

And Then The Murders Started

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

And then the murders started.

The very first person to be offed was the lovely Miss King, who had recently been found to have not only a charming disposition and a beautiful figure, but also a boatload of inherited money. The whole neighborhood was abuzz when they heard of her untimely exit from not just the neighborhood of Meryton, but also of this entire earthly dimension.

“The manner of Miss King’s death suggests a female murderer,” Mr. Bennet said with calm interest as he sat with his family at the breakfast table on the day after the horrible event.

“Oh, do not be so silly!” Mrs. Bennet exclaimed. “Just because Miss King was found dead at the bottom of the staircase with a pair of sewing scissors protruding from her chest does not mean that a lady did the deed! Anyone could have chosen *that* instrument. And besides, a lady would have made sure that the blood from the wound did not drip onto the carpet in such a disgusting way. No, I believe a man is to blame.”

“Nasty, freckled little thing,” Lydia laughed. “What do we care how she died, or who killed her? That just leaves more men for the rest of us!”

“I am sure whoever killed Miss King did not mean to do it,” Jane said sweetly, in her usual slightly dense way. “More than likely it was an accident. In fact, now that I think of it, Miss King was probably running with scissors through her parent’s home in the middle of the night and tripped over the top step before landing on the floor below with a broken neck and multiple bruises on her face and body. And scissors standing straight up in her chest, of course,” she added, frowning slightly. Then she thought of Mr. Bingley, with whom she had just fallen in love last week, and smiled.

“An eligible young man is always considered the rightful property of at least one of the families in the neighborhood,” said Lizzy, “and Mr. Bingley just moved here. It stands to reason, therefore, that one of those families must have had their hand in Miss King’s untimely demise. They would stand to gain the most if they succeeded in removing the competition.”

“But Lizzy!” exclaimed Kitty. “That would mean that Jane—” she broke off in horror, staring at her oldest sister as the thought occurred to her. Jane was still staring vacantly into space.

“Nonsense!” Elizabeth replied stoutly, though she did look at Jane suspiciously for a moment. But only a moment. “Jane is too good to see other ladies as rivals, let alone to off them!”

“There’s my clever daughter,” Mr. Bennet said cheerfully. “Just the sort of logic we needed for such a question. No wonder you are my favorite. Hand me another scone, Kitty.”

“But if not Jane, then who?” Lydia wondered, her eyes wide.

“There is another rich, single young gentleman who recently arrived in the neighborhood,” Mary reminded them, speaking solemnly. “Perhaps the murderess hopes to make a match with him, and not with Mr. Bingley.”

“I wish the murderess had offed Mr. Darcy rather than Miss King,” was her father’s sanguine reply, “considering how he insulted my little Lizzy at the ball.”

“I quite agree,” said Elizabeth.

“Oh, hang Miss King!” exclaimed Mrs. Bennet. “And hang Mr. Darcy, too, for all I care, for if he does not wish to fall in love with one of my girls, he is of no use to me. But Jane, you are not to set foot out of doors on your own from now until the murderer is found and locked away! It would not do for you to be killed just when you are about to marry a rich man! Promise me that you will go nowhere outdoors by yourself until I give you leave. Unless it is with Mr. Bingley, of course.”

“But, mama, if I make a point of being outdoors alone with only Mr. Bingley, won’t my reputation be so ruined that he will have to marry me?”

“Jane, my dear, it is lucky for us that you are so beautiful.” And Mrs. Bennet started her day with a happy smile.

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The next unhappy victim was the unfortunate Mr. Collins.

“Rat poison!” Dr. Jones exclaimed, as soon as he smelled the glass from which Mr. Collins had just been drinking punch a few minutes before.

A loud crashing sound was heard as at least a hundred other glasses of punch were simultaneously dropped to the floor of the ballroom at Netherfield. “Oh, you need not worry,” Dr. Jones assured the aghast onlookers. “It was only in his cup, else you would all be dead already.”

“You might have mentioned that before,” Mrs. Nicholls, the housekeeper, grumbled as she surveyed the widespread damage. Fortunately no one heard her.

“Mr. Darcy, you were standing close by at the time that Mr. Collins started gasping, ‘Water, water,’ whilst he foamed at the mouth and his eyeballs bulged out of their sockets,” said Elizabeth, turning her keen, appraising gaze towards him. “Did you see anything unusual?”

“Not a thing, Miss Elizabeth,” Mr. Darcy replied, as he carefully fingered a small envelope in his pocket. He would have to burn it at his first opportunity.

“Nor I, unfortunately, though I danced with him twice,” Elizabeth answered, feeling the small envelope inside her glove. She wondered how hard it would be to discreetly discard it through the window of the family carriage while it was in motion.

Mary sighed with relief that her own dark plans would not have to be carried out now.

"Whoever the murderer was, they must have been strongly motivated," Dr. Jones commented, examining Collins' drinking glass more closely. "There is enough poison here to kill a small army."

"Half the room wished to be rid of his company," Elizabeth said archly. "The other half had not yet met him."

"Hear, hear!" came an answering chorus from everyone standing nearby.

"Was he really so disagreeable?" the doctor asked, surveying the room curiously.

"Sir, he was a toady of the first order," Mr. Bennet replied. "He had absolutely nothing to recommend him to anyone. He was sycophantic, fulsome, and groveling to the last. His final words were, 'What will her ladyship say? Pray make my excuses to her for not informing her of my death myself!' I assure you, no one will miss the man."

"And he was a terrible dancer," Lydia added, unable to resist joining the conversation.

"He sounds like he was an unregrettable person, and therefore I see no reason to make further inquiries. Has he any living relatives?"

"None that I know of."

"Excellent! Then I will dispose of the body for you, and we shall have an end to this unpleasant matter." And he would have a fresh cadaver on which to practice his surgery skills, with no nasty trip to the cemetery in the middle of the night.

"It does not seem right to simply get rid of him in this cold, unfeeling way," Jane said, looking down at the body sympathetically. "Surely there must have been someone who loved him, someone who will mourn his absence."

"I will certainly miss him!" Mrs. Bennet wailed. "There goes another chance to get one of my daughters married! But no one ever thinks about me!" She continued wailing so miserably that her husband was compelled to act concerned, offering her his arm to escort her from the scene.

Darcy had stood silent, watching all these interactions, but now he spoke to the doctor. "If you'll excuse me," he said, "I must go write to my aunt, to inform her that she must start looking out for a new parson." The doctor nodded his agreement and Darcy turned to leave the room. But just before he walked out the door he gave Lizzy a long, suspicious look, and was surprised to receive one just as long and suspicious in return.

After that, there were no more murders for several months. Elizabeth kept hating Darcy, who, unknown to her, had fallen madly in love with her; and Jane and Bingley continued their disastrous courtship, which ended in heartbreak when Darcy and Miss Bingley convinced Bingley to move back to town. It was spring time and nearly all the talk about the murders had died down (sorry for the pun!) when Elizabeth met Darcy again.

She was out walking one day when Darcy suddenly appeared on the path in front of her.

“Miss Elizabeth, I want you to marry me. Your family’s behavior is astonishing, you have no connections, and I really shouldn’t be asking you this. But it’s true. I want you to be my wife.”

Elizabeth could only stare, utterly astonished.

“You don’t have to fall at my feet in gratitude. A simple thank you will suffice,” he finished smugly.

Elizabeth found her voice.

“Mr. Darcy, I would not accept you even if the hounds of hell themselves were trying to chase me into your arms! You separated my sister from her one true love.”

“I didn’t think she liked him.”

“And you despise my family!”

“Don’t you?”

“Well . . . sometimes,” she had to concede. “But still, they are my family. And Mr. Wickham told me all about the horrible things you did to him.”

“I’m surprised you believed him. I thought you were clever.”

“I *am* clever! Nobody that handsome could possibly lie. Finally, besides all your other failings, do you think I would ever consent to marry someone who murdered my own cousin?”

Darcy looked offended. “I did not kill Mr. Collins, though I admit that I desperately wanted to.”

“Mr. Darcy, I saw your hand near his drinking glass just before he took his final sip and started gasping for air!”

“It was obvious that he had designs on you, and of course I had to put a stop to that. But I didn’t get the chance. Somebody else got to him first.”

Elizabeth shook her head in disbelief. “Mr. Darcy, you are the most arrogant, conceited and prideful man I have ever met. I think you should leave now, no matter how filthy rich and unbearably handsome you are.”

“I entirely agree. Please forget I ever said anything about marrying you.”

“Gladly!” Elizabeth turned to march out of the room, but then she remembered that they were outdoors, and all she could do was stomp away as noisily as possible.

The very next week, Bingley returned to Netherfield. He and Darcy came to call on the Bennets almost as soon as they arrived. Bingley was dressed all in black.

"I regret to inform you that there has been an accident," he said calmly, after the usual inquiries as to everyone's health. "My sister Caroline had an unfortunate encounter with a fire poker last week."

There were polite expressions of sympathy all around. "I suppose this means you cannot stay for supper," said Mrs. Bennet, a little discouraged.

"What was the manner of her death?" Elizabeth asked curiously.

"Beaten to death. Struck about the head repeatedly. Bludgeoned, I think they call it. Ground to a pulp. Completely annihilated--"

"Thank you, Mr. Bingley. That will do," said Mr. Bennet. "Will you keep the house or give up the lease now?"

"That depends on how things go in the neighborhood. Miss Bennet, may I have a walk with you . . . outside?"

"Oh do, do!" cried Mrs. Bennet, hope restored. "Take her outside, and quickly! We do not need her here at all!"

Elizabeth and Darcy accompanied Jane and Bingley outside but made sure to stay a good ways away from them.

"Mr. Darcy, do we have you to thank for this sudden return of my sister's suitor?"

"It's possible that I might have mentioned something to him about Jane."

"A kind gesture, but you are mistaken if you think this will make me think better of you. Where were you when Miss Bingley was busy being bludgeoned to death? I know how much you disliked her pursuit of you in the marriage market."

"I was reading a book in the library," Darcy answered, and Elizabeth thought he looked a little self-conscious while he said it.

"A likely story."

"If you are thinking that I am the one who beat Miss Bingley to death, I did not. I would have chosen a different method for her demise. Something more subtle, like being trampled to death under a band of wild horses."

"But you do not regret her death?"

"The only thing I regret is that I helped her separate Bingley and your sister in the first place. Miss Elizabeth, you persist in thinking the worst of me, but I assure you that I am innocent of any real wrongdoing."

"Time will tell, Mr. Darcy. Time will tell."

The ball at Sir William Lucas' home was in full swing a month later when Wickham suddenly appeared before Elizabeth.

"Mr. Wickham! Where have you been? My sisters and I have been longing to see you for weeks. We thought you were never coming back."

"I have been away on business, but I am returned now. I wonder if I might have a word with you. In private."

"Certainly." Elizabeth allowed Wickham to lead her to a balcony away from the crowd. There, he took her hands in his.

"Elizabeth, I want to marry you. Let us elope tonight."

"Mr. Wickham! How can this possibly be true? I had no idea you felt this way about me!"

"I have felt this way for weeks, but I could no longer hold myself back. I had to address you tonight."

"I really should not let you speak to me this way."

Wickham's immediate answer was to kiss her.

"And I should definitely not let you be so improper with me!"

"Oh, I have not yet *begun* to be improper." He kissed her again, and this time Elizabeth had to step back to catch her breath.

"Mr. Wickham!" She pushed him away as hard as she could.

"Come, Elizabeth, there is no need to be so missish." He began to pull on her arm to draw her to him again.

"Let go of me right now!"

"Yes, unhand her at once!" Darcy stepped out of the shadows of the balcony and into the light.

"Mr. Darcy, this is really no concern of yours. I can defend myself quite well."

"You need me to protect you. You do not know what he is capable of."

"I do not need you or any man! I can do this on my own." She slapped Wickham as hard as she could.

"Ow!" cried Wickham.

"That *was* an impressive blow. But please, Miss Elizabeth, allow me." Darcy punched Wickham in the stomach and Wickham doubled over, groaning in agony.

"Mr. Darcy, that was not necessary. I have the situation well in hand." She pulled her fan out of her reticule and began to beat Wickham about the head with it.

Darcy gave Wickham a sharp knee strike to the abdomen. "This is not for you. This is for what he tried to do to my sister."

Elizabeth continued her beating of the unhappy Wickham. "What did he try to do?"

Darcy switched knees and struck him again. "He tried to elope with her."

Elizabeth was still beating Wickham's ears. "That does not seem so bad."

"But she was only sixteen years old!" Darcy backfisted Wickham on the side of the neck.

"That does seem somewhat indefensible. Mr. Wickham, what have you to say for yourself?"

"I-- can't—speak—" Wickham gasped between punishing blows.

"And then," Darcy went on, "then he tried to . . . to . . ." he stopped for a moment.

"Tried to what, Mr. Darcy?"

"He tried to—" Darcy whispered in Elizabeth's ear. She turned bright red.

"You despicable beast!" she roared, and locked her hands around Wickham's throat.

"No, no!" cried Wickham, backing up to get away from her.

"Elizabeth! Stay away from him!" Darcy tried to step between the two, and Wickham backed up even farther.

"Mr. Darcy, get out of my way!"

"Aaaagghh!" said Wickham, as he backed up onto the railing, lost his balance, and fell off onto the pavement below.

"Fitzwilliam Darcy, you stand accused of murdering four people since November of last year: Miss Mary King, Mr. William Collins, Miss Caroline Bingley, and Mr. George Wickham. How do you plead?"

Darcy managed to stare down his nose at the bewigged judge, an impressive feat since the judge was seated on a platform and he was not. "Who dares accuse me?"

"There is no need for an accuser. It cannot be a coincidence that were mere feet away from Mr. Collins when he met his end by poisoning, that you were in residence at the time of Miss Bingley's brutal murder, and that you were seen on the balcony with George Wickham on the night of his death."

Darcy blinked. "What about Miss King? I think you missed her."

"If you could carry out one murder there's no reason you couldn't commit the others," the judge shrugged.

"Your honor, that is hardly fair! There were many people in Meryton who might have done it."

"Never mind the evidence, I'll make that up later. For now I am trying to determine your motive. Did Miss King insult you by turning down a proposal?"

Darcy rolled his eyes, exasperated. "No."

"Was Mr. Collins really that annoying?"

"Yes. I mean no, he was not."

The judge raised an eyebrow.

"Yes," Darcy admitted, "he was annoying enough to make one think of murder. But no, I did not actually do it."

"But you *would* have, if you had been given the chance?"

Darcy did not answer. The judge cleared his throat.

"In the matter of Caroline Bingley, I am willing to concede that there were aggravating circumstances, the most aggravating circumstance being Miss Bingley herself. She tried to throw herself at me once some years ago." The two men nodded solemnly at each other. "Nevertheless, one cannot simply go around offing every woman who drives one mad with her attentions. It gets messy."

"I did not off her!"

"Can you truthfully say that you know nothing of the circumstances of her death?"

Again, Darcy refused to reply.

"That leaves Mr. Wickham. I can only assume you pushed him off the balcony out of jealousy of his wit, his handsome appearance, and his general success with the ladies. Do you deny it?"

"I do not deny that he had those qualities."

"Do you deny being on the balcony with Wickham just before he fell off the balcony and splattered on the ground below?"

Darcy looked back at the judge steadily, and the crowd in the courtroom murmured. His guilt could not be denied.

The judge began to speak. "Fitzwilliam Darcy, you are found guilty of—"

"Stop!" cried Elizabeth, rising to her feet. "Mr. Darcy did not kill Mr. Wickham!"

"How do you know this?" the judge asked, peering at her over his glasses.

"Because I was with Mr. Darcy on the balcony that night!" The crowd murmured in surprise.

"You were with Mr. Darcy?"

"Yes."

"And the two of you were on the balcony?"

"Yes."

"Was there anyone else with you?"

"No."

"You were alone?"

"Yes."

"Completely alone?"

"Utterly and entirely alone. Mr. Wickham never came near us."

The judge looked at Darcy. "Is this true?"

Darcy opened his mouth, closed it, then opened it again. "We were definitely alone on the balcony together."

"Then hang it all, who killed Wickham?" the judge fairly roared.

"I do not know, but in light of the damage caused to Miss Elizabeth's reputation, I feel compelled to do the honorable thing and offer her my hand in marriage."

"I accept." Elizabeth and Darcy smiled at each other as the crowd murmured again.

"Well if you did not kill Wickham I will have to find the man who did!"

"Your honor," said Mr. Bennet, rising from the back of the courtroom, "it has recently come to my attention that Mr. Wickham had great debts of honor in Meryton and other places which he could not satisfy. I believe that he took the only way out by leaping over the balcony before my daughter and her—uhh, fiancé—ever stepped foot outdoors."

"Why didn't you mention this before?"

"It didn't seem important." He shrugged.

“My father was not aware until today that anyone was on trial for Mr. Wickham’s death,” Elizabeth supplied helpfully. “When he found out about the trial this morning I insisted that we come here at once.”

“Then Darcy is not guilty and we need to find the real murderers,” the judge proclaimed. “Bailiff, round up the usual suspects. Mr. Darcy, you are free to go.”

Darcy pulled Elizabeth into a separate room as soon as he could. “Elizabeth, do not feel obligated to marry me just to preserve your reputation. We do not have to be engaged. In time people will forget that we were alone in the dark on a balcony with a dead body close by.”

“Mr. Darcy, has it occurred to you that I might have admitted in open court to being compromised by you simply so that you would have to ask me to marry you again?” Darcy saw the teasing smile on her face and made the only possible reply that he could.

Three weeks later the double weddings between Charles Bingley and Jane Bennet and Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy took place. At the wedding breakfast, with no one but family nearby, Darcy addressed his new father-in-law.

“Now that we are related and you do not have to fear me turning you in to the authorities, I wonder if you would relieve my curiosity on a question which has preoccupied me for some time. Why did you kill your cousin last autumn?”

“Ho ho, Mr. Darcy!” exclaimed Mr. Bennet, not at all disturbed by the accusation. “I wondered when someone would realize who was behind that man’s death! Tell me, since you are so clever: what makes you think I carried out the deed?”

“You were the only one besides Elizabeth and myself who was anywhere near Collins’ glass before he drank from it,” Darcy said with a smile, “and I know that neither she nor I were able to do him in. Therefore it must have been you.”

“Very good, Darcy. Collins was going to propose to Elizabeth. She would have rejected him, and Mrs. Bennet would have made us both miserable for months to come. It was either dispose of him first or kill myself later. I chose the more palatable option.”

“I thank you, sir, for your explanation, and for the timely intervention which kept Elizabeth single long enough for me to win her hand.” Darcy bowed and Mr. Bennet nodded in return.

Next to Elizabeth at the table, Jane was speaking with her new husband. “How tragic that Caroline is not alive to see this day. She would have been so happy to be at your wedding. You must miss her immensely.”

“I have something terrible to confess to you, Jane,” Bingley said, a little embarrassed. “I am the one who brutally killed Caroline.”

“Oh! My poor Charles! You must feel terrible that you hit her over the head with the fire poker by mistake so many times!”

“Sixty-seven times, to be exact, but who’s counting?” Bingley confirmed.

“Tell me what made such an awful accident occur!”

“It was no accident. I had just told Caroline that I was determined to return to Meryton to propose to you, and she, I am afraid, had objections to the match. She told me I should marry someone with much more fortune.”

“Did she?” Jane opened her eyes wide.

“And that I should pick someone with a better family.”

“I am sure she did not mean it.”

“And lastly, she said that I ought not to choose someone so . . . so . . .” he paused.

“What, Charles, what?”

“Someone who was so dull.”

Jane gasped at the insult. "Charles, now I have to confess something."

"What is it, my love?"

She leaned close to whisper in his ear. "I wish you had bludgeoned her sixty *eight* times." She and Charles blushed and smiled at each other.

"I for one would dearly like to know what really happened to my dear Wickham," Lydia complained loudly. "One minute I was showing him Sir Lucas' wine cellar, and the next he was extremely dead!"

"And splattered," Mr. Bennet added, taking a sip from his wine glass.

"Showing him the wine cellar?" Elizabeth mused. "Is that what they call it these days?"

"Nobody would dance even one set after his body was found," Lydia continued. "Whoever killed him was abominably rude to interrupt a perfectly good ball!"

"Why were you showing him the wine cellar?" Jane asked. "Did Lady Lucas ask you to select more wine?" Bingley whispered in her ear for a moment and her eyes widened. "Oh! Lydia, how could you?"

"Because he was devilishly handsome in his red coat, that's how!"

"Never mind his red coat, you are lucky I found you when I did," said Mr. Bennet. "Another minute, and your reputation would have been past saving. I chased him out and then he ran upstairs, intent on humiliating me. I realized later that he tried to carry out his revenge with Lizzy by taking her to the balcony, which was fortunate for all of us. *She* is someone who could put him in his place! And apparently, she did."

"I did not push Mr. Wickham off the balcony!" Elizabeth exclaimed.

"Nor did I," Darcy added emphatically. "It was an accident."

Everyone around the table nodded knowingly at the couple. "A likely story," said Mary, looking very wise.

"Why did you come to my rescue at the trial, then?" Darcy asked Mr. Bennet.

"Because you seemed like a nice enough chap, and I was happy to get you out of trouble as long as it did not take too much effort. And besides, Lizzy was in love with you." Darcy and Elizabeth smiled at each other.

"Since we are all confessing," said Mrs. Bennet dramatically, "there is something I would like to announce."

"I know exactly what you are going to say," Jane answered without giving the others a chance to respond. "You are the one who stabbed Miss King to death."

"What! I thought it was such a secret! How did you find out?"

"Because you asked to borrow my sewing scissors the very next day." Jane smiled at her sweetly.

"Bless me, have I been sleeping next to a murderer all this time?" remarked Mr. Bennet with some surprise. "What a day this has turned out to be! Bingley offed his sister; Darcy and Lizzy together

disposed of Wickham somehow; Collins was poisoned by my hand; and yet Mrs. Bennet turns out to be the most ghastly murderer of all.”

“When do I get a chance to get rid of someone?” Kitty said, beginning to cry. “Nobody lets me do anything!”

“Let us pour into each other’s bosom this familial consolation,” Mary answered, “that such extreme measures will not be needed from now on. Mr. Collins is the only man I was ever tempted to off, but since he is gone and everyone else disagreeable has disappeared, none of us will never have to think about committing such acts again.”

“I can think of some other disagreeables to be gotten rid of,” Lydia contradicted, not at all put off. “And you may be jolly sure that I will do so, if I get the chance.”

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The wedding breakfast was over, and it was time for both couples to leave. Mrs. Bennet was crying copious amounts of tears, which everyone found odd considering how many of her dreams had just come true.

“Ten thousand a year, and very likely more!” she exclaimed. “A house in town! All that is charming! How shall I endure? I shall go distracted!”

“Not that we would notice much difference,” her husband commented; but no one noticed.

“You must come visit us very often,” Jane told Elizabeth, embracing her. Both sisters were portraits of happiness.

“And you must visit us,” Elizabeth answered. “We shall ask you to come to Pemberley for Christmas, and we will also—good lord, who is that?” A coach and four had turned the corner of the lane and was racing up the driveway towards the house. The light gleamed off the coat of arms on the door.

“If I am not mistaken, that is my aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh,” said Darcy. “We must prepare ourselves for an unpleasant scene.”

“Your aunt? Oh, dear.”

“Darcy!” cried Lady Catherine, even before the coach had come to a complete stop. “Is the wedding over? I am outraged that I was not consulted ahead of time. You have married into *such* a pitiful family!”

“Pitiful?” Elizabeth echoed, raising one eyebrow.

Her ladyship exited the carriage, closely followed by her daughter Anne. “What a hovel of a home! It is nothing to Rosings, nothing at all. No one of taste can possibly live here.”

“I resent that remark,” said Mary.

“There is no style, no fashion to be seen. Your dress, young lady,” (turning to Lydia) “is at least three seasons out of date!”

“It is not!” Lydia cried, stomping her foot.

“Your hair is atrocious!” she told Kitty next, and Kitty began to cry yet again.

“You have no money, no fortune,” she went on. Mr. Bennet shrugged.

“And madam,” she looked directly at Mrs. Bennet, “your daughters are exceedingly ugly!”

“Mama,” said Lydia, “Lady Catherine seems rather disagreeable to me.”

“I know, my darling! And to me as well.”

“And me!” cried Kitty.

“Me too!” Mary exclaimed.

“And to me!” said Jane, causing everyone to stop and look at her.

“My dearest, we should go now,” said Bingley, taking Jane’s arm and leading her towards the carriage.

“We really should,” Darcy echoed, doing the same with Elizabeth.

“Definitely,” said Mr. Bennet, eyeing Lady Catherine and her unfortunate daughter.

“Darcy, don’t you dare walk away from me!” Lady Catherine shrieked at her nephew’s back. “You are supposed to marry Anne! We can have the ceremony right now!”

“Good by, Lady Catherine,” Darcy told her gravely just before he climbed into the carriage. The door closed.

“Good by, mama and papa,” called Jane from the other carriage. “I will see you soon!”

“Good by, Lady Catherine!” Elizabeth cried from hers. “It has been such a pleasure to meet you! Good by, papa and mama! Good by, sisters!”

“Good by!” they all cried in return. “Good by and farewell!” Both carriages moved down the driveway, pulled away from the house, and disappeared around the curve. There was silence for a moment. Then-

“I don’t suppose you have any means of refreshment in such a dismal little hovel,” Lady Catherine said, sneering. “I could use some rest before returning to Rosings. And I have not found nearly enough to criticize yet.”

“Please come inside,” Mrs. Bennet said, smiling. “We would be honored to receive such an important guest.”

“We would indeed,” her husband echoed.

“Gladly,” Mary muttered.

“I shall lead the way!” cried Kitty.

“No, I shall!” Lydia contradicted her.

“Girls, where did you leave my new sewing scissors?”

Lady Catherine and her daughter were led inside Longbourn, guided by the rest of the Bennet family.

And then the murders started.

THE END

