

*My dear Georgianna,*

*With grateful appreciation I fondly recall our brief conversation at the reception following the wedding of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy. With deep satisfaction we shared confidence in their ongoing happiness, but you confided the question of whether this be the ultimate, objective good of marriage. You intimated that the juxtaposition of your hopes and hazards moves you to seek outside counsel.*

*As I was about to respond, Mr. Collins abruptly presented himself proclaiming the necessity to further your socialization via receipt of his arm, knee and foot at dance. Thus he swept-away you and our exploration, but only until I returned home to write.*

*Generous is the credit borne by your stated foundation for soliciting my opinions. It prompts my commendation of the employment of your senses and reason in speculating as to catalysts for the union of Mr. and Mrs. Darcy. However, I must demur as to your conclusions regarding the role played by myself and Mr. Gardiner. At best we are more appreciators than facilitators.*

*Your request for my thoughts is wise and proper. Unwarranted are your entreaties for forgiveness of any impropriety. To the contrary, I am*

*honored by your trust, grateful for your friendship, and challenged by our mission of examining your query.*

*Many and varying are the motives and means for marriage, but what is the institution's ultimate, intrinsic good? I begin with frank and confidential observations of unions of which we are each acquainted. In return I beseech you to enlighten me with critique of my ruminations.*

*Poor Mr. and Mrs. Bennet seem to share a marriage in tatters. Mr. Bennet's disdain for his wife seeps out in periodic emissions of cynicism and irony that are often directed at her vexation. Affection is an adhesive of marriage, and only a thin layer can be sufficient. Here I see none.*

*Mrs. Bennet maintains a tenuous grip on a weathered skeleton of marriage. The marital success of her daughters has become her primary concern. She desperately wants, and doggedly pursues, for them what she herself most values, and yet lacks: wealth and social standing. On this account she bears but disappointment and resentment toward her husband. All she seems to value in him are what scarce bones of utility he drops.*

*Yet offspring cannot be the central good, and the sole mover, of marriage. Instead, they are a fruit. The goodness of the tree succeeds its yield. Otherwise once the fruit departs the tree withers.*

*Do we find marital good in material resources or social standing?*

*Surely a measure of each furthers marital happiness, but contrary to wide-spread belief, excess of either is not the currency of marital good. With humble gratitude, I testify that the marriage of Mr. Gardiner and I is but one of many proving that abundance of wealth and lofty class distinction contribute nothing to marital depth, meaning and joy.*

*I know not why or how, but Mr. Hurst has little interest in his wife and in their marriage. Either he finds no satisfaction in it or the satisfaction he slavishly finds in food and cards has overwhelmed any that he once found in his spouse and their union.*

*Like all spouses, Mrs. Hurst, inevitably encountered in her mate some of the shortcomings innate to humans. The test is in her response. Failed is her mission to increase his intelligence, curb his appetites or invigorate his marital interest. Frustrated and discouraged, Mrs. Hurst has allowed bitterness and resentment to erode all her esteem and affection for Mr. Hurst. Patina encrusts her mettle.*

*Regrettably, a faltering of fortitude moved Charlotte Lucas to marry hapless Mr. Collins. Dreading becoming a burden to her family, Charlotte married a man that she does not love and cannot respect. Instead of embracing a husband, she grasped for financial security. To*

*trade love for security is to acquiesce to imprisonment by fear. Charlotte further exacerbated her predicament by perceiving marriage as a mere contractual transaction thereby basely wounding its transcendence.*

*Meanwhile, Mr. Collins has but superficially entered into marriage. He has yet to substantially open himself to his wife and intermingle their persons. Without openness there can be no reception. Without reception there can be no consideration. Without consideration there can be no progress. Mr. Collins is on course to remain where he is; nowhere.*

*The Bennet, Hurst and Collins marriages demonstrate that merely being married is no realization or guarantor of good. Still, despite these spouse's predicaments, good can emerge through void and each retains the prospect.*

*Home improvements remain of value even if made for a truant guest. Similarly, we can enhance our comprehension of marital good by contemplating potential spouses and pre-marriage romances. Presence can be comprehended through absence.*

*Young Mary Bennet, possess a latent and vague affinity toward marriage. Yet she unceasingly and exclusively clings to learning, taste and accomplishment. One must extend an open palm to take the hand of*

*another. Like a certain great author, her work may one day become a suppressed lamentation of irretrievably lost opportunity.*

*Lydia and Catherine Bennet regard men as one drawing nectar from a peach while expelling the pulp. They so crave the sweetness of romance that they are susceptible to forgoing the fiber of marriage. In an unseemly twist, it is they who risk being wrung dry.*

*As no stranger to his modus operandi, I need not tell you that Mr. George Wickham is a marauding reaper of money and pleasure. A serial beau manipulating others to unwittingly aid him. Preying upon their cravings for romance, Mr. Wickham lures female victims from their moral roots. Deceitfully dangling and delaying marriage, he plucks until the fruit shrivels, then he slithers on.*

*There is a husband's happiness, a wife's happiness and the happiness that they share. The exclusive pursuit of subjective satisfaction is not a good of marriage. Within the heart of love is self-giving, not self-indulgence. Love sometimes satisfies, but always sacrifices.*

*Amidst darkness shine many marriages with bright prospects, like that of our dear Elizabeth and Fitzwilliam. Their union is an expression of hope, a bold proclamation that marriage can be done, and done well.*

*Where in the Darcy marriage might we find the institution's ultimate good? Does it reside in personal attributes? Though neither is perfect, each spouse possess abundant intelligence, articulation, propriety, and good-manners. An extrovert able to think with her own head, Elizabeth is also attractive, lively, and witty. Fitzwilliam is a handsome and honorable introvert able to provide for all they may ever need, or want. Yet, personal assets and attributes possessed prior to marriage cannot be a good produced of marriage.*

*Pardon the digression, but from whence originate personal attributes? Is it from personal human action? From fate? From Providence? Why are some buoyed while others burdened?*

*Let me no longer laden you with superfluous language groping to describe what may in the end be best perceived through moral intuition. Thus, I leap to my conclusion. Marital good is realized via the complementary sacrificial service by which spouses advance toward transcendent perfection.*

*Elizabeth and Fitzwilliam begin life together with virtue. Each temperately overcame blind prejudice and divisive pride to fortuitously persevere in prudently seeing the other as they really are and to justly give what is due. Humility will open them to their marriage as a vehicle for furthering progress. Commitment will bind them to a friendship of*

*mission. Charity will transport them to transcendence. The good is in the flowering of four virtues here and three there.*

*As I wrote, hope yet abides for the wives and husbands of the Bennet, Hurst and Collins households. An earnest spouse in an unrequited marriage lacks the breadth of marital friendship. Still, latent possibilities await. Like early Spring crocuses emerging through snow to bloom, transcendence can arise from the depths of quiet, charitable, long-suffering.*

*For now this is enough. My hope is that in subsequent communications we will further discover and unpack truth. Until then I remain your faithful friend and confidant.*

*Mrs. M. Gardiner*