## Important Quotations Explained

1.
It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

This is the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* and stands as one of the most famous first lines in literature. Even as it briskly introduces the arrival of Mr. Bingley at Netherfield—the event that sets the novel in motion—this sentence also offers a miniature sketch of the entire plot, which concerns itself with the pursuit of "single men in possession of a good fortune" by various female characters. The preoccupation with socially advantageous marriage in nineteenth-century English society manifests itself here, for in claiming that a single man "must be in want of a wife," the narrator reveals that the reverse is also true: a single woman, whose socially prescribed options are quite limited, is in (perhaps desperate) want of a husband.

2.
"Which do you mean?" and turning round, he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said, "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men. You had better return to your partner and enjoy her smiles, for you are wasting your time with me."

These words describe Darcy's reaction at the Meryton ball in Chapter 3 to Bingley's suggestion that he dance with Elizabeth. Darcy, who sees the people of Meryton as his social inferiors, haughtily refuses to condescend to dancing with someone "not handsome enough" for him. Moreover, he does so within range of Elizabeth, thereby establishing a reputation among the entire community for pride and bad manners. His sense of social superiority, artfully exposed in this passing comment, later proves his chief difficulty in admitting his love for Elizabeth. The rudeness with which Darcy treats Elizabeth creates a negative impression of him in her mind, one that will linger for nearly half of the novel, until the underlying nobility of his character is gradually revealed to her.

3.
"In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you." Elizabeth's astonishment was beyond expression. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This he considered sufficient encouragement, and the avowal of all that he felt and had long felt for her, immediately followed. He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.

Darcy's proposal of marriage to Elizabeth in Chapter 34 demonstrates how his feelings toward her transformed since his earlier dismissal of her as "not handsome enough." While Elizabeth rejects his proposal, this event marks the turning point in the novel. Before Darcy asks Elizabeth to marry him, she feels only contempt for him;

afterward, she begins to see him in a new light, as certain incidents help illustrate the essential goodness of his character. At this moment, however, Elizabeth's eventual change of heart remains unforeseen—all she thinks of is Darcy's arrogance, his attempts to interfere in Bingley's courtship of Jane, and his alleged mistreatment of Wickham. Her judgment of Darcy stems from her initial prejudice against his snobbishness, just as his pride about his high social status hampers his attempt to express his affection. As the above quote makes clear, he spends more time emphasizing her lower rank and unsuitability for marriage to him than he does complimenting her or pledging his love. "He was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride," the narrator states; Darcy must prioritize love over his sense of superiority before he is worthy of Elizabeth's hand.

4.

They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills;—and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place where nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in her admiration; and at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!

These lines open Chapter 43 and provide Elizabeth's introduction to Darcy's grand estate at Pemberley. Her visit to Darcy's home, which occupies a central place in the narrative, operates as a catalyst for her growing attraction toward its owner. In her conversations with the housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, Elizabeth hears testimonials of Darcy's wonderful generosity and his kindness as a master; when she encounters Darcy himself, while walking through Pemberley's grounds, he seems altogether changed and his previous arrogance has diminished remarkably. This initial description of the building and grounds at Pemberley serves as a symbol of Darcy's character. The "stream of some natural importance . . . swelled into greater" reminds the reader of his pride, but the fact that it lacks "any artificial appearance" indicates his basic honesty, as does the fact that the stream is neither "formal, nor falsely adorned." Elizabeth's delight, and her sudden epiphany about the pleasure that being mistress of Pemberley must hold, prefigure her later joy in Darcy's continued devotion.

5.

Elizabeth was much too embarrassed to say a word. After a short pause, her companion added, "You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject forever." Elizabeth feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of his situation, now forced herself to speak; and immediately, though not very fluently, gave him to understand, that her sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which he alluded, as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure, his present assurances.

This proposal and Elizabeth's acceptance mark the climax of the novel, occurring in Chapter 58. Austen famously prefers not to stage successful proposals in full, and the reader may be disappointed in the anticlimactic manner in which the narrator relates Elizabeth's acceptance. It is important to remember, however, that the proposal and acceptance are almost a foregone conclusion by this point. Darcy's intervention on behalf of Lydia makes obvious his continuing devotion to Elizabeth, and the shocking appearance of Lady Catherine de Bourgh in the previous chapter, with her haughty attempts to forestall the engagement, serves to suggest strongly that a second proposal from Darcy is imminent.

The clunky language with which the narrator summarizes Elizabeth's acceptance serves a specific purpose, as it captures the one moment of joyful incoherence for this supremely well-spoken character. She accepts Darcy's proposal "immediately," the narrator relates, but "not very fluently." As Elizabeth allows herself to admit that her love has supplanted her long-standing prejudice, her control of language breaks down. The reader is left to imagine, with some delight, the ever-clever Elizabeth fumbling for words to express her irrepressible happiness.