

Lizzie Bennet's Diary

T. K. Marnell



June 23, 2016

The Day Mr. Hollywood Came to Town

Dear Diary,

I tried to write today. And by “I tried to write today,” I don’t mean I intended to write, but then I whittled the hours away reading back issues of *Writer’s Digest* and arguing with people on Reddit. I honestly, truly tried.

After breakfast, I sat down right away to work. I didn’t even check my email to see if my agent finally read my last manuscript. She’s had it for two months and three days now. Not that I’m counting.

To get in the Writing Zone, I read over the outline for my new novel. I decided to make a few tweaks to the plot...and then I had to do a bit of research...and then somehow it was 11 a.m.

I opened a new Word document, determined to start the first draft today.

“Daaarling!”

I heard Mom screeching in the foyer. Even from my loft on the third floor, every drawn-out syllable was loud and clear. Dad must have just come home from his morning round of golf.

“Susan Long just called. The house on the corner has been sold at last!”

I tried in vain to concentrate on my writing. The cursor blinked on the blank Word document in front of me.

“You’ll never *guess* who our new neighbor will be.” Mom waited patiently, but alas, Dad did not try to guess. “I *said*, you’ll never *guess* who our new neighbor will be!”

“I’m sure I won’t, so why don’t you just tell me?”

“Welp,” I said to myself, “Guess that’s plenty of work for today!” I closed my laptop on the blank document and joined my parents downstairs.

Dad was filling the electric kettle in the kitchen, looking the perfect picture of upper-middle-class retirement in his white golf shirt and khakis. Mom hopped up and down beside him in a satin robe and fuzzy slippers.

“His name is Charles Bingley, and he’s from California. He bought the house on the corner as a second home. Susan says she heard from Beverly that his house in Los Angeles is worth more than 5 million. Aaand...”

I was tempted to beat a drum roll on the kitchen island.

“He’s a *Hollywood producer!*” Mom burst out. “A real Hollywood producer! Ooh, how lucky for our Janie!”

Dad placed a bag of black tea in a mug and opened a box of Scottish shortbread cookies. “What does our new neighbor’s profession have to do with Jane?”

Mom batted Dad on the arm with a giggle, as if he’d just told a great joke. “This is the big break she’s been dreaming of all her life!”

What Mom said was true...if you replace “she’s been dreaming of” with “*I’ve* been dreaming of” and “all her life” with “all *my* life.” Jane dreams of playing Portia at the annual Shakespeare Festival

in Ashland. Mom dreams of seeing Jane on the red carpet at the Oscars.

“We must make sure he sees Janie on the stage. We can give him a ticket to *Into the Woods* as a housewarming gift. No no no, that’s too obvious. Let’s give three tickets to Susan, and she can mention to him that she and Dan are going...”

“Good Lord, woman! Are you trying to win an award for Craziest Stage Mother? The man bought a vacation home here to relax, not to be henpecked into sitting through community theater productions of *Into the Woods*.”

I couldn’t help myself. “Oh, Dad. Don’t you know that when a man with showbiz connections comes to town, he *must* be scouting for movie stars? What other *possible* reason could a wealthy Californian have for buying a vacation home in a sunny resort town famous for hiking and skiing?”

Mom crowed, “Exactly! You see, the smart one agrees with me!”

Dad let out an exaggerated sigh. He pushed the shortbread cookies towards me and winked.

The front door opened. Jane’s voice sang out, “I brought lunch!”

I joined Jane in the foyer and relieved her of two plastic bags. The Styrofoam boxes inside smelled of fresh flatbread and spicy Middle Eastern cuisine.

“Mm, falafel!” I said loudly. Then I leaned towards Jane and whispered, “A Hollywood producer is moving in down the street. Mom says your dreams are coming true. Act delighted.”

Jane smiled, and my self-confidence fell by ten points at the sight. I, who inherited our father’s stocky genes and haven’t stepped into a gym since college, can pass for “cute” with the aid of careful makeup and flattering clothes. My older sister, who inherited our

mother's willowy genes and runs twenty miles a week, is drop-dead gorgeous when barefaced in yoga pants. I'd resent her for her looks if she weren't so gash-darned lovable.

Mom flew towards Jane and grabbed her in a lung-crushing hug. "My beautiful, beautiful Janie, you'll just *die* when you hear what Susan told me on the phone!"

When Mom repeated her big announcement, Jane's convincing expression of surprise and joy proved she's more than just a pretty face. Her high school classmates didn't call her "Janie Zellweger" for nothing.

Jane said, "How exciting! Where are Mary and the twins? Have they heard the news?"

Behind us, the front door opened and closed with a BANG! Mary stomped in, her mules clomping on the hardwood.

"What's up, Doc?" I asked.

"Budget cuts!" Mary spat.

Mary works as a reference librarian at the local community college. The most highly educated of we five Bennet daughters, she has a PhD in Information Science that earned her sky-high debts and a rock-bottom job that pays \$15 per hour, 20 hours a week. From the sound of it, one or both of those numbers just sank even lower.

"I'm sorry. On the bright side...Jane brought falafel!"

I held up one of the bags and jiggled it. Mary glowered at me and stormed up to the second floor. Her bedroom door slammed shut, and the one next to it opened. Kitty stuck her messy brunette head out, blinking groggily.

Kitty called down the stairs, "What's going on?"

I called back, "Mary's poor, and Jane's going to be a movie star."

“What?!” Kitty squealed. “Lydia, Jane’s going to be a movie star!”

My two youngest sisters scrambled downstairs in their pajamas. Kitty and Lydia were born one year apart, but we call them “the twins” because they’re identical in nearly every way. They wear the same clothes, dye their hair the same shades, and spend every waking moment together doing the same things.

They even register for the same classes each term at Oregon State University, where they’ve been on-again, off-again students since high school graduation. For Lydia, that’s six years so far. For Kitty, seven. As far as I know, neither one is anywhere close to completing a degree.

Jane and I set out lunch on the kitchen island, while our mother and the twins gossiped about Mr. Hollywood. Did he earn his money or inherit it? What kind of movies does he make? Do you think he knows Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively?

Dad said to me, “If Ryan Reynolds were a college major, the twins would have graduated years ago and your mother would have an honorary doctorate.” He tuned out the chatter and checked the day’s stock prices on his iPad.

Mom dragged him back into the conversation. “Darling, Susan says Beverly Lucas is going to invite the producer to her Independence Day barbecue next Saturday. Why she’s calling it ‘Independence Day’ when it’s really July 2nd, don’t ask me. Bring it up with Tom tomorrow morning at the golf course, and get him to invite us too.”

Dad closed the cover over his iPad. “Why would I do that?”

“You know Beverly won’t invite us herself! She’s had a petty grudge against us for two years because the director of *Grease* gave the role of Sandy to Jane instead of Charlotte.”

I sat down and filled a plate for myself. “Really? It isn’t because you called that director, pretending to be Beverly Lucas, and told him Charlotte was dropping out of the audition due to a sudden unplanned pregnancy?”

Mom pursed her lips. “*Anyway*, if you care anything for Jane, you’ll talk to Tom about the barbecue. It’s not a big deal. Just bring it up casually.”

“Good lord! If it’s not a big deal, call Beverly yourself. Tell her you want to use her barbecue to parade Jane in front of the Hollywood producer. Better yet, just skip the party and introduce yourself to the man directly. Knock on his door with a cake and say, ‘Welcome to the neighborhood. Here’s my daughter. Please make her the next Scarlett Johansson.’”

“You don’t care one bit about your daughter, do you? You don’t care if her dreams are shattered because you can’t be bothered to get an invitation to the Lucas’ barbecue!”

As our parents bickered over her future, Jane ate her lunch quietly. Others might see her as a pushover because she never spoke up to Mom about her real dreams. But since I have the same Mom, I know Jane simply deals with her the same way I do: humor her for a bit while she prattles, then go on with life as if she’d said nothing at all.

Lydia piped up, “How come you all assume the producer will make Jane the next Scarlett Johansson? What if he scouts me instead?”

“Or me!” Kitty said.

“Or me,” I joined in. “Scarlett’s got nothing on me in skin-tight black leather. Come on, Dad, get us into that party so I can star in *The Avengers 4*.”

The twins shrieked with laughter. Jane hid her quirked mouth behind a piece of flatbread. Mom ignored us all and whined at Dad.

Dad raised his voice. “No matter what any of you say, I will not talk to Tom about the barbecue. There’s no point.”

He sipped his tea. “Because he already invited us this morning. We’re to bring a savory side dish.”

Mom gaped at Dad. Then she let out a squeal that pierced my eardrums. “Daaarling!” She pounced on Dad and kissed him on the cheek. “I just knew you were planning one of your surprises! Isn’t it wonderful, Jane? You’re going to meet a real Hollywood producer!”

Jane smiled as usual.

Mom’s mouth was off to the races. “What are you going to wear? The red mini dress with the sequined bodice? No no no, that will make you look like you’re trying to get his attention.”

Lydia said, “How about the green maxi dress?”

“Yes! That one shows off her shoulders beautifully. Oh, but it hides her legs.” Mom brightened and clapped her hands together. “Kitty, go get that long skirt with the high slit in it. The blue one with the white flowers.”

“But that’s *mine!*” Kitty wailed.

Dad said, “Now don’t fuss, Kitty. One blue skirt with white flowers is a small price to pay for the chance to meet Ryan Reynolds.”

I did not get any work done for the rest of the day.



July 2, 2016

The Day I Fell In and Out of Love in 10 Minutes Flat

I

Dear Diary,

It's nearly midnight and I'm way too riled up to sleep. Ooh, I'm so boiling mad, you could probably fry an egg on my head.

In fact, I'd be tempted to try it...but the twins just came in from one of their house parties, and they're gabbing it up in the kitchen. If they saw me put raw eggs on my head, they'd probably think it's a natural deep conditioning treatment I saw on Instagram. They'd want to try it themselves, and they'd look so ridiculous I couldn't be angry anymore. I want to be angry right now. I deserve to be angry right now.

The cause of my anger, surprisingly, isn't my agent—though I'm miffed about her behavior, too. It's been nearly two weeks since I nudged her about that manuscript, and still she hasn't replied. Is literary agent ghosting a thing? If she doesn't contact me by the end of the month, I might have to light a fire under her tuchus with empty threats of contract termination.

But my agent's silence is merely an irritation. I'm **hopping mad** because today I met a man, and I thought he was my soulmate, but then he turned out to be a conceited, judgmental, small-minded lemon-sucking jerk.

(No, I don't mean he literally sucks lemons. Get with it, Diary. I mean that's what his stupid face looks like. Yes, I'm a twenty-eight-year-old published author and I just wrote "stupid face." Who doesn't regress to elementary school when they're hopping mad?)

Let's start at the very beginning. It's a very good place to start.

I woke up at six this morning, not because I went to bed early last night or because I was too excited to sleep, but because Mom was making a racket in the kitchen. Dad added to the chaos by shouting that if Mom persisted in making smoothies at dawn, he was going to throw out the Vitamix once and for all. Even the twins dragged themselves out of bed at the crack of 9 a.m., complaining that making so much noise on a Saturday morning was child abuse.

As soon as Jane came in from her morning run, Mom pounced on her with protein shakes, hair curlers, and shimmering body butter. By the time we left for the Lucas' at eleven, Jane looked like she was ready to compete in Miss America.

I, on the other hand, looked like I was ready to compete in the Deschutes County Rodeo.

Like all literary greats, E. Bennet has more important things to do than take care of her health and hygiene. She does laundry when she must, which is when she has nothing left to wear.

And like all true artists, E. Bennet lives in the moment and does not stoop so low as to plan ahead. If there is a big event she has known about for weeks, she does not check her closet the night before to make sure there is at least one decent outfit available.

In short, E. Bennet goes to parties at her posh neighbors' homes wearing ripped jeans, riding boots, and a pink flannel shirt.

When we arrived at the barbecue, Tom Lucas was blasting Saint-Saëns' Organ Symphony in every room. According to Dad, Tom spent the past month installing a whole-house in-wall stereo speaker system, and talking about little else on the golf course.

Since I know you don't watch movies, Diary, I'll explain that the Organ Symphony is the one with the distinctive melody used in the 1990s masterpiece of animatronic puppetry, *Babe*.

I tried really, really hard to contain myself—but when I shook Tom's hand, I couldn't resist saying, "That'll do, Tom. That'll do." He didn't get it.

Beverly Lucas and Mom greeted each other with air hugs and artificial smiles. Beverly cooed over Mom's lovely potato salad, but regretted that there wasn't enough room on the refreshments table for it. Mom cooed over Beverly's gorgeous red-and-blue cheesecake, but regretted that it was sitting out in the sun, so she didn't feel comfortable allowing her children to eat it.

Charlotte Lucas waved at me from the other side of the yard. Charlotte works for a mortgage lender and dresses the part of "professional woman" perfectly. Even today, at a casual backyard barbecue, she wore a button-up blouse and crisply pressed slacks.

I joined her with a "Howdy!"

"Howdy, indeed." Charlotte looked me up and down. "I didn't know you were into the cowgirl style."

"I dressed down out of consideration for Jane. I worried that my radiant beauty would upstage her at her big debut."

I peered around the Lucas' large backyard. Dad was drinking beer with his golf buddies. Kitty and Lydia were playing badminton

with a group of teens and twenty-somethings. Jane chatted with two middle-aged women she knew from Pilates class.

“So where’s this Hollywood producer my mom keeps going on about?”

“Ah, so that’s why Jane doesn’t look like herself. He’s not here yet. *My* mom has been peeking out the front door every two minutes to look for him.” Charlotte rolled her eyes. “She tried to doll me up, too. I told her no way, my acting days are over. Besides, he’s not really a producer.”

“You mean it was just a rumor?”

“Not exactly. He *has* produced a couple of movies, but he doesn’t own a production company or anything. I talked to him for a few minutes when he was moving in. I got the impression he’s a trust fund kid who has some friends in the film industry, and he helps them out when they ask.”

I elbowed Charlotte playfully. “Ooh, you talked to him already? My mom will be furious that you got the jump on Jane! So what’s he like, this mysterious stranger with the five-million-dollar home in L.A.?”

Charlotte shrugged and popped a grape into her mouth. “He’s just normal. A nice guy. You know, obscenely rich people aren’t much different from anyone else.” She chewed her grape thoughtfully. “Though to be honest, he’s...”

“He’s what?”

“He’s kind of an idiot.”

I didn’t know how to respond to that. I couldn’t even come up with a good joke. “Uh...how so?”

“You’d have to be an idiot to buy that house at asking price. One million in this neighborhood? It’s worth seven-fifty, at most. I asked

him why he didn't negotiate for a better price, and he said paying a little extra was worth it for the view."

I tried to wrap my mind around the idea of having so much money that a quarter of a million dollars is "a little extra." My mind wasn't flexible enough to succeed.

Suddenly, Beverly Lucas rushed over and grabbed Charlotte's wrist. Mom scurried over to Jane and pulled her away from her Pilates friends. Both women half-dragged their adult daughters to the refreshments table on the patio.

At that moment, two men in their thirties stepped through the patio doors to the backyard.

One man was tall and thin, with a big smile on his face. Every inch of him, from his side-parted hair to his cream-colored cardigan, screamed "nice." This, I supposed, must be Charles Bingley, the not-really-a-producer from Beverly Hills.

The other man...

Let me just say, Diary, that while I don't judge people who enjoy hooking up with strangers—all power to them—I am not personally one of them. I have to be in an exclusive relationship with a man to feel comfortable enough for physical intimacy. When I date, I want to get to know each other as friends first before we jump into bed. Once we reach the stage of calling each other cutesy nicknames and ending text messages with hearts, *then* I'm ready to try more than kissing and snuggling.

But there have been exactly two occasions in my life when I have been inexplicably overwhelmed by the urge to pull a complete stranger into a locked room and tear his clothes off.

The first time was when I was living in New York, working as an editorial assistant for a women's magazine and writing novels on

the side. I met a friend for brunch at a small cafe, and there I saw the world's most handsome waiter. While he was taking my order, I suddenly had a steamy fantasy of the two of us in a small, dark closet in the back of the restaurant. Of course I didn't act on the feeling and quickly shook it off.

The second time was today, when I met the man named Will Darcy.

II

Unlike with the waiter, the rush of lust didn't strike out of the blue. At first I only thought the guy standing next to Mr. Hollywood was just my type: dark-haired, clean-shaven, with a classic sense of style. Not many men under sixty wear tailored sports coats to backyard barbecues.

Out of curiosity, I sidled up to Mom and Jane to hear the introductions.

Beverly Lucas said, "This is my daughter, Charlotte. She works at Collins Mortgage."

"We've met!" When Mr. Hollywood smiled, rays of sunshine escaped through his teeth. "Charlotte has given me tons of great advice about the area. I feel like we're best friends already!"

"Is that right?" Beverly shot a glance of triumph at Mom. "You know, Charlotte also does musical theater. She was the leading lady in *Oklahoma!* three years ago."

Mom cut in. "Charlotte has such a lovely voice! It's just a shame that directors care more about looks than talent, so Charlotte has landed so few roles."

She twittered like a transparently manipulative parakeet. “Oh, silly me—I haven’t introduced myself! I’m Lucy Bennet. This here is my daughter, Elizabeth.”

I waved with an awkward smile.

“My youngest girls, Kitty and Lydia, are playing badminton over there. They’re students at OSU. Aren’t they cute? I have another daughter, Mary, but she had to work today. She finished her doctorate last year. We’re all so proud of her.”

Mom pushed Jane forward a bit. “Oh, you’re here too, Jane! I’m so sorry, I nearly forgot you. This is my oldest, Jane. Coincidentally, she’s an actress, too!”

When men meet my sister, it’s not uncommon for them to metamorphosize from humans into dogs. Some stare at her with bulging pug eyes and start talking in a panting, breathless way. Others bark with unnatural laughter and prance around, begging for attention. The worst ones transform into wolves who feel entitled to mark her as their territory.

But Mr. Hollywood turned into a species I’d never seen before: a terrified, cowering puppy.

“H-how-how are you?” he said. His hand shook as he held it out to Jane.

“I’m well, thank you.” Jane clasped his hand in hers, and I half expected Mr. Hollywood to scamper away and hide under a table. “How do you like Oregon so far?”

Mr. Hollywood’s mouth opened and closed. I don’t think his brain was in a state to handle such a complex question.

“Rain,” he said finally. “It hasn’t rained. I thought there would be a lot of rain. I brought five umbrellas and I haven’t even used one yet.”

Jane giggled.

I gaped at her. Jane doesn't giggle in front of men she doesn't know. She smiles in her cool, classy way, and her calm voice builds an invisible wall with a big hanging sign that says, "Sorry, Not Interested." Yet in front of the babbling Mr. Hollywood, she actually *giggled*.

Jane said, "When people think of Oregon, they think of Portland and the coast. It rains all the time over there. But on this side of the Cascades, it's all high desert. When my college friends come to visit, they're always shocked that the climate is so dry."

"Right?!" Mr. Hollywood relaxed a bit. "I was looking forward to wearing galoshes, too."

Jane giggled again. "Wait until winter, and you can wear snow boots every day."

"There's *snow*?!" Mr. Hollywood's eyes grew as big and round as if he were three years old and someone had just told him there are establishments called "toy stores."

I said, "What brings you to Bend? A lot of Californians vacation up here for the skiing, but it sounds like that's not your thing."

"Ah! That's because of this guy." Mr. Hollywood looped his arm around the neck of the man standing beside him, who hadn't spoken a word so far. "He's the sheriff 'round these parts."

"Deputy district attorney," the man said. "A deputy district attorney. One of many."

He said nothing more. We waited, but he didn't say his name, or "nice to meet you," or even "howdeedo."

After a few seconds, Charles Bingley laughed and said, "Meet Will Darcy. Take a look, ladies: he's filthy rich, crazy smart, and almost as handsome as I am!"

Will Darcy gave a stiff bow of his head, then resumed standing there as still and silent as a statue.

Okay, that was weird. But Will's eyes were pretty, so I was willing to overlook the weirdness. His black hair was a little long and swooped down over his forehead in an alluring way. His lips were fuller than most guys'. His posture radiated confidence and maturity.

I smiled at him, hoping I didn't look quite as gooey as Mr. Hollywood did when looking at Jane. "So you two are good friends?"

Mr. Hollywood announced, "He's my bro! Um, not *literally* my bro, I mean...we're, like, bros." He glanced at Jane and blushed.

Will said, "We were roommates at Stanford."

"Yeah, that! I stayed at Will's place last month with my sister, and she was like, 'It's great here. You should get a place.' And I was like, 'Why not?' And here I am!"

If my jaw weren't fixed firmly to my skull, it would have hit the floor. The man had spent a million dollars because "why not?"

The last movement of the Organ Symphony struck up over the speakers. Mr. Hollywood cocked his head. "Hey, I think I know this song."

Tom Lucas said with approval, "You like Saint-Saëns? The subtle low tones of the pipe organ are spectacular, aren't they?"

"It's called 'Sand Sauce'? Hm, I know I've heard it before, but I don't know where."

Will said, "*Babe.*"

"Hm?"

"The movie about the sheep pig."

"The what?"

Perfectly stone-faced, Will said, "That'll do, pig. That'll do."

He met my eye by chance, and that's when it happened. I stared into this man's serious toffee eyes and thought, "Here is my soulmate. I want to get married and make babies with him. Right here, right now."

My hormones careened out of control. My breath hitched. My body tingled. Crazy visions of pouncing on him in a random bedroom of the Lucas' house flashed through my mind.

Yes, Diary, I wanted to jump the man's bones because he referenced a children's movie. I swear I'm not a pervert. I'm just a healthy twenty-eight-year-old woman with a biological drive to make out like crazy with hot lawyers who appreciate fine cinema.

Beverly Lucas said, "Charles, you must not have had many opportunities to get to know the neighborhood yet. Why don't you take a walk with Charlotte while my husband fires up the grill?"

Mom said, "Oh, but Charlotte has her own apartment on the other side of town. There's been so much new construction recently, she might get lost. Jane, darling, be a good neighbor and show Charles around."

Beverly spit venom at Mom through her eyes. "Charlotte works in real estate. She knows the city better than anyone else here."

Charlotte said, "Not really. I'm a loan processor, not a realtor."

Mom spat back to Beverly, "I'm sure she knows *maps* very well, but actually living here is different, isn't it? Jane goes for a jog on these roads every morning."

Jane said, "But I don't often come up this way..."

Mr. Hollywood said, "That's all right, we can explore together!" From the way he looked at Jane, it was clear he didn't see anyone else around him.

Hesitantly, Jane agreed to walk around and show Charles the best views. Mom glowed beatifically. Beverly Lucas fumed murderously. Charlotte cut a slice of cheesecake for herself.

After Jane and Mr. Hollywood left, the others drifted away. I stood by the refreshments table with Will, who made no motion to go somewhere else. I took this to mean he was in love with me too.

I put on my cutest, brightest expression. "So you work for the DA's office! You must get a lot of lawyer jokes at parties."

"I do, yes." Will fell silent again.

I said, "I can't imagine working with police and criminals every day. Is it a stressful job?"

"It can be." He didn't elaborate.

Man, he was not making this easy. Clearly small talk was not Will's strong point. But that was fine, because I wasn't as interested in *talking* with him as I was in doing certain other things.

I leaned closer with the excuse of reaching for the cubed honeydew melon. My arm *accidentally* brushed his. "I've heard lawyers often work sixty hours a week or more. That must be tough on your girlfriend."

(Yes, Diary, I *am* my mother's daughter.)

Will's phone buzzed. He pulled it out and looked at the screen. "Excuse me, I need to take a call."

He walked into the house without a backward glance. I stood on the patio alone and deflated, holding a serving spoon and a plate of honeydew melon.

I don't even like honeydew melon.

III

Kitty and Lydia joined me on the patio, breathless from their badminton game.

Lydia asked, “Is the Hollywood producer here yet?”

“You just missed him.”

Kitty screeched, “What?!”

“Sorry, girls. He fell for Jane already. Sadly, none of us three will be cast in *The Avengers 4*.”

Lydia sniffed, “Of course he fell for Jane. Any man with eyes would fall head over heels for a Bennet girl at first sight.” She tossed her long coffee-colored hair. “Why aren’t the burgers ready yet? I’m *starving*.”

As the twins ran off to make a ruckus at the barbecue, Jane and Mr. Hollywood came through the patio doors. Mr. Hollywood made a joke that wasn’t funny at all. Jane laughed and batted his arm.

Let me repeat, Diary. She **laughed** and **batted his arm**.

I remind you that we are talking about my sister, Jane Bennet. Jane, who spent all of adolescence pining for the boy next door but acting so indifferent around him, no one had any idea until many years later, when she casually referred to him as her high school crush. Jane, whose college boyfriend dumped her on the day she bought red lingerie and invited him to her place for the first time, because he’d believed he was the only one in love and assumed “I want to talk about us” meant “let’s break up.”

That Jane had, on this historic day, voluntarily reached out and touched a man’s arm. His *bare* arm. For Jane Bennet, this was akin to throwing herself at Charles Bingley sighing, “Take me!”

I asked, “How were the views?”

Charles beamed. "Beautiful! I can't wait to spend more time here." He gazed fondly at Jane. "A *lot* more time."

Jane asked, "Is lunch ready?"

I said, "Tom is still working on it. But this honeydew melon is delicious. Here, have some!"

I put the plate in Jane's hands and excused myself to the bathroom. Not only did I actually need the bathroom, but I felt like a third wheel hanging around those two lovebirds.

After washing my hands, I checked my appearance. I hadn't worn any makeup because I hadn't expected to meet my soulmate at the neighbors' barbecue.

I combed my hair with my fingers and applied the tinted lip balm I keep in my purse. The look didn't exactly scream "Take me!" Jane style, but sex appeal is all in the attitude, right? I practiced my best come-hither expression in the mirror. When Will Darcy came back after his phone call, he'd be putty in my hands.

As I walked back through the hall, I heard a man's voice.

"My God, Will! What are you doing?!"

I peeked into the living room. Mr. Hollywood was standing with his hands on his hips. Will Darcy was sitting on the Lucas' reclining leather couch with a laptop.

"I can't believe you brought your work computer to a Fourth of July party! What the heck is wrong with you?"

"How was your walk?" Will asked. "That...uh...actress. Do you like her?"

"Like her? Dude, I'm going to marry her! She's the most perfect angel I've ever met!"

"That's nice." Will continued typing.

"I think her sister is into you."

I felt my cheeks warm. Was I that obvious?

“What was her name? Elizabeth. She’s really pretty too. For God’s sake, put that away and go talk to her! Can’t you stop working for two minutes? It’s a three-day weekend!”

“Indeed it is. So there will be plenty of weekend left when I’m finished with this.”

“Do you really not get how rude you’re being to Tom and Beverly right now? How can someone so smart be so stupid?”

Will stopped typing and looked up with a frown. “Did you just say you’re getting married?”

Mr. Hollywood grinned. “Yup. So...do you like her?”

“Who? Your actress?”

“No, not Jane. Her sister. Elizabeth.”

My heart raced. I held my breath and strained to hear the answer.

Will quirked an eyebrow. “Sorry, Charles. I’m not interested in settling down on the farm with a plump wife to raise goats and chickens.”

My racing heart stopped dead. I looked down at my pink flannel shirt, my ripped jeans and riding boots.

So I wasn’t dressed to impress today. And maybe I wasn’t as svelte as Jane, or as sophisticated as Charlotte. But still, how could he say something so mean?

I’d thought he was just my type. He wore a tailored sports coat. He quoted *Babe*. I couldn’t believe Will Darcy turned out to be such a...a...small-minded lemon-sucking jerk!

When I raised my head, Will was looking straight at me.

I said, “We don’t have any chickens, actually. Just the two goats in the spare bedroom upstairs.”

Will blinked, but his stoic expression didn't change.

I held my head high and walked away.

Haaa. The sun is up now, my back hurts, and my eyes feel like they're burning up in their sockets...but I feel so much better after writing all that out.

The more I think about it, the more I realize how hilariously absurd that conceited jerk really is. I mean, what's so bad about raising goats and chickens? Everyone likes hot wings!

I'm not going to waste any more of my time thinking about that guy. I'm not going to dwell on the experience of having my heart ripped out of my body, thrown in the dirt, and trampled into a bloody pulp.

Actually, you know what, Diary? I'm *glad* I had this experience. It's never a bad thing for a writer to meet horrible people and feel horrible things. I can bottle up the heartbreak and put it away for reference later.

Maybe I'll take a stab at a mystery novel next. The victim will be an insufferable deputy district attorney who makes enemies of everyone around him with his caustic remarks. The heroine will be a brilliant novelist who stumbles upon him dead in City Hall, poisoned by his own acid tongue. Ooh, plot bunny!

Now I'm going to take a hot, soothing bath, put on my pink flannel pajamas, and drift off counting my lucky stars that I'll never, ever see Will Darcy again.

Thank you for reading this preview! Purchase the full text from the retailer of your choice at <https://author.tkmarnell.com/books>