

Pride and Perjury: Twelve Short Stories Inspired by Pride and Prejudice

Alice McVeigh

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These twelve enchanting stories contemplate events and perspectives beyond the scope of famed lovers and schemers.

Alice McVeigh's short story collection *Pride and Perjury* is a spirited speculative addition to the realm of Jane Austen-influenced literature.

Working around Austen's celebrated novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, these twelve stories contemplate events and perspectives beyond the scope of famed lovers Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy and the earnest machinations of Emma Woodhouse. Each story excels in recreating the tone and settings of Austen's fiction, offering compressed yet detailed alternate narratives. As a helpful reference point, the stories are prefaced with relevant selections from the original works.

In "A Heliotrope Ribbon," backstory is added to Lydia Bennet's impulsive elopement. While visiting the seaside town of Brighton, Lydia resumes her flirtation with dashing Lieutenant Wickham. Their attraction is heightened with more sensual and intimate language as Lydia allows Wickham to kiss her and later declares that she cannot live without him. Wickham is captivated by Lydia's "young, lively and innocent" passion, but he's also overwhelmed with gambling debts and has been trying without success to court a wealthy widow.

The delightful "Captivating Mr. Darcy" reveals diary entries of *Pride and Prejudice*'s Caroline Bingley as she begins her hopeless pursuit of Fitzwilliam Darcy, or "Fitzzy," as she calls him. After receiving detailed advice from her sister about how to attract a man, Caroline struggles to read Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* to impress Fitzzy; in truth, she finds the book to be "very dull" and hopes that Young Werther soon dies. And in "Of Tact and Tactics," Darcy's cousin, Anne, moves beyond her affections for Fitzwilliam by pursuing the intriguing Lord Cuthbert. Through skillful manipulation of circumstances, Anne avoids a marriage negotiated by her overbearing mother and instead finds the "freer, headier air" of self-determination.

The domestic staff's viewpoints are also included: Agnes Hill narrates "The Housekeeper's Tale" and offers insight into the considerable work involved in running the hectic Bennet residence. But there is little grousing on Mrs. Hill's part, and she, along with most of the other staff members, is committed to the Bennet family with an almost subsumed allegiance. In the more pensive "Mary Rose," *Emma*'s George Knightley recalls his youthful affair with a housemaid. Though George's father dissuades him from marrying the "ruined" girl, he also notes that despite George's courtly charm, Mary Rose may have felt obligated to enter the relationship due to fear of losing her employment.

Though there are repetitive chords and themes, compact world-building enhances the collection's overall smooth and cohesive flow. "Pride and Perjury" features an inventive crossover when *Emma*'s Mr. Elton encounters *Pride and Prejudice*'s still unmarried Caroline Bingley among the "scalloped alcoves and glorious chandeliers" of Christmastime in Bath. Rebuffed by Emma, Mr. Elton now focuses on Caroline and another eligible heiress, Augusta Hawkins. Like Darcy and Wickham, Elton is preoccupied with dowry size in his matrimonial choices; his observation of Caroline

being “twice as well-endowed as Miss Hawkins, with close on £20,000” represents mercenary but amusing candor.

With encapsulated creativity, the stories of *Pride and Perjury* add new facets to Jane Austen's beloved landscapes.

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