

# *The Sins of Their Fathers* Manuscript Evaluation

Dear Tiffany,

It's been so fun working on this project for you! I told my husband a while ago that I love *Pride and Prejudice* and I love fanfiction, so you're like a dream client. I know you're really excited to see the feedback I've got in store for you, so let's dive in.

Chapter by chapter, this story is really enjoyable and easy to binge-read. My biggest concern is that the story as a whole doesn't quite work cohesively. The majority of this manuscript evaluation will focus on how the themes and premise of this story are so promising but get lost in the way the structure and plot were handled. And since the plot is heavily driven by various character arcs, I'll also take a lot of time to talk about the various characters and how their arcs were or weren't satisfying as the plot progressed. After that, we'll talk about a few smaller details such as pacing, tone, and historical accuracy to top it all off.

But before we dive into all of that, I want to make sure we talk about a lot of the moments that worked really, really well and drew me in emotionally or really engaged me as a reader. Hopefully this will confirm that some of the things you were trying to accomplish worked just the way you wanted them to!

First, I wanted to tell you about the moments when I reacted emotionally to what the characters were doing on the page. I remember that moment when Mr. Bennet met young Collins for the first time and wasn't sure how to comfort the scared little boy. And Collins was just so honest asking about if he would be allowed to read, so when Mr. Bennet said, "Then I shall read with you," my heart seriously filled with joy and warmth to see Collins so touched by that simple kindness. It was a perfect bonding moment between them!

Another moment that hit me emotionally was at the end of Chapter 5 when I was putting the pieces together about how abusive Bingley Sr. was and what he wanted to do to Georgiana. Part of me wanted to hit Darcy over the head for not seeing it as clearly as I did (although I can't really blame him either), but the rest of me was just *filled* with dread wondering if Georgiana would be okay. Great emotion there!

There were a few other small moments that really made me smile. For instance, I loved seeing Charlotte try so hard to get dance partners in Chapter 7. It seemed really on point for her! And in Chapter 13 when Lizzy sees Darcy at Hunsford and thinks, "No! Surely Providence would not be so cruel," I literally laughed out loud. Her dread was just hilarious. I also chuckled a little when Lizzy and Darcy referenced the convenience of phones in the future in Chapter 21.

Another moment I really appreciated was when Caroline and Lizzy talked about postpartum depression and related mental changes during pregnancy. I thought you did a really excellent job of showing that they didn't really understand what was going on in these cases but that they still had compassion about it and recognized that it was a reality a lot of women go through. It just felt like the perfect balance of a realistic historical understanding and a modern day, more compassionate understanding. I like that this story is trying to bring out some of the hard truths and trials about life and have a conversation about how we deal with these issues.

I also loved all the tension that led up to Lizzy hoping to reunite with Darcy at Netherfield. That line when Darcy wasn't there was almost crushing! I think you were really effective in bringing out Lizzy's anticipation and building up to the moment when they finally saw each other again.

Finally, I'd just like to say that some of the twists in the story were really interesting to me and kept me engaged. For instance, I loved seeing how Collins influenced Mrs. Bennet to be a little calmer. His generosity in offering to take care of all five of his sisters however long he might need to was so sweet and really made him a likable character who I was excited to follow. I also liked seeing some small twists in Darcy and Lizzy's story. For instance, the fact that Lizzy suspected Darcy of stealing the calling card in Chapter 12 felt like a fresh take on the way she judges him.

Anyway, hopefully my reactions here give you a good view of what parts of the story were some of the most engaging and effective. I know a lot of reviewers on Fanfiction.net just say things like "this was so good!" every chapter they review, which is nice but also not constructive. It's important that you see your strengths as a writer so you can perpetuate those elements in your writing! However, I should add this caveat: Don't be afraid to take out or change these moments if you need to as you revise. I can't say for sure how extensively you'll want to revise after reading my feedback, but even if you end up needing to change some of these moments, I'm confident you'll be able to create similar emotional moments for your readers again.

## Structure and Plot

There's a lot about this story that draws readers in right away. For instance, I think the prologue is a great hook that helps readers sympathize with Collins. I saw a number of your reviewers say that they'd been looking for a story with just this sort of premise and were so excited to see what you had in store for them! Unfortunately, there are a few promises made in this premise that don't really get the payoff they should, and part of that has to do with how the story is pitched and part of that has to do with how the prologue and first few chapters are structured. This later affects how satisfying the plot is as it unfolds throughout the rest of the manuscript. So, let's dive in and talk about how the promises, progress, and payoffs work with the structure and plot.

## Structure: Promise, Progress, and Payoff

First, let's just overview what I mean by "promise, progress, and payoff" so we're on the same page. (If you want more detail/examples than what I'll cover, my favorite author Brandon Sanderson has a great lecture about it you can watch [here](#).) Essentially, to make a plot engaging for a reader, we start with some sort of promise about what the protagonist wants or needs. For instance (going super basic here), maybe a protagonist needs to fight through ten ninjas to rescue a loved one. We then keep the reader engaged by showing the progress of the protagonist potentially reaching their loved one by showing them take down each ninja—and the reader gets excited as the total count gets closer and closer to ten. Finally, the payoff comes when the protagonist either does or doesn't reach the goal, hopefully also growing their character in some way as a result.

So, how do we see the promise, progress, and payoff unfolding in *The Sins of Their Fathers*? The promise in the beginning is that William Collins is going to become an important part of the Bennet family and find happiness and safety in a new father figure, overcoming the pain and trauma he's experienced from his birth father's sins. The progress should come from seeing Collins develop relationships with his new family, influencing their lives (for better or worse), and making steps in overcoming his childhood trauma. The payoff should be the moment when Collins fully gets what he needs from his family relationships and friendships and overcomes the trauma holding him back from his full potential. However, this isn't the actual progress and payoff we see in the story. Instead, the book largely focuses on Darcy and Lizzy inevitably getting together under somewhat different circumstances than the original *Pride and Prejudice*. Can you see how this progression of the plot can be a little unsatisfying, even if the majority of your readers are still excited to see Darcy and Lizzy get together?

Like I said, part of the reason the promise is set up this way is because of the way the story is pitched. Of course, with only so many words allowed in a Fanfiction summary, it makes sense that it's hard to talk about more than Collins going to live with the Bennets and an appropriate trigger warning. Summarizing your book more completely when you're ready to publish it is an easy fix! What will take a lot more thought and revision will be establishing the right promises in the beginning of your story and developing the progress and payoffs accordingly. How you decide to revise will all depend on where you want the story to go and what themes you especially want to focus on (more on that in another section). For now, I'll give you an idea of what I think will be most effective.

I've already explained how Collins' initial promise in the prologue doesn't get quite the progress and payoff it's due, but there are a few other character arcs that have a similar problem. For instance, Darcy and Wickham both have a twist early on in their lives too regarding their fathers, but most of these issues are resolved within a few chapters. Additionally, some readers may be uncertain about how to truly perceive this change in Darcy and Wickham's backstory. Because there's a singular focus on Collins in the prologue, it's difficult to tell if Darcy and Wickham's situation is meant to somehow be affected by Collins' change in fate (maybe related to that

theory that a change as small as a butterfly's wingbeat could create a hurricane?) or if their backstory was just meant to be set up later than Collins' was.

We have a similar problem with the Bingleys. Although one could argue that Caroline Bingley's trauma could have been hidden within the original canon, we know giving Bingley Sr. a terrible sin as well is another change from the original story. However, it comes up in the plotline without warning or any of the set up that Collins, Darcy, or Wickham got. Again, we're left to wonder if this is a change brought on by the universe being adjusted slightly or if it just wasn't explained in the beginning (although I will say the progress and payoff of Caroline Bingley's arc is much more developed than any of the other characters, so great job on that).

I suggest you rewrite/restructure the prologue to be a series of three to four scenes establishing the root of the changes in each of these characters—Collins, Darcy, Wickham, and the Bingleys. By giving the readers an overview of the four fathers whose sins must be overcome in the end, they'll be excited to see how each character grows and changes the relationships around them. The rest of the story will need some refocusing and revising as well, I think, but I'll dive into that by talking a little more specifically about the plot and some issues that came up there.

## Plot

I mentioned before that *The Sins of Their Fathers* opens with a promise of William Collins being the main character but quickly turns into a typical retelling of Darcy and Lizzy inevitably getting together with only mildly different circumstances. Some of your readers definitely don't care about that inconsistency, but for many others, it's disappointing to see characters like Collins and Wickham become so likable and interesting to follow only to have them disappear for more than half of the story.

Personally, I was disappointed that I never got to see Collins grow up with the Bennets and develop relationships with his sisters. I felt cheated that I didn't get to see him and Mary fall in love. Later, Collins developed a friendship with Darcy, Bingley, and Wickham that I didn't actually see develop, making the relationships feel forced and unrealistic. And because I was so disappointed that I didn't get to truly see these changes slowly unraveling and changing events, I (to be frank) got a little annoyed when so many of the same old iconic scenes from *Pride and Prejudice* showed up in very similar ways to the original (such as Caroline inviting Lizzy to take a turn about the room).

Here, I must admit that I'm not as familiar with the *Pride and Prejudice* fandom as you likely are, so I don't know how many other readers tend to get bored of variations that promise to be really different and interesting but don't actually end up changing the story too much. And it's not that I think readers are looking for anything radical like *not* letting Darcy and Lizzy get together! But what we've really missed from this story is seeing how Collins, Darcy, Wickham, and the Bingleys really change the story around them because of their need to overcome their fathers' sins. I was dying to see what influence Collins might have to make Darcy and Lizzy's love story

different (there was a little influence, but not nearly enough). I think some of the iconic lines or scenes can definitely still work into the story, but they're going to be the most satisfying when they come about in very different and clever ways related to the new decisions these characters are making.

There's a lot to think about in how you're going to want to rework the plot, but I think the notes I have on the characters themselves will help you get more of an idea of some things that might be missing or need more emphasis. But before I get there, I want to point out one more thing related to the plot that didn't sit right. This is much more specific, but Bingley Sr.'s death in Chapter 6 seemed far too convenient to me. I know killing him off is a simple way to take care of a truly detestable character and allow the other Bingleys to get away for some healing and growth, but the way that he died had me rolling my eyes a little. Maybe all this scene needed was a different tone to make it work right, but you could also consider having him die another way or maybe not dying right away, which could definitely influence how the Bingleys develop.

## Characters and Relationships

There's a *lot* I want to say about all the character portrayals, arcs, and relationships. You'll find that quite a bit of what I'll discuss here goes hand in hand with the things I just mentioned with the structure and plot, as these characters should be driving the plot with their decisions and development.

### Darcy

To be honest, Darcy was my least favorite character in the story. It felt like there were literally two Darcys being written, and one of them was only hanging around to make Lizzy hate him until she read his letter.

The first Darcy had center stage in the first seven chapters. He was hard working, considerate, and loyal, and he didn't seem to care at all about anyone else's station in life compared to his own. Then suddenly, in Chapter 7, he completely flips and presents himself as someone so proud, cold, and removed, and he *very* much disparages those below him in station. I remember feeling a complete shock when I started reading Austen's own dialogue when Darcy slights Lizzy at the ball. He felt completely out of character compared to the Darcy I'd seen in the previous chapters.

This aspect of Darcy's double nature became hypocritical the further we got into the story. Darcy assured Wickham over and over that his station didn't keep him from being Darcy's brother in (quite possibly) every sense of the word. Darcy didn't hesitate to strike up a friendship with Bingley despite his roots in trade. And although Darcy and Collins weren't exactly best friends, there was no sign of Darcy having anything but respect for him despite his lower status, and Darcy certainly never seemed aloof around him. So why does all that kindness and respect

for people of lower classes go out the window when Darcy confronts the rest of the Bennet family? Why does Lizzy's station still come up as an issue in his proposal?

I think the root of this problem is that the Darcy who starts out before Chapter 7 is already acting too much like the Darcy we want to see at the end of the story. We need to see more of his pride and other weaknesses involved in these early chapters so we really have room to see him grow and change. For the most part, Darcy didn't really seem to have a character arc at all. Once he "flipped" in Chapter 7 and became rude-Darcy, the only "development" that came later was Darcy acting apologetic about it all to Elizabeth. Yet he didn't really *do* anything to redeem himself and become better.

Additionally, what little of an arc Darcy had had nothing to do with the original conflict set up in the first few chapters about his father. He essentially just promised to not drink alcohol, and then he never did, and that was that. I'd love to see Darcy struggling with more of the essence of what his father struggled with and learning from his own struggle. Maybe that comes down to indulgences of any kind or losing control in a moment of stress or despair. Whatever it is, how can Darcy truly have his own character arc that shows how he overcomes the scars left behind by his father's sins?

Finally, I'd like to point out some specific moments throughout the story that felt unlike Darcy or that just didn't quite work right for me.

- Chapter 2: In this chapter, Darcy asks Wickham, "What if we hate each other?" I understand that you're trying to allude to the fact that in the original book they *did* come to hate each other, and that's a fun little easter egg, but the comment seemed really heavy handed to me and like it came from you rather than Darcy.
- Chapter 3: Why wasn't Darcy trying harder to be around Wickham at school and help him? If being there for his friends is so important to Darcy (which he says a couple times in the story), I'm not sure why he didn't try harder to guide his friend in the right way. If Darcy isn't going to be there for Wickham, it should be because there are obstacles in his way (and not just Wickham avoiding a confrontation). (Also, why *doesn't* Darcy confront Wickham by himself? Why wait for their fathers to discipline him if Darcy thinks he can have a good influence on him?)
- Chapter 6: Darcy seems too quick to trust Collins. I can understand Bingley and Wickham opening up pretty quickly, but Darcy should be much more reserved.
- Chapter 7 (and elsewhere): I think there should be more to Darcy not loving Caroline. She's not quite so mean and proud as she is in the original, so I'd like something a little more concrete about why Darcy feels like they wouldn't be a good match.
- Chapter 7: I liked the excuse that Darcy was actually injured at the ball where he refused to dance with anyone, but I hated the way it was executed at the ball. If Darcy thought no one could overhear him talking with his friend (who knew he was injured), why wouldn't he complain about his pain instead of pretending that no one was pretty enough for him?
- Chapter 15: I definitely think the letter should be less graphic. Darcy can still explain himself without going into so many details. He has no business describing how

Georgiana cut her wrists and stomach, for instance. Not only is that so sensitive and private for his sister, but that could be such a disturbing image to convey to another woman! He also had no right to divulge Caroline's personal secrets, especially because he can't trust Lizzy to not misuse or gossip about this information because she just admitted that she *hates* him. I understand that you want to give the readers a full understanding of what actually happened, but the letter is not the place for it.

- Chapter 15: Why didn't Darcy go with Georgiana to Scotland? I would think that's the better, more brotherly thing to do. Then Bingley can take care of Netherfield himself, which is bound to be more effective than Darcy trying to take care of everything for his friend. I know you want an excuse for Bingley to be away so Jane's heart still gets broken and so Darcy can still be around to interact with Lizzy, but it just doesn't make sense for Darcy to not be there for his sister and ask Bingley to do that instead, especially since Bingley isn't even as close of a friend at this point as Wickham is supposed to be.

## Wickham

Overall, I really liked the premise of the change in Wickham's backstory and how he became such an honorable man because of it. Wickham is initially such a charming character in the original, so it's exciting to potentially see that charm come out in a good way! But, like I said, it's really disappointing when Wickham essentially disappears for half of the book and doesn't have any real character development after approximately Chapter 3. Here's a few thoughts about how to make his character more satisfying to follow throughout the story.

First, we know that Wickham has a really interesting conflict in the beginning. He doesn't know who his actual father is (although he's quite lucky that the two main possibilities are rather upstanding men). I felt that perhaps Wickham should be angrier or take a little more time to really process the fact that he could have been raised as a Darcy rather than a Wickham. This isn't just to add conflict or drama. Most people who don't know who their birth parents are have a lot of trauma to deal with in real life! They have question after question about who their real family is, why they weren't raised by both biological parents, if their parents really loved them, and all sorts of other hard questions. Granted, Wickham does know who his biological mother is, but simply not knowing whether Wickham Sr. or Darcy Sr. is his father should be enough to bring up a lot of identity issues that could manifest in many different ways. (If you want some inspiration for the kinds of emotions and questions Wickham might struggle with, watch some episodes of *Relative Race* on BYUtv! The first few seasons don't have a ton of adoptees searching for immediate family, but around season 4 there's a lot more of that and there are some incredible stories.)

I think you tried to address this with how Wickham acted at school, but it all felt sort of like a tangent after it was resolved. I'd love to see Wickham work on coming to terms with himself and his identity throughout the whole story—which would be a great way to keep him from just disappearing and being forgotten about.

Another way we can involve Wickham more throughout the story is using him as a little more of a bridge between Darcy, Bingley, and Collins. Because Darcy trusts Wickham as a brother, it makes sense that Wickham can convince him to open up and start building trust and friendship with Bingley and Collins. This could be even more important on Bingley's side of things when he has to deal with such sensitive matters surrounding his father and sister. Bingley and Darcy seem to be the ones working together most when all that drama happens, but it makes more sense for Bingley to reach out to Wickham first as a closer friend than Darcy at that point.

Additionally, I'm surprised Wickham and Lizzy didn't seem to have any sort of relationship throughout the entire story. They hardly spoke two words to each other! But in the original story, they got along really well at first—Lizzy basically had a crush on him. If Wickham still has his charming personality, Lizzy should be drawn to him even if she doesn't fall in love with him. I'd love to see what sort of influence Wickham has on her and her relationship with Darcy.

## Collins

Collins really shone as a protagonist in the prologue and second chapter of the story. I also really enjoyed seeing a little of his time at school. Him praying for a kind roommate was so on point! However, I still wanted a little more depth from Collins. Like I've said before, I wanted to see him grow up with the Bennets, fall in love with Mary, and grow into a compassionate man who didn't have to be a pastor but wanted to anyway because he wanted to help people. There's so much potential for him to face all sorts of conflict as the world keeps throwing tragedies and trauma at him when all he wants is to bring others the peace, safety, and joy that comes from his faith. It was disappointing to have the promised main character become a side character who hardly did anything. Collins doesn't have to become *the* main character of the story, but like Wickham, he should certainly play a larger role and not fade into the background.

## Bingley

From what I can tell of the *Pride and Prejudice* fandom, they get pretty excited when Bingley's character gets a little spine and becomes more than just the guy who was convinced to reject the love of his life. And there is so much potential for Bingley in this story that doesn't get taken advantage of at all!

Bingley finds out a pretty devastating truth about his father's incest. Like, I can't imagine how horrific that would be! Yet Bingley hardly seems to change at all because of this revelation. He kind of just goes along, the same old cheerful Bingley who falls head over heels for Jane. But what kind of impact could that revelation really have on someone? Might Bingley lose some trust in the other men around him? Might he be overly cautious about making unwelcome advances on other women? There's all sorts of psychological repercussions that could come from learning your father kept something so atrocious a secret from you in your own home. It would be amazing to see Bingley struggle with this trauma, overcome it, and become someone better because of it. I think this could really impact his relationship with his sisters, Jane, and

with his friends Darcy, Wickham, and Collins—all in potentially very satisfying and emotional ways!

Another thing to consider about the realities of Bingley having a father like this is that Bingley Sr. could have had a more negative influence on Bingley's honorable qualities. Predators like this groom their victims so that they think it's normal or that they can't fight back, and it makes sense that Bingley Sr. might have tried to groom Bingley Jr. to sort of turn a blind eye so he could have more control over his children. I'm not saying that Bingley has to be raised to take advantage of women, but I also can't imagine his father actively teaching him to respect women. It'll be important to think about how much influence Bingley Sr. really had on Bingley's character growing up and what that could mean for the rest of the story as well.

## Caroline

Speaking of the Bingleys, let's talk about Caroline! I think there was a lot of potential here. Caroline definitely had some difficult trauma and pain to work through, and it was cool to see how she overcame so much of it. However, sometimes I felt like I really didn't understand her character. I could see that this Caroline was nicer than the original Caroline, but then there were so many moments when her original pride and haughtiness popped back up. I know you were trying to make that stem from her trauma, but it didn't really feel connected to me and came across more like we were getting the same Caroline from the books but with a different backstory . . . a backstory that I think should have led to a more different Caroline.

There was a great line near the end when Lizzy realized all that Caroline had gone through and that she was really putting up walls around herself most of the time, not just being a brat. The problem was that even after Lizzy thought that, when I looked back on things, it didn't seem like Caroline was really putting up walls. It still felt like she was just being a brat!

I'd also like to point out one moment in particular when Caroline seemed rather out of character in Chapter 23. Here, she's a little frank with Lizzy in assuring her of her happiness in her sexual relationship with Wickham. That seems like an extremely forward conversation to have, even when Lizzy has become a better friend and is embracing her as a sister. It also seems a little odd to say that she knows Lizzy would be worried about her in this way when in reality it's only the readers who are actually concerned about this. If Lizzy does wonder about how Caroline and Wickham get on, it's probably more because she's being nosy than being thoughtful.

One thing to consider to try to get around these issues is to allow Caroline a few moments of her own POV. And specifically for this last issue I pointed out, another option is to wait to resolve this for the readers in the epilogue when Lizzy can easily claim that their relationship as sisters is much closer after so many years and that they've been able to have appropriate conversations about intimacy because of it.

## Lizzy

Overall, I don't have too much to complain about with Lizzy's arc, but to be fair, she largely followed her original arc anyway. On the bright side, we know the readers will enjoy Lizzy's storyline pretty easily because we know it works. On the downside, some readers may be dissatisfied with how similar her character turns out at the end. (Like I mentioned before, you know your audience a little better than I do, so use your best judgment here.) I think you could really go either way with how you want to revise her character. Depending on how much you might change about the gentlemen's interactions with her (like Collins or Wickham), she could definitely experience some different growth if you want her to.

One thing to consider about Lizzy's arc is that *her* lessons in pride and judgment aren't really the focus of the story anymore. Unless we give her a father's sin to overcome too, which seems a bit like overkill, it might be appropriate to spend a little less time in Lizzy's point of view and spend a little more time on the gentlemen's side of the story, since they're the ones experiencing vastly different and important character arcs because of the changes introduced to the storyline.

An aspect of Lizzy's character that took me a bit by surprise in this story was all the sexual tension and forwardness in the last third of the book. I'm sure it's common for *Pride and Prejudice* variations to get a little steamy sometimes, and I also totally understand that that's what some readers really look forward to most. (Who doesn't like a little steam once in a while?) However, to me, the intimate aspects of Lizzy's falling in love with Darcy seemed like a way to spice up the parts of the plot that were turning out a lot like the original book. This isn't necessarily to criticize including sexual tension itself, but I think it would be more satisfying for more readers if it wasn't just there to make the "boring" parts more exciting. But if you make the kinds of changes I've suggested earlier for Lizzy, then this probably won't be such an issue. I'll talk about this a little more in the section on tone as well.

Finally, I'd just like to point out a few moments throughout the story that felt out of character for Lizzy or that weren't quite satisfying.

- Chapter 8: I love seeing Lizzy care so much about her brother William and his well-being, but it's hard to really believe their relationship when I don't see them interacting on the page enough.
- Chapter 9: In one scene, Lizzy decides to be nice to Caroline simply because Darcy hasn't been very nice to her, and she feels like this will snub Darcy a little bit. I think that's a great conflict there, but I also wanted to see Lizzy struggle a touch more to be kind to *Caroline* and not be so overwhelmingly motivated by snubbing Darcy.
- Chapter 10: I think Lizzy would have a little more wit in saying she's not expecting to court Stanley. She just didn't seem like Lizzy when she was arguing with her mom here.
- Chapter 14: Why doesn't Lizzy suspect more about Darcy's feelings for her at Hunsford? He seems more attentive to her than in the original, so it would make sense for her to

wonder a little more about why he's trying so hard to go on walks with her and talk to her.

- Chapter 14: When Lizzy rejects Darcy's proposal, one of her arguments was all about William and Darcy's relationship. However, again, Lizzy's relationship with William has been all but ignored throughout the story, so it doesn't seem important enough to include in her arguments.
- Chapter 14: At the end here, it would have been nice to linger with Lizzy's emotions and crying, because I wasn't entirely sure why she was crying or what she was feeling.
- Chapter 16: Lizzy isn't necessarily a goody-two-shoes, but she definitely shouldn't have revealed the entire contents of Darcy's letter to Jane without permission. Even with permission, it probably would have been more considerate to leave out as many details as possible!

## Minor Characters

I just have a few things to add about some of the minor characters being underdeveloped in some aspects.

### Mr. Bennet

I really loved seeing Mr. Bennet be so much more involved with raising his family in the early chapters of the story, but I couldn't help wondering what prompted him to be a different father in this story. I have to assume that somehow Collins touched his heart and influenced him to be more involved, but I would have loved to see more of *how* Collins influenced Mr. Bennet. (This goes along with the idea that we didn't get to see enough of Collins growing up with the Bennets and developing relationships with them.)

One more thing about Mr. Bennet is that the scene when he questioned Darcy about marrying Lizzy seemed a little . . . off. He seemed to give in a little too much to the idea that he was being forced to say yes to them for the sake of appearances and not actually demanding more understanding about whether Lizzy and Darcy really loved each other.

### Dean Stokes

The dean of Collins' university only appears briefly in Chapter 4, but even in that brief time it stood out to me that he had very little personality. We don't expect minor characters like this to have their own arc or become a fan favorite, but they can be so useful in helping immerse the readers further into the world of the story when given a little more individuality. Think about how the dean's interactions with Collins could reveal some of his character. Maybe he's proud or vain or impatient or inattentive. . . . Traits like this can be conveyed in surprisingly few words. And these small character details can also help show readers how Collins feels about going to Oxford and how he's adjusting to the transition.

## Mrs. Gardiner

In Chapter 12, Mrs. Gardiner asks Lizzy all about how the relationship between Jane and Bingley is going. I know you were trying to make her the loving aunt who anyone can confide in, but it seemed so forward of her to ask about it. I think I'd believe and be okay with the conversation more if Lizzy sought out her aunt for encouragement and advice first. Otherwise, it almost seems like Mrs. Gardiner is becoming a gossip.

## Stanley

I thought Stanley seemed like a great side character when Collins met him at university. It was almost disappointing that I didn't get to see him develop a relationship with Collins more. However, when he appeared again in Chapter 13 as Charlotte's husband, I realized he was suddenly exactly like Collins was in the original story. While I'm sure it was meant more in humor than anything else, Stanley's character felt more like a cheap move. He was only around to replace the old Collins and was completely unoriginal. More than that, I felt like he was actually someone *different* than who I'd seen in Chapter 4 interacting with Collins at Oxford. Again, he's a minor character, so he doesn't need a whole character arc to himself, but I think a little more individuality and less copying of the original Collins would make him more appealing.

# Pacing, POV, and Description

Overall, I think the pacing of the story was engaging. Like I mentioned in an email, I read the whole story in just two or three days, and I definitely wasn't forcing myself to get through it! The story has lots of twists and turns to keep things exciting. Still, I think some tweaks could tighten up a few areas, and I also have some notes about handling the point of view and description a little.

## Pacing

I've already talked about the general structure and plot and how some aspects of the story seemed swept to the side, but here's a few more specific thoughts about how some of the pacing felt off at times.

The places that were in the most danger of slowing down and potentially boring readers were places where events and dialogue unfolded in very, very similar ways to the original story. An example of this is in Chapter 13 when Lizzy spends time with the Stanleys, the de Burghs, and Darcy. The way you handled Chapter 13 in particular was overall pretty good and didn't overwhelm the reader with all the same details in the novel, but I imagine some readers might still struggle to stay engaged with moments like these. Consider condensing even further some of these familiar scenes and trusting readers to fill in the gaps unless there's something truly critical to how a character is developing or interacting on the page.

Now, a few spots that felt awkward. The flashback in Chapter 5 (when Wickham gets over his drinking and whatnot at Cambridge) felt a little odd, and I would have preferred to have seen the moments happen in real time. The end of Chapter 8 also felt awkward, mostly because it ended with Lizzy thinking about her promise to be kind to Caroline when it felt like she should have been dwelling more on her conflict with Darcy. Finally, Charlotte and Stanley getting together felt just a little rushed, mostly because it had very little foreshadowing in my opinion.

I know you mentioned that some of your reviewers felt like Darcy and Lizzy didn't get quite enough time together to develop their relationship, and I see some places where I would agree with that. For instance, while I've mentioned that much of the time spent at Hunsford seemed a little slow, it would have been great to see some of the conversations Darcy and Lizzy had when he intercepted her on her walks. That's a great opportunity to give them more time to really get to know each other and establish more chemistry.

Another thing I would have really loved to see between Lizzy and Darcy was a longer conversation when they finally reunited in Chapter 20. A lot of the tension Lizzy felt coming up to that point was so great and effective, so when they basically said, "Oh, I love you now, so let's get married!" it felt too fast and unrealistic. I would have loved for Lizzy to explain a little more about why her opinions of Darcy had changed, and it also would have been great to hear why Darcy's feelings stayed constant despite everything Lizzy said when she initially rejected him. I think them having a serious conversation about their feelings would also help all the sexual tension feel more deserved because we would see that their relationship is about so much more than their physical attraction to each other. Without this more grounded aspect to their relationship, some of the moments when they can't resist kissing each other seems a little out of place in a regency story.

## POV

I've already suggested that the structure of the story may benefit from shifting around which characters have more dedicated POV time, so I won't recap that all here. What I do want to point out are a few places where some of the switches in omniscient POV felt awkward. In my opinion, third person omniscient is a really tricky POV to write because it's so hard to balance which characters you let give the readers information. Plus, hiding information from readers effectively can be really tricky because you technically have free access to all the characters' thoughts and reactions.

I think one of the most helpful strategies when writing in third person omniscient is to avoid having too many one-liners of one person's thoughts in the middle of another character having a scene primarily from their perspective. Although the omniscience technically allows for this, too many of these inconsistent switches can make it seem like we're head hopping out of third person limited perspectives.

Here's a few examples of some transitions that felt too awkward and like head hopping:

- Prologue: Some of the moments when we left Collins's perspective and saw his mother's thoughts.
- Chapter 4: The very end when we switched into Mr. Bennet's thoughts.
- Chapter 8 (page 68): The switch between Lizzy and Darcy felt very abrupt here.
- Chapter 13: Again, some of the switches here between Lizzy and Darcy felt too sudden.

## Description

Overall, there wasn't very much in the way of describing the various settings in the text—which isn't a huge concern in a *Pride and Prejudice* variation. After all, Austen herself didn't spend too many words on describing her settings, and the fans are familiar enough with the books and likely many of the movie adaptations that they don't need much help with envisioning each scene. However, I do feel like the story could benefit from a touch more attention to some description.

One place in particular that I felt was lacking this description was the very beginning of Chapter 4 when Collins arrived at Oxford. I felt that getting more description of the campus through his eyes could really help the readers *feel* how overwhelmed he was with being away from the Bennets for the first time. Describing a little of the grandeur of the buildings and landscaping, for instance, could show how highly he thinks of Oxford and how excited he is to receive an education there while also showing how intimidated he is to be somewhere new and challenging.

Essentially, when you think about whether you should add a little more description about the setting or not, think about what the various characters are experiencing and feeling and how their view of their surroundings could help inform the readers about what they're feeling. If you have that focus in choosing when to add more description, I trust you'll add it in just the right places so it doesn't feel overdone or unnecessary.

## Tone, Tropes, and Themes

I don't have too much to discuss about these sections because I've already touched on them a little bit in earlier sections, but I do have a few things to say, so here we go!

### Tone

Overall, I think you've got a great tone and voice in your story. You're generally sensitive in how you talk about difficult subjects like abuse or postpartum depression, and I think you've got a much better balance between your style and Austen's style than you did in your previous book. There's just two things I want to bring up for you here.

The first thing I want you to think about is that there are still a few places where Austen's original dialogue still reads as too obvious of a shift in voice. The place that was the most jarring

was in Chapter 7 because of what I've already explained about Darcy's character portrayal: he seemed like a completely different person when he started reciting Austen's dialogue. I'll be honest, I'm not sure what the best way to handle finding this balance is. Obviously, the fans of the books probably love finding some of the original lines in variations like this—they're classic and so loved. But at the same time, I don't want to push your writing style too far away from your own voice simply because you're trying to mimic Austen enough that her lines won't stand out. I don't know if fans would be offended if you tweaked the original dialogue you want to include to match your voice better. Or maybe you really want to make the transition between your writing and Austen's occasional lines as seamless as possible. Whatever effect you want to aim for, we can talk more in depth about strategies to hit that mark if you want (and it's definitely something I would address in a substantive edit as needed).

Second, I just wanted to point out that there was a bit of a tone shift when we started getting into the moments of sexual tension. It took me a little by surprise, honestly. It gives your second half a different feeling from the first half. And not that we have to have sexual tension in those early scenes when our main characters are still so young! But I think it would help avoid such a division in the book to have a steadier buildup of sexual tension. For instance, maybe when our gentlemen characters are at college, we get a few more hints of some of their hormones influencing the way they see the world. It can definitely be gradual at first, but if we can build on some smaller moments in the beginning, it will let moments like Lizzy's night fantasies feel more expected and natural for the story.

## Tropes

Here's the thing about tropes: Pretty much every reader has their own opinion about which tropes they think are bad and which ones they think are good. You're bound to disappoint someone no matter which tropes you use. But, on the other hand, just about every reader can still enjoy a trope they don't like if it's done well, and any reader can be disappointed with a trope they normally love when it's executed poorly. But even judging how well a trope is used can be subjective!

So, all that explanation is for me to say, please forgive me for a moment while I rant about a trope that I hate. If it's a trope that you love, I don't blame you at all for keeping it, but hopefully I can at least suggest a way for you to pull it off a little better.

Here it is: I find it extremely cheesy and unrealistic when someone touches someone else who they're destined to fall in love with and feels a literal electric shock like Lizzy did in Chapter 9. It always makes me roll my eyes and think something like, "No one ever *actually* feels a shock like that unless they've just experienced static electricity and mistaken it for love." (Although, who knows? Maybe someone really has experienced a sensation like that before. It just doesn't seem realistic in the slightest to me.)

Now, there are a few things that could make this trope work for me, although no one has quite done it yet. (Brandon Sanderson came close in *Starsight* because he had a really cool

explanation for it later on in the book. But the actual moment itself still made me roll my eyes.) One is to have some set up that there is definitely some physical attraction between the two people beforehand, or at least for the person who feels the shock. From what I remember, Lizzy didn't have a clear moment before this when she looked at Darcy and thought about how attractive he was. (I think some of these moments came up later, just not before.) Another is to make sure that in the moment, the character should be genuinely confused about why they felt a shock, because it's really not a natural experience, especially if there's not a common understanding of what static electricity is.

Finally, to be more specific to this situation, it would have also helped to have Lizzy reacting not just to the shock but also to the situation at hand. She was expected to take Darcy's arm to go to dinner, and she doesn't like Darcy at all at this point. Having a quick thought from her about how annoyed she was to even have to take his arm in the first place would be very in character and keep the moment from being all about the cliché shock.

Hopefully my rant there is useful for you. Honestly, I don't have any other tropes to complain about for this book, but like I've said, that could all be personal taste! I'd suggest paying attention to anything your reviewers might have called out like this and think about if it's a trope you really enjoy and want to use, and then think about whether there's anything you could do that would make it more interesting than what readers probably see of it in other stories.

## Theme

In your first book, *Behind the Mask*, I thought you had some very clear themes that came out throughout the whole book. However, in *The Sins of Their Fathers*, it feels like you identified a theme in the beginning and had a little fun with it, forgot about it for the majority of the book while Lizzy and Darcy got together, and then mentioned it again at the end to try to make it look like you hadn't forgotten about it. I've already talked about some reasons for this. We don't get enough time with characters like Collins, Wickham, and Bingley overcoming the trauma brought on by their fathers. And although we got plenty of time with Darcy, none of it was really about *him* becoming someone better despite what his father had done in the past. We also got lots and lots of time with Lizzy, who didn't have anything to really overcome as far as trauma or a poor father figure was concerned.

I'm all for Darcy and Lizzy still getting together in this story! But I think your desire to plug in some of the iconic scenes and situations from the original novel have taken over your ability to have a conversation with the reader about this theme. Maybe Lizzy doesn't have to hate Darcy and reject his proposal and then get a letter from him and see that he's been a true hero in the background all this time in order to have a good love story with him—at least, maybe not for *this* story, depending on what Darcy needs to learn about overcoming his father's previous mistakes. Maybe he needs to learn what actually overcoming those mistakes means. Is it avoiding the exact same choices someone else made, or does it have to do more with identifying principles that should guide you in your own life's circumstances?

Each of our four main gentlemen (and our lovely Miss Caroline Bingley) can have so much to discover about getting through trauma, accepting it, healing from it, and moving on to be and do better. The love stories don't have to get lost along the way, but they shouldn't get in the way of the themes developing, either.

If you feel like you need a little help developing these themes you've established in the beginning of your story, you're welcome to arrange a consultation call with me so I can brainstorm with you or just be a sounding board for your ideas. I'm sure you'll have lots of great ideas, though, and I can't wait to see what you come up with!

## Consistency and Historical Accuracy

Finally, a few things struck me as potentially being historically inaccurate or inconsistent in the text. Some of these things were really just questions that came to my mind because I'm not super familiar with Jane Austen "lore," so feel free to ignore anything I bring up that truly wouldn't be a problem.

- Prologue: I'm sure you did a little medical research, but just wanted to make sure the doctor's medical opinions were accurate for the time period.
- Prologue: When the doctor and constable discussed where to send Collins after finding his parents dead, I felt like it might not be the normal way to handle such a situation. I'm not a historical expert at all, so I might be wrong, but I imagine it would be common to send a boy like Collins straight to an orphanage or the streets. (Although perhaps his injuries were what made the difference?) If this is the case, it might be more accurate to have the doctor appear to be more compassionate than your average doctor and that's why Collins gets taken care of and sent to the Bennets, or maybe we could make it more clear that it's his injuries that make them go the extra mile.
- Chapter 4: Do the Bennets really have tenants? Maybe they just weren't mentioned much in the original book . . .
- Chapter 4: I think Collins is usually described as having a smaller frame rather than a large one . . . but maybe I'm just being influenced by the many adaptations that portray him that way.
- Chapter 5: I'm curious as to how Darcy and Bingley actually met in the novel (if it was ever mentioned in the book or by Austen herself) and why events in the story would make them meet under different circumstances.
- Chapter 18: I really liked that Lizzy pointed out that many men would abandon their sisters as soon as they found out they'd been compromised and that Darcy was admirable for remaining loyal to Georgiana. I'd like to point out, however, that Lizzy didn't actually assume Darcy would be like most men before finding out that he'd acted differently, which made her amazement at his actions a little less realistic.

## Final Thoughts

I know this is a lot of information to shift through! Hopefully the way I've organized it will help you feel confident in applying these suggestions the way you want to. Again, if you feel like you need a little help brainstorming specific ways to develop aspects of your story, you're welcome to reach out to me for a consultation session! If you need an hour to just chat and figure things out, I charge \$20 an hour for consultation calls. (And if you just have some small follow up questions, please ask! Especially if you need to clarify something I've written in here, I don't mind answering quick questions in an email.)

I know my availability going forward is a little up in the air because childbirth and postpartum recovery can be so unpredictable, but I'm excited about your book and already looking forward to the next round of edits! I'll do my best to respond quickly to any emails and let you know how I'm feeling and when I can or can't take on work for the next few months.

Thank you so much for trusting me with your manuscript! I can't wait to see how this story develops from here.

Sincerely,

*Brittany*