



## A MESSAGE FROM CHICKEN HOUSE

It's no secret that *Pride and Prejudice* has captured the hearts of readers for centuries. But what's been under wraps, until now, is the life and voice of one of its more minor characters – Lydia, the youngest Bennet sister – who's anything but minor in this funny and fresh reimagining of the beloved novel.

Lydia is spirited, witty and independent – a modern girl before her time. Through her diary entries and letters, we see a young woman trying to break free, trying to get what she wants, but who just . . . CAN'T. But there's romance and adventure on her horizon, and with it a life that she would have never thought possible.

Not to be too Austentatious, but I think there's a lot of Lydia in me. The author has told me she thinks there's a lot of Wickham in her. And I KNOW that readers will love seeing themselves in these much-loved characters . . . brought to life in the modern age in a way like never before.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Cunningham', with a stylized, flowing script.

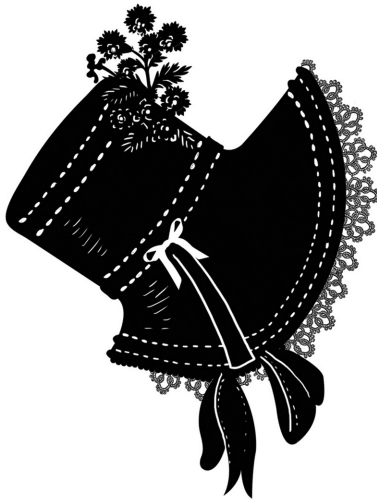
**BARRY CUNNINGHAM**

Publisher

Chicken House

# Lydia

THE WILD GIRL  
OF PRIDE & PREJUDICE



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*For Elinor*

ALSO BY NATASHA FARRANT

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Hertfordshire

1811

but really DECADES behind the civilized world  
because we are in  
the Depths of the English countryside  
where  
nothing  
EVER  
happens



Thursday, 13th June

I am fifteen years old today, and this journal was a present from Mary. She says I must write in it every day to improve my mind.

“Whatever for,” Mamma cried, “when she is so pretty?”

Father asked, “Are we even certain Lydia *has* a mind?”

“Of course she does!” Mary said. “It’s just not very developed.”

“Excuse me!” I tried to look down my nose at her, which was not easy because I was sitting and she was standing. “Right now, my undeveloped mind thinks you are extremely rude.”

Mamma snatched the diary out of my hand and waved it about like a murder weapon. “You had much better have given her some ribbon! She is so clever at making things.”

“What should I write about?” I asked, retrieving the diary.

“Reflections and meditations,” Mary murmured. “Prayers. Observations. The opposite of your usual frivolities.”

“I am not frivolous,” I snarled.



Father cried, “Ha!” and left the room.

“You are a *bit*,” Kitty said.

“Just write down what you do each day, dear.” Jane frowned at Kitty and Mary, urging them to be nice.

“And how it makes you feel,” Lizzy added.

So, to begin!

For breakfast, Hill made my favourite sweet rolls, with fresh cream and raspberry jam, which made me happy. Then my sisters gave me my presents in order of age, as always, from the oldest to the youngest.

Jane gave me some lace to trim my new sprigged muslin. This also made me happy. Jane always gives the prettiest things.

Lizzy gave me a yellow ribbon for my bonnet, which made me cross because she knows I wanted the lilac.

Mary gave me this journal (and I have already said quite enough about *that*).

Kitty gave me a needlepoint cushion. “Lord knows what you will do with it,” she said, “but cushions are the only thing I know how to make. You needn’t pretend to like it.” So I didn’t, but then one of the new tabby kittens kneaded it with his tiny claws, clambered on to it with his tiny legs, and fell asleep with tiny snores. It is a perfect kitten bed. Kitty and I carried him up to our room. We have called him Napoleon, because he is small but already tyrannical. And so the cushion was good, too.

My father gave me five shillings and my mother gave me her jade earrings, the ones I have wanted for ever, and these made me feel almost rich.

“The earrings were to be yours after I am gone,” Mamma said. “Lord knows your inheritance will be small enough, but

you are growing up so fast, my Lydia! And even though everyone knows how I suffer from my nerves, the doctor assures me that I am unlikely to die for years. You had much better enjoy the earrings now while you are young and beautiful.”

This afternoon I wanted to walk to Meryton, as with Father’s shillings and my savings I finally have enough for the lavender gloves with grey pearl buttons in Savill’s, but it rained and I am reduced to writing, which is even harder work than I expected and is making my hand ache. This evening, my aunt and uncle Philips come to dinner with the Lucases, if the rain does not cause them all to cancel. Lord, how I wish we lived in a town like them! It may be only a mile away, but it might as well be twenty. It is too dull, being stuck out here in the country.

I showed my journal to Mary, and asked if my mind was improved yet. She said that it was not.

“Just try to write one thing each day that is sensible,” she said. “Or are you afraid someone will read it and discover you do have a brain after all?”

I grabbed the diary back from her.

“I am not afraid of anything,” I told her. “But Mamma was right. I would much sooner you had given me ribbons.”