

A Truth Universally Acknowledged – The Secret Blog of Mary Bennet

7th March 1809

Oh! the wasted hours spent on that most undeserving other sex. My sisters are all flutterings and yearnings for a certain gentleman who is come to the house, one Mr Bingley who but for his horse and coat, they have yet to behold or become acquainted! My father, as I must call him though he treats me with no less contempt than the barren sow in the piggery, is attending Mr Bingley in the library as I write. My father and mother are of a mind that the gentleman in question would do very well for one of us girls. Doubtless – he is a single man of outrageous fortune in possession of much of the North of England if my mother is to be comprehended. My parents, dear reader, care not for deep thinking and wise reflections. Indeed, what care they for fine loins, a noble bulge and the promise of endless nights spent in the pursuit of passion? No, they desire only to see us married in a manner pleasing to society and the family purse. Marriage? What know they of marriage? My father is a gentleman who lacked the wit or self-regard to resist the heaving bosom and pleasing eyes of my mother, a tradesman's daughter of weak understanding and illiberal mind.

My scholarly pursuits, for that is how I am deemed to spend my time here in this apartment, have thrust me in the way of many great books. It is my considered view after years of devoted reading that all imaginable happiness can only be achieved by the female of the sex through her independence. Those like my dear sisters, who are of the opinion that marriage is the only true path to contentment in life, are grievously to be pitied. To make merry one must be free, of that I am certain. Freedom of thought and deed, what finer thing for a female.

Mr Bingley is taking his leave and to be sure my sisters are all animation at the sight of his rear countenance. They are come to my window to further behold his departure to Netherfield. Pitiful creatures! See how they follow him thither with their drooling eyes and beating hearts. Oh! be gone, pray, leave me to my books. To be sure the gentleman is passable, if myopic eyes and the fleeting turn of his head can be relied upon. Indeed, I would not say nay to him! though he comes not for me for I am the plain one of the family and a gentleman's fortune can afford him great beauty. Mr Bingley is doubtless come to Longbourn upon the word that here reside four young ladies to delight the eye of any man with four or five thousand a year. The fifth may have spectacles and quail's eggs for bosoms, but am I not learned and capable of insightful conversation. Yes, Mr Bingley is come like a dog to sniff and urinate around the ladies of Longbourn who are all in heat since it is my mother's choosing that we should all be out at once. But hush, I must not demean myself by thinking ill of him. It is my view that the male of the species is worthy of much pity and commiseration for are

they not constantly at the mercy of the violent throbbings and thrustings of their manhood. La! but what care I for a mere boy when I have the pleasure of spending the chief of every day in the company of that most excellent of noblemen, the Marquis de Sade. 'The 120 days of Sodom' is the subject of my reading presently. The Marquis is of all writers my delight. At nine and sixty years you must give me leave to imagine that he is very tolerably experienced in matters of base human nature. My spirits are in high flutter at the prospect of spending a most agreeable afternoon in the study of his four libertines and their vigorous exploits. Yes, dear reader, my excitement flows long! Thus I bid thee adieu (scandalous woman!)

10th March 1809

It was with much elevated spirits that I attended the Meryton Assembly Ball last evening. I confess I find such occasions greatly tolerable since they afford a scholar of immorality and the human condition like myself, every opportunity to observe my fellow man in the pursuit of recreation and amusement. The ball to be sure was rather a tame affair after long days and wakeful nights spent in an orgy of perversion with the Marquis. Nonetheless, there were many pleasing diversions to tempt me from the insufferable tedium.

The ball afforded the first proper sighting of Mr Bingley and a party from London: his two sisters, the husband of the eldest and another young man who quite stole away my breath. The gentleman in question was, I declare, the very image of de Sade's libertine as he appears to me in my imaginings. Thus did I feel an instant and violent attraction for him. Mr Bingley's acquaintance was named Mr Darcy, but what care I for names? Pray tell me the value of such things when there are desires to be satisfied. I am sensible of only three matters of import: the tallness of his figure, the power in his loins and a pair of brooding eyes that promise, I fancy, much in the way of dark illicit thoughts. Naturally all the ladies of the assembly were a-quiver at the prospect of Mr Darcy – such a fine husband in the making with his ten thousand a-year. Oh yes! how he did stride like a peacock about the room. But let us speak not of cocks, dear reader, for I am at the mere thought of him, a-quiver myself – though it is beneath my skirts not in my heart where these quiverings reside. Thus my evening was spent beholding this magnificent specimen of manhood. I followed him with mine eyes from behind pillar, post and a comely serving girl, whose huge bosom and rear attitude the width of a chaise and four, made her highly suitable for such covert surveillance. His disinclination to dance with any of the ladies in the room and indeed, his veritable rebuff of my own good sister Elizabeth, made him only the more desirable to me. Oh! what delicious cruelty did that not speak.

Thus it was in an attitude of unimaginable happiness that I progressed through the evening. The assembly was of course oblivious to my heightened state of contentment for being considered a bookish girl with no interest in such frivolities as dancing, it is assumed that I am elsewhere, that I do not exist. In truth, I have a great fondness for dancing and often indulge in wild gyrations of my own creation in the privacy of my room. Yet this false postulation of myself dear reader, I have no wish to correct for it serves me very well. It affords me a freedom of sorts at such gatherings; a freedom to observe rather than dance, to listen rather than speak and to appropriate by cunning sleight of hand the fine wine left unattended by those more eager to dance! You must permit me to disclose that it is a truth of perpetual wonder to me, dear reader, that I seem quite immune to intoxication. Oh! was I not born to a life of blissful hedonism.

That most excellent evening concluded with the sight of de Darcy (outrageous liberty Comptess Bennet!) taking his leave from the proceedings with Mr Bingley and the rest of his party. My observations were conducted from behind a stiff brocade drape, which I did grip violently upon seeing my lusty libertine swipe at a bush with his cane as he traversed to his carriage.

This morning, in the usual course of things, we were attended by Charlotte Lucas and her siblings to talk over the chief occurrences at the ball. I bear any visit by Charlotte Lucas with great interest for I confess she is one of my muses. The insipid character I present to the world of myself is based in no small part upon dear Charlotte, a duller woman I am at pains to believe it would be hard to find in all of England. I digress. The discourse was all of Mr Bingley and his partiality for my elder sister Jane and, thereafter, of the prideful Mr Darcy and his slight of Elizabeth. I contributed little to the conversation (as was expected of me) save to proffer some moralistic drivel on the differings of pride and vanity. It is all smoke and mirrors dear reader to conceal the truth of myself. The Lucas's' visit concluded with Charlotte's male sibling declaring (much to my mother's horror) that had he the riches of Mr Darcy he would drink a good deal of fine wine every day. I confess my regard for the boy increased immeasurably on hearing him speak thus. The little devil, that infant worshiper of Bacchus, has a glint in his eye that intimates a keen desire to be led astray...

12th March 1809

We were joined at table by quite the most insufferable young man who is come to stay with us. Mr Collins is the cousin to whom Longbourn is entailed upon the death of our father. From his obsequious mien to the graceless bulk of his figure, he is in every way horrible. I am very sensible that he is come to choose himself a wife from amongst my fair sisters and I. His fawnings and admirings thus far have been so wide-reaching as to include my mother's reproductive

prowess in producing so fine a family of daughters and from thence did progress to include flattering the hall, the dining room and all its furniture. Pray do take the dining table sir, for as a wife it will serve you very well – it is wordless, servile and can be relied upon to maintain a repose of the utmost stillness in the course of your monthly mountings.

My dear Jane shall be the one he shall fix upon, of that I am doubtless for Mr Collins has no conception of his own limitations in either figure, countenance or address. My sister Elizabeth too shall not have him. She was all strained politeness at table and although not a match for my own feelings, I know that she finds him the most irritable of men. Give me leave to suppose then dear reader that I, as the third in line (to the slaughter!), may very well be the one called upon to secure the family's future. And oh! how little a sacrifice it shall seem to them all, so oft am I forgot. Alas this is no exaggeration dear reader, for was not my mother severely lacking when she neglected to invite me along to visit Jane at Netherfield during her confinement there with influenza? Did she forget to entreat the company of my two youngest sisters, Kitty and Lydia on this visit? No, she did not. Thus, by such remiss, was I denied the pleasure of encountering once more my fair libertine made flesh, Mr Darcy, whose antics over recent chapters of de Sade's magnum opus I must report have been most deviant. For the exquisite penmanship of the Marquis I am all thanks and praise. For his perverse philosophies and imaginative couplings, I am all wondrous awe. Nought but a genius could conceive the use of frog legs in the pursuit of female pleasure! I digress. Indeed, I have quite lost the run of things!! (A moment Mary, compose yourself!!)

Yes, my betrothal then to Mr Collins would be no sad loss to the family. Indeed why my dear parents have not arrived at this notion as the most desirous of solutions I know not. Thus it is upon me to deploy the chief of my talents, namely the art of concealment, to avoid such an arrangement. I shall keep my own counsel for the duration of Mr Collins' visit... as far as is achievable without drawing undue attention to my absence. Failing that I shall resort to unleashing the feral fleece that is my hair in his presence, which I am certain can be relied upon to quell the passion of even the most ardent suitor. Thus and with no little good fortune, shall some other poor creature be found to make him the most happy of men. So, to bed dear reader and the promise of eight blissful hours of dream-filled repose at the mercy of Mr Darcy and a banquet table straining with les pattes de grenouilles.

15th March 1809

Despite my fervent resolve to keep close counsel for the remainder of Mr Collins' stay at Longbourn, I found myself quite incapable of resisting a noisy night of

games with my aunt and uncle last evening. It is my view that lottery tickets and whist are the most agreeable of distractions and I flatter myself that I am a natural at both! The occasion also afforded my first sighting of Mr Wickham, about whom my sisters have been all a-twitter since their own encounter with him the previous day in Meryton. Mine was not the only female eye turned upon the fortunate fellow for he did have a captivating air which obliged a person beyond mere curiosity to look upon him. He was by far the superior of all the gentleman assembled there. I entreat you not to suppose I mean in figure or discourse; both were pleasing but by no means capital in my view. No, the source of Mr Wickham's superiority lies in his ability to perform, for the gentleman is an actor of that I am certain. I fancy that as an actress myself I am qualified very well to recognise such talents in others. And I believe him to be blessed with such an aptitude to a very great degree for he plays the dashing red-coat with a mastery only bettered by my good self in the role of studious, upstanding Mary Bennet. Even my dear sister Elizabeth, ordinarily the mistress of her own good judgement, was not immune to his charms. Indeed I profess her to be quite won over. Mr Wickham I counter is but a scoundrel and a rogue. If it be not so then let me be proved otherwise but I wager I am right. He claimed no interest in whist and yet how intimately he caressed the card-table as he spake this. And I was at pains to overhear his pleadings of a very grave ill-usage at the hands of Mr Darcy and I confess them to be quite unbelievable; his own conduct too good and pure and Mr Darcy's so very bad that I wonder Elizabeth had not her own suspicions. Foolish girl to be taken in so. Had I not read of the wickedness of men I might too have been all wide-eyed delusion. No, dear reader, I have the measure of Wickham; he has met his match!

We received a visitation from Mr Bingley and his sisters earlier this day. They had come to Longbourn with their personal invitation to the ball at Netherfield Tuesday next. The two ladies to be sure would have preferred a servant deliver the invite, treating all of us but Jane as though afflicted by the pox. Upon the good authority of my studies, allow me to say with real certainty that those who believe themselves above others in rank, demeanour and culture, show the greatest inclination for threadbare morality and base behaviour. I myself would not be the least taken aback were it to come to light that both the Misses Bingley indulge themselves in nightly beatings from the butler who they insist be attired in a suit of armour.

Mr Bingley and his coven were soon gone, my mother's incivilities hastening their escape most effectively. Thus my sisters and I were given to rejoice in the prospect of the Netherfield ball. What felicity, what delight! I, of course was sparing in my praise of the idea, professing "no disinclination" for it, accepting it as a "claim of society", and that "intervals of recreation and amusement" are beneficial for everyone. A discerning ear would have recognised this address for that sack-like aspect of the male genitalia it was but to be sure it was a capital

performance on my part. The truth of the matter is dear reader that I am all yearnings and secretions at the prospect of seeing Mr Darcy and thus indulging in some base fantasies I have been incubating since last I saw him!

17th March 1809

It is only through great fortitude and discipline that I sit here to write this morning for I have pains in my head and heavings in my body that speak of a very grave sickness. Pity me not dear reader for such afflictions are all my own making. I fear that my sufferings are the result of intoxication; I did imbibe rather more than my usual intake of wine last evening at the Netherfield Ball. Mercifully no-one appeared to be wise to my inebriated condition. My behaviour, far from being erratic as afflicts many a drunkard, was little changed by the intoxicating liquid. Other than an inclination to fall into a state of repose, once beneath a table in the library and thence in the carriage on returning to Longbourn, I was little affected until this morning's sufferings.

It is with regret that I view my actions, for did I not risk the discovery of the true nature of myself? Give me leave to say in my defence dear reader, that I was severely provoked. My father behaved most abominably towards me. His singular lack of regard for his daughter cannot have been plainer to the many who witnessed his treatment of me. I must be permitted to explain the circumstances that led to this humiliation. It was upon seeing Elizabeth dancing so very often with Mr Darcy and conversing so affably with him that stirred in my pitifully absent bosom a desire to make him aware of my presence. I could not hope to capture his attention attired as I was in a veritable nun's habit of grey velveteen for naturally, Mary has no interest in the fashions of the day. Thus when supper was over did I not seize the opportunity to oblige the company of my singing at the piano. Such delight! for in mine eyes I was performing for the pleasure of my libertine. So very immersed was I in my display that I began another song forthwith and would have continued longer had not father appeared at my side. Loudly he did then proclaim to the assembled company "That will do extremely well child, you have delighted us long enough." Oh! humiliating slight. Child?! I am no child sir! Oh! how little my father regards me. How with such ease he disgraces me, his own flesh and blood! And why, pray, does he persist in perceiving me as he does Kitty and Lydia, as one of the silliest of girls in all of England.

I pretended not to hear him as I took my leave from the piano but I fear my features and a fierce flushing about my neck may have revealed the truth of my feelings. Thereafter I confess I took solace in wine seized from the waiters in the hall as they processed between kitchen and ballroom. And thus being serviced by a stream of willing men (with wine dear reader!) I did resolve to

have this continue. No longer would I allow that most undeserving sex to belittle me. In that instance, I determined by fair means or foul, I would be free of my father and indeed, any man desirous of controlling or containing me. By what means I was to achieve this I knew not as I looked upon the proceedings from behind Mr Bingley's great column. I profess ere long the wine began to take effect for did not the dancers soon appear to me all nakedness. In time it is my admission that the ball descended into a scene, which, upon my word, only the Marquis himself could have envisioned. For an hour together I looked upon the room indulging in such hedonistic pleasures ordinarily intolerable to polite society. I dare say you will concur with this view as I hint at the debasement taking place before me – the lickings and slappings, probings and penetrations, all of which were presided over by Mr Darcy. He was stood atop the staircase brandishing a whip! Beside him was our host, Mr Bingley, naked but for the tiara that earlier had adorned his frightful sister Mrs Hurst.

It was in my view the influence of the wine and my scholarly readings which did combine to induce such depraved imaginings. And yet how real they did seem, how vivid! So much so I am of the mind that their consequence should not be dismissed lightly. Perhaps in them lies the means of my escape and equal to this, the recognition I deserve. Yes, for I now realise it is my fervent desire to be rid of this perception of plainness and inconsequence. I wish to achieve notoriety so that my father will be forced to see me in my singularity, to look upon me with respect as an independent woman distinct from her sisters. Forgive me, dear reader, I must away. The agitations occasioned by recalling my father's conduct have vexed me grievously and worsened my headache. I must attend to it for I have much to think about that requires a clear and steady mind.

19th March 1809

It is evening and I am returned much refreshed from a walk into Meryton and thence dinner with the Lucases. The house has been all ructions and turmoil. Mr Collins made his declaration to Elizabeth soon after breakfast yesterday and she will not have him. I took no pleasure in having predicted this outcome for I was at once filled with dread that I may become prey to my cousin's transitory affections. Thus much of the past two days have I spent alone in my apartment. Mr Collins is insufferable and I confess stirs in me a desire to enact great violence against his person. How fine it would be to see him turn on a spit! Our mother is very sensible that Elizabeth cannot be dissuaded from her refusal to accept Mr Collins' proposal but persists with her irritating effusions. Father though differs from his good lady on this matter, which has merely heightened our mother's vexations. Oh! how I long for the day when I am rid of them all. Give me leave to hope dear reader that day may yet come for a solution has presented itself. Yes, the hearty nature of my exertions this day has served me

very well. Indeed, it is my firm opinion that walking and fine dining are recreations highly suited for nourishing the seeds of one's ideas.

The release of worrisome feelings too has much to benefit free and objective thinking, for I am now of the opinion that I no longer need fear of becoming the next Mrs Collins. To be sure that dubious honour shall rest with Charlotte Lucas. Her kindness and attentions towards that most undeserving fellow I profess speak of more than mere amiability. That her object is to secure Mr Collins' addresses of marriage for herself, could not be plainer. I predict that before the close of the morrow I shall be called upon to wish the happy couple every imaginable joy. Oh! what a blessed relief it is dear reader. I am to be spared the fate of an arranged marriage to a man who is not only a prize bore but my cousin to boot for, upon my word, is that not incestuous? Should not any country professing itself to be civilised deem it unlawful to fornicate with a man who is not only one's cousin but who is also abominably hirsute!? Horrors!

But I am to be reprieved so no matter. And it is thus, unburdened of my fears and with time to gather my thoughts that the solution brewing in my mind these past days is now come to me a-full. I am firmly of the view that my capacity for great imaginings such as visited me the night of the Netherfield Ball, is the means by which I shall gain my independence. Yes, it is my singular belief that freedom from wifely servitude can be mine instead by satisfying the base needs of the male for titillation and immorality. Fear not dear reader, I speak not of prostitution for figure is severely lacking and could not tempt a man to part with anything above a ha'penny a go. No, I shall become an author of erotic fictions such as that great French writer of my favour, the Marquis de Sade himself! Yes, I have had leisure for a full examination of the idea this past hour and it is decided. On the morrow I shall begin to write the first story, my chief inspiration being the visions I entertained of Darcy and Bingley and the debauchery in the ballroom at Netherfield.

22nd March 1809

I am undone! All blissful contentment is mine. Yes, the privacy afforded by the absence of my sisters has been greatly conducive to long spells of prolific writing. Lydia and Kitty are much occupied with trips to Meryton to service the red coats with their unguarded and excessive admirations. By such words I entreat you not to suppose that I sit in judgement upon their behaviour. Quite the contrary, I merely observe it with an amused writerly eye and take inspiration from it. Indeed I am all gratitude to my youngest sisters for have they not endowed me with the two harlots central to my novella.

Jane is gone away to London in the vain hope that proximity to Mr Bingley might reawaken his desire for her. Regrettably my sister understands not the desires of men. In such ways of the world, Jane, though my elder by some years, is painfully naïve. Had she but spent half the time I myself have in studying the sewer that is the male mind, she would know that chastity is not in truth the most prized female virtue sought by a young gentleman with lust in his loins. I have spent the chief of every day this past week in the company of Jane's Mr Bingley and I must be allowed to inform you dear reader that chasteness could not have been furthest from his mind. Indeed, this very morning in Bingley's library did I not bear witness to him and two chambermaids engaged in all manner of sexual perversions. A more wanton act involving the complete works of Shakespeare it would be hard to imagine dear reader... but give me leave to say I shall endeavour to try!

This week is to take Elizabeth to Hunsford to visit Mrs Charlotte Collins and thus there shall be still less to distract me from writing. My spirits are in high flutter at the thought of completing my novella. And thence I fancy begins the real subterfuge for wisdom exhorts me to present myself to the world as a gentleman writer. Do not you think it wisest? I am very sensible that all manner of obstacles would be thrust in the way of a female writer of erotic fiction. Journal- or letter-writing, yes, both perfectly acceptable pastimes for a young lady. But a woman who lives by her pen and uses it in the creation of licentious narrative prose? Impossible! Such writings by a female will be judged so depraved as to imply a sickness of the mind and I shall find myself locked away forthwith, forced to live out my days in some gothic asylum drooling into a bowl of gruel. No, it is decided, I shall write under the pen name Donald Alfred Franks – is that not a fine choice of name? Indeed, the more cunning amongst you will recognise the influence of the Marquis himself in my selection. And oh! great irony, dear reader, for my father and mother shall gain the son they have always desired, not through their own creation but through the labours of the very daughter they constantly find lacking! La! So, to work, for there is much scandalous abuse and sexual acts of an impossible nature to imagine before I retire to bed. Hmm, gothic asylum, what a delicious notion for a new book!

25th March 1809

It is early, not even Hill, the housekeeper has risen. I have taken to writing at this hour for the tranquillity it affords – although now Lydia has been allowed to go to Brighton to flirt with the officers, the house is less in uproar. My reason for rising early is so I might write naked but for my nightdress, with my hair unleashed from the constraints of clip and windings. It has been my discovery that I write with greater abandon in the absence of those physical restraints of dress that women are forced to endure daily. And I am much inspired dear

reader for last morning I was in receipt of a letter from town. I say "I" yet the correspondence was of course addressed to one Donald Alfred Franks. Two shillings and a flash of my ankle has silenced the post boy and secured his complicity in leaving all future correspondence for this gentleman beneath the feeding trough in the stables. And so, the letter. To my delight the publisher to whom I sent the earliest chapters of my novella, took leave to reply by return. His letter was to this effect:

Dear Sir

I feel myself called upon to write to you at the earliest opportunity. It was with immense pleasure that I read the commencement of '*Sin and Shamelessness.*' Indeed, I am all anticipation to learn what is to befall the naïve harlots in the hands of those lascivious rogues Bingham and Darcus. Will not their tortuous exploits be exposed to society before it is too late, by that cunning beauty Lady Mary perhaps? Yet does she not risk her own virtue by bringing thus their downfall? I write with every intention of beseeching you Sir, to send me the remainder of your capital work forthwith and to allow me to publish it on your behalf. I entreat you to believe, good Sir that a vast audience awaits such fictions, especially those endowed with illustrations. Four hundred pounds would be yours upon publication with the promise of additional monies should demand be such that printing further copies becomes a necessity. To be permitted to publish your novella Sir would be an honour and, to be sure would make me the most fortunate of men. Furthermore, I wish to assure you in the most animated of language, my desire to publish any future works penned by your good hand. Send me your answer as soon as you are able Sir. I am at your service. Yours, etc

Conrad L Pearson

Four hundred pounds and the promise of more! Oh! what riches. I shall be a woman of independent means by Michaelmas, sooner I fancy if I were to illustrate my writings. Pray how easy I do run away with myself for I am no artist! But then, am I not accomplished with pen and ink. Am I not renowned for my silhouettes! Yes, but my talents of penmanship lie in the art of copying. So be it, I shall find myself a model – the Lucas boy, that nubile worshiper of Bacchus. He shall not say no I wager. Whether he can be persuaded to hang bound and naked from a tree with an apple in his mouth, I am all doubt. La! but he shall do me very well. And then there are my young cousins, two girls of six and eight and two younger boys, who are come to Longbourn for the duration of Elizabeth's trip to Derbyshire with their parents. My cousins are under the particular care of Jane but doubtless I can rest them away from her for a morning. I shall entice them with a new game of my own design in which they

shall make merry in the mud with all manner of small farm animals and a length of rope! Yes, it is decided. I must dress and seek out my sketchbook.

28th March 1809

What grievous affliction has befallen us, or so my family will have it. I myself am all awe and I confess, excitement for Lydia has surpassed my expectations of her exceedingly dear reader. I was fixed in astonishment, as were we all, when news reached us that my youngest sister had eloped to Gretna Green with that ne'er-do-well Wickham! Upon my word, who would have thought it? Lydia and Wickham, between whom there seemed so very little symptom of fondness. But the matter has grown still more appealing in mine eyes for it has since come to light that the happy couple are not in Scotland but hid away in London and showing little haste to marry. To be sure, this is all part of Wickham's cunning plot to hold my father to ransom. To secure his marriage to Lydia forthwith Wickham will make him pay handsomely, for any father with any wit would do so in a thrice to avoid shame being brought on the family.

I am of the opinion that this highly agreeable situation could only be bettered if I were to add to the scandal myself by joining the pair in a merry threesome! For were I to wear a red coat and call myself a Captain doubtless my sister would bed me too. I must declare I can think of no finer condition than to live in town with a lover, unburdened by the shackles of marriage. Indeed, with countless lovers of great variation: the fairer sex or foul, refined or uncouth and of differing origins too for I should like to have the feel of a Negro's skin at least once before I am laid asunder! But Lydia and I are not to be compared. Foolish, naïve Lydia fancies herself in love with the gentleman and of becoming Mrs Wickham she has no greater desire. But she knows not the truth of Wickham. She knows not the true nature of his character and his propensity for living beyond his means. Give me leave to say dear reader that I take every pleasure in having known the truth of Wickham from my first encounter with him. My earliest impressions of the gentleman as a rogue and a scoundrel have been proved in every way correct. Yes, by his angelic goodness and seductive ways I was not in the slightest deceived.

And yet how easy it is to mislead people. Take my good self. My family, whom it is expected would comprehend me very well, knows me not at all. They know not my true feelings or beliefs. On such matters I conceal myself capitally as I have been doing all this day. Yes, at a time of moral calamity such as this, Mary has been in her element dear reader for what greater opportunity exists for her than to spout forth on the fragility of female virtue at the hands of that most self-seeking sex. Indeed, at table this evening I did confide to Lizzy about the unfortunate nature of the affair. But then I did err for at the conclusion of this

pronouncement I and all at table did hear me say the word 'bosom.' I can say with great confidence that 'bosom' is not a term Mary is accustomed to using in polite conversation. Upon my word is not the language of my fictions seeping into my everyday parlance? Horrors! I must be more vigilant dear reader or risk being discovered.

30th March 1809

Beyond my room where I have sought refuge these past hours, mother is all flutterings and palpitations. It has just come to our attention that dear Lydia is soon to be wed. Yes, Wickham's demands have been consented and thus he is to make an honest woman of Lydia. So, I am to have a new brother and a rival for the mantle of chief scandalmonger in the Bennet family to boot. But really, what scandal is theirs compared to the one in my power to unleash? Indeed, were all Meryton and beyond to learn that I am soon to be a published auteur of licentious prose, I am very sensible my mother would finally succumb to her nerves and my father take to drink. Before me at my table are the drawings I have thus far completed for '*Sin and Shamelessness*.' You must allow me to throw modesty aside dear reader when I say the likeness to my excellent young cousins is striking, despite the blindfolds and bindings. Be assured though that no children were harmed in the making of these drawings. Indeed, all but one, who took exception to the noose, have pleaded with me to repeat the entertainment at the earliest opportunity. However I have no wish to affect such a repetition for I have all the illustrations of their like that I need.

Alas I must confess that there are two that yet elude me. However, I am all hopefulness that ere long I shall have the chance to address this deficiency for Mr Bingley has returned to Netherfield and is shortly to come to Longbourn for dinner with his handsome acquaintance Mr Darcy. There is to be a large party assembled here at the house later and the good gentleman and Mr Bingley are both invited. Such serendipity! Are not the heavens conspiring to assist me in the completion of my novella by bringing the gentlemen here now so I might sketch their likeness? Anon dear reader, anon. I must prepare for such tidings that will please me exceedingly...

Tis late but oh! dear reader, I cannot hope to sleep. My spirits are all a-flutter the likes of which it is not my habit of experiencing. The silly cause was my close proximity to Mr Darcy this evening. Throughout the proceedings, I presented my usual indifference yet beneath my bosom my heart did skip its beatings. I confess it was as though a powerful aphrodisiac had quite taken me over. Cook, with what dizzying concoction did you spike the soup! Mr Darcy was seated some distance from me beside my mother – a situation I would not wish upon the worst of mine enemies. His manner and countenance, for I had

the pleasure of witnessing his every move from my position at the far end of the table, were formal and cold but then, how insufferably dull must such evenings be when debauchery and hedonism are more one's proclivity.

I had secreted a small sketchbook about my person (beneath my undershirts, I cannot deny it!) and later was able to draw his likeness very well from my corner of the drawing-room. Indeed I am convinced he knew of my intentions for did he not oblige me by sitting for a full half-hour together in one attitude at the whist-table. Regrettably Mr Bingley was far less obliging a subject. In such a happy humour was he in the company of my sister Jane that his expressions did change with very great frequency. His visage was such animation as to trouble me exceedingly; my pencil was at a loss to keep up. I entreat you not to suppose that the task of sketching was not without risk or disruption. In the midst of drawing the protrusion of Mr Darcy's naked member, it pains me to report that one of the ladies of the party did lean over my shoulder and look upon my sketchbook. It was a moment in every way detestable so nearly was I found out. However, it is my good fortune that the lady in question is quite uneducated in matters of a sexual nature. "Your drawing is very accomplished Miss Bennet," she did say. "But pray tell me, what is the subject holding beneath the table? I see he is in the act of passing something to the good lady to his right but am at a loss to determine what." Prudence thus urged me to take my leave from the room forthwith. Yet at the door of the drawing-room I confess I was overcome by a violent compulsion to turn around. And oh! happy hesitation for did not Mr Darcy look up that very instance and catch my eye. Nay did he not wink at me! He knows dear reader, he knows I am complicit in his inclinations. La! in what great danger are we of succumbing to our mutual lust.

2nd April 1809

Tis done. Jane is engaged to Bingley and thus she too shall know his shameful secret, which I have been privy to for some time – yes, the secret of what little lies beneath his breeches! But hark at me, such indiscretion, shame on you Mary! Is it not indecent to speak of these things when such an occasion calls for congratulation and merriment? Yes, great blessings have been bestowed upon us all, for I too am the owner of glad tidings dear reader. A letter is come this day from Mr Pearson, my publisher (pray let me say those words once, nay a thousand times more – "my publisher!!") to inform me that great joy was his upon receipt of my completed manuscript and the most excellent ink drawings. Mr Pearson has assured me that '*Sin and Shamelessness*' will very soon grace the shelves of all dubious book-selling establishments the length and breadth of England. The good Sir did then conclude his letter by intimating in the most avid of terms his desire to commission future erotic fictions penned by the "soon to be infamous Donald Alfred Franks." Yes, those were his very words. Infamy

dear reader! Oh! what delight for am I not by my own fair hand and without the yoke of marriage, to acquire the same wealth and power with which my eldest sister Jane is soon to be blessed?

I shall withhold from you a moment longer the last and most astonishing item of news and tell instead of the visitation to Longbourn this morning by a relative of Mr Darcy. His aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh did descend upon us unexpectedly and what a grievous displeasure did worry her features! I confess that a more fearsome gothic figure it would be hard to find in all of Transylvania. Indeed it is my considered view that Mr Darcy's inclination for perversity and scandalous conduct originates from an association with his aunt who, I am inclined to believe, spends the chief of her days confined to a coffin in a dungeon at Rosings. If not already one of the departed, so skeletal and pallid a creature is she that death must surely be imminent and agonising in nature. Give me leave to divulge at this point, so inspired was I by the good lady that she is to become the subject of my next novel. No-one is immune dear reader, no-one!!

And so to that shocking news which has rendered me all bewildered astonishment. When I spake earlier "tis done", I referred not merely to my sister Jane but also to Elizabeth for it seems she too is to enter the state of matrimony. But can you deduce the identity of her future husband? I myself could not perceive it, nor can I still. Elizabeth is betrothed to none other than His Licentiousness, Fitzwilliam of Darcy! Give me leave to say I am in a flurry of spirits dear reader, one instance shock, the next a very great contempt, for has not the man denied his true feelings and allied himself to the wrong Miss Bennet. Yes, only I, Mary Bennet, have the true understanding of him. Oh! foolish, weak-willed man to conform to the conventions of society in this way. Darcus you disappoint me.

And so it is dear reader that I sit here in two minds. As much maligned Mary I am severely vexed. Mary, the plain one of the family, considered as silly as the two youngest; perceived as nothing in either beauty or quickness to her sisters Jane and Elizabeth, desires retribution and wants to have her day. And is it not very much within her power to do so, to put paid to both marriages and the family's reputation with just one word about the publication of '*Sin and Shamelessness.*' But Donald Alfred Franks begs to differ. He knows that such a disclosure would be highly damaging for the author. Thus am I faced with two such differing views as to challenge me exceedingly. Whichsoever I decide upon will afford a victory of sorts, of that I am very sensible. A vengeful revelation would afford instant gratification to be sure but with repercussions too horrible to contemplate. Yes, a pyrrhic victory indeed. On the other hand, biding my time, remaining at home to pursue my fictions and attend my mother in the solitude of her absent daughters, will bring forth sufficient riches to enable me to affect an escape on my own terms. Would it be so unspeakably intolerable to continue in

my role of dutiful, scholarly daughter for a little while longer? By such means I would doubtless achieve my longed for independence but it would be a silent victory of course. No-one must know that Mary Bennet and Donald Alfred Franks are one and the same for success is dependent, is it not, on the good gentleman remaining distinct from myself. Oh! vexing conundrum. Yet, in truth, whilst it is tempting to give my family such pain as they have visited upon me with their slights and disregard, I do not think I can do it. Yes, my heart knows the honest course of action and for once I shall take heed of it.

* * * The End * * *

Note to reader:

Blogus, derived from the words blog and bogus, is a work of fiction. Each short story in the Blogus series is constructed incrementally over a period of weeks from the imagined blog entries of people or characters whose names and certain other features about them, may be recognisable to the reader. For reasons of verisimilitude, each short story bears some relation to the lives and/or careers of either a real person or persons, living or deceased, or a literary character or characters created by another writer. However, any words or actions attributed to such persons or characters, and indeed any relations or associations suggested between them, have been wholly imagined by the author.

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