent was clear. A wheel gear would work better than the cog Miss Catherine had sketched, but the principle was sound. Sir Jasper looked over at his youngest brother, Henry, who was the best of them with model making. "Come tell me what you think of this."

Miss Catherine had also included a small satirical sketch, of her device and a cart, anthropomorphised as the Biblical figures of David and Goliath, the Cart-Goliath being hoisted into the air. That was a far more expert drawing, and Sir Jasper could envision them walking through an Art Gallery together, discussing the works on display. He could practically feel her hand in the crook of his arm, her excited voice in his ear.

Seven years was not so very great of an age gap, was it?

Henry looked over the sketch, then left the room just slowly enough to avoid a lecture on decorum from Mother, returning with the large box that he kept his model parts in. Their other brothers looked up from their own pursuits as Henry pieced together something functional from Miss Catherine's design. John handed over a small wooden carving, heedless of Mother's pointedly raised eyebrow, to test it. "Hey, Michael, bring the financials out here, will you?"

Michael, sixteen months younger than Sir Jasper and nominally in charge of the Longbottom family's business ventures, was reading a book by the fire. He looked up from its pages with an expression that clearly stated John had better have a reason behind the request. "Why?"

John was clever, but it was the kind of clever that rarely waited to think through the possible outcomes, or write down a hypothesis before he rushed off to try it. Becoming a Baronet and taking control of the purse- strings not connected to the

family business had gone a long way to restraining his wilder ideas, but Sir Jasper doubted that anything short of death would actually stop him. If John was asking about financing, it couldn't be too hare-brained... "I want to know if I can afford to marry this woman, if Jasper doesn't!"

Never mind. Sir Jasper glared at his second-youngest brother. "First of all, John, I made sure that all of us can marry without consideration of money, should you ever find someone willing to put up with you. Second of all - which probably should have been first - don't you dare!"

Michael did a very bad job of hiding his amusement. Sir Jasper resisted the urge to kick him as though they were still schoolboys together. Michael had been annoying enough when the Bingleys and Miss Lydia visited them. "Might be coming on a little strong there, anyway; we don't want to scare the young lady off entirely."

Mother cleared her throat, and the younger three were abruptly reminded that they were discussing marriage in front of the county's premier matchmaker. Mother might very well take their sudden interest in the married state as permission to begin searching on their behalf, and for all John's interest in Miss Catherine's designs, Jasper was quite sure that his younger siblings had no desire to settle down just yet. They hastily fell quiet, and Sir Jasper took the opportunity to inject some practical considerations. "I'm hoping to wrangle an invitation to visit out of Bingley when he returns from his wedding tour, since we don't have any convenient sisters to invite her to visit."

It was a heavy hint, but perhaps Mother already had designs in such a direction. "I did hint at our upcoming visit to London in my last letter, and Mrs. Bennet mentioned that they will be making plans to shop for Miss Mary Bennet's wedding clothes soon."

A few days of primarily shopping, and perhaps a dinner or evening entertainment of

some kind was far less than Sir Jasper had hoped for. His disappointment must have shown, because Mother smiled. “I wish to meet her properly, and one can hardly expect parents to entrust their daughter to someone unknown to them. We will meet the Bennets in London, and if her parents approve, I will invite Miss Catherine to remain with us when they depart.”

As a mother of unmarried daughters, Mrs. Bennet was unlikely to object. Sir Jasper’s interactions with Mr. Bennet had been few, but between two determined matrons and the prospect of a titled son-in-law, hopefully he could be persuaded. Miss Catherine had often spoken of wanting to explore the art galleries and perhaps attend a seminar on artistic technique, if Sir Jasper’s presence wasn’t a convincing enough argument.

He sat down to sketch Henry’s prototype in action. Writing Miss Catherine a letter would be inappropriate, but apparently sketches were permissible.

One sketch in the corner of a page turned into several, forming a kind of border around the parchment, and leaving less room for Mother to write her letter. She was fondly exasperated, however, rather than truly annoyed, so it was probably all right. The framework of a half-finished sleigh, the horses trotting through the paddock, Mother in her chair by the fire, the line where field met forested hills...

Perhaps one day he would be able to show her in person.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

Mary was in the middle of a spirited debate with Mama about the length of time they should spend in London when Mrs. Longbottom's letter arrived.

Kitty had been staying well out of it, torn between her desire to spend more time with Sir Jasper, and not wishing to side against Mary on what was, after all, her trip. Papa had already retreated to his book-room in the hope of avoiding travel at all. Mrs. Hill entering with a letter was, on the whole, a great relief.

Mama paused to read it, and Mary retreated to the couch next to Kitty, who showed her the sketch she had been working on. It was the Longbourn church, with Mr. McKnight and Mary standing at the altar. "I can change the details of the dress if you like, but I thought the Modiste might appreciate a sketch. Mrs. Weaver in Meryton always prefers a visual of what I wish a dress to look like."

An impatient frown stole over Mary's face, as it often did when someone failed to realise something that Mary considered obvious. "Mrs. Weaver's assistants were never taught to read or figure beyond the basics. A picture is easier for them to understand when they are sewing." Mary viewed the design thoughtfully. "Can you change the sleeves? I do not like them quite so fitted."

Kitty did so. Looser sleeves were not precisely in fashion, but they never really went out of fashion, either. "Would you like a bonnet or a turban, like Mrs. Hurst favours?"

Mary scoffed, "I do not need an abundance of feathers to appear even more like a sparrow to my sisters' songbirds. Mr. McKnight and I will live more modestly than we do at Longbourn; there is no need for such fancies."

Catherine would never understand her next-eldest sister. None of the younger sisters had Jane's beauty or Elizabeth's charisma, but that did not make them plain or ill-featured, like Charlotte or Mary King. "Then at least let me re-make your bonnet for the occasion! I am quite good at it, and if the Lord is kind, you will only be married once. You deserve for it to be a memorable occasion."

Mary still looked exasperated, but a little less resistant to the prospect. "It will be memorable for who I am marrying, but if you wish for a new project, I will allow it. I had been meaning to do something with my brown bonnet, anyway."

The brown bonnet was a very acceptable stovepipe, made in brown silk that put one in mind of chocolate on a winter morning. "Brown is very versatile. I will buy a ribbon to match whatever colour your dress will be, and promise not to make it too extravagant. I am sorry that Mama is pressing you for my sake, too."

They were distracted by a cry of triumph from the writing desk, which brought Papa out of his study. "Is everything all right out here?"

Mama was all smiles, "Oh, Mr. Bennet, Mrs. Longbottom writes that they will be in London at the same time as our trip for Mary's wedding clothes, and she wishes to meet Kitty for herself! They will be in London a month, and she wishes for some female company, amid her four sons."

Papa had improved at knowing when to tease and when not to. At least a little. "Well, I suppose we can spare Kitty, at least until she is required home to stand up with Mary. For how long shall you be in London?"

Mama launched into the same arguments she had been using with Mary, and the insistence that Papa must join them, to meet the people Catherine would potentially be staying with. On the couch, Mary spoke to her sister in an undertone. "Four days, returning on the fifth, and you will back me when I disagree with Mama's fashion

choices. Papa does not enjoy London any more than I."

That sounded a very fair arrangement to Catherine. London was only half a day's journey on good roads. "Agreed. How would you feel about Mama remaining in London for a few days after, if I do receive an invitation?"

Mary's smile was like the sun coming out, and really, wherever did she get the idea that she was unattractive? "If you can arrange it, I will be forever indebted to you. I can arrange things to my taste, Papa can approve it, and I can give Mama her way with the Wedding Breakfast when she returns."

Mama had her triumph over Lady Lucas in the matter of their eldest daughters, with Jane's wedding breakfast at Netherfield being obviously superior. Now Lady Lucas had begun to be smug about Charlotte's marriage to a man of the cloth, and the descriptions of Hunsford, in comparison to Mary's upcoming wedding, and Mama's hackles were up.

Four days sounded like an excellent compromise to Catherine, though she was sure Mama would not see it so. She raised her voice to join the conversation between their parents. "As Mary was saying, a London dressmaker will have more seamstresses than Mrs. Weaver, so we will not need to wait so long for the dress to be ready, and Mary intends to purchase much of her trousseau here in Longbourn village and Meryton."

Mary had been very firm on that, not wishing to appear to snub her future parishioners, and nodded eagerly. "I am sure three days complete will be more than enough time away."

Mama immediately protested, arguing her way up to four days, and leaving after luncheon on the fifth, as Mary had planned. Mama was permitted her way on the matter, and rang for Hill to begin preparations for their journey. "There will only be

the four of us, and my sister Gardiner already agreed to host our family for the duration. Oh, Kitty, it seems Sir Jasper enclosed some sketches for you, as well. You may read the letter, if you wish."

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Mrs. Longbottom's letter had a lovely border of simple sketches, and from a brief skim of the graceful writing, she was certainly on board with Mama's matchmaking schemes.

'I have not my sons' education in such matters, but from the model my younger son, Henry, created, Miss Catherine's design was a great success. Even if I did not share your hopes, my dear friend, I would happily host her for an engineering lecture or two. '

Kitty almost melted in relief; she could not have borne it if Sir Jasper mocked her idea as the tenant boys had. Mrs. Longbottom's words were high praise, and more than she had ever received before. What did one do with the design of a new invention, in any case? Surely there was some kind of legality over the matter, in the same way novels had a copyright?

One of the sketches showed Kitty's invention in miniature, hoisting a wooden ornament, and a thrill of pride warmed her to the core. She would have to ask Sir Jasper's advice on the matter of copyright.

Kitty's eye was drawn to the note Sir Jasper had added to his mother's letter. " Dear Miss C, I have not your skill with a pencil, but I hope you enjoy these sketches none-the-less. I look forward to seeing you in London.

Yours etc., Sir J"



She should have known that he would not mock her. Sir Jasper had laughed at her sketches, but in genuine humour and appreciation of the sardonic joke they were meant to be. He'd offered his opinions on her more serious artworks, when she asked for them, but never unwanted criticism. Now, he was answering her missive in kind; artwork for artwork.

One of the sketches was the framework of a sleigh, without the boarding of the finished product. Kitty would need to see the finished thing to be sure, but if one added a... brace, lock, whatever the name was for a holding device was... here and here, runners could be stowed beneath the seating area, their curved ends following the line of the seat. By raising the top a little, a storage compartment could be added for a wheel... not too large a wheel, but sleighs, even convertible ones, did not need to carry the weight a carriage did, and a spare wheel was always useful in emergencies.

Kitty carefully placed the letter on the writing desk, and dove for her sketch-book, opening it to a new page.

She would see Sir Jasper soon, and show him the new idea then.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

Normally, Sir Jasper would avoid the Modiste, but the Bennets had a day of shopping planned, and Mother had promised to leave his brothers at home.

Miss Catherine looked delighted to see him, and their mothers greeted each other as though they were life-long friends, before sweeping Miss Mary - who looked something like a cornered fox on a hunt - into the shop. Miss Catherine pressed a piece of paper into his hand, before hurrying after them. "Mary is not comfortable being the centre of attention, and her tastes do not always agree with Mama's. I promised to mediate."

That would be interesting to watch. Mr. Bennet came to stand beside him. "What on earth did you say to Kitty before you left? I've never seen her so studious as when she was trying to teach herself mechanics."

Sir Jasper had no idea, but he could hardly complain about the results. He tucked the paper, still folded, into a pocket. "Perhaps she merely needed the right inspiration. I confess, Sir, I am surprised to see you here."

Mr. Bennet looked rueful. "My dear wife found the book I was reading, hid it in one of the trunks, and informed me that if I wished to finish reading it, I had better accompany them to London and meet the family Kitty might be visiting."

He'd known Mrs. Bennet to be a determined sort, but not to that extent. Sir Jasper hastily tried to cover his laugh with a feigned cough. Mr. Bennet's expression suggested that he had not been successful, before the older man sighed. "Well, we had best join our ladies, before they purchase the entire shop."

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Miss Mary Bennet was looking overwhelmed as Mrs. Bennet exclaimed over samples of lace, and the Modiste, Madame Dubois, displayed a variety of fabric swatches. Miss Catherine had been surveying the fray, but straightened her spine, and sallied forth. “Oh, Madame, my sister has already decided upon the style she wishes. Here, I have the sketch for you.”

Madame Dubois examined the sketch as Miss Catherine turned to her mother, “Mama, Mary is marrying a churchman. She will not wish to be so extravagant as to completely cover herself in lace, but perhaps something more subtle?”

Given a direction, Mrs. Bennet began examining the lace more closely, weighing the impact of each. Miss Catherine selected a bolt of silk, dusky blue as the night sky above a sunset. “Mary, what do you think of this colour? I know you do not favour bright tones, but it will suit you well.”

Madame Dubois beamed. “Ah, somber enough for a Parson’s wife, but reminding him that for all his heavenly calling, earthly delights still exist! I shall enjoy making this gown very much, the artist has an excellent eye.”

Both sisters blushed furiously, and Sir Jasper decided that the shelf of gloves and handkerchiefs was in dire need of his attention as Miss Mary was ushered behind a screen to have her measurements taken. His mother, seated with a cup of tea and light refreshments, watched the entire scene with delight, before rising to join Mrs. Bennet at the lace, speaking in low voices together.

The paper in his hand crinkled, reminding Jasper of its existence, and he unfolded it. It was another mechanical sketch, clearly based off the one of the half-built sleigh he had added to his mother’s last letter, but improved. How very like Miss Catherine, to look at a thing and see a thousand possibilities of what it could become.

Sir Jasper immediately resolved not to show it to his brothers until he had the opportunity to propose to Miss Catherine himself. Hopefully John had not been serious about that, but eldest siblings learned to be cautious about the antics of younger brothers.

A moment's though later, he fervently blessed whatever impulse had struck him to not only purchase a necklace when Bingley had been shopping for an engagement gift for his own Miss Bennet, but to bring it with him to London now. Mr. Bennet, who Sir Jasper had almost forgotten, nudged him. "I know I did not let Kitty near my Anatomy books, and Da Vinci's study of the human form was not that explicit. It cannot be so very bad."

Sir Jasper was speaking before he had the chance to consider his words. "Sir, I wish to inform you that I will be marrying your fourth daughter, if she will have me."

Mr. Bennet blinked in surprise. "My wife did say she anticipated your making such a request, but she sees matrimony in every flower petal. For my part, I think that such a discussion requires port, and should not take place in the middle of a dress shop."

Mr. Bennet had a point, unfortunately. "If you have no dinner engagements, perhaps you and your family will join us for dinner tonight. Mr. and Mrs... Gardiner, I believe their names were, are welcome too, of course. Perhaps we can speak when the ladies withdraw."

Their London housekeeper always had a grand dinner to welcome them to Town, so adding six more places would not stretch the meal unduly.

Besides, it was still early enough for the cook to add some smaller dishes to stretch the courses out, if she felt it necessary.

Mr. Bennet's eyebrow lifted even higher. "I do not believe we are engaged, unless

Mrs. Bennet has planned something and plans to spring it on me too late for me to object or feign illness.”

Sir Jasper immediately thought over the itinerary his mother had planned for the time the Bennets were in town. “I believe there is a theatre outing planned for tomorrow night, but it is one of Shakespeare’s Histories, so it should not be too taxing.”

His hopefully-future-father-in-law considered. “Well, if Mrs. Bennet can stand my whispering about all the inaccuracies, I suppose it shall not be unbearable.” He looked briefly nostalgic, “We did that during our courtship, and she said it made the play more interesting.”

Would Miss Catherine look back on their interactions so fondly, in years to come? The tickets for the Satire Exhibition the following day weighed heavy in his pocket, alongside a small cloth jeweller’s bag. Sir Jasper certainly hoped so.

Mr. Bennet wandered back over to the tea tray, pouring a cup each for himself and Mrs. Bennet, and fixing them according to what was clearly long-standing preference. Miss Catherine replaced him, her smile and the sparkle in her eyes bright enough to render him temporarily mute. “I am glad to see you again.”

Sir Jasper cleared his throat. “As am I. To see you, that is. Your invention was amazing; have you considered getting it patented?”

She blinked. “I would have needed Papa for that; ladies do not handle legal matters themselves [1] . I had not quite worked up the nerve to show him, yet. Uncle Phillips works more in the business of contracts and estate law.”

The man who had managed the patent Sir Jasper had filed for the interchangeable sleigh design had been quite good, and was still in practice. “I can introduce you to one here in town, if you wish. You deserve the credit for your work.”

Sir Jasper had spent enough time in the Bluestocking Seminars to have heard a great deal about learned women and their struggles to have their work recognised independent of their husbands. If Miss Catherine was to patent her work, better to do it now, under her maiden name, so it could remain hers without reference to him.

Her mind had apparently not quite caught up with his, or perhaps Sir Jasper was getting ahead of himself. “For you to act on my behalf, we would need to be at least engaged.”

Oh, yes, that. “I just invited your family to dine with mine this evening. If you are amenable, I thought I could speak to your father then.”

Catherine blinked, and Sir Jasper belatedly realised that he was making rather a hash of his proposal. “I hoped to court you properly during our visit, but I am selfish, and I cannot imagine that you will be unknown for long, and I did not wish to miss my chance to tell you how much I admire and care for you, before you are swarmed by other suitors.”

She looked torn between bafflement and flattery, though the latter gradually won out. “Then I should inform you that you are the first man who has looked at me and appreciated my true self, rather than seeing a shadow of one of my sisters. Speak to Papa tonight, and then ask me properly, so that our Mama’s may have a good story to tell the neighbours.”

That was an excellent thought; Mother would not have appreciated having to admit that Sir Jasper had lost his head and offered marriage in the middle of a Modiste’s shop, and while Mrs. Bennet might have been able to spin that into something nearly acceptable, the proper forms should be followed. “That is an excellent idea. Please do not let my brothers scare you off before then.”

She laughed, and they went to join their parents over tea as Miss Mary was whisked

away for a mock gown to be fitted.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

London was like a waking dream.

Kitty could think of no other way to describe her every wish coming true at once. Sir Jasper thought her mechanical ideas were worth the bother of legal paperwork to declare them hers, and he wished to marry her! How lovely, to become engaged - oh.

Taking advantage of her parents' distraction, she slipped into the room where Mary was having pieces of calico pinned to her shape. The tight line of her jaw indicated a degree of discomfort at having people in such close proximity. Mindful of Mary's dislike of crowds, Catherine kept her distance. "Are you bearing up all right?"

Mary did not bother faking a smile. "I shall endure, and perhaps be able to empathise more with a dressmaker's dummy. I presume you had a question that could not wait?"

Catherine stifled a laugh at her sister's bone-dry wit. "Sir Jasper means to speak to Papa tonight at dinner. Would you like me to ask him to wait until you and our parents have departed? This is your trip to London, after all."

Mary stared at her for a moment. "If you can take the attention off me, you will become quite my favourite sister. I dislike the spotlight, as you well know, and having two weddings to plan will let me push for a smaller celebration for Mr. McKnight and myself."

That was a point that Catherine had not considered, although maybe she should have. Hunsford and Swansea had similar incomes, from what she had gathered from Mama and Lady Lucas's sparring, but Mr. McKnight tended toward frugality, and felt no



need to overspend in order to court the Bennets' good opinion, as Mr. Collins leaped to imitate Lady Catherine's opulence.

Hopefully Charlotte would be able to coax him toward a modicum of common sense.

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Later, back at the Gardiner's, the sisters took the opportunity to rest, while Mama entertained Aunt Gardiner with tales of the Modiste. Kitty, as promised, was re-making Mary's bonnet when Mary sighed, putting down her book. "Our eldest sisters are not here to advise you, so the duty falls to me. You know I struggle with the best way to say things, but I promise to do my best."

Oh, Lord... but Mary had improved at leaving the sermons to her future husband, lately. "I promise not to leap to offence."

Her next-eldest sister turned the closed volume over in her hands. "I fell in love slowly, but Jane knew Mr. Bingley for barely six weeks before he declared himself and she accepted. I will not claim that everyone must fall in love the same way, but... are you sure? Marriage is for life, and very difficult to undo."

Kitty was eighteen, still three years from attaining her majority, but she was not the flighty fool that so many assumed her to be. She had an eye for fashion, and adored socialising, and her drawings were not the pastoral landscapes or still-life drawings that were popular for young ladies to create. In many ways, she was still learning who Catherine Bennet was, but since at least three philosophers agreed that such discovery was a lifelong journey, she saw no need to put her life on hold for it.

Still, Mary's inquiry came from a place of kindness, and she was as unaccustomed to giving such talks as Kitty was in receiving them. "I told Sir Jasper that he was the first man to notice me for who I am, rather than seeing a shadow of my sisters, but it

is more than that. He believes in me, in the things I create. He is kind, and if it is not love yet, I believe that it can very easily grow to be."

Sir Jasper was not like Mr. Bond, who dismissed the beauty of Mrs. Bond's artwork as if they were a child's scribbles. He was like Uncle Phillips, who listened when Aunt Phillips suggested a new system for storing his old files that both made it easier for Uncle Phillips to find things... and utterly confounded potential thieves. One such miscreant had actually been discovered in tears, too confused to even start looking for the old Will which favoured him over his cousins, which he had hoped to swap for his recently-deceased Aunt's current will.

Given the invective he hurled at a smug Aunt Phillips when he was hauled off to the magistrate, Kitty was hardly that surprised that Old Mrs. Church had changed her mind about who should inherit.

Mary smiled, and re-opened her book. "Then I will not question you further, as long as you are certain."

Catherine tilted her head, trying to read the title. "A guide to Pedagogy?" Her knowledge of Greek begun and ended at root-words that had lent themselves to the English language. "That is to do with children, is it not?"

Mary nodded, "The teaching of children, specifically. I want to help with the Parish school, once it opens, and if I cannot... well, I will have children eventually, and I do not want them to flounder like we did."

Mama had taught them to read and write, and accounting, and the basics of a stillroom; everything they would need to run their own household one day. Papa had taken Jane and Elizabeth in hand for a few years, while the younger three were still under the care of a nursemaid, but tired of the endeavour before Catherine was old enough to benefit. Lydia preferred to learn her history from plays and novels, more

than books, and there was no denying that their education had been... scattered.

Well, the future was bound to be bright for both of them, and that was what mattered. Outside, bells chimed the hour, and they would soon be departing for dinner at the Longbottom townhouse. Kitty considered her dresses, before selecting a dinner dress the colour of lavender, and a sage- green ribbon for her hair.

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Sir Jasper had mentioned having three younger brothers, but he hadn't mentioned how different they all were.

John and Henry, the younger two, had all of Lydia's energy and about as much restraint. Henry had barely waited until the introductions were over before quizzing Kitty on her design process, and John had lasted only a little longer before asking her sources. Sir Jasper had checked that she was all right with the attention before vanishing into his study with Papa.

Catherine, despite his fears, was very familiar with this style of conversation, for Mama and Lydia communicated in much the same fashion when they were excited. She waited for them to take a breath, then launched into an explanation just as the second-eldest, Michael, was about to admonish them to leave her alone.

Mrs. Longbottom looked approving, which Catherine took as a good sign.

By the time Sir Jasper and Papa emerged from the study, Michael had engaged Mary in conversation. Mary had nearly refused when he openly admitted it was to avoid the loud debate taking up the bulk of the room, but relented when he paled at the thought of taking sides. Mama and Mrs. Longbottom were keeping an odd kind of score on the sidelines.

Kitty had sketched two comparative designs, one of the unmodified sleigh frame, and one with her own modified design. John thought it would make the sleigh too heavy, while Henry wondered if the additional cost in time and materials was too high to justify their inclusion. Kitty folded her arms. “Clearly, you’ve never been stuck beside the road in the rain while a footman rides back for additional men and a cart!”

Sir Jasper cleared his throat. “Only once, and we overturned the conveyance and sheltered beneath it until the storm passed.”

Gentlemen who only needed to change a pair of stockings, and whose dark breeches would show less stains, could afford to do that, Kitty supposed. “I doubt that it was a particularly pleasant experience, none-the-less?”

Michael weighed in from the safety of his corner, “Not at all, and it took some very careful work to get it upright again, and back home and dried before the wood started to warp.”

Catherine waved a hand impatiently, “While if you had a spare wheel with you, and the hoist I designed, you would only need a little time to exchange the wheels and be on your way home to hot baths and clean clothes!”

Sir Jasper chuckled softly, “That is a compelling argument, you must admit.”

Henry nodded reluctantly, “More-so at the time than now, when we are speaking in theoreticals. Perhaps as an optional extra for customers who want a year-round vehicle, not just a winter sleigh.”

Catherine had not been educated in matters of business. She was happy to leave such things to those who were. Papa was watching her as if she were a new person he had never seen before. “Kitty, my dear, Sir Jasper wishes a private conference with you, if you are amenable.”

A quick glance at Mary, who nodded confirmation that she would not be upset, and Catherine eagerly followed Sir Jasper out of the room.

Her heart was pounding in her chest, loud enough that she barely heard the undoubtably very pretty speech he was giving. She pinched herself in order to focus, just in time to hear, "- be my wife, Catherine Bennet?"

Breathless with joy, she clapped her hands, "Oh, yes, I should like nothing better!"

A squeal of delight came from the other side of the door, where at least one of their mothers had undoubtably been listening. Sir Jasper paused, "I did not think... will Miss Mary mind us announcing our engagement tonight?"

Catherine smiled; this was what made them such a good pair. "I did, and asked her earlier. She is quite happy for the distraction."

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

While Sir Jasper was in no great need of a rich heiress to marry, he had overheard Miss Catherine expressing a desire to bring more to her marriage

than the thousand pounds that had so far been accumulated for her dowery, and the same when her Mama passed. That, at least, Sir Jasper had the power to help with.

It had not been as easy as he expected. Two of the solicitors he approached had refused to believe that Miss Catherine had been the mind behind the invention. A third had believed it, but scoffed at the idea of letting her have the credit in her own name. The list of people that Sir Jasper was going to refuse business with in the future was becoming longer than he would like.

Mother was sympathetic, having been in Miss Catherine's shoes herself, but pragmatic to a fault. "Find a Solicitor who works with female merchants and businesswomen. They may have their prejudices, but they care more about getting paid than they do about who is handing over the coin."

That was good advice, and led Sir Jasper to a Mr. Smith, who had handled the recent export of a patent by the American Mrs. Kies [2] for use by British Milliners and their suppliers. Apparently, Colonial Bureaucrats were still holding a grudge over the Revolution, almost a generation ago, now. Sir Jasper made an appointment for later that afternoon, after the Satire exhibition.

Political Cartoons had always been a favourite part of the newspaper, but Sir Jasper was almost surprised at just how much variety there was in the satirical artworks on display.

Caricatures abounded, of course, but there was also an oil painting of an elaborate fruit bowl filled with cluster-fruit stems, apple cores and fruit stones, with the tongue-in-cheek title ‘ Aftermath of a growing boy ’. On a pedestal nearby stood a series of clay and glass miniatures; a frog in a delicate tiara, forelimbs placed crossly on what might have been guessed to be its waist. A dancing slipper with a broken heel. Miss Catherine laughed, “Someone was inspired by popular fairytales, I see.”

Oh, a princess who was turned into a frog after being promised a handsome prince if she kissed the amphibian, and gentle mockery of the very idea of trying to dance all night in glass slippers. “Ah. After the caricatures, my mind was on politics and philosophy.”

Miss Catherine slipped her arm into his. “Artwork does not always need to be deep and meaningful. I have entire sketchbooks filled with nothing more than whatever made me smile to draw it.”

That was true enough. They turned into the next gallery, filled entirely by drawings, paintings and the occasional screen of classical artworks made parody by some humorous twist. Some were subtle, some not at all, but they were quite good.

The next hall was dedicated to statues, and Miss Catherine hastily averted her eyes from someone’s very detailed idea of the alternate meanings of ‘ political congress ’ . “The exhibition might have been better if there was some kind of theme beyond just ‘satire’, but I suppose it would have been hard to narrow down.”

A rather cunning two-faced statue, trying to cram as many dualities as possible into a single sculpture, was much safer to look at. “Not to mention the arguments on whether or not something fit the theme. Anyone with rhetorical training can make a halfway convincing argument, whether or not it’s grounded in facts.”

Miss Catherine closed her eyes in a kind of remembered pain. “You were fortunate

enough to miss our cousin Collins's visit. He would argue whatever viewpoint his noble patroness instructed, and convince himself it was purest truth."

Everyone had relatives that they would rather avoid. Sir Jasper was lucky that his had moved to the Americas. "I shall be glad to avoid the acquaintance, then."

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Mr. Smith was an unremarkable sort of man with a remarkably keen mind and a sharp eye for detail, but no particular taste for polite small-talk.

He quizzed Miss Catherine on her designs with a rigour that reminded Sir Jasper of his university examinations. She held up very admirably, but faltered on some of the technical terms, and her hesitations made it clear that she had never been taught to debate or defend a stance.

Of course, she would not have. Ladies' Seminaries taught polite conversation and deflection, not academic debate or scholarly defence, and Miss Catherine had no brother to have passed on the techniques while complaining about his professors. Sir Jasper cleared his throat. "Forgive me, but would you ask these questions of a gentleman, as well?"

Mr. Smith raised a disapproving eyebrow. "As a matter of fact, I would. Not all patent applicants are as detailed as yours in where they got their ideas, and I must be thorough in order to be assured that they are not infringing on an existing patent."

Miss Catherine nodded, apparently un-offended. "My father had books on the foundations of mechanics, and one on Da Vinci's sketches. The rest, I admit, was largely trial and error based off my interpretation of drawings, as I had no formal schooling on the subject. Rather a lot of error, actually. Did Da Vinci ever patent his inventions?"



Mr. Smith appeared slightly less stern, perhaps due to the fact that neither had erupted in outrage. "Some of them, but I believe it has since expired. Do you recall which of your father's books you read?"

She named the titles, and Mr. Smith nodded. "I am aware of them. There are no patented works within them, but they do give a good grounding on the subject. Now, had you thought on the subject of licensing fees?"

Miss Catherine looked rather relieved that the questioning was over, but rallied quickly. "What amount might a Cartwright earn in a year? I have no desire to have my works be too expensive to use."

Cartwrights were the most likely to use her invention, at least at first. "A skilled craftsman might expect to earn up to two hundred pounds a year. More, if he has apprentices or sons to assist him and make the work go faster."

Miss Catherine nodded decisively. "Then they will very easily be able to afford six shillings as a flat fee. My brother Bingley is not the only factory owner in the North, perhaps we could farm out the manufacturing, and split the profit."

Sir Jasper could very easily make inquiries on that front, or pass the project off to his younger brothers to keep them busy. "A worthwhile prospect, but for that, you'd do better to look at Liverpool or Newcastle; those are the great metalworks ports."

Mr. Smith made a note, then rose to his feet. "I will submit the paperwork this afternoon, and keep you advised."

They took their cue and Sir Jasper extended a hand. "Thank you for your time, I look forward to hearing from you."

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The theatre was an experience, with Mr. Bennet whispering quietly to his wife, and Mrs. Bennet making an effort to keep her laughter quiet enough not to disturb the performance. Miss Mary seemed as though she would prefer one of Shakespeare's Histories to the bawdier Comedy [3] , but appeared to enjoy herself. Miss Catherine was all delight, and her pleasure quite infectious.

Sir Jasper hoped that she found equal enjoyment in tomorrow's lectures.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

Having an official patent in her name still felt surreal to Kitty.

What made her so special, above other educated women with inventions of their own? The answer, of course, was a (future) husband with a title and the (apparently shockingly rare) belief that she deserved credit for her work. Mrs. Longbottom had entirely too many stories of women whose relations claimed influence or contribution toward the invention, whether or not it was actually true.

Not wanting to tempt Fate, she remained quiet over breakfast. There would be time to boast later, when the patent was filed, approved and official. Besides, this was still Mary's trip.

Uncle Gardiner had already departed for his warehouses, and Aunt Gardiner had sent the children out for a morning walk with their Nursery Maid, so the house was comparatively quiet. Papa rustled his newspaper, "Apparently you are for a series of lectures today, Kitty. Do you know where?"

Catherine swallowed her porridge before answering. "It is being hosted by Eton, mostly for their older students who are due to graduate for Cambridge or Oxford, to make sure they don't forget everything in their excitement. Ladies are allowed to watch from the viewing gallery, but Mrs. Longbottom will be with me."

Set about an hour's travel outside of London proper, Eton was strictly an all-male institution, but they were a Public school, and with the rising number of town-living students ( Oppidans , Papa had called them once) versus boarders, disputes over interactions with the fairer sex had arisen. Apparently, women being invited to attend a select few lectures, held after classes, was the compromise. Perhaps one day there

would be a university for women [4] , but until then, or the opportunity to travel to one of the six existing Universities, all located at least a day's travel away, Kitty would take what she could get.

Papa had been a Cambridge graduate, but as the only man currently at the table, had no-one to launch into a bout of alumni mud-slinging with. "I suppose it will do the lads good to realise that women are not a foreign species before they are launched into Society."

Mama laughed quietly, and gave him an arch look over her tall chocolate cup. Papa's lips quirked, "Yes, my dear, I well remember my own shyness as a new graduate."

Oddly enough, Kitty could easily envision that, as she exchanged curious glances with Mary. Papa was very much a recluse, and it was easy to imagine Mama, newly introduced to Society, lively and engaging and a potential social shield. Perhaps that had been the initial attraction for them, twenty years and more ago.

Mama did not comment on Papa's mannerisms, then or now. Instead, she tilted her head in consideration. "I promised Mary that she might have the morning to herself, before we return to the Modiste this afternoon, and you have made great efforts in socialising. Would you like a tour of the library? I am not one for lectures, but I can very well listen to you talk about books for an hour or so."

Mary practically wilted in relief; of all the Bennet sisters, she had most inherited Papa's dislike of excessive society. "I have letters to write, I will be quite content by myself, and you need have no fear of my feeling neglected."

Papa nodded, "In that case, I would be glad to tour the library with you, my dear, and you shall see that my book collection is not so very large, after all."

That was an old argument; Mama was firmly of the opinion that Papa and Lizzy

could purchase more books only when they had the shelves to keep them, and that the sitting room was not to become a second book-room in the process. Catherine was quite sure that Lizzy's current plan involved improving the rather sparse Bingley library to her standards, and getting around Mama's restrictions that way. Kitty thought that her second-eldest sister would do better to find a husband with a library that would take her a lifetime to read through, instead, but otherwise kept herself out of the clashing opinions.

There were more exciting things to occupy her thoughts, today.

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The journey to Eton was not as long as the overnight journey that Oxford or Cambridge would have been, nor quite as long as the trip from Hertfordshire to London, but neither could it be called short.

Mama and Papa departed for the Library, while Kitty enjoyed walking quietly with Sir Jasper until they reached the auditorium in which the lecture was to be held. Mrs. Longbottom guided Kitty to a side stair that led to a viewing gallery, where the ladies were to sit separately.

Kitty would have preferred a seat where she could have a clearer view of the writing on the chalkboard, but she could always ask Sir Jasper later. A young lady behind her, wearing spectacles, appeared to be of similar opinions. "I would prefer being able to see what the lecturer is talking about."

Catherine turned in her seat. "I cannot make out the words, either, but I am sure I can sketch the concepts, if that would help."

Today's lecture was on transportation. The professor started by holding forth extensively on current modes of travel - primarily horse, boat, and carriage - but also

delved into new developments to make the traversing of waterways more effective, and the progress some French innovators had made with the Hot Air Balloon. Next, came a long lecture on the potential power of not merely hot air, but steam.

There was a good bit of talk about natural sciences that Kitty lacked the education to understand, but she thought she grasped the concept. Some of the Eton boys looked to be falling asleep in their chairs, thankfully oblivious to the glares aimed at them by young ladies far more aware of the privilege such a lecture afforded. Kitty kept her voice low. "If I understand correctly, steam is intended to be a stronger version of hot air. Like the difference between... oh, a bird soaring on a warm updraft, and a boiling kettle."

Her new friend nodded in understanding, much more familiar with birds and kettles than the professor's talk of heat affecting the mass and acceleration of air. "Oh, so if there is enough heat and steam, it will be strong enough to move these pistons he speaks of, like a running stream on a waterwheel turning the millstone!"

One eye on the professor, Catherine pulled out her sketchbook, the description of a waterwheel making the pieces click into place in her mind, like the final piece of a puzzle. Pistons moved mostly up and down, but they could power a wheel, which then powered this theoretical 'engine'... the cost of fuel to run such a device for more than a few minutes would be exponential, of course, but that was the point of innovation, to improve what was already known.

Kitty still far preferred sleighs and carriages, for one could hardly feed carrots to an engine, but in terms of transport... had she not been lamenting the distance that made the Universities of England impractical? The journey to Oxford could be made in as little as seven hours, with good roads and changing horses rather than resting them, but how swift might the journey become with a steam engine? What effect would it have on the moving of trade goods, or army supplies?

Sitting in the halls of educational institutions that would normally be forbidden to her, Catherine's imagination exploded with possibilities.

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They walked the short distance into town, finding a tea-shop that also served a more substantial lunch menu during certain hours. Mama and Papa met them there. Papa seemed more relaxed than he had been during the entire trip, after the visit to his natural environment. Mama was not his equal enthusiast when it came to books, but she was smiling, as if Papa's delight inspired her own.

Conversation about the lecture carried them through lunch and several pots of tea. "Do you think these steam engines will replace carriages?"

Sir Jasper shook his head. "Not for everyday travel, or at least, not without many additional improvements. It will be too expensive for the average person, at least for the first few decades."

Kitty nodded, "Take the whistling of a tea-kettle, and magnify it as many times as would be needed to move several wagon-lengths of iron. The smoke and noise alone makes a carriage the more attractive option, until they work out how to keep it from affecting the passengers."

Henry winced at the idea, then laughed. "Good to know that we won't be going out of business in our lifetime, then."

Michael rolled his eyes at his younger sibling. "These new ideas are still years away from a working model, but speed is their main selling point, while a sleigh is predominantly for leisure. A racing curricule, on the other hand..."

"...Is a young man's toy that has sent far too many to meet their maker ahead of

schedule.” The speaker was the bespeckled young lady who had sat behind Kitty at the lecture, and was now trying to introduce caution to Michael’s enthusiasm. “I doubt that making it mechanical will decrease those odds by any significant margin.”

Catherine smiled, and used her foot to nudge an empty chair the young lady’s way. “Assuming the lecture counts as a prior acquaintance, I am Miss Catherine Bennet. Perhaps protective wear might also be invented?”

The young lady smiled. “Miss Amelia Harding. I have yet to hear a satisfactory answer to why, if we can invent new modes of travel, we cannot also invent travelling safely .”

Michael huffed. “A ship in the harbour is safe, but that is not what ships are built for. Every action carries some kind of inherent risk.”

Mrs. Longbottom interrupted, performing the rest of the introductions before Miss Harding could mount a rebuttal, most likely along the lines that ships were not meant to decorate the ocean floor in pieces, either. “We must be leaving soon if we wish to make it home before too late, but I hope you will call on us. I like a young lady willing to think and stand up for herself.”

Miss Harding smiled and curtsied. “I certainly shall, and I hope that at least you and Miss Catherine will return the visit. I am no bluestocking, but I am sure there is a balance somewhere between the lady academics, and those who would like to know more than a Ladies’ Seminary teaches.”

Kitty would have liked to attend a Seminary at all, but her own path of self- study had brought her this far, and Miss Harding seemed like a good friend to have. Sir Jasper went to settle their account, and Catherine smiled. “That sounds like a wonderful plan.”



*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

Sir Jasper wondered if his brother recognised the trap their mother was setting.

Michael liked nothing more than to goad some unsuspecting fellow into a debate, and Miss Harding certainly seemed the type to refuse to let a challenge go unanswered. Mama had seized the opportunity, and invited Miss Harding " and any of her similarly-inclined friends who wished to come " to tea, before Miss Mary Bennet and her father returned to Hertfordshire. If all went well today, Mama's next step would be to make it a regular gathering, and find a way to include her sons.

Now that he was safely engaged, Sir Jasper found the antics of Matchmaking Mamas far more tolerable. The real question was whether or not Michael, John and Henry would catch onto the scheme before it was too late. Really, it was their own fault for joking about wanting an intelligent wife in front of their mother and giving her ideas.

Regrettably, Sir Jasper couldn't spend all his time in London courting his wife-to-be. There were meetings with the men who handled business matters and investments for him, and with his solicitor to have the marriage settlement drawn up. He had to visit his Club, to maintain the connections of his rank.

Sir Jasper was grateful for the inheritance that allowed him to follow his dreams of horse-breeding, and assured his family's comfort if carriages ever became a thing of the past, but he was less enthusiastic about many of the people who inhabited the same sphere. Peers looked down on him for being less than the previous holders of the title. Other newly made Knights and Baronets were often too busy competing with each other and trying to leave their roots behind to be much in the way of company.

There was much to be said for the life of a country gentlemen, and the lack of having to perform for the Ton comprised a great deal of it.

Arranging the settlement was his longest appointment, as he wished to have it signed and filed while Mr. Bennet was still in town. Part of the reason it took so long was that his Solicitor had little experience with what Sir Jasper wanted.

Most marriage settlements were set up to ensure a bride's well-being in case of being widowed young, or to safeguard an inheritance or dowry from a wasteful husband. The idea of a husband insisting that the profits of his wife's (intellectual) property remaining hers to distribute as she chose was apparently as foreign a concept as some of the more bizarre wildlife sketches being brought back from New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land [5] .

Finally, however, the solicitor had thrown up his hands and agreed, writing in vague terms that " what funds and goods she brings to the marriage are to remain the property of Catherine Prudence Bennet and her heirs and beneficiaries ".

Sir Jasper's aunt, widow of the previous Baronet, had been far from penniless upon the death of her husband three years ago, but with no children left to care for her and the estate passing to Sir Jasper, she lived in circumstances much reduced from the luxury of her younger days. She had her jointure, and a considerable stipend, to maintain her, but even if Tragedy struck Sir Jasper and all his brothers, he wanted to be sure that Kitty was taken care of.

There was nothing he could do to change the laws and social customs that restricted a woman's independence. That would require Parliament, and cases brought before the courts to create precedent. Such a problem certainly would not be solved in Sir Jasper's lifetime, if ever, but every change started somewhere, and perhaps Catherine's settlement would be the first of many to come.

Mr. and Miss Bennet were due to depart after lunch, so unless Sir Jasper wanted the papers sent to and from Meryton, he had better return home in time for Mr. Bennet to sign them.

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He returned to the townhouse to find Mama and Mrs. Bennet holding court in the parlour, and Sir Jasper's brothers bravely hiding in his study with Mr. Bennet. Fortunately, Sir Jasper's future father-in-law seemed it amusing more than irritating.

Leaving the settlement for Mr. Bennet to look over, Sir Jasper returned to the parlour. "May I join you?"

He didn't think that he would ever tire of seeing Catherine's face light up with a smile every time she saw him. She shifted on the love-seat to make room for him. "Of course! We were discussing ways that the steam engine might be made commercially viable. Miss Harding and Miss Dupain were just telling us about the paddle-steamer boats they had seen."

Miss Dupain rose and curtsied, speaking with the barest trace of a French accent. Lord knew that England had seen enough refugees of the Great Terror, over the years. "It is not a new concept, there are accounts of the Romans using oxen to power a paddle [6] , but the manpower required to keep the paddle turning is no less than other methods. But in conjunction with a steam engine..."

She trailed off with a broad, delighted smile, mirrored on the faces of the other young ladies. The smiles faded as the hall clock and the nearby church bells rang the hour, signalling the end to morning call hours. Mama rose to her feet. "Ladies, I hope we shall see you at the same time next week."

Miss Harding lingered a little, pressing a card into Kitty's hand. "Do think about it?"

Catherine nodded, and Miss Harding hastened after the other young ladies. Sir Jasper offered his arm, following their mothers and Miss Mary out of the parlour. "What was that about? The card she gave you, I mean."

She smiled, leaning into him slightly, "Miss Harding has a cousin who recently opened a manufacturing mill. She wondered if I would consider letting him produce my hoist."

It was a good idea on both sides. Newcomers to any industry struggled to establish themselves enough to expand, and established businesses would charge a higher cost. "If you decide to do business with him, may I suggest a trial of perhaps a year? If you find the arrangement to your satisfaction, you can renew and re-negotiate terms if either of you wish. If not, you will not be trapped."

Catherine nodded, "That is an excellent idea, thank you. I shall send Amelia a note this evening."

A h, of course; Miss Harding would have to arrange an introduction to her cousin before Catherine could speak to him. Men had rather more flexibility when discussing business together, though introductions were still considered polite. Sir Jasper changed the subject. "We should see if your father has finished reviewing the settlement. I would welcome your input, but as you are not of age, your father was required to see it first."

She did not object, and they entered the study together, while their Mamas went to see what was being done about lunch. Michael looked up in relief. "Oh, does that mean that your Bluestocking Chapter has departed?"

Sir Jasper glared at him, but Catherine injected before he could say anything. "I would hardly call us Bluestockings. None of us wish to follow Mrs. Anning [7] in becoming Scientists ourselves, nor do I think we will dedicate our lives to

scholarship, but the pursuit of knowledge is no waste, and until it is safe to travel the Continent, or until there is a University for women, we must make our own opportunities."

Mr. Bennet looked at his daughter with a new kind of respect, and tapped the document he had been reading, "I must say, Sir Jasper, that my only objection is that by marrying Kitty, you will be removing my opportunity to come to know the remarkable young woman she is becoming."

Kitty laughed. "I am hardly moving to the Colonies, Papa. You will simply have to leave your study more often to visit me."

Mr. Bennet signed the settlement and stood from the desk, walking around it to embrace his daughter and kiss her on the forehead. "You have chosen a very good man. I look forward to seeing what you will do together."

Miss Bennet shifted slightly, reminding them of her presence. It was not that Sir Jasper meant to ignore his future sister, but she possessed a remarkable talent of blending into the background until she made herself known. "I admit that my own education has been... undirected, but today's gathering was very enlightening. I hope you will continue writing to me, Kitty, to tell me of your future discussions."

Catherine looked surprised at her sister's interest, but also pleased. "Of course I shall. You must let me know you have any suggestions for topics of discussion, too."

They were interrupted by a call to luncheon, and Mrs. Bennet admonishing her husband to ensure his valet had packed his trunks.

That sent all of them upstairs to wash, and then back down to seat themselves at the large table.

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As the first course was being laid out, Mrs. Bennet turned her attention to Catherine, “Have you thought of a date for when you will marry?”

Catherine shook her head, glancing briefly at her sister. “No, other than that it should be after Mary’s wedding. She deserves to have her day be about her, and we have not even read the banns yet.”

Miss Mary smiled into her soup, and made no rebuttal. Perhaps she would have been happy to share a wedding day, but the Banns required at least three readings. The first reading should happen this Sunday, as long as nothing had delayed the post to Sir Jasper’s home Parish. A common license could be purchased for a few pounds, but still required a delay of seven days. A special license was rarely granted outside the peerage, and even then, one required family connections or a hefty donation to the church coffers [8] , as well as explaining why the couple couldn’t wait for a Common license.

Sir Jasper had been warned about Mrs. Bennet’s tendency to let grand ideas get away from her, and the best ways to nip such ideas in the bud. “We could apply for a license, but the church is rather less co-operative if you cannot supply a reason for the haste. Far better to wait, and have the chance to plan a wedding breakfast worthy of Catherine, rather than a rushed affair.”

His mother smiled from where she sat, and Sir Jasper fancied that she looked approving. In truth, he would have happily married Catherine whenever she wished, but she had been adamant about not upstaging her sister, and there was no need for any particular haste.

Besides, for the first time, he was enjoying the family’s London visit, and cutting it short would be a dreadful shame.

At Longbourn, Catherine had few friends who were not someone else's friend first.

Maria Lucas was Lydia's friend above all, and Miss King was so rarely in company that she could not really be called friend to anyone, though she and Mary sometimes exchanged letters. Charlotte was Lizzy's friend and confidant, though she was a pleasant enough acquaintance, and now she was married to Mr. Collins and living in Kent. Miss Bond and the Miss Longs were much as Maria; Lydia's friends who accepted Catherine's presence as a default.

Amelia Harding and her cousin-by-marriage Miss Dupain, and their friends Miss Flemming and Miss Sharpe were the first friends Kitty had made for herself, and she hoped that they continued as such.

Amelia was rather like Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst in her background, except that her brother had already purchased an estate, after selling off his Steel and Iron mills to his assortment of cousins, one of whom she had promoted to Kitty for his plans to begin producing mechanical parts. Mr. Smith, who had acted as her Agent in negotiating the deal, had sent off the signed contract only yesterday. She shared Kitty's interest in engineering and mechanical drawing, but was determined to study more before venturing into any grand ideas of her own.

Miss Penelope Flemming had her roots firmly in Trade, and the family was likely to stay there for another generation or two, though her parents had hopes of marrying their daughters to Gentlemen. Her interest lay in architecture and archeology, and plans were being made for a tour of St. Alphage Garden, and the ruins of the medieval church there, to see if they could re-create what the old church once looked like. She had yet to decide whether her interest was to be a hobby or a serious pursuit,

though Kitty suspected her indecision stemmed as much from lack of opportunity as from genuine uncertainty.

Miss Henrietta Sharpe was another gentleman's daughter, but rather less focused than the rest of their little circle. She drew tolerably well, played to an acceptable standard, had a rudimentary knowledge of several sciences, and was determined to learn as many subjects as she could, by whatever means became available to her. In some ways, she reminded Kitty of her sister Elizabeth; reading whatever took her fancy, mastering the pianoforte and other arts to the degree deemed necessary, but lacking the desire or dedication to be considered truly proficient. Or Truly Accomplished,

according to Mr. Darcy's high standards as held forth one evening at Netherfield. What Henretta sought from the meetings, even she had yet to determine, but Catherine liked to think that she rounded them out well.

Miss Chloe Dupain's grandfather had been the youngest son of a Duke, whose family had already given two spares to the Church and the Army, and thus allowed him to seek his future on foreign shores. He'd met and married a French heiress when they both studied at the University of Bologna [9] in Italy, happily taken her name [10] , and settled down with her in France, a scant few years before what France called the Glorious Revolution and the rest of the world knew as The Great Terror.

Miss Dupain's grandparents had been Country aristocrats, less oppressive of their local peasantry than many others, and being located near the coast, had managed to flee with their young children, and the bulk of their possessions and fortune before the mob arrived. That fortune had allowed the Dupain's to purchase an estate worth a few thousand per annum, and some carefully-chosen investments, and a generation later, they were thriving. They did not forget their roots, however, and her family history had left Chloe with a number of opinions that her Ducal cousins might prefer she lacked.



Chief among them was the determination to found a school for girls that taught more than just the social graces, that education and opportunity for the lower classes was vital to the stability of the state, and that the original Bluestockings had been fools for eschewing politics.

The latter opinion had come out as a result of one of Michael's instigating remarks about their Bluestocking Chapter. Chloe had taken offence to the comparison, and that had led to a rousing debate that Sir Jasper's nearest brother was clearly aware he was losing, but just as clearly unsure how he had come to that point. John, the third Longbottom brother, had eschewed hiding in the study in favour of watching Chloe with stars in his eyes.

Mama had noticed, and the matchmaker's gleam in her eye was likely the only reason the debate had been allowed to get so heated. Or go on so long. Mrs. Longbottom looked both amused and extremely pleased with herself.

Chloe jabbed a finger in Michael's direction. "Furthermore, it is the duty, no, the obligation of the privileged to support the lower classes in their advancement! Those with no education and no opportunity will listen to anyone charismatic and convincing enough to tell them who to blame for their misery. Did England's own Civil War not start because a King refused to listen to the complaints of his nobles?"

Clearly, oration had formed a significant part of Chloe's education. Michael took advantage of the opportunity for rebuttal. "That's something of an over-simplification, you must admit. Besides, if everyone is educated, who will do the work that requires little education? Street-sweepers and lamp lighters will always be needed, as will shepherds and farm labourers. What will become of those professions?"

Kitty saw the opportunity to interject... and bring the topic back to the original planned subject, which had been the modernising of factories. "The heights of education are not for everyone, and there will always be those who prefer the country

to the city, or are willing do to the least they may to earn their keep. When my brother Bingley modernised his factories last year, there were many who wished to keep to the old looms, and still do so, despite the proven benefits of machine looms."

A quick glance at Amelia had her jumping in. "With so many factories modernising, education of the working class is a necessity, as grunt work is replaced by jobs fixing and maintaining the machines. But with steam- power gaining momentum, there will always be someone needed to shovel coal or stoke a boiler."

The debate progressed from there, with arguments for and against each side. The devaluation of skilled trade, and the limitations of machinery. Issues of supply and demand, as even the new machines could only produce as long as there was raw materials available, which led to a disagreement over the difficulty of imports during wartime, and the supposition that Napoleon would be defeated eventually.

Finally, Mama and Mrs. Longbottom called a halt for lunch, which the other young ladies had been invited to join. As a lovely game pie was served, Sir Jasper caught Chloe's eye. "We ended up talking around the point, but why do you think the Bluestockings were foolish for disdaining politics?"

Chloe gestured with her fork, "I see their reasoning; being apolitical allowed them greater acceptance within society, but it was an utter waste of their influence [11] ."

She paused to take a bite of her food, and Catherine thought over what she knew of the Bluestocking Society. Great-Grandmother Bennet had been a satellite member, accounting for at least half of Papa's impressive library. Miss Bingley had indirectly compared Lizzy to a bluestocking, but she had not meant it as a compliment. "They were among the wealthy and powerful, and with their contacts on both sides of Parliament... well, educational reforms would not have been easy , but certainly achievable."

Amelia nodded emphatically. “Instead, their lack of engagement led to their dispersement, when Parliament changed to those less accepting of opinionated women, and the Bluestocking Society lacked the numbers or the cultivated influence to counter their new lack of popularity.”

Henrietta also counted a Bluestocking among her ancestry, if Kitty recalled correctly. “That is not to say that they necessarily could have saved the Society, but if they’d had more support outside of their own families, it might have been a longer battle.”

Mama and Mrs. Longbottom exchanged smiles as Penelope agreed firmly. “Well, we shall have to agree that whatever we make of our own education, we shall not hoard it to ourselves.”

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The following morning, Catherine received a letter from Lydia.

How strange, to read the familiar chatter, and realise how much she had grown away from the follower she had once been.

This letter was only the second that she had received from the youngest Bennet sister, other than a short note around the time they were planning the London trip, which had contained an apology for past behaviour and a promise to do better, which had nearly prompted Kitty to write to Jane for reassurance that Lydia had not been stolen away by some Faerie Queen and replaced with an entirely different person. Mary had received a similar letter, and had looked prepared to ask Mr. McKnight whether the Anglican church practiced Exorcisms.

Thankfully, Mama had received a note from Jane around the same time, explaining it as Lydia having encountered an unpleasant individual, resulting in a changed perspective. Doubtless there was far more that Jane and Lydia were not saying, but

Kitty was willing to be cautiously optimistic.

‘ My dear Kitty,

What an adventure I have had! My eyes have been opened in ways I never could have imagined in our little corner of Hertfordshire, and were it not for attending Mary’s wedding, I should be contriving of ways to remain here forever!

Our sisters were right; accompanying Jane on her wedding tour was good for me, and it has turned my head entirely away from Officers. Much has happened that I am cannot adequately describe in a letter, and I can hardly wait to tell you about it in person.

When you return from your London visit, might you be able to assist me in improving my drawing skills? Jane is better at still-life and landscape sketches, and you have the most experience of all of us.

If you do not wish to, or lack the time, I will request that Papa find a tutor, instead.

Your affectionate sister, Lydia B.

The Lydia of a few months ago would never have thought to ask whether or not Kitty wanted to help her with something, or considered the imposition on Catherine’s time. The Old Lydia might not have even viewed her sister’s time and effort as having any value at all. Perhaps this seeming transformation was genuine.

In any case, Catherine could certainly find time to impart some advice, before she started planning her own wedding.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

This year would be the first time in Sir Jasper's memory that he did not anticipate leaving London.

Even the few balls they had attended had been surprisingly painless, with Kitty on his arm to deter any husband hunters. Sir Jasper still did his duty to the other ladies present, and Miss Harding or Miss Dupain were happy to keep her company for those rests when he was occupied. He was insistent, however, on spending at least one of Catherine's rest-sets discussing the lectures they had attended, and ideas for future inventions.

Sir Jasper would firmly deny being struck speechless when Catherine insisted that she wished for her next patent to bear her married name, since the re-designed convertible carriage was a joint project between them. His brothers were already finding far too much entertainment at his expense as it was.

Kitty had only smiled at his astonishment, and squeezed his hand under the table, as Sir Jasper wondered if it were possible to spontaneously combust from adoration. Mr. Smith had already begun the paperwork, and merely awaited the date upon which to submit it.

It had been a joy, watching Catherine blossom into her full potential. The friendships she formed, unashamed of the fierce intelligence she was only beginning to explore. How she stepped out of the shadow of her absent sisters, flourishing as soon as she was given the space and freedom to do so.

What would she become, in their years together?

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Mrs. Bennet and Catherine would be returning to Longbourn tomorrow, with the Gardiners, who were spending a few days in Hertfordshire in advance of the wedding. Mr. and Mrs. Bingley, and the youngest Miss Bennet, were due to return the day after, which had allowed Mama to defer the invitation to stay at Longbourn in advance of their own journey North.

With four out of five daughters home, and the Gardiners and their children, and all the wedding preparations, Longbourn would be hard-pressed to host an additional five guests, but the Bingleys might appreciate the company.

With Catherine's looming departure, her friends had descended during calling hours, to ensure that each had the others' direction for letters, and to make plans for the next Season.

"Of course we shall all visit for your wedding, as soon as you know when it is to be!" Miss Flemming was bouncing in her seat with excitement. "I know many do not travel for weddings [12] , but we can well afford it, and I could not bear to wait a full year to see you again."

Miss Dupain nodded, "Oh, and you must all be sure to write tell me if there are any estates in the area come free."

Catherine looked at her, "You have finally persuaded your parents that your heart is set on a school?"

Miss Dupain beamed, "As long as I prove myself able to manage it, yes. I have kept my promise of a Season, so now they are willing to let me explore other options. London rents are exorbitant, and the Town has far too many distractions, but a small estate in the country could be converted easily enough."

Mrs. Bennet usually contented herself with watching and listening, knowing herself to be outclassed in intellectual debates, but she spoke up now. "My eldest, Mrs. Jane Bingley, has hinted that while she and her husband found Netherfield very pleasing, it is inconvenient to Mr. Bingley's interests in the north of the Kingdom. If they decide not to renew the lease, we can certainly inform you."

Bingley had been rather more explicit in his letters, expressing a desire to settle somewhere between London and Scarborough, but he had no desire to break the lease early, and was happy to stay at Netherfield while he organised the purchase of a new estate. Sir Jasper said nothing of that, however. Let the Bingleys break the news that they would be more than a few miles away from the Bennets in the future. "On that note, have you any thoughts on where you would like to go for your wedding tour, my dear?"

Kitty eyed him speculatively, even as she laughed. "I have lived in Hertfordshire all my life, Sir Jasper. I would not know where to begin, but I suspect you have a suggestion?"

Sir Jasper was happy to be an open book to his future wife. "Knowing how much you adore my horses, I thought you might like to see the lands they came from, but a tour of Norway does present some issues, as it would be better to go in summer, which would mean either marrying quickly to go this year, or waiting until next spring."

She considered. "Let us look into whether this year is feasible, before we decide whether to delay."

He kissed her hand, and delighted in her blush. "Then if you ladies will excuse me, my writing desk demands my attention."

Sir Jasper paused a moment at the end of the hallway, and smiled at the excited squeals that he could hear from the parlour. Kitty was extremely fond of his horses,

but Sir Jasper also wished to see what she made of the Scandinavian methods of transport and coping with a land that spent much of the year covered in snow and ice. Necessity was the main driver of invention, which made the Nordic peoples very innovative indeed, and he looked forward to seeing what Catherine would think of the things they came up with.

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The Bingleys and Miss Lydia arrived the following day, having accepted Sir Jasper's invitation to lunch as an opportunity to rest the horses before the final stretch of the journey to Hertfordshire.

Bingley was as convivial and good natured as ever, and Mrs. Bingley's smiles had increased both in frequency and luminousness since her marriage. Miss Lydia, as tall as her sister despite the age difference between them, seemed a little distracted, but in the same way that Catherine was when she was working through an idea that would become an invention. Her manners had also improved, likely through practice and thoughtfulness.

Perhaps Michael could take a hint from her, as he took one look at Miss Lydia and groaned, "Not another invasion of young ladies, I hope?"

Miss Lydia smiled, a little too brightly to be sincere, and Sir Jasper tried not to think of two duelling opponents sizing each other up. "Oh, yes, my sister mentioned those. She wasn't sure if you spoke out of ego, a desire to provoke debate, or if you simply enjoyed picking fights you couldn't win."

Michael opened and closed his mouth, then inclined his head in respect, quitting the field before someone got hurt. "Miss Harding is something of a delight when she is disagreeing with me. I had thought I was being subtle while I determined her own feelings."



Dear god, Sir Jasper hoped that Darcy's method of dealing with young ladies wasn't catching . At least Darcy had the excuse of trying to deter husband hunters.

He exchanged looks with Bingley, who reached around his wife to clap Michael on the shoulder. "Darcy can get away with that, because he has every young lady in London seeing interest where none exists. You should be more concerned about convincing the young lady you don't despise her very existence."

Apparently, Michael hadn't considered that, because his face fell. Mama hummed as a game pie was served, along with devilled eggs. In light of the welcome dinner that surely awaited them at Netherfield, Sir Jasper had kept the menu simple. "I do not believe that Miss Harding took offence, she has too much confidence in herself for that, but you should avoid the tactic with other young ladies."

Bingley changed the subject before Michael could wilt too much. "Will you be returning to Scarborough soon? Netherfield is rather large for a party of just two."

Sir Jasper smiled. "It depends on when Catherine wishes to marry. We planned to stop in Hertfordshire on our way, but depending on her answer, I may return to Scarborough briefly before we wed. Either way, we would be grateful for the hospitality."

Bingley looked at his wife, who was carefully sampling the items on her plate. Coupled with Mama's knowing gleam, Sir Jasper had his suspicions as to the cause of her caution, but would wait for them to announce the happy news. "What do you think, my dear? Can we host guests on short notice?"

Mrs. Bingley smiled warmly, apparently deeming the pie safe. "Estate houses can always afford a guest or two [13] , Charles. How many were you thinking?"

The expectation of playing host to strangers of suitable prestige travelling through the

area had been a surprise to Sir Jasper, when he took up his title. He was still convinced that whichever ancestor built Snowsdale had made it inconvenient to get to on purpose. Bingley tried to look as if he had known that. "Sir Jasper's family, if possible. I suppose we should expect to host more, in the event of a second wedding to come."

Michael had recovered his wit in the meantime. "Miss Harding and the rest of them have already declared that they would visit for the occasion, though I urge caution. Miss Dupain is seeking a site for her school."

Bingley laughed. "Netherfield would be a good choice, then, once the lease expires. The owners are looking to sell, but they have had trouble finding buyers. Not quite enough woodland for more than small shooting parties, not enough pasture or fields to really make a profit. Not without more work and new infrastructure than most buyers are willing to put in after a large expenditure."

Jane nodded, raising an egg to her mouth, then hastily returning it to her plate as she paled, and took a steadying breath. "If she intends a school, I would suggest selling the adjacent fields to the other estates in the area, keeping only the gardens and home farm. In the long run, a school is good for the neighbouring towns and villages, and agricultural lands are more affordable than an entire estate for the local Gentlemen."

It was a good suggestion; reducing land taxes and providing Miss Dupain with some savings until the fees from students made the school self-sustainable. "You intend to move North, then?"

Bingley had been slipping some candied ginger to his wife, as he answered the question. "Yes, I have begun the process to purchase Wakefield Hall, in Doncaster. It is a good distance from London and Scarborough, and far better suited for us. If the owner is willing to forgo penalties in order to sell, I would not object to breaking the lease early."

At least Catherine's friends would not be bored while they were away on their own Wedding Tour. "Then you will have to tell Catherine that, and she can inform her friends. Now tell me, Miss Lydia, how did you enjoy Scotland?"

Miss Lydia set down her fork as the pie was removed and replaced by a spiced cake, a recipe that Sir Jasper had brought back from his first visit to the far north. "I can see why so many poets were inspired by the landscape, but the Theatre was quite my favourite thing. Mr. Douglass was ever so kind in giving us a tour, but I am sure the costumes can be improved by..."

She launched into a lengthy explanation that dwelled on the subtleties of meaning in fashion, liberally peppered with references to a 'Mr. Douglass', who was apparently the finest and most forward-thinking man in the world. After weeks of dealing with young ladies of a more intellectual bend, none of his brothers seemed to quite know how to respond to this decidedly feminine subject.

Sir Jasper leaned in toward Bingley speaking in an undertone. "Who is this famous Mr. Douglass?"

Bingley gave his sister a fond look, "The eldest son of Baron Rowanfield, in his last year of university. Too young to be considering marriage just yet, as is Lydia, but they have a mutual interest in the theatre. My dear Jane has given permission for letters to be exchanged through her, so we shall be well aware of any developments."

Baron Rowanfield had gone to school with Sir Jasper's father and Baronet Uncle, though Sir Jasper had never met him in person. He was said to be a good man, though suffering the same problems as many border landholders. The wrong side of the border to be considered truly English, especially by those who had long memories of the Jacobite rebellion half a century ago, yet deemed too English by the Highland Clans.

Well, it was not yet Sir Jasper's place to concern himself. Not until Miss Lydia became his sister by marriage.

Regardless, colour theory and the quirks of tailoring carried the rest of the meal, until a footman appeared awkwardly in the doorway. "Begging your pardon, Mr. Bingley, but if we're to make Netherfield before nightfall..."

Bingley and Sir Jasper both glanced at the clock, noting the time. Bingley stood, helping Mrs. Bingley to her feet. "Oh, yes, quite right! At any rate, you and your family will be most welcome to join us at Netherfield at your leisure."

Miss Lydia ended her explanation of the many meanings of the colour red, for which Mother had been a patient audience, and joined her sister and brother-in-law with a polite curtsy. Sir Jasper bowed politely in farewell. "We will follow you there tomorrow morning, then."

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

Papa had welcomed Mama and Catherine back with an unusual amount of sentiment, taking several minutes to themselves in Papa's book room while the Gardiners settled in. At loose ends until dinner, Catherine walked to Longbourn village with Mary, who wished to confirm that no details of the church decorations or wedding breakfast would be changed in the three days before the event.

London had been lovely, but it was nice to be back in the country air of Hertfordshire, too. "Did something happen in our absence?"

Mary smiled softly. "Our parents have been partners in marriage for more than twenty years, for good or ill. Unlike some couples, they are rarely out of each others company, and our Father is discovering that Mama is not as silly as he thought her. I believe he found himself lonely in her absences."

Catherine and Sir Jasper had only been parted for a day, and she already missed the steady presence she had become accustomed to in London. "I suppose it is a good discovery to make, since they will soon have only two daughters at home, and rather more time to themselves."

Mary laughed, "Given both Lydia and Elizabeth's fondness for long walks outside the house, you mean? But Lydia seems to have improved somewhat, so perhaps she may take on some responsibilities."

Catherine decided not to mention that she and Lydia would have happily been helping with tenant visits before, but their eldest three sisters had already divided that duty between them. With enough servants that the Bennet daughters did not need to help cook, as the Lucas girls did, and Kitty having only a little talent in the stillroom,

was it any wonder that they had gone searching for occupation?

Mr. McKnight joined them, an unknown young man trailing behind him like a duckling, raising Mary's hand briefly to his lips. "Good afternoon my dear, Miss Catherine. May I introduce Mr. John Marshall?"

Catherine might have appreciated a more lengthy introduction, but Mary smiled warmly. "Oh, your new curate. We did not expect you until tomorrow."

Mr. Marshall bowed politely. "I made better time than I expected, but I can very well stay at the inn if there is a need."

Mr. McKnight waved away his concerns. "There will be no need for that, though offering a tour of the parsonage is not yet Mary's duty, so we will let you ladies go about your day whilst I get Mr. Marshall settled in."

They parted ways and continued to the village. Catherine did not think that she would have been suited to the life of a churchman's bride, but if it made Mary happy, she could have no objections. "I had not realised that Mr. McKnight was seeking a curate."

Mary nodded, leading the way into a shop. "Well, someone must tend to the needs of the parish while we are on our wedding tour, even if it will not be nearly as long as Jane's or yours. A curate is a good thing to have, in any case."

If the North Sea wished to follow the example of the Red Sea from the Book of Exodus to shorten the journey, Kitty would not complain. Until then, the distance to their destination would require a longer absence than either of her sisters. But Mary had less of a taste for such jokes than Lydia did, so Catherine kept it to herself. "I suppose there will be room for all three of you. Mr. Collins was offended that Swansea was larger than Hunsford, after all."

Mary covered a smile. "That is because Swansea was built by the first Longbourn Bennets for a younger brother in need of a living, and expanded with a curate's cottage when another younger son needed an occupation. Hunsford, on the other hand, pre-dates Rosings Park. Lady Catherine does not seem the sort to expand a parsonage's land or house, when she can re-arrange the insides and declare it charity."

Catherine laughed, envisioning shelves in closets and no room to hang dresses or outerwear. "I am glad to see you so happy, Mary."

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The following day was much busier. Elizabeth arrived with Maria Lucas, the two of them conveyed by none other than Mr. Darcy and a young lady who could only be his sister. Mr. Darcy had greatly improved from the Netherfield Ball, where he had danced only three times, and spent the rest of the evening disapproving of everyone.

Barely had Elizabeth been unloaded, and her trunks carted inside, when the Bingley carriage arrived. Likely Jane and Mr. Bingley had meant only to deliver Lydia home before continuing on, but for all her occasional silliness, Mama had sharp eyes and could spot a pregnant woman at twenty paces.

Exclaiming with delight, she sent Hill to fetch ginger root tea from the store-room, and to make up a pot of the same. Exchanging rueful glances, the Bingleys sent the carriage with the servants and luggage on to Netherfield. "We have not made any announcements yet, Mama."

Mama nodded, pouring a generous cup for Jane and adding several spoons of honey. "It is best to wait until the child quickens, yes, but you should have honey over sugar to sweeten ginger tea. I am sure you will be quite sick of it by the sixth month, but it does help."

Jane's eyes widened. "The sixth month? It will last that long?"

Papa sat down with them, Mr. Bingley having wanted to talk in his book room briefly. "It varies, I am given to understand. Lizzy and your lost brother had Mrs. Bennet drinking ginger root tea almost the full term."

Kitty cast around for something else to pay attention to, and settled on her younger sister. "What has sparked this new interest in art?"

Lydia had been instructed by the same Art Master that Kitty had requested to learn from, but had found herself in the same boat as Lizzy; not particularly inclined to sit and draw nature when she could experience it for herself. Lydia, astonishingly, blushed. "I wrote to you of the theatre we attended in Scotland, did I not?"

She had, extensively. At one point, she had been in such raptures that Kitty had wondered if she should be writing to Jane with her concerns about Lydia running away to be an actress, even if that apparently meant something rather different in Scotland. "You did, yes."

Lydia bounced in her seat. "Well, Mr. Douglass, who Mr. Bingley introduced us to, he is a patron and theatre enthusiast. They were having rather a hard time with designing costumes, and Mr. Douglass said that if I could come up with something better, he would use them."

Lydia had always had a deft hand with re-making bonnets, and an eye for fashion. Kitty hadn't expected to enjoy mechanical drawings until she met someone who gave her room to grow. Perhaps it was the same here. "So what is it that you need help with?"

The youngest Bennet sister pouted, but not in the way she had before, as a prelude to some demand. "I could not do more than rough sketches, standing still. I should be



better than that, if I wish to be taken seriously."

Catherine nodded. "Well, faces are not so much a requirement, especially if you do not know who will be cast in the roles yet. We should begin with a study of the human form, and how it changes with movement. Wait here a moment."

The gift shops in London's art galleries had a surprising number of instructional texts for young ladies who came in to draw the exhibitions, and produced less than stellar results. One of Catherine's purchases was a book dedicated to drawing the human form, presumably for would-be painters and sculptors. Returning to the drawing room, she handed it to Lydia. "You may borrow this, and once you have read it, we can practice the techniques. What kind of play are you looking to design for?"

Lydia was already opening the book, a brief quirk of her eyebrow the only indication of her surprise at the inscription. Sir Jasper had excellent taste in gifts. "Moralities, for the most part. Scotland is extremely strict on what can be shown for public consumption, even with the sanitised versions of Shakespeare that are shown in London."

Kitty personally preferred the un-sanitised versions in Papa's study; much of the comedy was lost in censorship. Perhaps more outside help would be needed. "Then when you are ready to design, we may bring Mary in. She will be familiar with such plays."

Lydia smiled, "Perhaps Lizzy, too, as she has been stuck with Mr. Collins for over a month."

Ah, there was the sister Catherine remembered. The return of Lydia's sharp tongue was almost a relief.

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The following day was the day before Mary's wedding, and so busy that Kitty almost missed the Longbottom carriage arriving.

Catherine almost danced at the confirmation that they might go to the far north this year. Mama was less enthusiastic at the idea of pulling together another wedding breakfast in only a month, but agreed in the end. After all, no-one else in Meryton was marrying their daughter to a Baronet; how could anyone compete?

The Longbottoms would be staying at Netherfield overnight, and continuing on to Scarborough after Mary's wedding, but would return before Catherine took her turn at the altar. Which was all to the good, because Kitty had no desire to find another husband on short notice, if something happened to delay them!

Sir Jasper squeezed her hand lightly, before raising it to his lips. "This time, we can write to each other openly, without needing intermediaries."

Catherine smiled, missing him already. "I still intend for my next invention to bear my married name, so I shall have to spend my days in a window seat, sketching and dreaming of the moment you return."

He laughed heartily, and released her back to her family. "I shall count the days."

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

The month before his wedding was busy, as the next several months had to be planned out in case their return was delayed, and preparations made for the addition of another person to the household, when he and Kitty returned from their wedding tour.

Mother had chosen a room in the family wing, rather than taking the Mistress's chamber for herself, when Sir Jasper inherited. When asked, she'd said that she didn't want to choose a new room when her sons married, just as she got used to them. At the time, he'd thought Mother was being unreasonably optimistic.

Perhaps she was, because three years had passed before Sir Jasper met the young woman who stirred so much as a passing interest. New brides often re-decorated their marital home within their means after the wedding tour, but that could come later.

Retiring for the evening, Sir Jasper sat down to write a letter to Kitty, and muse over the feasibility of pre-paying for a delivery. The Bennets could very well afford the cost of a letter every few days, but there were those for whom the standard tuppence for a letter, and sixpence for a parcel, were a measurable expense...

His soon-to-be wife was a faithful correspondent, and kept up a steady stream of letters about life at Longbourn, wedding preparations, and how much she missed him.

Amid hinting at anecdotes which were apparently too lively to be entrusted to the Royal Mail, but which Catherine promised to relate in person at the first opportunity, was the story of Miss Lydia having successfully painted a backdrop for a travelling puppet show, and demanded that they put on a performance for the tenant children of Longbourn, as payment.

The transactions of the upper class had always been a source of intrigue to Sir Jasper, raised the son of a businessman, who would have never dreamed of accepting a favour in lieu of payment. The gentry, of course, could not accept being paid for a service, not when that might hint dire things about their own generational wealth, so everything was couched in terms of favours, for themselves, or to earn social credit through generosity to the less fortunate. Even those younger sons who chose the law, accepted gifts from those they represented, rather than drawing a salary. [14]

Miss Lydia had been viewed as rather flighty, prior to her tour of the North of the kingdom. Perhaps doing something for her father's tenants would go some way toward improving her, in their eyes. In any case, with soon-to-be three of her sisters married, Miss Lydia would find herself taking on more responsibilities for the estate, once she and Miss Elizabeth Bennet were the only daughters left at home. At least she was taking the responsibility seriously.

There were also the promised sketches. Apparently, Kitty's least favourite part of the stillroom - apart from the hot work of making soap to begin with, which was mostly done by the maids - was extracting it from the mould and cutting it into bars. While it was easier to cut into bars before it hardened too much, Kitty was sure she would prefer smaller moulds to begin with, and had included a number of sketches about what such a thing might look like.

The initial sketch looked a little like the barrow graves Sir Jasper had seen on his Tour. Ten hollows in two rows of five, in a larger block mould. Sir Jasper also freely admitted to knowing next to nothing of stillroom work. "Mama, may I have your opinion on this?"

His mother had been reading a book next to the fire, but put it down to come over and see what he was talking about. "Oh, that is a good idea. There is not much wastage from soap cutting, but there is always the worry that if it sets too long, cutting will make it shatter, and then it's only fit to give away."

Mrs. Bennet took pride in the fact that her daughters did not help with the housework, but she was also of the belief that every lady should know her way around a stillroom, to avoid being overcharged for things she could very easily have made at home. Kitty (and her sister Mary) could be sensitive to how certain things felt on her skin, so making her own soap was entirely sensible. It was a shame that men were not taught such useful skills, but expected to rely on a mother or wife.

Mama continued talking, used to his lapsing into thought. “Bakers might find similar things useful, as well. Your father used to say that in his bachelor days, he never managed to finish a full loaf before it went stale.”

Sir Jasper made a note to include that in his letter to Catherine. The more uses she could argue, the easier it would be to get the patent accepted.

By the time Michael threatened to punch him if Sir Jasper 'reminded' him about one more aspect of running the estate in Sir Jasper's absence, or mentioned how much he missed Kitty, it was time to return to Hertfordshire. There would be a dinner at Longbourn to welcome them, and a card party hosted by Catherine's Aunt Phillips, and the next day they would be married.

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Mrs. Bennet continued to uphold her reputation of setting a fine table for all comers, and especially for future sons-in-law. Mr. and Mrs. Bingley were there, too, and offered the use of their coach to Netherfield after, so that the luggage could be sent on ahead. Mrs. Bennet had offered Longbourn's guest rooms, but Mother and Mr. Bennet had agreed that five miles of distance between the engaged couple was better than five minutes down a hallway, however well-occupied.

From the way that both of their Mamas had kept their arms firmly linked with their own, to stop him and Kitty running into each other's arms upon the Longbottoms'

arrival, Sir Jasper had to concede that they may have had a point. Two days suddenly felt like forever.

The new Mrs. McKnight joined them just before dinner, pleading the need to visit a farming family, one of the few independent, rather than tenant, farms in the area. One of their sons had been injured in an accident, and while Dr Jones was by no means in despair, Mr. McKnight was staying with the family in case he was needed for Last Rites. “He sends his best wishes, of course, and will see you at Aunt Phillips’s party tomorrow, once matters are... less uncertain.”

Marriage suited Mary, in Sir Jasper's opinion. Her sense of fashion had softened from the rather severe look she had favoured before, and she clearly flourished as the mistress of her own home. She was more confident in herself, too, and settled in a way she hadn’t been before. “Please convey our best wishes for the lad’s recovery.”

The dinner conversation re-directed to discussing what could be done to help the family. That was one of the things Sir Jasper liked about being a baronet; the ability to help the less fortunate under the guise of noblesse oblige . Many tenants were as bad at accepting charity as some landholders were about giving it. From there, Mrs. Bennet mentioned a new project: light linen scarves to cover the nose and mouth of those tenants who did not do well with faces full of pollen, but could not reasonably avoid the spring planting.

Mr. Bingley nodded, “I doubt that I will be much help with sewing, but it reminds me that we should make some tenant visits ourselves, and let them know of some coming changes.”

Mr. Bennet looked up from carving the meat sharply. “Changes? You might do better to spend a season or two learning how Netherfield operates, before you start changing things.”

Mrs. Bennet gave her husband a reproachful stare, likely over his phrasing. “After all, with farming, it will take some time to see the effects.”

Mrs. Bingley smiled gently at her parents. “What my dear Charles means is that the owner of Netherfield has found someone willing to purchase it, and we have found another estate more suited to us.”

Mrs. Bennet looked dismayed at the prospect of the Bingleys leaving so soon, even though it was not the surprise to her that it was to some other at the table. “Do you know who is purchasing?”

Catherine bounced a little in her seat. “My friend, Miss Dupain. I received her letter yesterday, but didn’t want to share the news before Jane and Mr. Bingley had the opportunity.”

Mrs. Bennet relaxed. “Well, that will be all right, then, and it will be good to have more than just Mary’s parish school in the area. Mary, you said that several of your pupils would benefit from further education, I believe?”

Mary nodded, smiling slightly. “Indeed. With Miss Dupain’s ideals of social reform, I hoped to see if she might take scholarship pupils.”

Very likely she would, and if she did not, Sir Jasper could certainly afford to cover the fees for an intelligent student or two.

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The Card Party at the Phillips’ was exactly the kind of quieter, subdued event that the soon-to-be-wedded couple preferred.

Other brides might have wanted a grand dinner, or a Ball to celebrate. Catherine was

an excellent dancer, but not the enthusiast that Miss Lydia was. Mrs. Phillips was all delight on Kitty's behalf, flitting between tables to make sure her guests of honour lacked for nothing.

Being the centre of attention wasn't so bad when he was too busy with his cards to be anxious about it.

Bingley dealt the cards for a hand of Whist. "The pre-wedding parties are more for the community, in any case. Lasting happy memories for when the bride goes to her new home."

Sir Jasper hadn't considered that aspect of marriage. It wouldn't be so bad for a young lady who married in the same community, but Catherine would

be moving to a new home several days distant. Let the neighbours who had known Kitty all of her life see her laughing and happy, before she became Lady Longbottom on the morrow.

Mrs. Bingley's serene countenance made her dreadfully hard to read as an opponent, which was likely the point. Kitty caught his eye. "There is always the next round. Hopefully against less-talented players."

Sir Jasper laughed. He couldn't wait to call himself her husband.

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Sir Jasper had always thought that Catherine Bennet was beautiful, but watching her walk down the length of Longbourn church toward him, radiant in a purple-pink gown that put him in mind of spring flowers, she was breathtaking. Had he not feared giving offence to Mr. McKnight, returned from his own wedding tour in time to marry them, Sir Jasper might have compared her to a pagan goddess, come to earth to



dazzle and enchant mortal men. From the way his brothers were grinning from the family row, he was sure his expression adequately conveyed the sentiment.

Miss Dupain, Miss Harding, Miss Flemming and Miss Sharpe were beaming at him from the row behind the Bennet family, so it must be all right.

Kitty was smiling as he took her hands, her voice both steady and breathless with excitement as they recited their vows and exchanged rings, and that was all that really mattered.

*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

Their ship departed on the evening tide from Southend-on-Sea, so it made sense to stop in at Mr. Smith's London office, especially since his letter of congratulations had mentioned wishing to discuss their ongoing working relationship.

Catherine brought a copy of her next patent to file, as well, and hoped that it was good news.

Mr. Smith greeted them warmly, offering tea as they settled into chairs. That was probably a good sign; he had been all business the first time she had visited, so setting aside extra time for social pleasantries meant that Mr. Smith did not think it a waste of valuable working hours. Kitty decided to appreciate the compliment. "Thank you for seeing us today, Mr. Smith."

He inclined his head, "The pleasure is truly mine. I had hoped to go over your first quarter's profits and discuss how you would like me to proceed on your behalf while you are on your wedding tour. Mr. Harding has expressed great satisfaction with your current partnership, and a willingness to continue on the same terms."

Mr. Smith handed her a statement, and Catherine's eyes felt as though they might fall out of her head at the numbers. "It was truly so successful? Then I am very happy to continue as we are."

She handed the paper to her new husband, and Sir Jasper's eyes also widened. "Well, you shall hardly have to worry about spending money on the tour! That was very well done, my dear."

Catherine drew the new patent out of her reticule. "While we are absent, would you

look over this and see about filing it? I am happy to continue with Mr. Harding for production, unless you believe there is someone better suited. It does not do to have all of one's eggs in a single basket."

Mr. Smith very nearly smiled. "I will investigate and have some options ready for your review when you both return. Did you have any plans for the funds that you wished to implement, other than leaving them to accrue interest?"

Sir Jasper squeezed her hand. It was a matter they had discussed in the carriage. "My sister Mary is opening a Parish school with her new husband. I would like to create scholarship funds for students that she believes have the intelligence, but not the family means, for further education."

Something in Mr. Smith appeared to soften, at that, and Catherine wondered if he had fought his way up to establish himself, in a way that

many gentlemen did not have to. "That sounds a wonderful idea, Lady Longbottom. Had you decided upon the amounts?"

A Ladies' Seminary ran between twenty pounds per annum for a basic education, to around forty for an especially modern one. She and Mary had looked at advertisements, some years ago, when it became clear that Papa was losing interest in their education. Add in room and board, clothing and laundry, better not to rely on what the child's family might be able to contribute themselves, and some money for spending... "Sixty pounds per annum, per pupil."

Mr. Smith made a note. "A student could manage on just fifty, if they are frugal."

Catherine agreed, but frugality was not always easy. "Yes, but I would rather they be able to visit home occasionally, and have some extra funds to enjoy themselves or put aside, as well. Scholarship students will have struggles that their peers will not, there

is no need to make them choose between clean clothes or the occasional outing.”

Her husband touched her hand lightly. “It is a kind idea, and from the amounts you have shown us, quite affordable.”

Mr. Smith did not argue further. “Have you thought about how many students you wish to support?”

Kitty would have wished to support every student who wanted to learn, but she had better limit herself. “I believe we will start with just two, one girl and one boy. My funds from the partnership with Mr. Harding will serve as the principal. Next year, we shall see about the possibility of increasing the number of students.”

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Once he had handed her into the carriage, and boarded himself, Sir Jasper drew the curtains, eyeing the way she tapped her fingers against her leg. “No one is looking, if you wish to express yourself freely.”

Kitty slumped back against the carriage seats, fanning herself. “Nearly four hundred pounds, from just the first quarter! I thought my invention would be useful, but I never dreamed...!”

What in the world was she to do with such amounts? Catherine had expected to live on the interest of her portion of her mother’s fortune, perhaps sharing living expenses with her sisters, before Mama had told them the truth of their dowries. The Bennets were well-off, but not so well-off that they could afford to not pay attention to their accounts.

Jasper - it felt odd calling him that, after so long reminding herself to use his title - smiled at her gently. “I felt much the same when I became my cousin’s heir. Who

was I, to suddenly have a title and a fortune at my feet?”

It was so lovely to have someone who understood, instead of laughing and calling her silly for her fears. “However did you manage?”

He smiled, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and bracing himself as the shape of the cobblestones changed, making the carriage jolt. “I forgave myself for having come into money that I did nothing to earn, and used it to better the lives of the people around me. If my brothers decide that sleigh-making is not for them, they will have the funds to establish themselves in whatever profession they desire.”

Kitty felt her heartbeat become a little less rapid. “When our circle first spoke of scholarships, it was largely practical. Chloe’s school will cost money to run, but we cannot simply give it to her. If we wish educated women to become less of a rare sighting, we cannot limit ourselves to the upper classes, where most only wish to know enough to marry well.”

Not that there was anything wrong with wishing to marry well! But it was Lizzy’s wit and honesty that won Mr. Darcy’s heart - Mama had nearly fainted when her second daughter confessed to being courted - without ever having set foot in a school. Then there were those whose parents could never afford to send them to be educated. Papa had at least hired masters for whatever they wanted to learn.

How could she put such sentiment to words? “Lydia speaks of her maid’s intelligence, and how it is a shame she never thought she could be anything more than a maid. How many great minds were never realised, for a quirk of fate that kept them from halls of learning?”

Her husband rested his head atop hers. “There is a factory in Scarborough that may have to shut down, because the owner refuses to provide the same opportunities that Bingley did for his workers, so they are leaving for greener pastures. You are doing a

good thing, my love. Dwell on that, rather than on what you have not yet achieved.”

Catherine leaned into his side, letting herself bask in the feeling of being loved and appreciated by someone who understood her. “Thank you.”

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Catherine had never actually seen the sea before, and the vastness of it all took her breath away.

She was sure she would appreciate it more when it didn’t come with people shouting, the smell of dead fish, and the clamour of wagons.

The driver began to unload their trunks, setting them down near several others, ready to be loaded onto the Amphitrite [15] . A good choice of name, mythologically speaking. More people in travelling clothes huddled nearby, mostly women and children, and a handful of men.

Finally, a weathered-looking man appeared, and introduced himself as Mr. Harper, the first mate, beckoning them on-board. The other passengers were directed to “steerage”, but Sir Jasper and Lady Longbottom were escorted to a private cabin. “I’m afraid there’s not much in the way of comforts, Sir, but it’s the best there is outside of the captain’s cabin.”

From the poorly-concealed worry on his face, Mr. Harper seemed to expect them to demand that the ship’s Captain be evicted on their behalf. Catherine smiled at him. “I have never been on a ship before, but it seems quite lovely.”

Mr. Harper relaxed a little, and then a little more when Jasper spoke. “I have been shipboard before, and am grateful for anything that is not a hammock. I spent half the night fearing I was about to be sent flying.”

Mr. Harper chuckled in spite of himself. “Captain is busy getting ready to sail, but he’s invited you to dine with him and the other officers tonight.”

Her husband accepted for both of them, and Mr. Harper departed to go shout at some young boys who were clearly new to life on the sea, and had tangled some ropes. The cabin was small, but well-appointed, with a bed and a small desk and chairs, all firmly bolted to the floor. There was even a small closet that turned out to be a garderobe, built into the outer wall and emptying into the sea. Catherine was sure that it would be better than a chamber pot, with the constant movement of the ship.

Jasper eyed the bed. “I hope you do not mind sharing, but ships rarely have more than one private cabin, outside of the Captain’s lodgings.”

The sun was setting, and the ship began to move away from the port. “Lizzy said that she had a dreadful time learning to sleep alone, after Jane married, and it took me weeks to fall asleep by myself when Lydia was touring with the Bingleys. I find I prefer the company.”

He smiled as she darted to the small cabin window, only tripping over her feet as the deck rolled beneath them once, and gazing out at the waves lit up by the setting sun. “I didn’t know what to do with myself when I suddenly had my own room at university, either.”

Catherine supposed that it would be best to stay out from under the sailors’ feet until they were properly underway. “How long shall we be at sea?”

He was quiet for a moment, thinking. “About a week, depending on the winds and the weather. Then we have three weeks to travel the area, before we return well ahead of the autumn storms. I cannot wait for you to see it.”

All four of her friends had gifted her a spare sketchbook, and insisted that she use

them so that they might see her impressions of distant lands. There were remnants of the Nordic culture's influence on the British Isles, in places like York and Dublin, and Kitty had seen woodcuts, but seeing it for herself would be something else entirely.

She would never be so cruel as to keep such memories all to herself!

Perhaps they would be able to see the horses that she had first fallen in love with, before she had even been introduced to their master, or even bring more home with them.



*Source Creation Date: August 12, 2025, 2:20 am*

The Dupain School for Educated Young Ladies, Hertfordshire, 1825...

The milestones of Catherine, Lady Longbottom's life could be measured in ballrooms.

From the Engagement Ball at the former Netherfield Park, where she had first danced with her then-future husband, to grand parties in Sweden and Norway under a Midnight Sun. From London ballrooms filled with investors and would-be manufacturers, to hosting dances herself in Scarborough, to being a guest at balls thrown by her friends and sisters, the twelve years of her married life had flown by.

Chloe danced past in the arms of John Dupain, the former John Lucas, who had offered to take his wife's name when she refused to change the name of the school she had founded, "After all the paperwork I did, and would have to do again? I would rather remain a Spinster!"

John had returned from University the same year Chloe opened her school, with Henrietta and Penelope as her first teachers. He'd promptly fallen head over heels for the young headmistress, and since his father was in good health, offered to join the teaching ranks. Somewhere along the line, he'd won her heart, though Chloe only conceded her hand when he offered to give up his name for hers.

Sir William and Lady Lucas had been appalled, of course, but John made a far better teacher than he did a landowner, and even Sir William Lucas had to admit that Henry, the next-eldest Lucas brother, did a far better job of managing Lucas Lodge.

Miss Millicent Brown, one of the first students Catherine had sponsored through a

scholarship, caught her eye from across the room. She had graduated, then served something of a teaching apprenticeship before taking her place as a teacher of Advanced Mathematics. Catherine could not have been more proud of her.

Lydia, Baroness Rowanfield, was too large with her third child to be dancing tonight, but had insisted upon coming to watch, and to tour the school that she hoped to one day send her daughter. Jane's daughter, not yet a year old and the youngest after her three older brothers, still had quite some time before Jane and Charles had to think about her schooling.

Catherine herself had been blessed with only two children, a son and a daughter, both of whom had remained in Scarborough under the care of their Uncle Michael and Aunt Amelia, having proclaimed the company of their cousins as far preferable to a ball. They were only eight, still a long

way from being permitted to join social events outside of family, and had plenty of time to change their minds.

Catherine's mother and mother-in-law were sitting together, along with Aunt Phillips. When Chloe had been selling off some of the land that comprised the bulk of Netherfield Park, Mrs. Longbottom had purchased a small plot nearest Meryton, and built a cottage. It was much smaller than Snowsdale or Longbourn, but fit three elderly widows (and a few servants) quite handily, after Papa died last year.

Catherine had never been close to her father, but nor had she been disappointed by him. It was strange, to feel as close to a memory of him, as she had when he was alive but rarely stirring from his book room. Perhaps one day, she would grieve more fiercely than she did now.

Elizabeth and Mary sat nearby with their husbands, and Catherine shamelessly eavesdropped while waiting for her own spouse to return to her side with the glass of punch he'd promised. "Mr. Evans, at Kympton, is hoping to retire soon, and has

requested that we seek a successor.”

Ten years of marriage had not made Mr. Darcy any more verbose or inclined to waste words than when he had first come to Hertfordshire. Catherine smiled to herself, and counted backward from five.

“You should not feel obligated, if you wish to stay at Swansea.” Ten years of marriage had improved Lizzy’s ability to understand what her husband meant, rather than what he said. “But if you find it... difficult to live near Mr. Collins...”

Mr. Collins had barely waited until after the funeral before he moved himself, Charlotte, and their two sons into Longbourn, and began to demonstrate how much he had taken the interfering guidance of his Esteemed (former) Patroness, The Honourable Lady Catherine de Burgh, to heart. Mary had expressed her frustration in her letters to her sisters, especially when Mr. Collins tried to ‘advise’ Mr. McKnight on the contents of his sermons.

A living could not be revoked once it was gifted, but it was not unknown for a single churchman to have multiple livings, leaving the management of the additional ones to his curates. Mr. John Marshall did have a much higher tolerance for fools than Mary or Mr. McKnight did, and a sly sense of humour that would enjoy running Mr. Collins in circles.

Mary looked at her husband. “It will be a shame to leave the school behind, but it is only a building. We will consider your generous offer.”

Catherine might have listened further, but her own husband was approaching, with one of Chloe’s visiting guest lecturers on Chemistry in tow. “My dear, you must hear what Mr. Berzelius has been telling me of his experiments!”

The unfamiliar gentleman, presumably Mr. Berzelius, bowed. “Lady Longbottom, it is an honour. I have heard a great deal about your inventions, and requested an

introduction.”

Catherine did not think that she would ever tire of hearing such statements, even if she lived to be over a hundred years. She rose, curtsied, and accepted the glass of punch. “The pleasure is mine. Please, sit, and tell me about what you have discovered.”