

ORGULLO Y PREJUICIO CAPÍTULOS 42-51

Capítulo 42

Si Lizzy hubiese tenido que fundar sus opiniones sólo en lo que veía en su propia familia, no habría podido albergar muy grata idea de la felicidad conyugal o la comodidad domésticas. Su padre, cautivado por la juventud, la hermosura y, sobre todo, por la apariencia de ambas, se había casado con una mujer cuya mezquindad y falta de inteligencia habían puesto fin, ya en los comienzos del matrimonio, a todo afecto real hacia ella. El respeto, la estimación y la confianza se habían desvanecido para siempre, y las perspectivas de felicidad doméstica de aquél se habían disipado. Pero no era propio del carácter de Mr. Bennet buscar consuelo para las consecuencias de su propia imprudencia en ninguno de los placeres que consuelan a menudo, con locuras o vicios, a los infortunados. Amaba el campo y los libros, y de semejantes aficiones había extraído sus principales goces. Poco debía a su mujer, a no ser la diversión que le habían procurado su necedad y su ignorancia. No es ésta la clase de dicha que un hombre desea, por lo común, deber a una mujer; pero donde faltan otros medios de diversión, el verdadero filósofo sabe sacar partido de los que están a su alcance.

Lizzy, no obstante, jamás había dejado de percatarse de las inconveniencias de la conducta de su padre como marido. Siempre la había observado con pena, pero, respetuosa de su talento y agradecida por el modo afectuoso con que la trataba, procuraba olvidar lo que no podía pasar por alto, apartando de su pensamiento aquella continua infracción de los deberes conyugales y del decoro, que, por el hecho de exponer a su esposa al desprecio de sus propias hijas, era tan reprehensible. Nunca había sentido con tanta fuerza los daños que pueden causar a los hijos matrimonios tan incongruentes, ni nunca se había percatado tanto de los peligros que derivan de tan errada dirección del talento; talento que, empleado debidamente, habría mantenido incólume, por lo menos, la respetabilidad de las hijas, aunque no hubiese bastado para aumentar la inteligencia de la esposa.

Si bien es cierto que Lizzy se alegró de la marcha de Wickham, no puede decirse que encontrara motivo de satisfacción en la del regimiento. Salía menos que antes, y en casa tenía una madre y una hermana cuyas constantes quejas por el aburrimiento de cuanto las rodeaba entristecían su vida doméstica. Aunque Kitty llegase a recobrar con el tiempo algo de su sentido común, puesto que ya no existían las causas que la perturbaban, Lizzy pensaba con intranquilidad en su otra hermana, cuya locura e imprudencia aumentarían al frecuentar, con cierta libertad, la playa y el campamento. En resumidas cuentas, ocurría ahora, como tantas veces antes, que un acontecimiento por el que tanto había suspirado no podía, al verlo realizado, proporcionarle toda la dicha soñada. Era preciso, por lo tanto, señalar otros límites para el comienzo de su felicidad, tender a otro punto al que quedasen ligados sus deseos y esperanzas y que, proporcionándole placer anticipado, la consolase del presente y la preparase para otro disgusto. Su excursión a los Lagos era, por el momento, el objeto de sus pensamientos. Resultaba su mayor consuelo en los momentos desagradables que pasaba soportando el descontento de su madre y de Kitty, y todo habría sido perfecto si el plan de viaje hubiese incluido a Jane.

Notas

Subraya las citas importantes.

Escribe un resumen de cada página.



Es una suerte, pensaba, que tenga algo que desear. Si todo fuera completo, mi disgusto sería seguro. Pero ahora, al cargar con la incesante fuente de pena por la separación de mi hermana, puedo, razonablemente, pensar que todas mis esperanzas de placer quedarán colmadas. Un proyecto que promete innumerables delicias nunca puede tener éxito, y la decepción general sólo se salva gracias a algún detalle molesto.

Al marcharse, Lydia prometió escribir a menudo a su madre y a Kitty, pero sus cartas se hicieron esperar mucho tiempo, y todas fueron breves. En las que dirigía a su madre siempre repetía lo mismo: que acababan de regresar de la sala de lectura, bellamente decorada, donde tales y cuales oficiales las habían saludado; que poseía un vestido nuevo o una nueva sombrilla que describiría con más lujo de detalle si no se viese obligada a dejarlo para otra ocasión por tener prisa, pues Mrs. Forster la llamaba para ir al campamento. De las cartas a su hermana aún se extraía menos información, pues aunque eran más largas, tenía demasiadas palabras subrayadas como para hacerla pública.

Dos o tres semanas después de la marcha de Lydia, la salud, el buen humor y la alegría comenzaron a brillar en Longbourn. Todo presentaba más grato aspecto. Regresaban las familias que habían pasado el invierno en la capital y volvían a celebrarse reuniones veraniegas. Mrs. Bennet dejó de quejarse y hacia mediados de junio, Kitty estuvo lo bastante restablecida para poder entrar en Meryton sin llorar. Hecho tan insólito hizo abrigar esperanzas a Lizzy de que para la próxima Navidad su hermana ya se encontraría en disposición de no mencionar a los oficiales más que una vez al día, a no ser que por alguna cruel y maligna orden del Ministerio de la Guerra se acuartelara en Meryton otro regimiento.

La época fijada para su excursión al Norte se aproximaba ya. Faltaban sólo dos semanas cuando se recibió una carta de Mrs. Gardiner, que a la vez dilataba su comienzo y abreviaba su duración. Mr. Gardiner se veía impedido, a causa de sus negocios, de partir hasta dos semanas después de comenzado julio, y le era forzoso estar de nuevo en Londres al cabo de un mes. Como esto reducía demasiado el tiempo para ir tan lejos como habían proyectado, y como esta circunstancia no les permitía ir demasiado lejos ni verlo todo con el reposo y comodidad necesarios, se sentían en la obligación de renunciar a los Lagos, sustituyéndolos por otra excursión más breve. Por consiguiente, habían decidido no ir más allá del condado de Derby. En esta comarca había bastantes cosas dignas de verse para ocupar la mayor parte del tiempo, y a Mrs. Gardiner le hacía mucha ilusión ir allí. La ciudad donde había pasado algunos años de su vida y ahora descansarían unos días, acaso fuera para Lizzy objeto de curiosidad tan grande como todas las célebres bellezas de Matlock, Chatsworth, Dovedale o el Peak.

Lizzy se sintió muy disgustada; había puesto sus anhelos en ver los Lagos, y creía que habrían tenido tiempo suficiente. Pero no tenía más remedio que conformarse, y seguro que sería feliz, por lo que pronto se resignó.

Con el nombre de Derby asociaba muchas ideas. Lizzy no podía oír esa palabra sin pensar en Pemberley y en su propietario. «Pero de seguro —se decía— podré entrar en sus dominios impunemente y hurtarle algunos fósiles sin que se dé cuenta.»

Por todo esto, la espera se hizo doblemente larga. Cuatro semanas transcurrieron antes de que llegaran sus tíos. Pero los señores de Gardiner se presentaron por fin en Longbourn con sus cuatro hijos. Éstos, dos niñas de seis y ocho años respectivamente y dos varones menores, quedarían bajo el cuidado especial de su prima favorita, Jane, cuyo carácter tranquilo y temperamento dulce la hacían perfectamente apta para instruirlos, jugar con ellos y quererlos.

Los Gardiner pasaron la noche en Longbourn y partieron con Lizzy a la mañana siguiente en busca de novedades y esparcimiento. La excursión sin duda sería agradable, pues los tres tenían una excelente disposición para el compañerismo, gozaban de buena salud y podían adaptarse a cualquier clase de incomodidades.

No es objeto de esta obra describir el condado de Derby ni ninguno de los notables puntos del itinerario de nuestros viajeros: Oxford, Blenheim, Warwick, Kenelworth, Birmingham, etcétera, son suficientemente conocidos. A una reducida parte del condado se refiere lo que sigue: a la pequeña ciudad de Lambton, escenario de la antigua residencia de Mrs. Gardiner, donde supo después que le quedaban algunos conocidos y adonde se encaminaron los expedicionarios después de ver las principales maravillas de la campiña; y el corazón dictó a Lizzy que a menos de cinco millas de Lambton estaba situado Pemberley, no en el camino directo, sino a una o dos millas de él. Mrs. Gardiner había manifestado el día anterior su deseo de volver a ver aquella residencia. Mr. Gardiner dio su aprobación y solicitó la de Lizzy.

—Querida, ¿no te gustaría ver un lugar del que tanto has oído hablar? —le dijo su tía—. Lugar, además, con el que tan relacionadas están algunas personas que conoces. Ya sabes que Wickham pasó su juventud allí.

Lizzy se vio de pronto en un aprieto. Sabía que nada tenía que hacer en Pemberley y hubo de confesar que no tenía interés en verlo. Añadió que estaba harta de contemplar grandes palacios, que tras haber visto tantos, ya no encontraba placer en las alfombras lujosas ni en las cortinas de seda.

Mrs. Gardiner censuró su desinterés.

—Si sólo se tratase de una casa ricamente amueblada —le dijo—, tampoco me interesaría a mí; pero la finca es deliciosa. Tiene uno de los mejores bosques de la comarca.

Lizzy no habló más, pero su espíritu ya no tuvo paz; temía la posibilidad de encontrarse con Darcy mientras visitaban el lugar. ¡Sería horroroso! La sola idea hizo que se sonrojase, y pensó que sería mejor hablar con claridad a su tía que correr semejante riesgo. Pero había objeciones contra ese proceder, y a la postre resolvió que sería el último recurso si sus indagaciones particulares sobre la ausencia de la familia del propietario eran contestadas de manera desfavorable.

En consecuencia, cuando se retiró por la noche preguntó a la criada si Pemberley era un lugar bonito, cuál era el nombre de su propietario y, luego, si la familia estaba allí durante el verano. Acogió con infinito alivio la respuesta negativa a esta pregunta, y más tranquila, comenzó a sentir

una gran curiosidad por ver la casa. Por consiguiente, cuando por la mañana se volvió a hablar del asunto, manifestó, con fingida indiferencia, que no le disgustaba. Así pues, fueron a Pemberley.

*¿Cuáles temas has
identificado?*

*¿Cuál es el tono
general de la novela
hasta ahora?*



Capítulo 43

Mientras se dirigían hacia allí, Lizzy contempló los bosques de Pemberley con cierta turbación, y cuando por fin entraron en la finca, se sentía muy inquieta.

El parque era muy extenso y abarcaba gran variedad de tierras. Entraron en él por una de las zonas más bajas y el coche avanzó por un hermoso bosque.

Lizzy tenía demasiadas preocupaciones como para conversar, pero aun así pudo observar y admirar las bellezas de aquel paraje. Subieron gradualmente durante media milla, y por fin llegaron a una elevación desde la cual se distinguía la casa de Pemberley, situada al lado opuesto del valle por el cual se deslizaba el algo abrupto camino. Era una construcción de piedra, amplia y hermosa, bien emplazada en un terreno elevado, que destacaba sobre una cadena de altas colinas cubiertas de bosques, y tenía enfrente un considerable arroyo bastante caudaloso y orillas irregulares y descuidadas. Lizzy estaba maravillada. Jamás había visto un lugar tan mimado por la naturaleza o donde la belleza natural fuera menos contrariada por el mal gusto. Todos se mostraron admirados, ¡y en aquel instante se dio cuenta de que ser la dueña de Pemberley era algo muy importante!

Descendieron por la ladera de la colina, cruzaron un puente y siguieron hasta la puerta, y mientras examinaban el aspecto de la casa desde cerca, se renovó en Lizzy el temor de encontrarse con su propietario. Temía que la criada se hubiera equivocado. Al pedir permiso para visitar la casa fueron introducidos en el vestíbulo; mientras esperaban al ama de llaves, Lizzy no pudo por menos que maravillarse de hallarse donde se hallaba.

El ama de llaves era una mujer anciana y respetable, mucho menos distinguida pero más cortés de lo que había imaginado. La siguieron al comedor. Era una estancia amplia y hermosamente amueblada. Lizzy, tras una rápida mirada, se acercó a una ventana para gozar del panorama. La colina coronada de bosque por cuya ladera habían bajado, resultaba hermosa. Toda la disposición del terreno era acertada, y con delicia contempló la escena: el arroyo, los árboles esparcidos por sus orillas, y la curva del valle hasta donde la vista alcanzaba. Cuando pasaron a otras habitaciones, las mencionadas vistas aparecían en disposiciones diferentes; pero desde todas las ventanas había algo bello que contemplar. Las estancias, por su parte, eran altas y bellas, y su mobiliario en armonía con la fortuna de su propietario; pero Lizzy notó, admirando el gusto de éste, que no había nada muy llamativo ni vanamente lujoso, que reinaba menos esplendor pero más elegancia que en la mansión de Rosings.

¡Y de este sitio, pensaba, habría podido ser dueña! ¡Estas habitaciones podrían ser ahora familiares para mí! ¡En lugar de visitarlas como forastera podría disfrutarlas como mías y recibir en ellas a mis tíos! Pero no, se dijo, recobrándose, eso no habría podido ser, pues seguramente hubiese perdido a mis tíos al no permitírseme invitarlos.

Ésa fue una afortunada reflexión, pues la libró de algo parecido a la tristeza.

Notas

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Deseaba averiguar por el ama de llaves si el dueño de todo aquello estaba de veras ausente, pero carecía de valor para ello. Al fin, hizo la pregunta su tío, y ella se volvió alarmada al contestar Mrs. Reynolds afirmativamente, añadiendo:

—Pero lo esperamos mañana. Llegará con numerosos amigos.

Lizzy se alegró al oír aquello, así como de que su viaje no hubiese tenido que demorarse un día.

La llamó en ese momento su tía para mostrarle un cuadro. Se aproximó y vio el retrato de Wickham sobre un tapete, entre otras miniaturas. Su tía le preguntó, con una sonrisa, qué le parecía. El ama de llaves se acercó y les dijo que aquel retrato era de un joven hijo del último administrador de su amo, educado por éste y a sus expensas.

—Se ha alistado en el ejército —añadió—, y temo que se haya vuelto muy desenfrenado.

Mrs. Gardiner dirigió una sonrisa a su sobrina, pero ésta no se la devolvió.

—Y éste —dijo Mrs. Reynolds refiriéndose a otra de las miniaturas— es el retrato de mi amo. Fue pintado al mismo tiempo que el otro, hace unos ocho años.

—Mucho he oído elogiar las facciones de su amo —dijo Mrs. Gardiner mirando el retrato—; es un rostro bello. Pero, Lizzy, dime si se le parece o no.

El respeto de Mrs. Reynolds por Lizzy pareció aumentar al enterarse de que conocía a su amo.

—¿Conoce esta señorita a Mr. Darcy?

—Un poco —respondió Lizzy, sonrojándose.

—¿Y no le tiene usted por muy apuesto caballero, señorita?

—Sí, muy apuesto.

—Estoy segura de que no conozco otro tan guapo. Pero en la galería del piso superior verán ustedes un retrato de él mejor y más grande. Esta habitación era la favorita de mi anterior amo, y estas miniaturas se hallan exactamente como solían estar entonces. Le gustaban mucho.

Eso explicó a Lizzy el motivo por el cual el retrato de Wickham se encontraba allí entre ellas.

Mrs. Reynolds dirigió entonces la atención de los visitantes hacia una miniatura de Miss Darcy pintada cuando sólo tenía ocho años.

—Y Miss Darcy ¿es tan agraciada como su hermano? —preguntó Mrs. Gardiner.

—¡Oh, sí! Jamás he visto señorita más hermosa e instruida. Se pasa el día cantando y tocando el piano. En la habitación de al lado hay un piano nuevo, recién traído para ella, regalo de mi amo. Llegará mañana con él.



Mr. Gardiner, cuyos modales eran complacientes y amables, la animaba a hablar con preguntas y advertencias, y Mrs. Reynolds, ya por orgullo, ya por afecto, tenía gran satisfacción en dar noticias de su amo y de la hermana de éste.

—¿Reside su amo en Pemberley mucho tiempo durante el año?

—No tanto como sería mi deseo, pero puedo afirmar que pasa aquí la mitad del tiempo; y en cuanto a Miss Darcy, no puede moverse de aquí durante los meses de verano.

Excepto, pensó Lizzy, cuando va a Ramsgate.

—Si su amo se casase le vería más a menudo.

—Sí, señor; pero no sé cuándo llegará ese momento. No sé quién será bastante buena para él.

Mr. y Mrs. Gardiner sonrieron. Lizzy no pudo evitar decir:

—Le honra el que usted tenga de él tan alto concepto.

—No digo sino la verdad y lo que dirá cualquiera que le conozca — replicó Mrs. Reynolds. Lizzy vio que la adulación era excesiva, y escuchaba con creciente asombro, cuando el ama dijo—: Nunca en mi vida he recibido de él una palabra de enojo, y lo conozco desde que tenía cuatro años.

Era ése un elogio mucho más extraordinario que los otros y más opuesto a lo que Lizzy pensaba de Darcy. Su firme opinión había sido que él no era hombre de buen carácter. Sintió entonces mucha curiosidad; ansiaba oír más, y quedó complacida con su tío cuando éste dijo:

—Pocas personas hay de quienes se pueda decir eso. Es usted afortunada teniendo un amo así.

—Sí, señor, sí que lo soy. Si recorriera el mundo no podría dar con otro mejor. Pero con los años he observado que quienes muestran buen carácter desde niños lo conservan cuando son mayores; y él siempre fue el muchacho más dulce y más generoso que se pueda imaginar.

Lizzy miró fijamente a la mujer y pensó: ¿Puede ser ése Darcy?

—Creo que su padre era una excelente persona —intervino Mrs. Gardiner.

—Sí, señora, lo era, en efecto; y su hijo es exactamente igual, tan afecto a los pobres.

Lizzy escuchaba, se admiraba, dudaba y estaba impaciente por oír más. Mrs. Reynolds no despertaba su interés con otra cosa. En vano le hablaba de los cuadros, de las dimensiones de las habitaciones y del valor del mobiliario. Mr. Gardiner, a quien divertía esa especie de prejuicio de familia a que Mrs. Reynolds atribuía los excesivos elogios a su amo, pronto volvió al tema; y, mientras subían por la escalera, la mujer insistió en los muchos méritos de Darcy.

—Mi señor es el mejor amo —dijo— que ha habido jamás; no se parece a esos alocados jóvenes que no piensan sino en sí mismos. No hay uno solo de sus arrendatarios y criados que no lo



elogie. Algunos dicen que es orgulloso; pero estoy segura de no haber notado nada de eso. Imagino que se lo tiene como tal porque no suele charlar como otros.

¡Qué favorable resulta todo eso para él!, pensó Lizzy.

—Tan delicado elogio —susurró su tía a su oído mientras recorrían la casa— no se aviene con su conducta para con nuestro pobre amigo.

—Quizá estemos equivocados.

—No lo creo. Nuestra información era muy digna de crédito.

Cuando llegaron al amplio corredor de arriba, el ama les mostró un hermoso saloncito, recientemente reformado y dispuesto con mayor elegancia y sencillez que las estancias inferiores, y les dijo que todo se había hecho por complacer a Miss Darcy, quien había tomado apego a dicha habitación la última vez que estuvo en Pemberley.

—Es de veras un buen hermano —dijo Lizzy mientras se encaminaba hacia una de las ventanas.

Mrs. Reynolds manifestó el placer que sentiría Miss Darcy cuando entrase en aquel saloncito.

—Y así se porta él siempre —añadió—. Cuanto puede proporcionar una alegría a su hermana, no duda en hacerlo. Haría todo lo que fuese por ella.

La galería de pinturas y dos o tres de los principales dormitorios era cuanto quedaba por enseñar. En la primera lucían varios cuadros buenos; pero Lizzy no entendía nada de arte, y sólo se interesó por ciertos dibujos a lápiz de Mrs. Darcy, cuyos asuntos eran, en general, más interesantes y, a la vez, más inteligibles.

En la galería había también varios retratos de familia; pero pocos valían lo suficiente para atraer la atención de un extraño. Lizzy la recorrió buscando el único retrato cuyas facciones había de reconocer. Al llegar a él se detuvo, advirtiendo la sorprendente semejanza con Darcy, en cuyo rostro aparecía cierta sonrisa que ella recordaba muy bien. Permaneció varios minutos ante la pintura, contemplándola atentamente, y aún volvió a ella de nuevo antes de abandonar la galería. Mrs. Reynolds le hizo saber que había sido hecha en tiempos del fallecido Mr. Darcy.

En ese momento, en el ánimo de Lizzy había, en verdad, más inclinación hacia el original de la que había experimentado hasta entonces. Los elogios de Mrs. Reynolds no eran poca cosa. ¿Qué elogio más valioso que el de un criado inteligente? ¡Consideraba a cuánta gente podía hacer feliz como hermano, como señor y como amo!; ¡cuánto placer y cuánta pena podía proporcionar!; ¡cuánto bien y cuánto mal podía hacer! Todo lo manifestado por el ama de llaves hablaba en favor de su carácter, y al colocarse ante el lienzo en que estaba representado, fijos los ojos en ella, juzgó el interés que le manifestó con más profundo sentimiento de gratitud del que antes le había suscitado. Al recordar su furia, dulcificó las palabras, por otra parte impropias que había pronunciado.

Una vez visto cuanto de la casa se abría al público, volvieron a bajar, y despidiéndose de ellos, el ama de llaves les presentó al jardinero, que esperaba a la puerta del vestíbulo.

Cuando se encaminaban, cruzando el prado, hacia el arroyo, Lizzy se volvió para mirar de nuevo la casa; su tío y su tía se detuvieron también, y mientras aquél hacía conjeturas sobre la época de construcción del edificio, el propietario del mismo se acercaba deprisa hacia ellos desde el camino que por detrás conducía a las caballerizas.

Estaban a menos de veinte yardas, y tan repentina fue su aparición, que resultó imposible impedir que los viera. Los ojos de Lizzy y de Darcy se encontraron al instante, y los rostros de ambos se ruborizaron. Él se paró en seco, y permaneció por un instante inmóvil a causa de la sorpresa; pero recobrándose rápidamente, se acercó al grupo y habló a Lizzy, si no en términos amables, sí al menos corteses.

Ella se volvió, instintivamente, pero, tras detenerse cuando él llegó, recibió sus cumplidos con turbación imposible de disimular. Si su aspecto a primera vista, o su parecido con los retratos que acababan de contemplar, hubieran sido insuficientes para que Mr. y Mrs. Gardiner supieran que estaban ante Darcy, la expresión de sorpresa del jardinero al encontrarse con su amo habría tenido que revelárselo al punto. Se detuvieron a cierta distancia mientras Darcy hablaba con su sobrina, quien, asombrada y confusa, apenas osaba levantar los ojos hacia él y no sabía qué contestación dar a las preguntas que le dirigía sobre su familia. Sorprendida por el cambio que habían experimentado sus modales desde que se separaron por última vez, a cada frase que decía aumentaba su turbación, y al acudir a su mente las ideas de lo impropio que era encontrarse allí, durante los pocos momentos que estuvieron juntos no pudo evitar sentirse profundamente intranquila. Tampoco parecía él muy sereno; cuando hablaba, su acento no poseía nada de su calma habitual, y repetía sus preguntas acerca de cuándo había dejado Longbourn y sobre su estancia en el condado de Derby tantas veces, y con tal apresuramiento, que a las claras delataba lo agitado que estaba.

Al cabo, pareció que las ideas se negaban a acudir a su mente, y tras permanecer por unos instantes sin pronunciar palabra, se despidió y se dirigió hacia su casa.

Mr. y Mrs. Gardiner se reunieron entonces con Lizzy y elogiaron el aspecto de Darcy; pero ella no oía nada y, sumida en sus pensamientos, los siguió en silencio. Se sentía triste y avergonzada. ¡Haber ido a aquel lugar era la cosa más desatinada que había hecho jamás! ¡Qué extraño tenía que haberle parecido! ¡Cómo habría de tomar su actitud un hombre tan vanidoso! Podía creer que ella de nuevo había intentado cruzarse en su camino. ¡Ah! ¿Por qué había venido?, o ¿por qué había venido él un día antes? Si se hubiera adelantado sólo diez minutos, no se habrían encontrado pues era evidente que acababa de llegar en aquel momento. Se avergonzó una y otra vez de su desdichado encuentro. Y la conducta de él, tan notoriamente distinta, ¿qué podía significar? ¡Era sorprendente que todavía le hubiera hablado, pero hablarle con tanta cortesía, preguntarle por su familia! Jamás había advertido tal sencillez en sus modales, nunca le había oído hablar con tanta gentileza como en aquel inesperado encuentro. ¡Qué contraste ofrecía con



la última vez que se había dirigido a ella, en el parque de Rosings, para entregarle la carta! No sabía qué pensar ni cómo interpretar todo aquello.

Entretanto, habían entrado en un hermoso paseo próximo al arroyo, y a cada paso se ofrecía, o un más bello declive del terreno, o una más preciosa vista de los bosques a que se aproximaban; pero transcurrió tiempo antes de que Lizzy se percatara de ello, y aunque respondía maquinalmente a las reiteradas preguntas de sus tíos y parecía dirigir la mirada a los objetos a que éstos se referían, no distinguía nada en absoluto. Sus pensamientos estaban fijos en aquel sitio de la casa de Pemberley, cualquiera que fuese, donde entonces debía de encontrarse Darcy. Anhelaba saber qué pasaba por la mente de él en ese momento, de qué modo pensaba de ella, y si a pesar de todo aún la quería. Acaso hubiera sido cortés tan sólo porque se sentía tranquilo; pero algo había en su voz que no delataba tranquilidad. No podía adivinar si él había sentido placer o pesar al verla, pero no cabía duda de que no la había visto con calma.

Las observaciones de sus tíos sobre su distracción hicieron que se sonrojara y sintió la necesidad de parecerse más a sí misma.

Entraron en el bosque y, alejándose del arroyo, subieron a uno de los puntos más elevados, desde el cual, en los sitios donde, desde algún claro entre los árboles, se divisaban muchos encantadores paisajes del valle, de las colinas opuestas, cubiertas de bosques y, de vez en cuando, atravesadas por algún arroyo. Mr. Gardiner manifestó deseos de rodear el parque, pero temía que eso resultara más que un simple paseo. Con sonrisa triunfal se les dijo que el parque tenía diez millas de circunferencia, lo que decidió la cuestión. Siguiendo el mismo camino, que los condujo a una pendiente con árboles inclinados sobre el borde del agua, en uno de los puntos más estrechos. Cruzaron el arroyo por un pequeño puente. El paisaje era menos frondoso y la hondonada, ahora convertida en cañada, sólo proporcionaba espacio para el arroyo y para un estrecho sendero en medio del rústico soto que lo bordeaba. Lizzy deseaba explorar aquellas revueltas, pero cuando hubieron cruzado el puente y advertido la distancia que los separaba de la casa, Mrs. Gardiner, que no era amiga de caminar, sólo pensó en volver al coche lo antes posible. Su sobrina, pues, se vio obligada a resignarse, y emprendieron el camino hacia la casa por el lado opuesto del arroyo y en la dirección más corta. Pero avanzaban lentamente, pues, Mr. Gardiner era muy aficionado a pescar, aunque pocas veces pudiera darse ese gusto, y se entretenía en vigilar la aparición de alguna trucha en el agua, y en hablar de este tema con el jardinero. Mientras caminaban a paso lento fueron de nuevo sorprendidos, y el asombro de Lizzy fue tan grande como el de la vez anterior al observar que Darcy se aproximaba a ellos y estaba ya a corta distancia. Como el camino allí era menos frondoso, pudieron verlo antes de encontrarse con él. Lizzy, aunque asombrada, hallábase más dispuesta que antes a entablar conversación, y resolvió manifestar calma en su aspecto y en su lenguaje, si realmente él intentaba salirles al encuentro. Por un instante creyó firmemente que Darcy se había dirigido por el otro sendero, y esa idea le duró mientras un recodo del camino le ocultaba la vista de aquél; pero pasado dicho recodo lo encontraron ante ellos. A la primera mirada notó Lizzy que Darcy no había perdido nada de su reciente cortesía, y para imitar su buena educación comenzó, en cuanto se reunieron, a elogiar la belleza del paisaje. Pero no había llegado a las palabras «delicioso» y «encantador»,

cuando algún desdichado recuerdo se interpuso, y Lizzy imaginó que elogiar a Pemberley sería mal interpretado. Palideció y no dijo más.

Mrs. Gardiner venía algo atrás, y aprovechando Darcy el silencio de Lizzy le preguntó si le haría el honor de presentarle a sus amigos. Ésa fue una muestra de cortesía para la que no estaba preparada, y con dificultad pudo evitar una sonrisa al ver que él pretendía conocer a algunas de aquellas personas contra las que había manifestado su desdén al declarársele. ¿Cuál será su sorpresa, pensó, cuando sepa quiénes son? Ahora los toma por gente distinguida.

Con todo, la presentación se hizo al instante, y al mencionar el parentesco, miró con rapidez a Darcy para ver cómo recibía la noticia, y no sin esperar que huyera tan pronto como pudiese de tan poco gratos compañeros. Que quedó sorprendido por aquella noticia, fue evidente; la soportó no obstante con entereza, y en lugar de continuar adelante, retrocedió con todos ellos, entrando en conversación con Mr. Gardiner. Lizzy no pudo por menos que alegrarse y considerarse triunfante. Era consolador que él supiese que tenía algunos parientes de los que no era preciso avergonzarse. Escuchó muy atenta la conversación entre Darcy y su tío, congratulándose de toda frase de este último que denotara su inteligencia, su gesto y sus buenos modales.

El tema de la pesca surgió enseguida, y la joven oyó que Darcy invitaba a su tío a pescar allí siempre que quisiera, ofreciéndose, además, a procurarle aparejos de pesca y señalándole los puntos del río donde de ordinario ésta abundaba. Mrs. Gardiner, que paseaba cogida del brazo de Lizzy, la miraba con expresión de asombro. Lizzy no dijo nada, pero le agradó mucho la situación; el cumplido tenía que ser, de seguro, por ella. Su asombro, con todo, era extraordinario, y sin cesar se repetía: «¿Por qué está tan cambiado? No puede ser por mí, no puedo ser la causante de que sus modales se hayan dulcificado tanto. Mis reproches de Hunsford no podían producir un cambio así. Es imposible que aún me ame.»

Después de pasear un rato de esa forma, las dos señoras delante y los dos caballeros detrás, al volver a emprender de nuevo el camino, tras un descenso al borde del arroyo, con objeto de contemplar mejor cierta curiosa planta acuática, se efectuó un trueque. Lo originó Mrs. Gardiner, quien, fatigada por el ejercicio del día, encontraba el brazo de su sobrina inadecuado para sostenerla, y en consecuencia prefirió el de su marido. Darcy se situó entonces al lado de Lizzy y siguieron así su paseo. Después de un corto silencio, ella se animó a hablar. Deseaba hacerle saber que se había cerciorado de su ausencia antes de llegar a ese sitio, y por ello comenzó por observar que su llegada había sido inesperada.

—Su ama de llaves —añadió— nos había informado de que no vendría hasta mañana; y aun antes de salir de Bakewell entendimos que no se lo esperaba a usted pronto.

Él reconoció la verdad de todo eso y dijo que asuntos con su administrador habían motivado que se adelantara algunas horas al resto del grupo con que viajaba.



—Mañana temprano —prosiguió— se unirán todos conmigo, y entre ellos hay algunos que querrán verla a usted; me refiero a Mr. Bingley y sus hermanas.

Lizzy sólo contestó con una ligera inclinación de la cabeza. Su pensamiento voló al instante a la última ocasión en que el nombre de Bingley había sido mencionado por ambos, y, a juzgar por la expresión de Darcy, éste debía de estar pensando en lo mismo.

—Figura también otra persona en la partida —continuó él después de una pausa—; alguien que desea conocerla. ¿Me permitirá usted, o es pretender demasiado, presentarle a mi hermana mientras están ustedes en Lambton?

La sorpresa por semejante pedido fue grande, en verdad. Lizzy no podía imaginar cómo aquélla pretendía semejante cosa; pero al instante comprendió que cualquier deseo de conocerla que abrigase Miss Darcy tenía que ser obra de su hermano, y por ende, sin que hubiese más que pensar en ello, resultaba grato saber que el resentimiento no le había hecho pensar mal de ella.

Siguieron paseando en silencio, profundamente sumidos ambos en sus pensamientos. Lizzy no estaba tranquila, érale imposible, pero se sentía halagada y complacida. El deseo de Darcy de presentarle a su hermana era una atención muy digna de ser tenida en cuenta. Pronto dejaron atrás a los otros, y cuando alcanzaron el coche, Mr. y Mrs. Gardiner estaban a un cuarto de milla de distancia.

Él la invitó entonces a entrar en la casa, pero Lizzy respondió que no estaba cansada, y permanecieron juntos en el prado. Durante ese tiempo habrían podido decir mucho, y este silencio fue una verdadera torpeza. Al fin, Lizzy recordó que había viajado, y habló de Matlock y Dovedale con efusión. El tiempo pasaba, su tía se movía con calma y su paciencia y sus ideas se consumían antes de acabarse la conversación. Cuando Mr. y Mrs. Gardiner hubieron llegado, se invitó a todos a entrar en la casa y tomar un refrigerio, pero la invitación fue rehusada y se separaron con la mayor cortesía. Darcy acompañó a los señores al coche, y cuando éste partió, Lizzy vio a aquél encaminarse despacio hacia la casa.

Entonces comenzaron las observaciones de sus tíos, declarando ambos que Darcy era infinitamente superior a cuanto podía esperarse.

—Es educado, cortés y sencillo —dijo el tío.

—Estoy convencida de que hay en él algo de orgullo —continuó la tía —, pero no le sienta mal. Puedo decir, con el ama de llaves, que aunque se le tilde de arrogante, yo no he visto en él nada de eso.

—Me ha sorprendido su conducta para con nosotros. Más que cortés, ha sido atento, y no tenía necesidad de semejante atención. Su relación con Lizzy era muy superficial.

—Cierto, Lizzy —dijo la tía—, que no es tan guapo como Wickham, o mejor dicho, que no posee su figura, pero sus facciones son perfectas. Mas ¿por qué motivo insistías en que era tan desagradable?

Lizzy se disculpó lo mejor que supo: dijo que al encontrarlo en Kent le había gustado más que con anterioridad, y que nunca lo había hallado tan amable como ese día.

—Acaso su amabilidad sea algo caprichosa —dijo el tío—. Estos personajes suelen ser así. Por eso no consideré su invitación en lo referente a la pesca, no sea que cualquier día cambie de opinión y me eche de la finca.

Lizzy comprendió que habían confundido por completo su carácter, pero no dijo nada.

—De lo que hemos visto en él —continuó Mrs. Gardiner— no habría pensado que se portara con nadie tan mal como lo ha hecho con Wickham; no tiene aspecto de persona cruel. Por el contrario, hay en su voz algo agradable. Y también algo de dignidad en su porte que a nadie haría desconfiar de sus sentimientos. Pero la buena mujer que nos enseñó la casa le atribuía carácter más ardiente. Al oírla decir eso, tuve que reprimir la risa. Pero será que se trata de un amo generoso, y a los ojos de una sirvienta eso comprende todas las virtudes.

Lizzy se sintió en ese momento obligada a salir en defensa del proceder de Darcy para con Wickham; y así, les dio a entender, con la mayor delicadeza de que fue capaz que, por lo oído a los parientes que él tenía en Kent, sus actos podían interpretarse de muy diferente modo, y que ni su carácter era tan malo ni el de Wickham tan bueno como se había creído en el condado de Hertford. En confirmación de lo dicho, refirió las particularidades de todas las transacciones pecuniarias en que habían tomado parte, sin mencionar la fuente de donde las tomaba, pero afirmando que todo era tal como lo contaba.

Mrs. Gardiner quedó sorprendida e interesada con todo eso, pero como en aquel momento iban acercándose al teatro de sus pasados placeres, estas ideas cedieron al encanto de sus recuerdos, y se ocupó de señalar a su marido los interesantes puntos que les rodeaban, para pensar en otra cosa. Así que, a pesar de la fatiga producida por el paseo de la mañana, apenas hubieron terminado de comer salieron de nuevo en busca de antiguas amistades, y la velada transcurrió en medio de la satisfacción producida por un trato renovado tras muchos años de interrupción.

Los acontecimientos del día habían sido demasiado interesantes para permitir a Lizzy prestar mucha atención a ninguno de sus nuevos amigos, y no pudo sino reflexionar con asombro en la amabilidad de Darcy, y más aún en el deseo de éste de que conociera a su hermana.

¿Cuáles temas has identificado?

¿Cuál es el tono general de la novela hasta ahora?



Capítulo 44

Lizzy había calculado que Darcy y su hermana le harían una visita al día siguiente de su llegada, y, en consecuencia, había resuelto no perder de vista la pensión en toda la mañana. Pero su cálculo resultó equivocado, pues sus visitantes vinieron el mismo día que llegaron a Pemberley. Lizzy y Mr. y Mrs. Gardiner paseaban por la población con algunos de los nuevos amigos, y regresaban en aquel momento a la pensión para vestirse e ir a comer con ellos, cuando el ruido de un carruaje los hizo asomarse a la ventana, desde donde vieron a un caballero y a una señorita en un cabriolé que subía por la calle. Lizzy, que reconoció al instante la librea, adivinó lo que eso significaba y proporcionó no escasa sorpresa a sus parientes poniéndolos al corriente del honor de que iba a ser objeto. Su tío y su tía quedaron asombrados, y el nerviosismo en el modo de hablar de ella, unido al hecho mismo y a muchas de las circunstancias del día anterior, les hizo concebir el asunto desde un nuevo aspecto. Nada lo había dado a entender antes, pero ahora convinieron en que no había otro medio de explicarse esas atenciones por parte de él, sin suponer cierto interés por su sobrina. Mientras acudían a sus mentes esas nuevas ideas, la perturbación de Lizzy aumentaba por momentos. Admirábase de su propia inquietud, pero, entre otras causas de desasosiego, temía ahora que la parcialidad del hermano hubiera hablado a Miss Darcy demasiado en su favor, y deseosa de resultar particularmente agradable, no lo consiguiera.

Se apartó de la ventana para no ser vista, y mientras paseaba por la estancia, tratando de calmarse, percibió tales miradas interrogativas en sus tíos, que esto la puso aún más nerviosa.

Entraron Darcy y su hermana, y llegó el momento de las presentaciones. Con asombro advirtió Lizzy que su nueva conocida estaba casi tan azorada como ella misma. Desde su llegada a Lambton había oído que Miss Darcy era extremadamente orgullosa, pero tras estudiarla por unos minutos llegó a la conclusión que sólo era tímida en exceso. Se expresaba prácticamente con monosílabos.

Miss Darcy era más alta que Lizzy, y aun cuando sólo tenía dieciséis años, ya estaba desarrollada y su aspecto era femenino y muy agradable. Era menos agraciada que su hermano, pero su rostro denotaba inteligencia y buen carácter, y sus modales eran sencillos. Lizzy, que había creído encontrarla observadora y tan perspicaz y constante como había sido siempre Darcy, se sintió muy aliviada al observar cuán diferentes eran los dos hermanos.

Poco tiempo llevaban juntos cuando Darcy dijo a Lizzy que Bingley estaba en camino, y apenas había tenido tiempo de expresar su satisfacción y prepararse para semejante visita cuando oyeron los precipitados pasos de Bingley en la escalera, y al instante entró en la habitación. Toda la cólera de Lizzy contra él había desaparecido hacía tiempo, pero de haber sentido todavía alguna, difícilmente habría podido resistirse a la franca cordialidad con que se expresó. Le preguntó por su familia y se condujo y habló con el buen humor que le eran habituales.

Para Mr. y Mrs. Gardiner, Bingley era un personaje poco menos interesante que para Lizzy. Hacía tiempo que deseaban conocerlo. En realidad, todos los presentes les inspiraban la mayor

Notas

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curiosidad. Las sospechas que acababan de concebir sobre Darcy y su sobrina los forzaron a dirigir la atención, y pronto tuvieron la certeza absoluta de que uno de ellos dos, al menos, estaba enamorado. De los sentimientos de Lizzy dudaron un poco, pero la admiración del caballero era patente.

Lizzy, por su parte, estaba muy ocupada tratando de adivinar los sentimientos de cada uno de sus visitantes; debía también contener los suyos propios y mostrarse amable con todos. Bien es verdad que en cuanto a lo último, aun temiendo equivocarse, estaba segura del éxito, porque aquellos a quienes trataba de complacer sentían por ella verdadera simpatía. Bingley estaba dispuesto, Georgina, dispuesta, y Darcy, resuelto a quedar complacidos.

Al ver a Bingley, Lizzy pensó, como es natural, en su hermana; y ¡oh, con cuánto ardor deseaba saber si los pensamientos de aquél seguían la misma dirección! A veces imaginaba que él hablaba menos que en ocasiones anteriores, y una o dos veces se complació con la idea de que al mirarla él trataba de descubrir un parecido. Pero aun siendo todo imaginaciones, no podía equivocarse en cuanto al modo en que él se comportaba con Miss Darcy, que era considerada la rival de Jane. Ni una mirada descubrió que pudiera justificar las esperanzas de la hermana de aquél; en cuanto a eso, pronto quedó satisfecha, y aún ocurrieron dos o tres cosas antes de que se marchasen que, según interpretó, denotaban por parte de Bingley un recuerdo de Jane no exento de ternura y de deseo de decir algo más, que hubiese podido conducir a mencionarla si se hubiera atrevido. En un momento de la conversación él le indicó, con un tono que revelaba sincero pesar, que «hacía mucho que no tenía el gusto de verla», y antes de que ella pudiera responder, añadió:

—Hace cerca de ocho meses. No nos hemos visto desde el veintiséis de noviembre, en ocasión de aquel baile de Netherfield.

Lizzy se regocijó con la exactitud de su memoria, y él, después, cuando los demás no se fijaban, tuvo ocasión de preguntarle si todas sus hermanas estaban en Longbourn. No había nada de particular ni en la pregunta ni el recuerdo precedente, pero ambos fueron acompañados de unas miradas y unos ademanes significativos.

Lizzy no podía dirigir muy a menudo la mirada hacia Darcy, pero cada vez que lo hizo advirtió en él cierta expresión de complacencia, y en todo cuanto dijo percibió un acento tan carentes de altanería o desdén, que se convenció a sí misma de que la mejoría de carácter que había observado el día anterior, había continuado por lo menos al siguiente. Al verlo solicitando el trato y procurándose la buena opinión de personas cuya conversación meses antes había considerado aburrida, al encontrarlo tan cortés no sólo con ella sino con los mismos parientes que abiertamente había menospreciado, y recordar al mismo tiempo la última escena que había tenido lugar en la abadía de Hunsford, la diferencia, el cambio que notaba era tan grande y con tal fuerza hería su mente, que a duras penas pudo impedir sentirse asombrada. Nunca, ni aun en compañía de sus amigos de Netherfield o de sus ricos parientes de Rosings, lo había visto tan ansioso de agradar, tan poco dispuesto a darse aires o mostrarse reservado, como lo estaba ahora, precisamente cuando el éxito de sus esfuerzos podía carecer de importancia y cuando

incluso el trato de aquellos a quienes dirigía sus atenciones habría sido censurado y hasta ridiculizado tanto por las señoras de Netherfield como por las de Rosings.

Los visitantes permanecieron alrededor de media hora, y cuando se levantaron para despedirse, Darcy invitó a su hermana a unírsele para expresar su deseo de invitar a comer a Pemberley a Mr. y Mrs. Gardiner y a Miss Bennet antes de que abandonasen la comarca. Miss Darcy, aunque no solía tener invitados, estuvo de acuerdo. Mrs. Gardiner miró a su sobrina, deseosa de adivinar si ésta, a quien se dedicaba la invitación, se sentía dispuesta a aceptarla, pero Lizzy había vuelto la cabeza. Presumiendo, con todo, que su estudiada evasiva significaba turbación momentánea antes que disgusto por la proposición, y al advertir que su marido, a quien le agradaban las reuniones sociales, tenía deseos de acudir a ésta, se arriesgó a aceptar la invitación, que se fijó para dos días después.

Bingley manifestó gran satisfacción ante la perspectiva de volver a ver a Lizzy, ya que, según dijo, aún tenía que decirle muchas cosas y hacerle muchas preguntas sobre todos los amigos del condado de Hertford. Ella, interpretándolo como deseo de oírla hablar de su hermana, se alegró, y por semejante hecho y por algunos otros, cuando los visitantes se fueron se sintió capaz de recordar la última media hora como bastante satisfactoria, aunque hubiera disfrutado poco durante su transcurso. Ansiosa de verse sola, y temerosa de las preguntas o imaginaciones de sus tíos, se quedó sólo lo suficiente para escuchar la favorable opinión de los mismos sobre Bingley, y se apresuró a ir a vestirse.

Pero no tenía motivos para temer la curiosidad de Mr. y Mrs. Gardiner, que no tenían intención de forzarla a hablar. Era evidente que estaba mucho mejor relacionada con Darcy de lo que ellos habían creído, así como que él estaba muy enamorado de ella. Habían visto muchos detalles que despertaron su interés, pero nada que justificase hacer ninguna pregunta indiscreta.

Era preciso ahora pensar bien de Darcy, y en cuanto al comportamiento de éste, no había nada que pudiera considerarse censurable. No podían permanecer indiferentes a su cortesía, y si hubieran tenido que describir su carácter basándose en lo que ellos mismos opinaban y en los informes de su ama de llaves, prescindiendo de todo lo demás, aquellos del condado de Hertford que habían tenido tratos con él no lo habrían reconocido. Inclinábanse a creer al ama de llaves, y pronto concedieron ambos que el testimonio de una sirvienta que lo conocía desde los cuatro años, y cuyo propio modo de ser indicaba respetabilidad, no debía ser rechazado de buenas a primeras. Por otra parte, en los comentarios de sus amigos de Lambton no había nada capaz de aminorar el peso de aquel testimonio. No podían acusarlo sino de orgullo, y en cuanto a esto, se lo imputaban los habitantes de una localidad pequeña a quienes no visitaba la familia. Pero había que reconocer su generosidad y su preocupación por los pobres.

Respecto a Wickham, los viajeros vieron pronto que no era tenido allí en mucha estima, pues aunque lo más sustancial de sus relaciones con el hijo de su amo se conocía imperfectamente, era notorio, en cambio, que al salir del condado de Derby había dejado tras de sí muchas deudas, las cuales saldó Darcy.



En cuanto a Lizzy, esa noche sus pensamientos estuvieron en Pemberley más aún que la anterior, y aunque mientras transcurría le pareció larga, no lo fue bastante para interpretar sus sentimientos hacia uno de los moradores de aquella mansión, y permaneció echada, pero despierta, dos horas enteras tratando de concretarlos. No podía decirse que lo odiara. No, el odio se había desvanecido hacía mucho tiempo, y ahora se avergonzaba casi de haber experimentado hacia esa persona un sentimiento que pudiera calificarse de antipatía. El respeto debido a la convicción en sus valiosas cualidades, aunque admitido al comienzo contra su voluntad, se había tornado respeto y aprecio, pero, sobre todo, gratitud; gratitud no sólo por haberla amado, sino por amarla todavía lo bastante para olvidar el modo en que lo había rechazado y las injustas acusaciones que acompañaron a su repulsa. Quien debía considerarla —y de eso estaba persuadida— una verdadera enemiga, parecía ahora ansioso por conservar su relación, mostrándose amable con sus parientes y llegando al punto de desear que su hermana la conociese. Semejante cambio en un hombre tan orgulloso no sólo movía a asombro, sino a gratitud, pues no podía por menos que atribuirse a un amor ardiente. Por eso en aquel momento estaba segura de que lo respetaba, lo estimaba, le estaba agradecida, sentía un verdadero interés por su felicidad, y sólo le faltaba saber hasta qué punto deseaba que esa felicidad dependiera de ella y si podía contribuir a la dicha de ambos el que emplease el poder, que su imaginación le presentaba aún como suyo, de arrastrarlo a renovar su proposición.

Aquella misma tarde la tía y la sobrina habían acordado que una atención tan sorprendente como la que había temido Miss Darcy al visitarlos el mismo día de su llegada a Pemberley —pues había llegado a la hora de almorzar, y tarde— debía ser imitada, y, en consecuencia, convinieron en que sería sumamente acertado visitarla en Pemberley a la mañana siguiente. A Lizzy le alegró mucho esta decisión, aunque cuando se preguntaba a sí misma por qué, no atinaba a hallar respuesta.

Mr. Gardiner se marchó después del almuerzo. La invitación a pescar había sido renovada el día anterior, y se le había asegurado que a mediodía encontraría en Pemberley a alguno de los caballeros dispuesto a acompañarlo.

¿Cuáles temas has identificado?

¿Cuál es el tono general de la novela hasta ahora?



Capítulo 45

Lizzy estaba convencida de que el origen de la antipatía de Miss Bingley eran los celos; y no podía apartar de su pensamiento cuán funesto tenía que ser para ésta su aparición en Pemberley, y sentía curiosidad por saber en qué grado de cortesía iba a renovar su relación con ella.

Al llegar a la casa atravesaron el vestíbulo y entraron en un salón cuya orientación al Norte lo hacía ideal para el verano. Las ventanas posteriores a la casa, abiertas de par en par, ofrecían una vista encantadora de las altas colinas pobladas de bosque, y más cerca los hermosos robles y castaños españoles esparcidos por el prado.

En ese salón fueron recibidas por Miss Darcy, que estaba sentada junto a Mrs. Hurst, Miss Bingley y la señora con quien vivía en Londres. El recibimiento de Georgina fue muy cortés aunque no pudo evitar aquella turbación que procedía de su profunda timidez y del temor de ser interpretada como una prueba de orgullo y reserva por alguien de condición social inferior. Pero Mrs. Gardiner y su sobrina lo comprendieron enseguida y no se molestaron en analizar sus gestos.

Mrs. Hurst y Miss Bingley la saludaron sólo con cortesía y después de sentarse se produjo un silencio engorroso, como suele suceder en tales reuniones. La primera que se decidió a hablar fue Mrs. Annesley, una afable y atractiva mujer que demostró así estar mejor educada que cualquiera de las otras, y entre ella y Mrs. Gardiner, con alguna intervención de Lizzy, logró mantenerse la conversación. Miss Darcy parecía no atreverse a tomar parte en ella, y sólo de vez en cuando se aventuraba a pronunciar alguna frase breve cuando creía que nadie podría oírla.

Lizzy pronto advirtió que estaba estrechamente vigilada por Miss Bingley y que no podía pronunciar una palabra, y en particular si iba dirigida a Miss Darcy, sin llamar su atención. Semejante descubrimiento no le hubiera impedido hablar con esta última de haberse sentado más cerca una de otra, pero no lamentó el hecho de no poder conversar mucho pues estaba sumida en sus propios pensamientos. Deseaba y temía a la vez que apareciese el dueño de la casa y apenas podía determinar si lo deseaba más que lo temía. Transcurrió casi un cuarto de hora sin oír para nada la voz de Miss Bingley, cuando de pronto Lizzy salió de su ensimismamiento al preguntarle aquélla con frialdad sobre la salud de su familia. Ella respondió con igual indiferencia, y la otra no dijo nada más.

Afortunadamente, la entrada de los criados con fiambres, pasteles y frutas del tiempo, amenizó la reunión, pero para que eso aconteciera Mrs. Annesley tuvo que dirigir muchas miradas significativas a Miss Darcy para recordarle sus deberes. Ello proporcionó motivo de entretenimiento al grupo, pues aunque no podían hablar todas la vez, las hermosas pirámides de uvas, ciruelas y melocotones las congregaron pronto alrededor de la mesa.

Mientras se ocupaban de charlar y comer, Lizzy se dedicó a pensar con detenimiento si temía o deseaba más la presencia de Darcy. Enseguida tuvo la oportunidad de saberlo al verle entrar de

Notas

Subraya las citas importantes.

Escribe un resumen de cada página.



pronto en la sala, y aunque un instante antes había creído que predominaban los deseos de verle, lamentó que se hubiese presentado.

Darcy había pasado varias horas en el río con Mr. Gardiner y otros dos o tres caballeros invitados, a quienes había dejado al enterarse de que las damas de su familia proyectaban visitar a Georgina aquella misma mañana. Tan pronto hubo entrado en la sala, Lizzy se esforzó en mostrarse tranquila y natural, decisión necesaria, pero quizá difícil de cumplir, ya que sabía que todos en la reunión estaban pendientes de ella y de la actitud de Darcy. Pero ninguno de los allí presentes reflejaba en su rostro tanta curiosidad como el de Miss Bingley, a pesar de las sonrisas que brotaban de él al hablar a cualquiera de los componentes del grupo ya que los celos aún no la habían desesperado y seguía prodigando sus atenciones a Darcy. La hermana de éste se esforzó mucho más en hablar al verlo entrar, y Lizzy advirtió que él estaba ansioso de que su hermana y ella intimasen, para lo cual favorecía toda tentativa de conversación entre ellas dos. Miss Bingley se dio cuenta e impulsada por un imprudente despecho aprovechó la primera oportunidad para decir con irónica afabilidad:

—Miss Lizzy, ¿es cierto que el regimiento del condado ha abandonado Meryton? Si es así, representará una gran pérdida para su familia.

Aunque no se atrevió a pronunciar el nombre de Wickham en presencia de Darcy, Lizzy comprendió que era a él a quien se refería y los recuerdos relacionados con él le causaron una momentánea tristeza, pero reaccionó enseguida y pudo contestar en tono despreocupado. Al hacerlo, una mirada involuntaria le permitió ver a Darcy que, ruborizado, la miraba con atención, y a su hermana, visiblemente confusa e incapaz de levantar la vista. Si Miss Bingley hubiera sabido cuánto apenaba a su amado amigo, sin duda, se habría abstenido de hacer aquella alusión, pero sólo había tratado de confundir a Lizzy trayendo a colación la idea de un hombre por quien la creía interesada, para que en el rostro de la joven apareciera alguna emoción que la dañara a los ojos de Darcy, y quizá también para que éste recordara los absurdos incidentes ocurridos a la familia de Lizzy por sus relaciones amistosas con ciertos oficiales de ese regimiento. Miss Bingley desconocía el proyecto de fuga de Miss Darcy, que no había sido revelado a nadie, excepto a Lizzy, y que, seguramente, Darcy ansiaba ocultar, en especial a todos los parientes de Bingley, por el deseo de que llegara a casarse con éste. En efecto, ése fue el propósito de Darcy, aunque no la única causa de pretender separar a su amigo de Miss Bennet.

La serena e inteligente reacción de Lizzy apaciguó su emoción. Ofendida y decepcionada, Miss Bingley no se atrevió a hacer nuevas alusiones a Wickham. Georgina se recobró enseguida del sofocón aunque no lo suficiente como para poder intervenir de nuevo en la conversación. Su hermano, cuyas miradas temía encontrar, apenas conservó interés por el asunto, y pareció fijarse en ella con mayor simpatía aún después de la desafortunada alusión de Miss Bingley.

La visita no se prolongó mucho más y mientras Darcy los acompañaba al coche, Miss Bingley desahogó su mal humor criticando la persona, la conducta y el vestido de Lizzy. Pero Georgina no le hizo caso. La recomendación de su hermano era suficiente para asegurar su beneplácito; sabía

que nunca se equivocaba al juzgar a una persona, y había hablado de Lizzy en términos tan elogiosos que ella sólo podía encontrarla amable y encantadora.

Cuando Darcy regresó al salón, Miss Bingley no pudo resistir la tentación de hacerle saber algo de lo dicho a su hermana.

—¡Qué fea estaba Lizzy Bennet esta mañana, Darcy! —exclamó—. Jamás he apreciado un cambio tan grande como el que se ha producido en ella desde el invierno pasado. Se ha vuelto morena y vulgar. Louisa y yo conveníamos en que no la hubiésemos reconocido.

Aunque a Darcy le hicieron muy poca gracia estas palabras, se limitó a responder con frialdad que sólo había notado en Lizzy un ligero cambio en el tono de la piel, lo que era consecuencia natural de viajar en verano. Pero no satisfecha con esta respuesta, Miss Bingley replicó:

—Por mi parte he de confesar que nunca he apreciado en ella ninguna belleza. Su rostro es demasiado delgado, su cutis muy poco fino, y sus facciones no son nada bonitas; a su nariz le falta carácter, y nada resalta en su perfil; su dentadura es cosa corriente, y no acierto a comprender cómo es posible que haya personas que digan que sus ojos son hermosos; no veo que tengan nada de extraordinario. Su mirada es sarcástica, no me gusta; y hay tantas pretensiones en su aire en general y en su forma de andar que resulta intolerable.

Persuadida como estaba Miss Bingley de que Darcy admiraba a Lizzy, no era ése el mejor sistema para recomendarse a sí misma; pero la prudencia no suele acompañar a las personas que se encolerizan con facilidad y lo único que consiguió fue verle por fin algo ofendido. Y como él continuaba obstinadamente callado, decidida a hacerle hablar, prosiguió:

—Aún recuerdo que la primera vez que la vimos en el condado de Hertford quedamos sorprendidos de que se la considerara como una belleza, y viene a mi memoria una frase que usted dijo una noche, después de haber comido en Netherfield: «¡Ella una belleza! Antes se podría considerar a su madre un genio.» Sin embargo, parece que desde entonces tiene usted mejor concepto de ella y, si no me equivoco, más bien la tiene usted por bonita.

—Sí —replicó Darcy, que no pudo contenerse más—; eso fue sólo al principio de conocerla, porque hace muchos meses ya que la considero como una de las más bellas mujeres que conozco.

Una vez dicho esto partió, y Miss Bingley se quedó con la satisfacción de haberlo obligado a decir lo que no apenaba a nadie más que a ella misma.

Mientras regresaban, Mrs. Gardiner y Lizzy hablaron de cuanto había ocurrido durante la visita, excepto de aquellos detalles que les interesaban particularmente a ambas. Discutieron los modales y el comportamiento de todas las personas que habían visto, excepto los de quien les había ocupado más intensamente la atención. Hablaron de la hermana de Mr. Darcy, de sus amigos, de su casa, de sus frutas, de todo excepto de él, a pesar de que a Mrs. Gardiner le habría agradado muchísimo que su sobrina entrara en materia.

¿Cuáles temas has identificado?

¿Cuál es el tono general de la novela hasta ahora?



Capítulo 46

Elizabeth had been a good deal disappointed in not finding a letter from Jane, on their first arrival at Lambton; and this disappointment had been renewed on each of the mornings that had now been spent there; but on the third, her repining was over, and her sister justified by the receipt of two letters from her at once, on one of which was marked that it had been missent elsewhere. Elizabeth was not surprised at it, as Jane had written the direction remarkably ill.

They had just been preparing to walk as the letters came in; and her uncle and aunt, leaving her to enjoy them in quiet, set off by themselves. The one missent must be first attended to; it had been written five days ago. The beginning contained an account of all their little parties and engagements, with such news as the country afforded; but the latter half, which was dated a day later, and written in evident agitation, gave more important intelligence. It was to this effect:

"Since writing the above, dearest Lizzy, something has occurred of a most unexpected and serious nature; but I am afraid of alarming you—be assured that we are all well. What I have to say relates to poor Lydia. An express came at twelve last night, just as we were all gone to bed, from Colonel Forster, to inform us that she was gone off to Scotland with one of his officers; to own the truth, with Wickham!—Imagine our surprise. To Kitty, however, it does not seem so wholly unexpected. I am very, very sorry. So imprudent a match on both sides!—But I am willing to hope the best, and that his character has been misunderstood. Thoughtless and indiscreet I can easily believe him, but this step (and let us rejoice over it) marks nothing bad at heart. His choice is disinterested at least, for he must know my father can give her nothing. Our poor mother is sadly grieved. My father bears it better. How thankful am I, that we never let them know what has been said against him; we must forget it ourselves. They were off Saturday night about twelve, as is conjectured, but were not missed till yesterday morning at eight. The express was sent off directly. My dear Lizzy, they must have passed within ten miles of us. Colonel Forster gives us reason to expect him here soon. Lydia left a few lines for his wife, informing her of their intention. I must conclude, for I cannot be long from my poor mother. I am afraid you will not be able to make it out, but I hardly know what I have written."

Without allowing herself time for consideration, and scarcely knowing what she felt, Elizabeth on finishing this letter, instantly seized the other, and opening it with the utmost impatience, read as follows: it had been written a day later than the conclusion of the first.

"By this time, my dearest sister, you have received my hurried letter; I wish this may be more intelligible, but though not confined for time, my head is so bewildered that I cannot answer for being coherent. Dearest Lizzy, I hardly know what I would write, but I have bad news for you, and it cannot be delayed. Imprudent as a

Notas

Subraya las citas importantes.

Escribe un resumen de cada página.



marriage between Mr. Wickham and our poor Lydia would be, we are now anxious to be assured it has taken place, for there is but too much reason to fear they are not gone to Scotland. Colonel Forster came yesterday, having left Brighton the day before, not many hours after the express. Though Lydia's short letter to Mrs. F. gave them to understand that they were going to Gretna Green, something was dropped by Denny expressing his belief that W. never intended to go there, or to marry Lydia at all, which was repeated to Colonel F. who instantly taking the alarm, set off from B. intending to trace their route. He did trace them easily to Clapham, but no farther; for on entering that place they removed into a hackney-coach and dismissed the chaise that brought them from Epsom. All that is known after this is, that they were seen to continue the London road. I know not what to think. After making every possible enquiry on that side London, Colonel F. came on into Hertfordshire, anxiously renewing them at all the turnpikes, and at the inns in Barnet and Hatfield, but without any success, no such people had been seen to pass through. With the kindest concern he came on to Longbourn, and broke his apprehensions to us in a manner most creditable to his heart. I am sincerely grieved for him and Mrs. F. but no one can throw any blame on them. Our distress, my dear Lizzy, is very great. My father and mother believe the worst, but I cannot think so ill of him. Many circumstances might make it more eligible for them to be married privately in town than to pursue their first plan; and even if *he* could form such a design against a young woman of Lydia's connections, which is not likely, can I suppose her so lost to every thing?—Impossible. I grieve to find, however, that Colonel F. is not disposed to depend upon their marriage; he shook his head when I expressed my hopes, and said he feared W. was not a man to be trusted. My poor mother is really ill and keeps her room. Could she exert herself it would be better, but this is not to be expected; and as to my father, I never in my life saw him so affected. Poor Kitty has anger for having concealed their attachment; but as it was a matter of confidence one cannot wonder. I am truly glad, dearest Lizzy, that you have been spared something of these distressing scenes; but now as the first shock is over, shall I own that I long for your return? I am not so selfish, however, as to press for it, if inconvenient. Adieu. I take up my pen again to do, what I have just told you I would not, but circumstances are such, that I cannot help earnestly begging you all to come here, as soon as possible. I know my dear uncle and aunt so well, that I am not afraid of requesting it, though I have still something more to ask of the former. My father is going to London with Colonel Forster instantly, to try to discover her. What he means to do, I am sure I know not; but his excessive distress will not allow him to pursue any measure in the best and safest way, and Colonel Forster is obliged to be at Brighton again to-morrow evening. In such an exigence my uncle's advice and assistance would be every thing in the world; he will immediately comprehend what I must feel, and I rely upon his goodness."



"Oh! where, where is my uncle?" cried Elizabeth, darting from her seat as she finished the letter, in eagerness to follow him, without losing a moment of the time so precious; but as she reached the door, it was opened by a servant, and Mr. Darcy appeared. Her pale face and impetuous manner made him start, and before he could recover himself enough to speak, she, in whose mind every idea was superseded by Lydia's situation, hastily exclaimed, "I beg your pardon, but I must leave you. I must find Mr. Gardiner this moment, on business that cannot be delayed; I have not an instant to lose."

"Good God! what is the matter?" cried he, with more feeling than politeness; then recollecting himself, "I will not detain you a minute, but let me, or let the servant, go after Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner. You are not well enough;—you cannot go yourself."

Elizabeth hesitated, but her knees trembled under her, and she felt how little would be gained by her attempting to pursue them. Calling back the servant, therefore, she commissioned him, though in so breathless an accent as made her almost unintelligible, to fetch his master and mistress home, instantly.

On his quitting the room, she sat down, unable to support herself, and looking so miserably ill, that it was impossible for Darcy to leave her, or to refrain from saying, in a tone of gentleness and commiseration, "Let me call your maid. Is there nothing you could take, to give you present relief?—A glass of wine;—shall I get you one?—You are very ill."

"No, I thank you," she replied, endeavouring to recover herself. "There is nothing the matter with me. I am quite well. I am only distressed by some dreadful news which I have just received from Longbourn."

She burst into tears as she alluded to it, and for a few minutes could not speak another word. Darcy, in wretched suspense, could only say something indistinctly of his concern, and observe her in compassionate silence. At length, she spoke again. "I have just had a letter from Jane, with such dreadful news. It cannot be concealed from any one. My youngest sister has left all her friends—has eloped;—has thrown herself into the power of—of Mr. Wickham. They are gone off together from Brighton. *You* know him too well to doubt the rest. She has no money, no connections, nothing that can tempt him to—she is lost for ever."

Darcy was fixed in astonishment. "When I consider," she added, in a yet more agitated voice, "that *I* might have prevented it!—*I* who knew what he was. Had I but explained some part of it only—some part of what I learnt, to my own family! Had his character been known, this could not have happened. But it is all, all too late now."

"I am grieved, indeed," cried Darcy; "grieved—shocked. But is it certain, absolutely certain?"

"Oh yes!—They left Brighton together on Sunday night, and were traced almost to London, but not beyond; they are certainly not gone to Scotland."

"And what has been done, what has been attempted, to recover her?"

"My father is gone to London, and Jane has written to beg my uncle's immediate assistance, and we shall be off, I hope, in half an hour. But nothing can be done; I know very well that nothing can be done. How is such a man to be worked on? How are they even to be discovered? I have not the smallest hope. It is every way horrible!"

Darcy shook his head in silent acquiescence.

"When *my* eyes were opened to his real character.—Oh! had I known what I ought, what I dared, to do! But I knew not—I was afraid of doing too much. Wretched, wretched, mistake!"

Darcy made no answer. He seemed scarcely to hear her, and was walking up and down the room in earnest meditation; his brow contracted, his air gloomy. Elizabeth soon observed, and instantly understood it. Her power was sinking; every thing *must* sink under such a proof of family weakness, such an assurance of the deepest disgrace. She could neither wonder nor condemn, but the belief of his self-conquest brought nothing consolatory to her bosom, afforded no palliation of her distress. It was, on the contrary, exactly calculated to make her understand her own wishes; and never had she so honestly felt that she could have loved him, as now, when all love must be vain.

But self, though it would intrude, could not engross her. Lydia—the humiliation, the misery, she was bringing on them all, soon swallowed up every private care; and covering her face with her handkerchief, Elizabeth was soon lost to every thing else; and, after a pause of several minutes, was only recalled to a sense of her situation by the voice of her companion, who, in a manner, which though it spoke compassion, spoke likewise restraint, said, "I am afraid you have been long desiring my absence, nor have I any thing to plead in excuse of my stay, but real, though unavailing, concern. Would to heaven that any thing could be either said or done on my part, that might offer consolation to such distress.—But I will not torment you with vain wishes, which may seem purposely to ask for your thanks. This unfortunate affair will, I fear, prevent my sister's having the pleasure of seeing you at Pemberley to-day."

"Oh, yes. Be so kind as to apologize for us to Miss Darcy. Say that urgent business calls us home immediately. Conceal the unhappy truth as long as it is possible.—I know it cannot be long."

He readily assured her of his secrecy—again expressed his sorrow for her distress, wished it a happier conclusion than there was at present reason to hope, and leaving his compliments for her relations, with only one serious, parting, look, went away.

As he quitted the room, Elizabeth felt how improbable it was that they should ever see each other again on such terms of cordiality as had marked their several meetings in Derbyshire; and as she threw a retrospective glance over the whole of their acquaintance, so full of contradictions and varieties, sighed at the perverseness of those feelings which would now have promoted its continuance, and would formerly have rejoiced in its termination.

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise, if the regard springing from such sources is



unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged, nothing can be said in her defence, except that she had given somewhat of a trial to the latter method, in her partiality for Wickham, and that its ill-success might perhaps authorise her to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. Be that as it may, she saw him go with regret; and in this early example of what Lydia's infamy must produce, found additional anguish as she reflected on that wretched business. Never, since reading Jane's second letter, had she entertained a hope of Wickham's meaning to marry her. No one but Jane, she thought, could flatter herself with such an expectation. Surprise was the least of her feelings on this development. While the contents of the first letter remained on her mind, she was all surprise—all astonishment that Wickham should marry a girl, whom it was impossible he could marry for money; and how Lydia could ever have attached him, had appeared incomprehensible. But now it was all too natural. For such an attachment as this, she might have sufficient charms; and though she did not suppose Lydia to be deliberately engaging in an elopement, without the intention of marriage, she had no difficulty in believing that neither her virtue nor her understanding would preserve her from falling an easy prey.

She had never perceived, while the regiment was in Hertfordshire, that Lydia had any partiality for him, but she was convinced that Lydia had wanted only encouragement to attach herself to any body. Sometimes one officer, sometimes another had been her favourite, as their attentions raised them in her opinion. Her affections had been continually fluctuating, but never without an object. The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl.—Oh! how acutely did she now feel it.

She was wild to be at home—to hear, to see, to be upon the spot, to share with Jane in the cares that must now fall wholly upon her, in a family so deranged; a father absent, a mother incapable of exertion, and requiring constant attendance; and though almost persuaded that nothing could be done for Lydia, her uncle's interference seemed of the utmost importance, and till he entered the room, the misery of her impatience was severe. Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner had hurried back in alarm, supposing, by the servant's account, that their niece was taken suddenly ill;—but satisfying them instantly on that head, she eagerly communicated the cause of their summons, reading the two letters aloud, and dwelling on the postscript of the last, with trembling energy.—Though Lydia had never been a favourite with them, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner could not but be deeply affected. Not Lydia only, but all were concerned in it; and after the first exclamations of surprise and horror, Mr. Gardiner readily promised every assistance in his power.—Elizabeth, though expecting no less, thanked him with tears of gratitude; and all three being actuated by one spirit, every thing relating to their journey was speedily settled. They were to be off as soon as possible. "But what is to be done about Pemberley?" cried Mrs. Gardiner. "John told us Mr. Darcy was here when you sent for us;—was it so?"

"Yes; and I told him we should not be able to keep our engagement. *That* is all settled."



"That is all settled;" repeated the other, as she ran into her room to prepare. "And are they upon such terms as for her to disclose the real truth! Oh, that I knew how it was!"

But wishes were vain; or at best could serve only to amuse her in the hurry and confusion of the following hour. Had Elizabeth been at leisure to be idle, she would have remained certain that all employment was impossible to one so wretched as herself; but she had her share of business as well as her aunt, and amongst the rest there were notes to be written to all their friends in Lambton, with false excuses for their sudden departure. An hour, however, saw the whole completed; and Mr. Gardiner meanwhile having settled his account at the inn, nothing remained to be done but to go; and Elizabeth, after all the misery of the morning, found herself, in a shorter space of time than she could have supposed, seated in the carriage, and on the road to Longbourn.

¿Cuáles temas has identificado?

¿Cuál es el tono general de la novela hasta ahora?



Capítulo 47

"I have been thinking it over again, Elizabeth," said her uncle, as they drove from the town; "and really, upon serious consideration, I am much more inclined than I was to judge as your eldest sister does of the matter. It appears to me so very unlikely, that any young man should form such a design against a girl who is by no means unprotected or friendless, and who was actually staying in his colonel's family, that I am strongly inclined to hope the best. Could he expect that her friends would not step forward? Could he expect to be noticed again by the regiment, after such an affront to Colonel Forster? His temptation is not adequate to the risk."

"Do you really think so?" cried Elizabeth, brightening up for a moment.

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Gardiner, "I begin to be of your uncle's opinion. It is really too great a violation of decency, honour, and interest, for him to be guilty of it. I cannot think so very ill of Wickham. Can you, yourself, Lizzy, so wholly give him up, as to believe him capable of it?"

"Not perhaps of neglecting his own interest. But of every other neglect I can believe him capable. If, indeed, it should be so! But I dare not hope it. Why should they not go on to Scotland, if that had been the case?"

"In the first place," replied Mr. Gardiner, "there is no absolute proof that they are not gone to Scotland."

"Oh! but their removing from the chaise into an hackney coach is such a presumption! And, besides, no traces of them were to be found on the Barnet road."

"Well, then—supposing them to be in London. They may be there, though for the purpose of concealment, for no more exceptionable purpose. It is not likely that money should be very abundant on either side; and it might strike them that they could be more economically, though less expeditiously, married in London, than in Scotland."

"But why all this secrecy? Why any fear of detection? Why must their marriage be private? Oh! no, no, this is not likely. His most particular friend, you see by Jane's account, was persuaded of his never intending to marry her. Wickham will never marry a woman without some money. He cannot afford it. And what claims has Lydia, what attractions has she beyond youth, health, and good humour, that could make him for her sake, forego every chance of benefiting himself by marrying well? As to what restraint the apprehension of disgrace in the corps might throw on a dishonourable elopement with her, I am not able to judge; for I know nothing of the effects that such a step might produce. But as to your other objection, I am afraid it will hardly hold good. Lydia has no brothers to step forward; and he might imagine, from my father's behaviour, from his indolence and the little attention he has ever seemed to give to what was going forward in his family, that *he* would do as little, and think as little about it, as any father could do, in such a matter."

Notas

Subraya las citas importantes.

Escribe un resumen de cada página.



"But can you think that Lydia is so lost to every thing but love of him, as to consent to live with him on any other terms than marriage?"

"It does seem, and it is most shocking indeed," replied Elizabeth, with tears in her eyes, "that a sister's sense of decency and virtue in such a point should admit of doubt. But, really, I know not what to say. Perhaps I am not doing her justice. But she is very young; she has never been taught to think on serious subjects; and for the last half year, nay, for a twelvemonth, she has been given up to nothing but amusement and vanity. She has been allowed to dispose of her time in the most idle and frivolous manner, and to adopt any opinions that came in her way. Since the — —shire were first quartered in Meryton, nothing but love, flirtation, and officers, have been in her head. She has been doing every thing in her power by thinking and talking on the subject, to give greater—what shall I call it? susceptibility to her feelings; which are naturally lively enough. And we all know that Wickham has every charm of person and address that can captivate a woman."

"But you see that Jane," said her aunt, "does not think so ill of Wickham, as to believe him capable of the attempt."

"Of whom does Jane ever think ill? And who is there, whatever might be their former conduct, that she would believe capable of such an attempt, till it were proved against them? But Jane knows, as well as I do, what Wickham really is. We both know that he has been profligate in every sense of the word. That he has neither integrity nor honour. That he is as false and deceitful, as he is insinuating."

"And do you really know all this?" cried Mrs. Gardiner, whose curiosity as to the mode of her intelligence was all alive.

"I do, indeed," replied Elizabeth, colouring. "I told you the other day, of his infamous behaviour to Mr. Darcy; and you, yourself, when last at Longbourn, heard in what manner he spoke of the man, who had behaved with such forbearance and liberality towards him. And there are other circumstances which I am not at liberty—which it is not worth while to relate; but his lies about the whole Pemberley family are endless. From what he said of Miss Darcy, I was thoroughly prepared to see a proud, reserved, disagreeable girl. Yet he knew to the contrary himself. He must know that she was as amiable and unpretending as we have found her."

"But does Lydia know nothing of this? Can she be ignorant of what you and Jane seem so well to understand?"

"Oh, yes!—that, that is the worst of all. Till I was in Kent, and saw so much both of Mr. Darcy and his relation, Colonel Fitzwilliam, I was ignorant of the truth myself. And when I returned home, the — —shire was to leave Meryton in a week or fortnight's time. As that was the case, neither Jane, to whom I related the whole, nor I, thought it necessary to make our knowledge public; for of what use could it apparently be to any one, that the good opinion which all the neighbourhood had of him, should then be overthrown? And even when it was settled that Lydia should go with



Mrs. Forster, the necessity of opening her eyes to his character never occurred to me. That *she* could be in any danger from the deception never entered my head. That such a consequence as *this* should ensue, you may easily believe was far enough from my thoughts."

"When they all removed to Brighton, therefore, you had no reason, I suppose, to believe them fond of each other."

"Not the slightest. I can remember no symptom of affection on either side; and had any thing of the kind been perceptible, you must be aware that ours is not a family, on which it could be thrown away. When first he entered the corps, she was ready enough to admire him; but so we all were. Every girl in, or near Meryton, was out of her senses about him for the first two months; but he never distinguished *her* by any particular attention, and, consequently, after a moderate period of extravagant and wild admiration, her fancy for him gave way, and others of the regiment, who treated her with more distinction, again became her favourites."

It may be easily believed, that however little of novelty could be added to their fears, hopes, and conjectures, on this interesting subject, by its repeated discussion, no other could detain them from it long, during the whole of the journey. From Elizabeth's thoughts it was never absent. Fixed there by the keenest of all anguish, self reproach, she could find no interval of ease or forgetfulness.

They travelled as expeditiously as possible; and sleeping one night on the road, reached Longbourn by dinner-time the next day. It was a comfort to Elizabeth to consider that Jane could not have been wearied by long expectations.

The little Gardiners, attracted by the sight of a chaise, were standing on the steps of the house, as they entered the paddock; and when the carriage drove up to the door, the joyful surprise that lighted up their faces, and displayed itself over their whole bodies, in a variety of capers and frisks, was the first pleasing earnest of their welcome.

Elizabeth jumped out; and, after giving each of them an hasty kiss, hurried into the vestibule, where Jane, who came running down stairs from her mother's apartment, immediately met her.

Elizabeth, as she affectionately embraced her, whilst tears filled the eyes of both, lost not a moment in asking whether any thing had been heard of the fugitives.

"Not yet," replied Jane. "But now that my dear uncle is come, I hope every thing will be well."

"Is my father in town?"

"Yes, he went on Tuesday as I wrote you word."

"And have you heard from him often?"

"We have heard only once. He wrote me a few lines on Wednesday, to say that he had arrived in safety, and to give me his directions, which I particularly begged him to do. He merely added, that he should not write again, till he had something of importance to mention."

"And my mother—How is she? How are you all?"

"My mother is tolerably well, I trust; though her spirits are greatly shaken. She is up stairs, and will have great satisfaction in seeing you all. She does not yet leave her dressing-room. Mary and Kitty, thank Heaven! are quite well."

"But you—How are you?" cried Elizabeth. "You look pale. How much you must have gone through!"

Her sister, however, assured her, of her being perfectly well; and their conversation, which had been passing while Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner were engaged with their children, was now put an end to, by the approach of the whole party. Jane ran to her uncle and aunt, and welcomed and thanked them both, with alternate smiles and tears.

When they were all in the drawing-room, the questions which Elizabeth had already asked, were of course repeated by the others, and they soon found that Jane had no intelligence to give. The sanguine hope of good, however, which the benevolence of her heart suggested, had not yet deserted her; she still expected that it would all end well, and that every morning would bring some letter, either from Lydia or her father, to explain their proceedings, and perhaps announce the marriage.

Mrs. Bennet, to whose apartment they all repaired, after a few minutes conversation together, received them exactly as might be expected; with tears and lamentations of regret, invectives against the villanous conduct of Wickham, and complaints of her own sufferings and ill usage; blaming every body but the person to whose ill judging indulgence the errors of her daughter must be principally owing.

"If I had been able," said she, "to carry my point of going to Brighton, with all my family, *this* would not have happened; but poor dear Lydia had nobody to take care of her. Why did the Forsters ever let her go out of their sight? I am sure there was some great neglect or other on their side, for she is not the kind of girl to do such a thing, if she had been well looked after. I always thought they were very unfit to have the charge of her; but I was over-ruled, as I always am. Poor dear child! And now here's Mr. Bennet gone away, and I know he will fight Wickham, wherever he meets him, and then he will be killed, and what is to become of us all? The Collinses will turn us out, before he is cold in his grave; and if you are not kind to us, brother, I do not know what we shall do."

They all exclaimed against such terrific ideas; and Mr. Gardiner, after general assurances of his affection for her and all her family, told her that he meant to be in London the very next day, and would assist Mr. Bennet in every endeavour for recovering Lydia.

"Do not give way to useless alarm," added he, "though it is right to be prepared for the worst, there is no occasion to look on it as certain. It is not quite a week since they left Brighton. In a few days more, we may gain some news of them, and till we know that they are not married, and have no design of marrying, do not let us give the matter over as lost. As soon as I get to town, I



shall go to my brother, and make him come home with me to Gracechurch Street, and then we may consult together as to what is to be done."

"Oh! my dear brother," replied Mrs. Bennet, "that is exactly what I could most wish for. And now do, when you get to town, find them out, wherever they may be; and if they are not married already, *make* them marry. And as for wedding clothes, do not let them wait for that, but tell Lydia she shall have as much money as she chuses, to buy them, after they are married. And, above all things, keep Mr. Bennet from fighting. Tell him what a dreadful state I am in,—that I am frightened out of my wits; and have such tremblings, such flutterings, all over me, such spasms in my side, and pains in my head, and such beatings at heart, that I can get no rest by night nor by day. And tell my dear Lydia, not to give any directions about her clothes, till she has seen me, for she does not know which are the best warehouses. Oh, brother, how kind you are! I know you will contrive it all."

But Mr. Gardiner, though he assured her again of his earnest endeavours in the cause, could not avoid recommending moderation to her, as well in her hopes as her fears; and, after talking with her in this manner till dinner was on table, they left her to vent all her feelings on the housekeeper, who attended, in the absence of her daughters.

Though her brother and sister were persuaded that there was no real occasion for such a seclusion from the family, they did not attempt to oppose it, for they knew that she had not prudence enough to hold her tongue before the servants, while they waited at table, and judged it better that *one* only of the household, and the one whom they could most trust, should comprehend all her fears and solicitude on the subject.

In the dining-room they were soon joined by Mary and Kitty, who had been too busily engaged in their separate apartments, to make their appearance before. One came from her books, and the other from her toilette. The faces of both, however, were tolerably calm; and no change was visible in either, except that the loss of her favourite sister, or the anger which she had herself incurred in the business, had given something more of fretfulness than usual, to the accents of Kitty. As for Mary, she was mistress enough of herself to whisper to Elizabeth with a countenance of grave reflection, soon after they were seated at table,

"This is a most unfortunate affair; and will probably be much talked of. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other, the balm of sisterly consolation."

Then, perceiving in Elizabeth no inclination of replying, she added, "Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson; that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable—that one false step involves her in endless ruin—that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful,—and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex."



Elizabeth lifted up her eyes in amazement, but was too much oppressed to make any reply. Mary, however, continued to console herself with such kind of moral extractions from the evil before them.

In the afternoon, the two elder Miss Bennets were able to be for half an hour by themselves; and Elizabeth instantly availed herself of the opportunity of making many enquiries, which Jane was equally eager to satisfy. After joining in general lamentations over the dreadful sequel of this event, which Elizabeth considered as all but certain, and Miss Bennet could not assert to be wholly impossible; the former continued the subject, by saying, "But tell me all and every thing about it, which I have not already heard. Give me farther particulars. What did Colonel Forster say? Had they no apprehension of any thing before the elopement took place? They must have seen them together for ever."

"Colonel Forster did own that he had often suspected some partiality, especially on Lydia's side, but nothing to give him any alarm. I am so grieved for him. His behaviour was attentive and kind to the utmost. He *was* coming to us, in order to assure us of his concern, before he had any idea of their not being gone to Scotland: when that apprehension first got abroad, it hastened his journey."

"And was Denny convinced that Wickham would not marry? Did he know of their intending to go off? Had Colonel Forster seen Denny himself?"

"Yes; but when questioned by *him* Denny denied knowing any thing of their plan, and would not give his real opinion about it. He did not repeat his persuasion of their not marrying—and from *that*, I am inclined to hope, he might have been misunderstood before."

"And till Colonel Forster came himself, not one of you entertained a doubt, I suppose, of their being really married?"

"How was it possible that such an idea should enter our brains! I felt a little uneasy—a little fearful of my sister's happiness with him in marriage, because I knew that his conduct had not been always quite right. My father and mother knew nothing of that, they only felt how imprudent a match it must be. Kitty then owned, with a very natural triumph on knowing more than the rest of us, that in Lydia's last letter, she had prepared her for such a step. She had known, it seems, of their being in love with each other, many weeks."

"But not before they went to Brighton?"

"No, I believe not."

"And did Colonel Forster appear to think ill of Wickham himself? Does he know his real character?"

"I must confess that he did not speak so well of Wickham as he formerly did. He believed him to be imprudent and extravagant. And since this sad affair has taken place, it is said, that he left Meryton greatly in debt; but I hope this may be false."



"Oh, Jane, had we been less secret, had we told what we knew of him, this could not have happened!"

"Perhaps it would have been better;" replied her sister. "But to expose the former faults of any person, without knowing what their present feelings were, seemed unjustifiable. We acted with the best intentions."

"Could Colonel Forster repeat the particulars of Lydia's note to his wife?"

"He brought it with him for us to see."

Jane then took it from her pocket-book, and gave it to Elizabeth. These were the contents:

"MY DEAR HARRIET,

"You will laugh when you know where I am gone, and I cannot help laughing myself at your surprise to-morrow morning, as soon as I am missed. I am going to Gretna Green, and if you cannot guess with who, I shall think you a simpleton, for there is but one man in the world I love, and he is an angel. I should never be happy without him, so think it no harm to be off. You need not send them word at Longbourn of my going, if you do not like it, for it will make the surprise the greater, when I write to them, and sign my name Lydia Wickham. What a good joke it will be! I can hardly write for laughing. Pray make my excuses to Pratt, for not keeping my engagement, and dancing with him to-night. Tell him I hope he will excuse me when he knows all, and tell him I will dance with him at the next ball we meet, with great pleasure. I shall send for my clothes when I get to Longbourn; but I wish you would tell Sally to mend a great slit in my worked muslin gown, before they are packed up. Good bye. Give my love to Colonel Forster, I hope you will drink to our good journey.

"Your affectionate friend,
"Lydia Bennet."

"Oh! thoughtless, thoughtless Lydia!" cried Elizabeth when she had finished it. "What a letter is this, to be written at such a moment. But at least it shews, that *she* was serious in the object of her journey. Whatever he might afterwards persuade her to, it was not on her side a *scheme* of infamy. My poor father! how he must have felt it!"

"I never saw any one so shocked. He could not speak a word for full ten minutes. My mother was taken ill immediately, and the whole house in such confusion!"

"Oh! Jane," cried Elizabeth, "was there a servant belonging to it, who did not know the whole story before the end of the day?"

"I do not know.—I hope there was.—But to be guarded at such a time, is very difficult. My mother was in hysterics, and though I endeavoured to give her every assistance in my power, I



am afraid I did not do so much as I might have done! But the horror of what might possibly happen, almost took from me my faculties."

"Your attendance upon her, has been too much for you. You do not look well. Oh! that I had been with you, you have had every care and anxiety upon yourself alone."

"Mary and Kitty have been very kind, and would have shared in every fatigue, I am sure, but I did not think it right for either of them. Kitty is slight and delicate, and Mary studies so much, that her hours of repose should not be broken in on. My aunt Philips came to Longbourn on Tuesday, after my father went away; and was so good as to stay till Thursday with me. She was of great use and comfort to us all, and lady Lucas has been very kind; she walked here on Wednesday morning to condole with us, and offered her services, or any of her daughters, if they could be of use to us."

"She had better have stayed at home," cried Elizabeth; "perhaps she *meant* well, but, under such a misfortune as this, one cannot see too little of one's neighbours. Assistance is impossible; condolence, insufferable. Let them triumph over us at a distance, and be satisfied."

She then proceeded to enquire into the measures which her father had intended to pursue, while in town, for the recovery of his daughter.

"He meant, I believe," replied Jane, "to go to Epsom, the place where they last changed horses, see the postilions, and try if any thing could be made out from them. His principal object must be, to discover the number of the hackney coach which took them from Clapham. It had come with a fare from London; and as he thought the circumstance of a gentleman and lady's removing from one carriage into another, might be remarked, he meant to make enquiries at Clapham. If he could any how discover at what house the coachman had before set down his fare, he determined to make enquiries there, and hoped it might not be impossible to find out the stand and number of the coach. I do not know of any other designs that he had formed: but he was in such a hurry to be gone, and his spirits so greatly discomposed, that I had difficulty in finding out even so much as this."

¿Cuáles temas has identificado?

¿Cuál es el tono general de la novela hasta ahora?



Capítulo 48

The whole party were in hopes of a letter from Mr. Bennet the next morning, but the post came in without bringing a single line from him. His family knew him to be on all common occasions, a most negligent and dilatory correspondent, but at such a time, they had hoped for exertion. They were forced to conclude, that he had no pleasing intelligence to send, but even of *that* they would have been glad to be certain. Mr. Gardiner had waited only for the letters before he set off.

When he was gone, they were certain at least of receiving constant information of what was going on, and their uncle promised, at parting, to prevail on Mr. Bennet to return to Longbourn, as soon as he could, to the great consolation of his sister, who considered it as the only security for her husband's not being killed in a duel.

Mrs. Gardiner and the children were to remain in Hertfordshire a few days longer, as the former thought her presence might be serviceable to her nieces. She shared in their attendance on Mrs. Bennet, and was a great comfort to them, in their hours of freedom. Their other aunt also visited them frequently, and always, as she said, with the design of cheering and heartening them up, though as she never came without reporting some fresh instance of Wickham's extravagance or irregularity, she seldom went away without leaving them more dispirited than she found them.

All Meryton seemed striving to blacken the man, who, but three months before, had been almost an angel of light. He was declared to be in debt to every tradesman in the place, and his intrigues, all honoured with the title of seduction, had been extended into every tradesman's family. Every body declared that he was the wickedest young man in the world; and every body began to find out, that they had always distrusted the appearance of his goodness. Elizabeth, though she did not credit above half of what was said, believed enough to make her former assurance of her sister's ruin still more certain; and even Jane, who believed still less of it, became almost hopeless, more especially as the time was now come, when if they had gone to Scotland, which she had never before entirely despaired of, they must in all probability have gained some news of them.

Mr. Gardiner left Longbourn on Sunday; on Tuesday, his wife received a letter from him; it told them, that on his arrival, he had immediately found out his brother, and persuaded him to come to Gracechurch street. That Mr. Bennet had been to Epsom and Clapham, before his arrival, but without gaining any satisfactory information; and that he was now determined to enquire at all the principal hotels in town, as Mr. Bennet thought it possible they might have gone to one of them, on their first coming to London, before they procured lodgings. Mr. Gardiner himself did not expect any success from this measure, but as his brother was eager in it, he meant to assist him in pursuing it. He added, that Mr. Bennet seemed wholly disinclined at present, to leave London, and promised to write again very soon. There was also a postscript to this effect.

"I have written to Colonel Forster to desire him to find out, if possible, from some of the young man's intimates in the regiment, whether Wickham has any relations or connections, who would

Notas

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be likely to know in what part of the town he has now concealed himself. If there were any one, that one could apply to, with a probability of gaining such a clue as that, it might be of essential consequence. At present we have nothing to guide us. Colonel Forster will, I dare say, do every thing in his power to satisfy us on this head. But, on second thoughts, perhaps Lizzy could tell us, what relations he has now living, better than any other person."

Elizabeth was at no loss to understand from whence this deference for her authority proceeded; but it was not in her power to give any information of so satisfactory a nature, as the compliment deserved.

She had never heard of his having had any relations, except a father and mother, both of whom had been dead many years. It was possible, however, that some of his companions in the — — shire, might be able to give more information; and, though she was not very sanguine in expecting it, the application was a something to look forward to.

Every day at Longbourn was now a day of anxiety; but the most anxious part of each was when the post was expected. The arrival of letters was the first grand object of every morning's impatience. Through letters, whatever of good or bad was to be told, would be communicated, and every succeeding day was expected to bring some news of importance.

But before they heard again from Mr. Gardiner, a letter arrived for their father, from a different quarter, from Mr. Collins; which, as Jane had received directions to open all that came for him in his absence, she accordingly read; and Elizabeth, who knew what curiosities his letters always were, looked over her, and read it likewise. It was as follows:

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I feel myself called upon, by our relationship, and my situation in life, to condole with you on the grievous affliction you are now suffering under, of which we were yesterday informed by a letter from Hertfordshire. Be assured, my dear Sir, that Mrs. Collins and myself sincerely sympathise with you, and all your respectable family, in your present distress, which must be of the bitterest kind, because proceeding from a cause which no time can remove. No arguments shall be wanting on my part, that can alleviate so severe a misfortune; or that may comfort you, under a circumstance that must be of all others most afflicting to a parent's mind. The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this. And it is the more to be lamented, because there is reason to suppose, as my dear Charlotte informs me, that this licentiousness of behaviour in your daughter, has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence, though, at the same time, for the consolation of yourself and Mrs. Bennet, I am inclined to think that her own disposition must be naturally bad, or she could not be guilty of such an enormity, at so early an age. Howsoever that may be, you are grievously to be pitied, in which opinion I am not only joined by Mrs. Collins, but likewise by lady Catherine and her daughter, to whom I have related the affair. They agree with me in apprehending that this false step in one daughter, will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others, for who, as lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family. And this consideration leads me moreover to reflect



with augmented satisfaction on a certain event of last November, for had it been otherwise, I must have been involved in all your sorrow and disgrace. Let me advise you then, my dear Sir, to console yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offence.

"I am, dear Sir, &c. &c."

Mr. Gardiner did not write again, till he had received an answer from Colonel Forster; and then he had nothing of a pleasant nature to send. It was not known that Wickham had a single relation, with whom he kept up any connection, and it was certain that he had no near one living. His former acquaintance had been numerous; but since he had been in the militia, it did not appear that he was on terms of particular friendship with any of them. There was no one therefore who could be pointed out, as likely to give any news of him. And in the wretched state of his own finances, there was a very powerful motive for secrecy, in addition to his fear of discovery by Lydia's relations, for it had just transpired that he had left gaming debts behind him, to a very considerable amount. Colonel Forster believed that more than a thousand pounds would be necessary to clear his expences at Brighton. He owed a good deal in the town, but his debts of honour were still more formidable. Mr. Gardiner did not attempt to conceal these particulars from the Longbourn family; Jane heard them with horror. "A gamester!" she cried. "This is wholly unexpected. I had not an idea of it."

Mr. Gardiner added in his letter, that they might expect to see their father at home on the following day, which was Saturday. Rendered spiritless by the ill-success of all their endeavours, he had yielded to his brother-in-law's intreaty that he would return to his family, and leave it to him to do, whatever occasion might suggest to be advisable for continuing their pursuit. When Mrs. Bennet was told of this, she did not express so much satisfaction as her children expected, considering what her anxiety for his life had been before.

"What, is he coming home, and without poor Lydia!" she cried. "Sure he will not leave London before he has found them. Who is to fight Wickham, and make him marry her, if he comes away?"

As Mrs. Gardiner began to wish to be at home, it was settled that she and her children should go to London, at the same time that Mr. Bennet came from it. The coach, therefore, took them the first stage of their journey, and brought its master back to Longbourn.

Mrs. Gardiner went away in all the perplexity about Elizabeth and her Derbyshire friend, that had attended her from that part of the world. His name had never been voluntarily mentioned before them by her niece; and the kind of half-expectation which Mrs. Gardiner had formed, of their being followed by a letter from him, had ended in nothing. Elizabeth had received none since her return, that could come from Pemberley.

The present unhappy state of the family, rendered any other excuse for the lowness of her spirits unnecessary; nothing, therefore, could be fairly conjectured from *that*, though Elizabeth, who was by this time tolerably well acquainted with her own feelings, was perfectly aware, that, had

she known nothing of Darcy, she could have borne the dread of Lydia's infamy somewhat better. It would have spared her, she thought, one sleepless night out of two.

When Mr. Bennet arrived, he had all the appearance of his usual philosophic composure. He said as little as he had ever been in the habit of saying; made no mention of the business that had taken him away, and it was some time before his daughters had courage to speak of it.

It was not till the afternoon, when he joined them at tea, that Elizabeth ventured to introduce the subject; and then, on her briefly expressing her sorrow for what he must have endured, he replied, "Say nothing of that. Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it." "You must not be too severe upon yourself," replied Elizabeth.

"You may well warn me against such an evil. Human nature is so prone to fall into it! No, Lizzy, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough." Elizabeth asked, "Do you suppose them to be in London?" Mr. Bennet replied, "Yes; where else can they be so well concealed?"

"And Lydia used to want to go to London," added Kitty. "She is happy, then," said her father, drily; "and her residence there will probably be of some duration."

Then, after a short silence, he continued, "Lizzy, I bear you no ill-will for being justified in your advice to me last May, which, considering the event, shews some greatness of mind." They were interrupted by Miss Bennet, who came to fetch her mother's tea.

"This is a parade," cried he, "which does one good; it gives such an elegance to misfortune! Another day I will do the same; I will sit in my library, in my night cap and powdering gown, and give as much trouble as I can,—or, perhaps, I may defer it, till Kitty runs away." "I am not going to run away, Papa," said Kitty, fretfully; "if I should ever go to Brighton, I would behave better than Lydia."

"You go to Brighton!—I would not trust you so near it as East Bourne for fifty pounds! No, Kitty, I have at last learnt to be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it. No officer is ever to enter my house again, nor even to pass through the village. Balls will be absolutely prohibited, unless you stand up with one of your sisters. And you are never to stir out of doors, till you can prove, that you have spent ten minutes of every day in a rational manner."

Kitty, who took all these threats in a serious light, began to cry. "Well, well," said he, "do not make yourself unhappy. If you are a good girl for the next ten years, I will take you to a review at the end of them."

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Capítulo 49

Two days after Mr. Bennet's return, as Jane and Elizabeth were walking together in the shrubbery behind the house, they saw the housekeeper coming towards them, and, concluding that she came to call them to their mother, went forward to meet her; but, instead of the expected summons, when they approached her, she said to Miss Bennet, "I beg your pardon, madam, for interrupting you, but I was in hopes you might have got some good news from town, so I took the liberty of coming to ask."

"What do you mean, Hill? We have heard nothing from town."

"Dear madam," cried Mrs. Hill, in great astonishment, "don't you know there is an express come for master from Mr. Gardiner? He has been here this half hour, and master has had a letter."

Away ran the girls, too eager to get in to have time for speech. They ran through the vestibule into the breakfast room; from thence to the library;—their father was in neither; and they were on the point of seeking him up stairs with their mother, when they were met by the butler, who said,

"If you are looking for my master, ma'am, he is walking towards the little copse."

Upon this information, they instantly passed through the hall once more, and ran across the lawn after their father, who was deliberately pursuing his way towards a small wood on one side of the paddock.

Jane, who was not so light, nor so much in the habit of running as Elizabeth, soon lagged behind, while her sister, panting for breath, came up with him, and eagerly cried out,

"Oh, Papa, what news? what news? have you heard from my uncle?"

"Yes, I have had a letter from him by express."

"Well, and what news does it bring? good or bad?"

"What is there of good to be expected?" said he, taking the letter from his pocket; "but perhaps you would like to read it."

Elizabeth impatiently caught it from his hand. Jane now came up.

"Read it aloud," said their father, "for I hardly know myself what it is about."

"Gracechurch-street, Monday,
August 2.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"At last I am able to send you some tidings of my niece, and such as, upon the whole, I hope will give you satisfaction. Soon after you left me on Saturday, I was

Notas

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fortunate enough to find out in what part of London they were. The particulars, I reserve till we meet. It is enough to know they are discovered, I have seen them both—"

"Then it is, as I always hoped," cried Jane; "they are married!"

Elizabeth read on; "I have seen them both. They are not married, nor can I find there was any intention of being so; but if you are willing to perform the engagements which I have ventured to make on your side, I hope it will not be long before they are. All that is required of you is, to assure to your daughter, by settlement, her equal share of the five thousand pounds, secured among your children after the decease of yourself and my sister; and, moreover, to enter into an engagement of allowing her, during your life, one hundred pounds per annum. These are conditions, which, considering every thing, I had no hesitation in complying with, as far as I thought myself privileged, for you. I shall send this by express, that no time may be lost in bringing me your answer. You will easily comprehend, from these particulars, that Mr. Wickham's circumstances are not so hopeless as they are generally believed to be. The world has been deceived in that respect; and I am happy to say, there will be some little money, even when all his debts are discharged, to settle on my niece, in addition to her own fortune. If, as I conclude will be the case, you send me full powers to act in your name, throughout the whole of this business, I will immediately give directions to Haggerston for preparing a proper settlement. There will not be the smallest occasion for your coming to town again; therefore, stay quietly at Longbourn, and depend on my diligence and care. Send back your answer as soon as you can, and be careful to write explicitly. We have judged it best, that my niece should be married from this house, of which I hope you will approve. She comes to us to-day. I shall write again as soon as any thing more is determined on. Your's, &c.

"Edw. Gardiner."

"Is it possible!" cried Elizabeth, when she had finished. "Can it be possible that he will marry her?"

"Wickham is not so undeserving, then, as we have thought him;" said her sister. "My dear father, I congratulate you."

"And have you answered the letter?" said Elizabeth.

"No; but it must be done soon."

Most earnestly did she then intreat him to lose no more time before he wrote.

"Oh! my dear father," she cried, "come back, and write immediately. Consider how important every moment is, in such a case."



"Let me write for you," said Jane, "if you dislike the trouble yourself."

"I dislike it very much," he replied; "but it must be done."

And so saying, he turned back with them, and walked towards the house.

"And may I ask?" said Elizabeth, "but the terms, I suppose, must be complied with."

"Complied with! I am only ashamed of his asking so little."

"And they *must* marry! Yet he is *such* a man!"

"Yes, yes, they must marry. There is nothing else to be done. But there are two things that I want very much to know:—one is, how much money your uncle has laid down, to bring it about; and the other, how I am ever to pay him."

"Money! my uncle!" cried Jane, "what do you mean, Sir?"

"I mean, that no man in his senses, would marry Lydia on so slight a temptation as one hundred a-year during my life, and fifty after I am gone."

"That is very true," said Elizabeth; "though it had not occurred to me before. His debts to be discharged, and something still to remain! Oh! it must be my uncle's doings! Generous, good man, I am afraid he has distressed himself. A small sum could not do all this."

"No," said her father, "Wickham's a fool, if he takes her with a farthing less than ten thousand pounds. I should be sorry to think so ill of him, in the very beginning of our relationship."

"Ten thousand pounds! Heaven forbid! How is half such a sum to be repaid?"

Mr. Bennet made no answer, and each of them, deep in thought, continued silent till they reached the house. Their father then went to the library to write, and the girls walked into the breakfast-room.

"And they are really to be married!" cried Elizabeth, as soon as they were by themselves. "How strange this is! And for *this* we are to be thankful. That they should marry, small as is their chance of happiness, and wretched as is his character, we are forced to rejoice! Oh, Lydia!"

"I comfort myself with thinking," replied Jane, "that he certainly would not marry Lydia, if he had not a real regard for her. Though our kind uncle has done something towards clearing him, I cannot believe that ten thousand pounds, or any thing like it, has been advanced. He has children of his own, and may have more. How could he spare half ten thousand pounds?"

"If we are ever able to learn what Wickham's debts have been," said Elizabeth, "and how much is settled on his side on our sister, we shall exactly know what Mr. Gardiner has done for them, because Wickham has not sixpence of his own. The kindness of my uncle and aunt can never be requited. Their taking her home, and affording her their personal protection and countenance, is such a sacrifice to her advantage, as years of gratitude cannot enough acknowledge. By this time



she is actually with them! If such goodness does not make her miserable now, she will never deserve to be happy! What a meeting for her, when she first sees my aunt!"

"We must endeavour to forget all that has passed on either side," said Jane: "I hope and trust they will yet be happy. His consenting to marry her is a proof, I will believe, that he is come to a right way of thinking. Their mutual affection will steady them; and I flatter myself they will settle so quietly, and live in so rational a manner, as may in time make their past imprudence forgotten."

"Their conduct has been such," replied Elizabeth, "as neither you, nor I, nor any body, can ever forget. It is useless to talk of it."

It now occurred to the girls that their mother was in all likelihood perfectly ignorant of what had happened. They went to the library, therefore, and asked their father, whether he would not wish them to make it known to her. He was writing, and, without raising his head, coolly replied,

"Just as you please."

"May we take my uncle's letter to read to her?"

"Take whatever you like, and get away."

Elizabeth took the letter from his writing table, and they went up stairs together. Mary and Kitty were both with Mrs. Bennet: one communication would, therefore, do for all. After a slight preparation for good news, the letter was read aloud. Mrs. Bennet could hardly contain herself. As soon as Jane had read Mr. Gardiner's hope of Lydia's being soon married, her joy burst forth, and every following sentence added to its exuberance. She was now in an irritation as violent from delight, as she had ever been fidgetty from alarm and vexation. To know that her daughter would be married was enough. She was disturbed by no fear for her felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of her misconduct.

"My dear, dear Lydia!" she cried: "This is delightful indeed!—She will be married!—I shall see her again!—She will be married at sixteen!—My good, kind brother!—I knew how it would be—I knew he would manage every thing. How I long to see her! and to see dear Wickham too! But the clothes, the wedding clothes! I will write to my sister Gardiner about them directly. Lizzy, my dear, run down to your father, and ask him how much he will give her. Stay, stay, I will go myself. Ring the bell, Kitty, for Hill. I will put on my things in a moment. My dear, dear Lydia!—How merry we shall be together when we meet!"

Her eldest daughter endeavoured to give some relief to the violence of these transports, by leading her thoughts to the obligations which Mr. Gardiner's behaviour laid them all under.

"For we must attribute this happy conclusion," she added, "in a great measure, to his kindness. We are persuaded that he has pledged himself to assist Mr. Wickham with money."



"Well," cried her mother, "it is all very right; who should do it but her own uncle? If he had not had a family of his own, I and my children must have had all his money you know, and it is the first time we have ever had any thing from him, except a few presents. Well! I am so happy. In a short time, I shall have a daughter married. Mrs. Wickham! How well it sounds. And she was only sixteen last June. My dear Jane, I am in such a flutter, that I am sure I can't write; so I will dictate, and you write for me. We will settle with your father about the money afterwards; but the things should be ordered immediately."

She was then proceeding to all the particulars of calico, muslin, and cambric, and would shortly have dictated some very plentiful orders, had not Jane, though with some difficulty, persuaded her to wait, till her father was at leisure to be consulted. One day's delay she observed, would be of small importance; and her mother was too happy, to be quite so obstinate as usual. Other schemes too came into her head.

"I will go to Meryton," said she, "as soon as I am dressed, and tell the good, good news to my sister Philips. And as I come back, I can call on Lady Lucas and Mrs. Long. Kitty, run down and order the carriage. An airing would do me a great deal of good, I am sure. Girls, can I do any thing for you in Meryton? Oh! here comes Hill. My dear Hill, have you heard the good news? Miss Lydia is going to be married; and you shall all have a bowl of punch, to make merry at her wedding."

Mrs. Hill began instantly to express her joy. Elizabeth received her congratulations amongst the rest, and then, sick of this folly, took refuge in her own room, that she might think with freedom.

Poor Lydia's situation must, at best, be bad enough; but that it was no worse, she had need to be thankful. She felt it so; and though, in looking forward, neither rational happiness nor worldly prosperity, could be justly expected for her sister; in looking back to what they had feared, only two hours ago, she felt all the advantages of what they had gained.

¿Cuáles temas has identificado?

¿Cuál es el tono general de la novela hasta ahora?



Capítulo 50

Mr. Bennet had very often wished, before this period of his life, that, instead of spending his whole income, he had laid by an annual sum, for the better provision of his children, and of his wife, if she survived him. He now wished it more than ever. Had he done his duty in that respect, Lydia need not have been indebted to her uncle, for whatever of honour or credit could now be purchased for her. The satisfaction of prevailing on one of the most worthless young men in Great Britain to be her husband, might then have rested in its proper place.

Notas

Subraya las citas importantes.

Escribe un resumen de cada página.

He was seriously concerned, that a cause of so little advantage to any one, should be forwarded at the sole expence of his brother-in-law, and he was determined, if possible, to find out the extent of his assistance, and to discharge the obligation as soon as he could.

When first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless; for, of course, they were to have a son. This son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for. Five daughters successively entered the world, but yet the son was to come; and Mrs. Bennet, for many years after Lydia's birth, had been certain that he would. This event had at last been despaired of, but it was then too late to be saving. Mrs. Bennet had no turn for economy, and her husband's love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income.

Five thousand pounds was settled by marriage articles on Mrs. Bennet and the children. But in what proportions it should be divided amongst the latter, depended on the will of the parents. This was one point, with regard to Lydia at least, which was now to be settled, and Mr. Bennet could have no hesitation in acceding to the proposal before him. In terms of grateful acknowledgment for the kindness of his brother, though expressed most concisely, he then delivered on paper his perfect approbation of all that was done, and his willingness to fulfil the engagements that had been made for him. He had never before supposed that, could Wickham be prevailed on to marry his daughter, it would be done with so little inconvenience to himself, as by the present arrangement. He would scarcely be ten pounds a-year the loser, by the hundred that was to be paid them; for, what with her board and pocket allowance, and the continual presents in money, which passed to her, through her mother's hands, Lydia's expences had been very little within that sum.

That it would be done with such trifling exertion on his side, too, was another very welcome surprise; for his chief wish at present, was to have as little trouble in the business as possible. When the first transports of rage which had produced his activity in seeking her were over, he naturally returned to all his former indolence. His letter was soon dispatched; for though dilatory in undertaking business, he was quick in its execution. He begged to know farther particulars of what he was indebted to his brother; but was too angry with Lydia, to send any message to her.

The good news quickly spread through the house; and with proportionate speed through the neighbourhood. It was borne in the latter with decent philosophy. To be sure it would have been



more for the advantage of conversation, had Miss Lydia Bennet come upon the town; or, as the happiest alternative, been secluded from the world, in some distant farm house. But there was much to be talked of, in marrying her; and the good-natured wishes for her well-doing, which had proceeded before, from all the spiteful old ladies in Meryton, lost but little of their spirit in this change of circumstances, because with such an husband, her misery was considered certain.

It was a fortnight since Mrs. Bennet had been down stairs, but on this happy day, she again took her seat at the head of her table, and in spirits oppressively high. No sentiment of shame gave a damp to her triumph. The marriage of a daughter, which had been the first object of her wishes, since Jane was sixteen, was now on the point of accomplishment, and her thoughts and her words ran wholly on those attendants of elegant nuptials, fine muslins, new carriages, and servants. She was busily searching through the neighbourhood for a proper situation for her daughter, and, without knowing or considering what their income might be, rejected many as deficient in size and importance.

"Haye-Park might do," said she, "if the Gouldings would quit it, or the great house at Stoke, if the drawing-room were larger; but Ashworth is too far off! I could not bear to have her ten miles from me; and as for Purvis Lodge, the attics are dreadful."

Her husband allowed her to talk on without interruption, while the servants remained. But when they had withdrawn, he said to her, "Mrs. Bennet, before you take any, or all of these houses, for your son and daughter, let us come to a right understanding. Into *one* house in this neighbourhood, they shall never have admittance. I will not encourage the impudence of either, by receiving them at Longbourn."

A long dispute followed this declaration; but Mr. Bennet was firm: it soon led to another; and Mrs. Bennet found, with amazement and horror, that her husband would not advance a guinea to buy clothes for his daughter. He protested that she should receive from him no mark of affection whatever, on the occasion. Mrs. Bennet could hardly comprehend it. That his anger could be carried to such a point of inconceivable resentment, as to refuse his daughter a privilege, without which her marriage would scarcely seem valid, exceeded all that she could believe possible. She was more alive to the disgrace, which the want of new clothes must reflect on her daughter's nuptials, than to any sense of shame at her eloping and living with Wickham, a fortnight before they took place.

Elizabeth was now most heartily sorry that she had, from the distress of the moment, been led to make Mr. Darcy acquainted with their fears for her sister; for since her marriage would so shortly give the proper termination to the elopement, they might hope to conceal its unfavourable beginning, from all those who were not immediately on the spot.

She had no fear of its spreading farther, through his means. There were few people on whose secrecy she would have more confidently depended; but at the same time, there was no one, whose knowledge of a sister's frailty would have mortified her so much. Not, however, from any fear of disadvantage from it, individually to herself; for at any rate, there seemed a gulf



impassable between them. Had Lydia's marriage been concluded on the most honourable terms, it was not to be supposed that Mr. Darcy would connect himself with a family, where to every other objection would now be added, an alliance and relationship of the nearest kind with the man whom he so justly scorned.

From such a connection she could not wonder that he should shrink. The wish of procuring her regard, which she had assured herself of his feeling in Derbyshire, could not in rational expectation survive such a blow as this. She was humbled, she was grieved; she repented, though she hardly knew of what. She became jealous of his esteem, when she could no longer hope to be benefited by it. She wanted to hear of him, when there seemed the least chance of gaining intelligence. She was convinced that she could have been happy with him; when it was no longer likely they should meet.

What a triumph for him, as she often thought, could he know that the proposals which she had proudly spurned only four months ago, would now have been gladly and gratefully received! He was as generous, she doubted not, as the most generous of his sex. But while he was mortal, there must be a triumph.

She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance.

But no such happy marriage could now teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was. An union of a different tendency, and precluding the possibility of the other, was soon to be formed in their family.

How Wickham and Lydia were to be supported in tolerable independence, she could not imagine. But how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, she could easily conjecture.

Mr. Gardiner soon wrote again to his brother. To Mr. Bennet's acknowledgments he briefly replied, with assurances of his eagerness to promote the welfare of any of his family; and concluded with intreaties that the subject might never be mentioned to him again. The principal purport of his letter was to inform them, that Mr. Wickham had resolved on quitting the Militia.

"It was greatly my wish that he should do so," he added, "as soon as his marriage was fixed on. And I think you will agree with me, in considering a removal from that corps as highly advisable, both on his account and my niece's. It is Mr. Wickham's intention to go into the regulars; and, among his former friends, there are still some who are able and willing to assist him in the army. He has the promise of an ensigncy in General —'s regiment, now quartered in the North. It is an advantage



to have it so far from this part of the kingdom. He promises fairly, and I hope among different people, where they may each have a character to preserve, they will both be more prudent. I have written to Colonel Forster, to inform him of our present arrangements, and to request that he will satisfy the various creditors of Mr. Wickham in and near Brighton, with assurances of speedy payment, for which I have pledged myself. And will you give yourself the trouble of carrying similar assurances to his creditors in Meryton, of whom I shall subjoin a list, according to his information. He has given in all his debts; I hope at least he has not deceived us. Haggerston has our directions, and all will be completed in a week. They will then join his regiment, unless they are first invited to Longbourn; and I understand from Mrs. Gardiner, that my niece is very desirous of seeing you all, before she leaves the South. She is well, and begs to be dutifully remembered to you and her mother.—
Your's, &c.

“E. Gardiner.”

Mr. Bennet and his daughters saw all the advantages of Wickham's removal from the —shire, as clearly as Mr. Gardiner could do. But Mrs. Bennet, was not so well pleased with it. Lydia's being settled in the North, just when she had expected most pleasure and pride in her company, for she had by no means given up her plan of their residing in Hertfordshire, was a severe disappointment; and besides, it was such a pity that Lydia should be taken from a regiment where she was acquainted with every body, and had so many favourites.

"She is so fond of Mrs. Forster," said she, "it will be quite shocking to send her away! And there are several of the young men, too, that she likes very much. The officers may not be so pleasant in General —'s regiment."

His daughter's request, for such it might be considered, of being admitted into her family again, before she set off for the North, received at first an absolute negative. But Jane and Elizabeth, who agreed in wishing, for the sake of their sister's feelings and consequence, that she should be noticed on her marriage by her parents, urged him so earnestly, yet so rationally and so mildly, to receive her and her husband at Longbourn, as soon as they were married, that he was prevailed on to think as they thought, and act as they wished. And their mother had the satisfaction of knowing, that she should be able to shew her married daughter in the neighbourhood, before she was banished to the North. When Mr. Bennet wrote again to his brother, therefore, he sent his permission for them to come; and it was settled, that as soon as the ceremony was over, they should proceed to Longbourn. Elizabeth was surprised, however, that Wickham should consent to such a scheme, and, had she consulted only her own inclination, any meeting with him would have been the last object of her wishes.

¿Cuáles temas has identificado?

¿Cuál es el tono general de la novela hasta ahora?



Capítulo 51

Their sister's wedding day arrived; and Jane and Elizabeth felt for her probably more than she felt for herself. The carriage was sent to meet them at —, and they were to return in it, by dinner-time. Their arrival was dreaded by the elder Miss Bennets; and Jane more especially, who gave Lydia the feelings which would have attended herself, had *she* been the culprit, was wretched in the thought of what her sister must endure.

They came. The family were assembled in the breakfast room, to receive them. Smiles decked the face of Mrs. Bennet, as the carriage drove up to the door; her husband looked impenetrably grave; her daughters, alarmed, anxious, uneasy.

Lydia's voice was heard in the vestibule; the door was thrown open, and she ran into the room. Her mother stepped forwards, embraced her, and welcomed her with rapture; gave her hand with an affectionate smile to Wickham, who followed his lady, and wished them both joy, with an alacrity which shewed no doubt of their happiness.

Their reception from Mr. Bennet, to whom they then turned, was not quite so cordial. His countenance rather gained in austerity; and he scarcely opened his lips. The easy assurance of the young couple, indeed, was enough to provoke him. Elizabeth was disgusted, and even Miss Bennet was shocked. Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless. She turned from sister to sister, demanding their congratulations, and when at length they all sat down, looked eagerly round the room, took notice of some little alteration in it, and observed, with a laugh, that it was a great while since she had been there.

Wickham was not at all more distressed than herself, but his manners were always so pleasing, that had his character and his marriage been exactly what they ought, his smiles and his easy address, while he claimed their relationship, would have delighted them all. Elizabeth had not before believed him quite equal to such assurance; but she sat down, resolving within herself, to draw no limits in future to the impudence of an impudent man. *She* blushed, and Jane blushed; but the cheeks of the two who caused their confusion, suffered no variation of colour.

There was no want of discourse. The bride and her mother could neither of them talk fast enough; and Wickham, who happened to sit near Elizabeth, began enquiring after his acquaintance in that neighbourhood, with a good humoured ease, which she felt very unable to equal in her replies. They seemed each of them to have the happiest memories in the world. Nothing of the past was recollected with pain; and Lydia led voluntarily to subjects, which her sisters would not have alluded to for the world.

"Only think of its being three months," she cried, "since I went away; it seems but a fortnight I declare; and yet there have been things enough happened in the time. Good gracious! when I went away, I am sure I had no more idea of being married till I came back again! though I thought it would be very good fun if I was."

Notas

Subraya las citas importantes.

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Her father lifted up his eyes. Jane was distressed. Elizabeth looked expressively at Lydia; but she, who never heard nor saw any thing of which she chose to be insensible, gaily continued, "Oh! mamma, do the people hereabouts know I am married to-day? I was afraid they might not; and we overtook William Goulding in his curricle, so I was determined he should know it, and so I let down the side glass next to him, and took off my glove, and let my hand just rest upon the window frame, so that he might see the ring, and then I bowed and smiled like any thing."

Elizabeth could bear it no longer. She got up, and ran out of the room; and returned no more, till she heard them passing through the hall to the dining-parlour. She then joined them soon enough to see Lydia, with anxious parade, walk up to her mother's right hand, and hear her say to her eldest sister, "Ah! Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman."

It was not to be supposed that time would give Lydia that embarrassment, from which she had been so wholly free at first. Her ease and good spirits increased. She longed to see Mrs. Philips, the Lucases, and all their other neighbours, and to hear herself called "Mrs. Wickham," by each of them; and in the mean time, she went after dinner to shew her ring and boast of being married, to Mrs. Hill and the two housemaids.

"Well, mamma," said she, when they were all returned to the breakfast room, "and what do you think of my husband? Is not he a charming man? I am sure my sisters must all envy me. I only hope they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Brighton. That is the place to get husbands. What a pity it is, mamma, we did not all go."

"Very true; and if I had my will, we should. But my dear Lydia, I don't at all like your going such a way off. Must it be so?"

"Oh, lord! yes;—there is nothing in that. I shall like it of all things. You and papa, and my sisters, must come down and see us. We shall be at Newcastle all the winter, and I dare say there will be some balls, and I will take care to get good partners for them all."

"I should like it beyond any thing!" said her mother.

"And then when you go away, you may leave one or two of my sisters behind you; and I dare say I shall get husbands for them before the winter is over."

"I thank you for my share of the favour," said Elizabeth; "but I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands."

Their visitors were not to remain above ten days with them. Mr. Wickham had received his commission before he left London, and he was to join his regiment at the end of a fortnight.

No one but Mrs. Bennet, regretted that their stay would be so short; and she made the most of the time, by visiting about with her daughter, and having very frequent parties at home. These parties were acceptable to all; to avoid a family circle was even more desirable to such as did think, than such as did not.

Wickham's affection for Lydia, was just what Elizabeth had expected to find it; not equal to Lydia's for him. She had scarcely needed her present observation to be satisfied, from the reason of things, that their elopement had been brought on by the strength of her love, rather than by his; and she would have wondered why, without violently caring for her, he chose to elope with her at all, had she not felt certain that his flight was rendered necessary by distress of circumstances; and if that were the case, he was not the young man to resist an opportunity of having a companion.

Lydia was exceedingly fond of him. He was her dear Wickham on every occasion; no one was to be put in competition with him. He did every thing best in the world; and she was sure he would kill more birds on the first of September, than any body else in the country.

One morning, soon after their arrival, as she was sitting with her two elder sisters, she said to Elizabeth,

"Lizzy, I never gave *you* an account of my wedding, I believe. You were not by, when I told mamma, and the others, all about it. Are not you curious to hear how it was managed?"

"No really," replied Elizabeth; "I think there cannot be too little said on the subject."

"La! You are so strange! But I must tell you how it went off. We were married, you know, at St. Clement's, because Wickham's lodgings were in that parish. And it was settled that we should all be there by eleven o'clock. My uncle and aunt and I were to go together; and the others were to meet us at the church. Well, Monday morning came, and I was in such a fuss! I was so afraid you know that something would happen to put it off, and then I should have gone quite distracted. And there was my aunt, all the time I was dressing, preaching and talking away just as if she was reading a sermon. However, I did not hear above one word in ten, for I was thinking, you may suppose, of my dear Wickham. I longed to know whether he would be married in his blue coat.

"Well, and so we breakfasted at ten as usual; I thought it would never be over; for, by the bye, you are to understand, that my uncle and aunt were horrid unpleasant all the time I was with them. If you'll believe me, I did not once put my foot out of doors, though I was there a fortnight. Not one party, or scheme, or any thing. To be sure London was rather thin, but however the little Theatre was open. Well, and so just as the carriage came to the door, my uncle was called away upon business to that horrid man Mr. Stone. And then, you know, when once they get together, there is no end of it. Well, I was so frightened I did not know what to do, for my uncle was to give me away; and if we were beyond the hour, we could not be married all day. But, luckily, he came back again in ten minutes time, and then we all set out. However, I recollected afterwards, that if he *had* been prevented going, the wedding need not be put off, for Mr. Darcy might have done as well."

"Mr. Darcy!" repeated Elizabeth, in utter amazement.



"Oh, yes!—he was to come there with Wickham, you know. But gracious me! I quite forgot! I ought not to have said a word about it. I promised them so faithfully! What will Wickham say? It was to be such a secret!"

"If it was to be secret," said Jane, "say not another word on the subject. You may depend upon my seeking no further."

"Oh! certainly," said Elizabeth, though burning with curiosity; "we will ask you no questions."

"Thank you," said Lydia, "for if you did, I should certainly tell you all, and then Wickham would be angry."

On such encouragement to ask, Elizabeth was forced to put it out of her power, by running away.

But to live in ignorance on such a point was impossible; or at least it was impossible not to try for information. Mr. Darcy had been at her sister's wedding. It was exactly a scene, and exactly among people, where he had apparently least to do, and least temptation to go. Conjectures as to the meaning of it, rapid and wild, hurried into her brain; but she was satisfied with none. Those that best pleased her, as placing his conduct in the noblest light, seemed most improbable. She could not bear such suspense; and hastily seizing a sheet of paper, wrote a short letter to her aunt, to request an explanation of what Lydia had dropt, if it were compatible with the secrecy which had been intended.

"You may readily comprehend," she added, "what my curiosity must be to know how a person unconnected with any of us, and (comparatively speaking) a stranger to our family, should have been amongst you at such a time. Pray write instantly, and let me understand it—unless it is, for very cogent reasons, to remain in the secrecy which Lydia seems to think necessary; and then I must endeavour to be satisfied with ignorance."

"Not that I *shall* though," she added to herself, as she finished the letter; "and my dear aunt, if you do not tell me in an honourable manner, I shall certainly be reduced to tricks and stratagems to find it out."

Jane's delicate sense of honour would not allow her to speak to Elizabeth privately of what Lydia had let fall; Elizabeth was glad of it;—till it appeared whether her inquiries would receive any satisfaction, she had rather be without a confidante.

¿Cuáles temas has identificado?

¿Cuál es el tono general de la novela hasta ahora?

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