Mismatched Muses

Pride, Prejudice, and Super Powers: Critical Introduction

This is in the vein of “cross-over” fanfiction, taking the world and characters of *Pride and Prejudice* and adding some mutant powers in the theme of Marvel’s X-Men. My interest is less in their powers and more in the social commentary that Stan Lee intended when he first introduced the X-Men. In the world of the comic, people’s fear and disgust for the super-powered mutants was and is a critique of ethnic and racial prejudices. In this fanfiction, I am displacing the critique of ethnic bias onto Austen’s interest in class relationships. Ideas from various critical readings influence my short “cross-over” piece, although I don’t believe any one article dominates my thinking. Those ideas, which you will hopefully perceive in your reading, are namely: it is not necessarily *in spite of* Elizabeth’s undesirable situation that Darcy wants her, but because he seems to want what is difficult to have (when wealth makes everything easily obtainable, romance offers itself as the last field of challenge, where the challenge is to both win Elizabeth’s heart and overcome the familial resistance to a girl of her status); and perhaps Elizabeth was humbled or “humiliated” (see Susan Fraiman’s “The Humiliation of Elizabeth Bennet”) into wanting Darcy in part from her fear of ending up like her father, in a loveless and unproductive marriage, and the corresponding desire for stability realized in Pemberley (see the beginning of chapter 43 of Austen’s novel). I also wanted to interact with Austen’s use of “free indirect discourse,” attempting to replicate the character’s influence on the narrator (a very incomplete explanation of it) in a way more natural to today’s reader. Additionally, Jo Baker’s *Longbourn* influences my representation of the Bennet’s servants. So, without further ado, enjoy.

**PRIDE, PREJUDICE, AND SUPER POWERS**

It is a truth universally acknowledged that every *Pride and Prejudice* story must begin with a truth universally acknowledged.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that while a mutant may look like a proper person, they are not and cannot be such.

As the sunlight caught the facets in her diamond-like skin and shone- she had let herself, in her reverie, revert to her diamond form, her skin achingly beautiful but damning all the same- she reflected on how thankful she was for Longbourn. The home was humble enough, but its real charm was the relative isolation and consequential protection it provided. Those whose shared her “condition” were both dangerous and in danger out in the larger world. She had heard of the mobs, torches burning as bright as their hate, that had pursued and tormented mutants of all ages, even children, for no reason other than their perceived difference. The Bennets were fortunate in that they had a luxury many mutants did not- the luxury of passing for human. *If they were careful,* Elizabeth corrected with a frown as she looked at her diamond skin, the telling mark of her condition. With some focus, she returned to as she should be, her pale flesh more beautiful to her than the precious stone it replaced. Yes, if they were careful, everything might be okay. Her sisters, however, excepting dear Jane, could not, unfortunately, be counted on to be careful and thus Longbourn was both their refuge and their prison.

One of the servants interrupted her musings with tea. Elizabeth had known the serving girl as long as she had known her own sisters and could finally look at the serving girl’s scaly skin without flinching. The Bennets hired mutant servants out of understanding kindness (or, more likely, out of necessity- even at a time where many of the serving class did not have the luxury of choice, some non-mutants chose possible starvation over employment with mutants). Elizabeth nodded her thanks as the girl’s scales clattered against the platter. Taking her tea and returning to her reverie, Elizabeth’s frustration was reawakened. Did she avoid the girl because of her servitude or her skin? They had had conversations, shared in plenty of daydreams on dreary days, but Elizabeth’s closeness with the girl was never physical. Elizabeth scoffed- was her own skin so different? But this Bennet daughter was not one to be conquered by her thoughts. With a huff, she decided a walk would do her good.

Descending the stairs, Elizabeth saw a telltale dimple on the rug below.

“Mary?” she called. Her sister, tending toward invisibility both figuratively and literally, materialized.

“Yes?” Mary answered, falling in step with her sister.

“Where is Lydia?”

“It *is* quiet, isn’t it?”

A shudder in the house’s very foundation reprimanded their lack of appreciation for the reprieve. Another shudder, followed by the frequencies that caused it.

“*Kitty!* What have you done?” Lydia thundered, causing Mary and Elizabeth to cover their ears as the volume of her voice reverberated in their chests.

“Lydia! Hush!” Elizabeth scolded her sonic-voiced sister. With a glare, Lydia flounced away.

Mary spotted Kitty’s timid face peeking out from behind a doorframe. Kitty was the only Bennet sister without a condition, but that was most likely short-lived. Many mutants did not demonstrate their condition until the time normal girls came out into society. They were very different coming outs, that was certain. Kitty started to explain herself but was interrupted by another sound in the house’s bones. Their father’s certain steps, the chill he usually carried causing the wood to protest, produced a new problem as he entered.

“Fetch your mother.” Did Elizabeth catch a smile in his eyes when he looked at her as he walked back to his library as quickly as he had left it? Kitty sighed and went for a servant. Elizabeth went to the parlor where she saw what she expected to see- her mother floating a few feet above the ground, in a huff but unharmed. When the mother of these mutant children felt distressed, which was often, she would begin to steadily rise until her delicate feet floated some distance above the floor.

“Elizabeth! Finally! Where is your father? That man! Did you hear? He has spoken with the Bingleys! He delivered such news and then just left me here! How pleased I am! So happy I could float.” She giggled at her own joke, then soured. “Well, what are you standing around for? Where is the servant with the ladder? I would like to come down.”

At that moment, a servant walked in with a sigh, toting the ladder in his arms. He could do this in his sleep by this point in his career, this amusing and irritating act of retrieving the air-headed Mrs. Bennet down from the ceiling.

Elizabeth silently wondered how they intended to introduce themselves- was Mr. Bingley a mutant, too? Otherwise, why would their mother so obviously be scheming for marriage? Even she was not so foolish as to think a normal man would settle for one of her daughters.

Feeling a chill, Elizabeth turned to see her sister Jane walk in to see the conclusion of the frequent spectacle that was retrieving Mrs. Bennet. She caught her sister’s eyes and guessed that they were alike in their thinking.

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Nonetheless, the two eldest Bennet daughters attended the ball where the already beloved Mr. Bingley would be. It passed without catastrophe; Elizabeth’s brilliance was only her wit and Jane was cool only in her composure. Rather, the sisters had accomplished their mother’s goal and had caught the attention of wealthy men, although that was not necessarily *their* intent. It was Elizabeth’s *disinterest* in securing a connection at the ball, in fact, that sparked the interest of one Mr. Darcy. Jane, however, had been thoroughly captured by Mr. Bingley’s open charm. Elizabeth worried how the spark between them may continue. Jane’s composure was, to many, off-putting. Her coolness, maintained in part by her quiet focus to only look and not feel particularly cold, could easily be misread.

And, of course, it was. As Elizabeth later learned, it was Mr. Darcy’s persuasion, born of his affection for Mr. Bingley and his misreading of Jane’s composure, that ended the budding romance between the two young people.

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While she was staying with her childhood friend Charlotte some weeks later, Elizabeth discovered the truth of her sister’s ended romance when Mr. Darcy invited himself into Charlotte’s house to propose to Elizabeth.

The moment at which Elizabeth obtained the confirmation of her suspicions about Mr. Bingley’s removal from the neighborhood, Mr. Darcy seemed to be as cold in heart as Jane was in body. She wished for her sister’s and her father’s condition, to be able to make him as cold as his horrible heart, as she let herself feel her frustration and fury at the handsome man… the handsome man who apparently loved *her.* Loved her even as he had guessed her family’s condition, had known her inferiority and the degradation it would bring upon him- even as she was furious, she was also, though she would deny it, flattered. Although *she* thought little of her condition (or, more accurately, how she tried to think little of her condition), she understood how it interfered with her potential. She had seen how her father had settled and feared for her own future in romance. Yet, her emotions were not to be denied. He would know how she felt.

He saw the power of her passion and even in his hurt, he found himself admiring that passion. Even as his own emotion drained the color from his face, he could still appreciate the flush that her anger brought to her face. But then that flush shifted, soft skin contracting to countless gems that flashed brighter than his own feelings. Their shock was shared. Elizabeth’s face bowed in perhaps more shocking humiliation and Darcy did not know what his own face showed, but he did not *want* to know. He did not know how to feel. He had, of course, suspected that she had the condition as well, but he had hoped that she had been spared. Like a painting in motion, his memory threw him back to Mr. Bingley’s amused recount of Jane’s unnaturally cool touch. Yet Elizabeth was not cold like her sister nor affected like her other siblings, thank goodness, her brilliance was its own condition. Yet the ugly word condition, with all of its implications, seemed unfit. What happened to her in the height of her emotion was beautiful, Darcy found himself thinking as he gaped at her. *She* was beautiful. But she had denied him. The discomfort they shared, a new and not necessarily unwanted intimacy, was too much for Darcy’s shyness. The agency his anger had conferred upon him was snuffed out by his shock. But nonetheless, he walked out, reasoning to himself that he should leave because he had been denied by this woman, dazzling in wit and, unfortunately, in body. He did not know his own thoughts as he closed the door and walked out of the house and out of her life.

Or so he thought.

He walked, a thousand thoughts buzzing in his agitated mind. He realized that if nothing else, he should explain his shameful behavior, if not for her, then for him. But, when he later wrote his explanation and not-quite-apology, he realized that even so brutally confronted by the insensibility of the match, he still wanted her. Perhaps if he explained himself well enough… he did not let himself feel any more than a small glimmer of hope, thinking as he did of the breathtaking glow the sun made on her skin that moment it turned to diamonds.