

To me, Kitty Bennett has always seemed like a character who gets the short end of the stick in *Pride and Prejudice*. She gets lumped in as Lydia's conspirator but yet has none of the adventure Lydia has, instead ending up at home with a father who has too late realized the errors in his lax parenting style. I enjoyed the fanfiction that explores some of the more minor characters and add on to ending already in place, following the direction the author already created with their narrative. *Pride and Prejudice* mentions that Kitty often visits Jane and Elizabeth after their marriages and that felt like a natural jumping off point to me, a narrative that had more potential. The idea that between her older and younger sister's marriages, Kitty manages to find her own happy ending was something I liked. I situated my story in modern day because I felt it would be easier than attempting to emulate the writing style of the earlier period. This meant finding some line of work that would allow Darcy his wealth, while at the same time giving Wickham the celebrity status he seems to achieve in the novel, and therefore I decided they would need to work in some aspect of entertainment, but Darcy would still be a businessman at the end of the day. I tried to keep the ending a little vague and not add much romance because I feel like that is true to the original novel, and I do still want it be reminiscent of the source material. I made Denny the love interest for Kitty because I didn't want to stray outside the characters Austen provides us with, although I clearly added in two children, but they seemed like natural extensions of Lizzy and Darcy's narrative. I also wanted to call it "Second Impressions" because I've always liked the original title for *Pride and Prejudice* and wanted to play on that. Really, isn't the book about second, third, fourth impressions, etc.

## Second Impressions

By: Katie Knickerbocker

“Aunt Kit, Aunt Kit, you’re back, you’re back”

Kitty laughed, catching up her nephew Fitz and swinging him around in a circle as she stepped out of the Uber. Beaming at him she exclaimed, “I guess it’s safe to say you missed me then.”

“Oh yes! I only had Maddie to play with and you know she only wants to stay inside, she’s so boring” exclaimed the seven year old, sticking out his tongue to emphasize his point.

Smiling to herself, Kitty had to admit that although Lizzy and Darcy’s oldest child had inherited her mother’s love of books, the same could not be said for her love of the outdoors. Madeline, or Maddie as was affectionately known, much preferred to cozy up in the library than stromp through the vast wilderness of her parent’s secluded vacation home.

“...and there’s a visitor”

Startled, she realized Fitz was still talking to her, his mouth moving a million miles a minute, as if making up for all the conversations they hadn’t had over the past week. “What about a visitor?” she asked him, “It’s not Lady Catherine is it? If it is you and I might just have to walk to the ice cream shop and hide out for a little bit.”

“I said there’s a visitor. Someone mommy and you used to know from when you used to live with grandma and grandpa Bennett. He was asking about you.” And with that, exasperated with having to repeat himself, he wiggled out of her grasp and began sprinted up towards the main house, calling out behind him for his aunt.

Kitty followed behind at a more leisurely pace, breathing in the fresh air, glad to be back in the place that had in such a short time become home to her. She loved Mariah and had been honored to stand next to her as her maid of honor, but returning to her childhood house for the better part of two weeks only served to remind her how thankful she was that Lizzy and Darcy had welcomed her into their home a three years after Fitz was born. She doesn't want to think about the alternative.

With Jane, Lizzy, and Lydia married it had just been Kitty and Mary left at the house. Kitty loves Mary, but the two had never really understood each other and their lack of common interest became even more apparent once the other sisters left. There was only so much theology Kitty could have spouted at her before she would feign a headache and retreat to her room for some peace and quiet. And her parents, bless their hearts, were no better company. Her mother spent all her spare time on webMD, finding illness after potential illness that fit her laundry list of symptoms and consulting psychics when she became anxious, ringing up one hell of a phone bill each month. Her father kept mostly to himself, shut off in his study for the majority of the day, but that didn't stop him from keeping a close eye on the two daughters left at home. Kitty supposed she couldn't really blame him, after the debacle with Lydia, but still it didn't seem fair that she was the one left at home, her location tracked every time she went out and a curfew put in place. Thankfully, just when Kitty was at her wits end, Lizzy had suggested she could use some help with the children when she and Darcy went out of town on business and Kitty had practically leapt at the opportunity for a change of scenery. Yes, she was very happy to have ended up where she was.

Finally making it up the front steps, Kitty heard animated voices and followed the sounds past the main entertaining space and into the family room.

Her sister, perched on the arm of the chair Darcy sat in, looked up as Kitty came into the room and said, “There you are! Come say hello to our guest, I’m sure you remember Denny!”

Kitty glanced about the room before her eyes fell on a familiar face from her past. Denny! Once a man she greatly admired and liked, she hadn’t seen or heard from him since Wickham and Lydia had eloped. He looked a few years older than the last time she had seen him, though to be fair everyone including her did as well, but no less handsome than and she felt her heart flutter when he smiled at her greeting her as if no time had passed at all.

Kitty you look as beautiful as ever, this country sunshine seems to have brought out a sparkle in your eyes.”

Flustered and for the first time in a long time unsure of herself, she stammered out a “thank you” but couldn’t manage anything else.

“I came to meet with Darcy, didn’t he tell you he’s signed me to Pemberley records?”

“No, he didn’t say anything to me about it”

“Are you sure,” chimed Darcy from his position by the chair, “I’m sure I would have mentioned something. Oh no, I remember now. You had already left for Mariah’s wedding when I got back into town, and the paperwork hadn’t been finalized before that so I didn’t want to risk jinxing anything, sorry Kitty.”

Kitty knew this must be a big business deal if Darcy felt like he couldn’t tell her beforehand, he wasn’t usually the superstitious type. He had made his name as a record producer, seeing talent and investing in artists other labels had passed on. The first album he had ever produced had been his childhood friend Charles Bingley, who was now Jane’s husband, and

it had been profitable enough to launch both their careers. Now Darcy owned one of the most successful record labels in the country and apparently Denny's band, the Militia, was his newest acquisition. Kitty thought back to the days when the Militia played in seedy bars Wickham did them a favor by allowing their band to open for his act. My how things had changed.

Denny kept trying to talk to Kitty, but she did her best to ignore him, giving stilted one-word answers when absolutely necessary. Despite how handsome he might be, she knew better than to let herself get caught up with him again. She had seen a relationship with a musician play out first hand and knew they only ended in disaster. Bingley might be the exception, but he was also already branching out of performing when Jane had met him, moving into the position of business partner at Darcy's label, that was different.

After what felt like hours, Darcy suggested he and Denny head to the studio to discuss the next record and then meet Lizzy, Kitty, and the kids for dinner. Kitty felt relief when they left the room, which didn't last long. Lizzy looked at her for a long moment before launching into a tirade of questions.

"What was that all about? I thought you and Denny used to be friends, I thought you'd be happy to see him, that's why Darcy and I invited him over. You used to be obsessed with him, half of the town thought you two were dating and it seems like he still likes you."

"I am...we were....I don't know. There was a time when I really liked him, even thought he might have been the one for me. But with all that happened with Lydia and Wickham, I don't see how it could be a good idea to start up with a musician, they only lead to trouble."

Kitty always felt bad bringing up their sister and her ex-husband. She knew her sister felt partially responsible for how it all went down. At the early part of the

relationship, at the point when they both detested each other more than anything else, Darcy had told Lizzy about Wickham's past but she hadn't told anyone else what she'd learned. George Wickham had talked Georgiana Darcy into eloping with him, but they were caught in the act when her older brother's unexpected layover caused him to show up at her apartment. When told he would have to sign a pre-nup which would effectively keep him from accessing any of Georgiana's money, Wickham turned tail and fled. Lizzy hadn't wanted to believe it to be true. She had thought maybe he was a different person now, a changed person. But in the end, that same Wickham had seduced their sister and for no other reason it seemed than to say he could. Poor Lydia was heartbroken only a few months later when her husband was caught with one of his backup vocalists. Lydia's humiliation was broadcast all over the national news and Kitty refused to let the same thing happen to her.

"Well, you know what they say about assumptions," Lizzy answered. "Just think if I had based all my decisions on my first impression of Darcy, or him on me for that matter. I thought he was much too proud, uptight, and tactless while he thought we came from a fame hungry family. Turns out he's guarded based on past experiences. And he had to learn that Jane wasn't trying to trap Charles, she was just shy and not very forthcoming with her emotions."

"You and Darcy, Jane and Charles, you guys are the exception, not the rule," argued Kitty. "I don't want to risk my heart for someone who's going to move on the second the next best thing comes along."

"I really don't think Denny is like that. Ever since Darcy crossed paths with him at a charity function a few months ago I've heard nothing but good things and you have to admit he's a pretty great judge of character. I mean, just look who he chose for his wife!"

At that Kitty laughed. She could always count on her sister's wit to show up no matter the situation.

“Darcy really thinks so highly of him?”

“Says he reminds him of Charles at a younger age. Denny might be famous, but he's still just a down to earth guy, not trying to play games with anyone. He even apologized to us for not realizing who Wickham was sooner the first time we met up again.”

“I guess it's not really fair of me to jump to conclusions so quickly. But I was so awful to him earlier, I don't know why he'd go out of his way to try to talk to me again.”

Lizzy linked her arm in Kitty's and said with a conspiratorial gleam in her eye, “You'd better make a good second impression then.”