

Lydia's Lives

Chapter One

Lydia's Memoirs - 1810

IT is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. I recall my older sisters Lizzie and Jane saying so whenever an eligible single man of good fortune settled in our neighbourhood. Mamma naturally always agreed – at that time it was for them the height of a season that has no beginning and no end for most single ladies and their relatives – husband hunting.

It is also a truth, though not quite so universally acknowledged, that Lydia *will* not and *cannot* write anyone's memoirs. Enemies will say I am *incapable* of doing so. Friends, who know me better, will attribute any incapacity to nothing more than indolence.

But I am not completely one or the other – and the opening lines of these Memoirs ought to be an *acknowledgement* of *that* truth.

I myself would never have considered engaging in such an activity – regular writing, that is, something to which I am not by nature inclined – if I had not been most *strongly* urged by influential friends to write my Memoirs. Indeed, I am, so to speak, obeying a *Royal Command*.

I have no idea how other people choose a starting date for their Memoirs. But I knew immediately I should open mine in AD1810, my 13th year, when two truly notable events of my life occurred.

This was the year when I learned we had American relatives and that a great-uncle from New England planned to visit us.

Mamma said: 'He *is* a traitor to King George!' Papa replied: 'Don't be so foolish!' Papa was right. Mamma was being foolish. Great uncle William is no longer a traitor! For he is *now* an American – *not* an Englishman!

But perhaps for me the greatest day of the year was my first formal ball – and everyone whose opinion *I* valued agreed I looked stunning in my new ball gown!

There are few moments in a young lady's formative years so exciting or important as her first formal ball. The memory stays with most women forever! Perhaps this is not so true of less livelier, more serious minded young ladies. (My three sisters Jane, Elizabeth and Mary immediately come to mind. In Mary's case I do believe she was reading a book of sermons or philosophy even as she cleared the entrance to my Mamma's womb).

For a time it seemed there would be no ball or new splendid ball gown – both plans would have to be put to one side for a later date – a much later date! I was too young

for both ball and gown. So said Papa. Mamma, after listening to my fervent, tearful protestations that my life was at an end, disagreed with him.

Papa said I would look out of place at a ball. Jane, Lizzie and Mary had all had to wait until they were 16 for their first ball. Mamma replied: 'But Lydia's already taller and better formed than her sisters.' My sisters objected to this. They objected even more strenuously when I said, most forcefully, '*Much* better formed – in *every* respect!'

Papa is usually as firm as a rock, but Mamma, whose willpower is mostly only as strong and as consistent as winter workhouse gruel, can at times wear him down as surely as the drip, drip of water will eventually carve a channel through a slab of granite. After so much of Mamma's drip, drip I got my ball ticket and new gown.

So it was agreed – I *would* go to the ball.

Mamma then said all the girls needed new gowns – and as mine was to be my first it should be of the very best quality. Papa objected to the cost – he urged her to buy cheaper gowns. The chances of Mamma doing so were as likely as a cat kissing its captive mouse a tender farewell.

Mamma said, 'Buying cheap goods is often a false economy. And *you* especially ought to keep in mind our girls must be seen to *best* advantage at all public events – but most particularly at a ball.'

What Mamma *meant* was that balls and other social events gave all mamas and daughters their greatest opportunity to achieve their constant dream – *early* marriage for all. Of course, as in any respectable family, only *suitable* gentlemen would be considered. And Mamma's first enquiry in establishing the *suitability* of any gentlemen as a contender in the Bennet marriage stakes was: What is his yearly income? The richer the better. But all applicants for the honoured title of Bennet son-in-law should certainly come with an annual income of not less than £2,000! On that point Mamma was determined.

Not that marriage was on my mind at 13. That could wait! A ball for me was an opportunity for fun and frolics – on the dance floor and off!

And so it arrived, *the evening* – my first ball. I cannot claim to have been the belle of *that* ball – I needed more than a full figure and a flattering gown for *that*. I lacked *experience* – what young lady of 13 doesn't? But I made a great impression to judge from my full dance card, the admiring looks constantly sent in my direction. And when not dancing with gentlemen of all shapes, sizes and ages I made the acquaintance of a number of people – some of a most peculiar kind!

Although perhaps not the belle of the ball, one lady, a visitor to our town, was the centre of attention for both gentlemen and ladies from start to finish – for very different reasons! The lady's escorts, two of her sons, were also a matter of interest and speculation – again for *different* reasons! A conversation I had with one of the sons meant that Lizzie finished the evening less satisfied than I did – due to a little trickery on my part.

Sir Julian Makepeace, whose turn it was to act as master of ceremonies for the ball, made the introductions. *They* were Irish nobility. *She* was a Lady Delaney of the Dublin Delaneys. Her party made quite a stir when they arrived. The musicians had ceased playing for an interval and it seemed the room became very still and silent when the family entered.

For a woman of her age the lady had retained a remarkably fine figure – and much of its essential features were on display for everyone to see (and most particularly the gentlemen). She wore an off the shoulder skin tight silver ball gown reflecting the lights and giving prominence to every voluptuous feminine feature – in particular a vast bosom emerging like two white volcanic peaks from the tight laced confines of her bodice.

Followed by her sons she sailed into the room, a great galleon escorted by a pair of frigates. Preceded by Sir Julian, who made the introductions to our leading families, it was not long before she and her sons had seated themselves, for at each introduction she gave but the briefest nod of condescension and was swiftly followed in like manner by her sons (whose names we learned were James and Connor, the former being 21 and the latter 24).

The family's brief promenade was greeted with open mouths by the ladies – and bulging eyes by most of the gentlemen. It seemed she was ignored by Papa, although he does have the ability to see quite well out of the back of his head – something all five of his children have experienced from time to time.

I was sitting with Lizzie as this promenade took place. After the Delaneys and the Bennets had formally acknowledged each others' existence with the swiftest and most meagre of bows, and the Irish visitors had passed on, Lizzie whispered, 'That lady seems like a very elegant man-eating fish seeking to find its prey.' Papa disagreed. 'More like a famished buzzard circling a flock of dozing pigeons.'

If the gentlemen were her prey she succeeded – for from the time of her entry to the close of the ball she was surrounded by a gallant crew of all ages eager to be of service in one way or another. I might have felt quite envious if I had not been well supplied with offers of dance and Lady Delaney's admirers had not been either too old or too stuffy to be of interest to younger and livelier characters such as myself.

Her sons, tall and very elegant, were splendidly attired, but in no way could they outshine their mother. Papa, who seemed to have taken an instant dislike to the family, said, 'They are foppish.' Then he added, 'There is something disagreeable and unmanly in that pair.' Then James approached and asked permission to dance with me. I agreed somewhat reluctantly. Papa didn't approve, but his 'I don't think.....' was cut short by Mamma. Smiling, she interrupted Papa's objection. 'But of course Lydia will dance with you.' And so it was.

A strange young man, it seemed to me. He talked a great deal as we waited to go up and down the room. Much of his conversation related to the newest fashions in Italy, France and London – he seemed to have a most detailed knowledge of the more intimate garments that ladies wear. But it was his first words that astonished me most.

‘My Mamma told me to approach you and ask for a dance.’

For a moment or two I was speechless. I could only reply, ‘And do you always have to do what your Mamma tells you?’

‘Of course! Doesn’t everyone? Don’t you?’

My indignant reply was, ‘For Mamma, almost never! For my Papa, sometimes.’

‘How odd,’ he said. ‘My brothers and I rarely obey my Papa.’

‘How extraordinary,’ I said, ‘does he care so little about disciplining his children?’

‘Oh, not really. We have very rarely seen him.’

‘Do business affairs keep him so long from home?’ I asked.

‘Most certainly *affairs* kept him from home at one time – he had a passionate liking for certain kinds of Continental ladies. It was while indulging in one such *affair* that he suffered a fatal seizure.’

‘That is so sad,’ I said, although I found it difficult to conjure up an image of the event.

He tittered. ‘Not so much for Papa, he was quickly past it all. I imagine *he* died a happy man! More distressing for the poor lady involved, I should think. Such an embarrassing contretemps!’

‘What must your poor Mama have felt to learn of such a betrayal?’

James sniffed. ‘I’ve never thought of Mamma ever being *poor* in any sense at all. She has always had an *independent* social life. No! My Mamma’s only concern has been her sons, the estate and the succession.’

‘Surely there should be no problem. I hear there are four sons and your oldest brother must have already succeeded to the title and the estates.’

‘Ah, but none of us are married, nor have we shown any inclination to do so.’ He tittered. ‘And that, my dear, is why my Mamma has ordered me to dance with you – for like my brothers I am being driven relentlessly around the Kingdom by my Mamma to find a wife. She thinks you have the look of the finest breeder in the room!’

‘How disgusting!’ I said. ‘I am not long turned 13 – and have no interest in *breeding* on behalf of you, your mother or anyone else. I’ll not start thinking and talking about such things as marriage and husbands – and certainly not *breeding* as you put it – until I’m 15 or 16. Just as my sisters do – and Mamma, of course.’ But I felt compelled to add, ‘Although my thoughts might turn in that direction somewhat earlier if a handsome young gentlemen of fortune should take my fancy. Or me his.’

James bowed. ‘I do apologise if I have been too forward. I can still hardly believe you to be so young – you are such an extremely tall, mature and well formed lady.’

I returned his bow. ‘I thank you for the compliment, if such it is. But I still think it extraordinary that you and your Mamma seem to regard young English ladies as some kind of cow.’

‘I had not thought in such crude terms,’ he replied. ‘But even if it is so we are no different from every royal family in Europe, as well as the nobility.’

‘Perhaps so. It reminds me of what Mr Pottykins, my friend the apothecary, says of breeding cows. He says contented cattle make the best breeding cows. I suppose that whatever wives you and your brothers select on behalf of your Mamma and the Delaney posterity will need to be of the contented kind.’

As we were coming to the conclusion of our dance I saw that Lizzie was without a partner and talking to Mamma and Papa.

‘I think the young lady you should have approached in the first place is my older sister Lizzie,’ I said. ‘In respect of age and temperament she would suit you very well. She has a very placid nature – some people might even say at times she verges on the bovine.’

‘Bovine?’ James asked.

‘*Cow-like* – it was something the apothecary taught me,’ I replied. ‘I think if you dance with Lizzie she will be *most* interested in any proposals you may have to make.’

They did dance and Lizzie had a face like thunder. I thought the glares like lightning bolts she sent in my direction were such that they would pierce my breast. I managed to avoid being alone with her for several days and so escaped a tongue lashing. But I did find it necessary to change seats at the dining table after twice being surreptitiously kicked in the shins. The smile stayed fixed to Lizzie’s face as she mounted her undercover guerrilla attacks on my legs.

The day after the ball I overheard Papa and Mamma discussing Lady Delaney and her sons.

‘I hear Lady Delaney is seeking wives for her sons,’ Mamma said. ‘I thought Lizzie seemed to get along well with the younger son, James. Do you think....?’

‘No, I don’t!’ said Papa.

‘You haven’t heard what I was going to say,’ Mamma said.

‘I know what you intended to say. Lady Delaney is touring the country and seeking a speedy marriage for her sons in order to secure the estate and the line – and you have Lizzie in mind as the bride. But let me assure you that none of our daughters will ever marry into *that* family.’

‘I must admit I do not like Lady Delaney – but they *are* a wealthy family,’ Mamma said.

‘I like none of them,’ Papa said. ‘And the Delaney sons have no liking for our daughters – or any other female for that matter.’

‘*Oh!*’ said Mamma.

‘Exactly! *Oh!*’

I was somewhat ignorant at the time and I wondered just what ‘*Oh!*’ meant. I have since known a number of gentlemen concerning whom some folk might well exclaim ‘*Oh!*’

Whether the Delaneys made approaches to other families with young daughters in our neighbourhood I never heard. When they left they went as they came—without *breeders* of any kind – male or female.

Horror was *Mamma's* response to the letter we received from our American uncle. Papa told us, 'We have a relative from America coming to see us – my great-uncle William has written from Boston to say he hopes to visit us shortly. He last came to this country 50 years ago – before the Revolutionary War.'

Mrs Bennet's *daughters* are *not* horrified by the news. We were all delighted and excited, so much so that Papa ordered us to stop jumping about and reduce the noise. To murmured agreement from us all Jane said, 'I didn't even know we had an American relative!'

'There is more than one – William has a twin brother, Frederick,' Papa told us.

'And William is *not* the one we should be entertaining!' Mamma cried. 'He fought against the King while Frederick stayed loyal.'

'It is strange that political opinions can be held with such violence as to lead men into battle against each other,' Mary said

'Politics had nothing to do with it,' said Papa. 'They have fought almost from the day they were born, so it is said – and they were fated to be on opposing sides. Believe me, if William had chosen to fight for the British – Frederick would have served with the Americans.'

Papa added, 'Frederick now lives in Canada. At least the last I'd heard of him he was alive – he was an agent in control of Indian territories.'

'What does that mean?' I asked.

'It means that what he lost in the War of Independence in America he has rapidly recouped in Canada.'

'And how does he do that?' I asked.

'He made one fortune trading with Indians in America – he is now making another fortune *protecting* the rights of Indians in Canada,' Papa said.

'I just don't understand how two brothers could be *so different*,' Mamma said.

'The differences were there right at the beginning,' Papa said.

'Please explain,' Mamma said.

Papa sighed. 'Cain and Abel! Cain and Abel! Think about it.'

'I still don't understand.'

'They were the *first* brothers,' Papa said. 'And Cain set the pattern for fratricidal murder when he killed his brother Abel.'

'How does this apply to your uncles?' Jane asked.

'They disliked each other intensely from their earliest childhood,' Papa said.

'Tell them, tell them – tell them what happened!' Mamma cried..

Papa sighed. 'The brothers have fought each other all of their lives and it stayed so until they came to a permanent parting of the ways at the battle of Bunker Hill in

Boston in the revolutionary war – William fought for liberty – Frederick stayed loyal to King George.’

‘What happened?’ Lizzie asked.

‘William and his comrades stood at the top of the hill behind their brushwood redoubts and slaughtered the Redcoats as they charged and charged up the hill. Frederick caught a ball in the leg – but survived to be transported with other Loyalists from Boston to Canada. There is a tradition in the family that it was a ball from a musket fired by William that found its mark in Frederick. Nonsense, of course – hundreds of musket balls were fired that day.’

‘Such a shame. Such a shame,’ Mamma said. ‘Brothers fighting each other.’

‘It happens each time there is a civil war,’ Papa said. ‘Remember, in our civil war brothers, fathers, cousins fought and killed each for the Royalist and Roundhead cause.’

‘That was different,’ Mamma said. ‘It was such a long time ago. Your uncles are *still* alive!’

Papa sighed. ‘If you say so. Nevertheless, we’ll have to forgive *both* brothers for *not* being long since dead; and we will receive Uncle William with courtesy while he is our guest.’

Interludes

Lydia’s Diary 1810

January 1 – December 31

Daily weather reports: Wet, dry, sunny, cold, windy, gales, hailstones, fog, frost, snow. I have spoken to my friend the apothecary Mr Pottykins and he confirms that according to the laws of nature and chance it must be one or the other on each day of the year. With this entry I have, in a manner of speaking, done my daily weather entries for the year – with a few strokes of the pen!

January 1

This is my very first diary – and Papa hopes that I will follow the example of all my sisters and make *daily* entries. I fear he will be disappointed – I will only write as the mood takes me. In this I am sure I will be following in the footsteps of three of my sisters, for I am certain only goody goody Mary really makes a proper *daily* entry. Kitty once carelessly left her diary unguarded on our dressing table and I had a quick peek. There was very little in the way of writing but many pages filled with sketches of dresses. Very artistic! Kitty *begged* me not to reveal her *secret* – and as we are friends in a *sisterly* way I swore that my lips would remain sealed forever. Kitty bought my silence for a very small price – an occasional farthing to spend in the pie shop in Meryton.

January 5

Christmas and New Year celebrations seem things of a distant past. Days now so quiet and uneventful! Papa says it's almost as though the whole somnolent World has settled back in his chair, hands crossed on rounded belly, as he still digests his Christmas dinner!

January 6

But nights are more turbulent than days! A pig has been stolen from a farm close to Sir Julian Makepeace's estate. A large family of Romany gypsies named Smith have (as usual!) been accused – but after a diligent search of the gypsy encampment in one of Sir Julian's woods the constables (as always!) found not a trace of evidence. Not a single hog's bristle remains!

Papa says the best evidence of the Smiths' guilt immediately after a pig or sheep disappears is the sleek skin and plump bellies of the children – and the satisfaction and smirks on the faces of the men and women.

Sir Julian's neighbours have long demanded that he drive away the Smiths from his land – they complain of loss of animals. Sir Julian refuses – he says *he* hasn't lost a single hen.

I hope the Smiths stay – I like their children – they have taught me many strange things. I now know how to cook a hedgehog – a useful art if we Bennets descend into poverty, Mamma's constant fear. Rich husbands, not baked hedgehogs, is her answer to poverty.

February 8

Visited my friend Mr Pottykins the apothecary today. He says Rosanna, who is 19 and the eldest of the Smith children, is the *only* reason Sir Julian allows the gypsies to remain camped in his woods. Mr Pottykins says she is very beautiful in a dark and Italianate way. She *is* beautiful and I like her personally, but I find her perfume of wood fire smoke and hedgehog stew a trifle overpowering.

March 11

Sabbath – and so to church. Today Reverend Wellyboy has given additional spice to the service for it was one of those occasions when some poor sinner, whose name I cannot recall, was made to stand on the penitential stool beneath the pulpit.

On the way home from church Jane, who is a kind-hearted creature, said to Lizzie, 'It seems somehow so unchristian!'

Lizzie snorted. 'Compassion is not a requirement for ordination in the Church – from my reading of it too much compassion can be a drawback for a young Christian man seeking ordination.'

This evening I had a rare opportunity for a solitary talk with Lizzie and after I had pressed her for information about the sinful girls she told me of what I had not known about the parson.

Lizzie said, 'Mr Wellyboy's usual recommended cure for such sinning is a whipping, followed by a quick marriage, if possible; where that cannot be arranged the poor girl is hidden from public sight by being given shelter with a farmer and his wife, who in return for this act of *charity* receive a shilling a week as well as the services of an unpaid servant until the birth of the child, whose eventual destination is the poorhouse. It is not unknown for the farmer to get the girl in child again – and for the outraged farmer's wife to throw the poor wretch again on the mercy of the parish.'

'I'm not sure I understand what you mean,' I said.

She seemed not to hear me, for she continued as though I had not spoken. 'As you grow a little older – and perhaps more observant – you will notice that no pew holder is ever on the penitential stool – it's reserved for the poorer folk of the parish who we see standing at the back of the church waiting to receive their weekly dose of spiritual gruel. The sins of pew holders are not a matter for public denunciation. But if Papa was not so dilatory I'm certain he would have long since forbidden spiritual stoning for rich and poor alike.'

April 29

Papa has heard from a cousin serving with Viscount Wellington in Portugal. Clever, clever Wellington! He has carried out a cunning fighting retreat since the French invaded Portugal – and the English and Allied forces fell back behind an impregnable line of 100 fortresses called the Lines of Torres Vedras that defend Lisbon – and they were all built in the greatest secrecy, the work being completely unknown to the French.

Our cousin says the French will bleed and starve in front of the forts – but he disagrees with the views of some observers at home that the war will now be a short one. Papa says whatever the views of observers at home sitting in the comfort of their club chairs for the men who do the fighting all wars *seem long!*

June 18

My 13th birthday. Received a guinea spending money – the first time. In previous years it has been but half a guinea. Also new shoes, shift, pelisse, and an evening gown in the low cut fashion – the latter essential to give breath space to my bosom which *grows and grows*. Saw my friend the apothecary yesterday – he says I am a finely formed young lady. *He* should know – for I overheard my Aunt Phillips declare Mr Pottykins had much *experience* of ladies when living in London.

July 22

St Mary Magdalene's Day in the Calendar of Saints. Parson spoke most forcefully for one full hour on the sins of that fallen woman, the whore of the town. When I asked

Papa *his* opinion he said that as Christ had welcomed the woman into His house so would he – if she ever bothered to knock at our door. As for myself I think she was more to be pitied than persecuted.

I find romance in the account of how Mary's tears had bathed Jesus' feet, which she had dried with her hair, and had then put costly perfume ointment on His head. (Although the Apostles, being MEN, could not agree as to where the ointment went, on our Lord's *feet* or His *head*. This is NOT a matter of *importance* about which ladies would have erred if *they* had written the Gospels).

Parson Wellyboy did not say so, but I just *knew* that he was in alliance with Judas and thought Mary's money was ill-spent – and whatever the Gospel says about forgiveness if the Magdalene came to our town the parson would have her swiftly whipped and in the stocks as a target for rotting vegetables.

I know if the Lord were to visit our parish Mr Wellyboy would seize Him by his coat lapels, wag a reproving bony finger in the Saviour's face and berate Him for being criminally lax in *His* treatment of Sin. I once heard Papa tell Lizzie, 'Mr Wellyboy is one of those creatures who delight in casting the first stone – *first* stones being the *only* sort with which they are familiar.'

On the way home from church asked for knowledge concerning *whore*, but as with *fornication* was hushed and shushed. Papa, who normally preaches that knowledge is good for mankind, threatened me with denial of food and banishment to the bedroom if I did not remain quiet. Most unusual for Papa – the threats I mean, for such is not his nature.

August 15

Today I became a woman! At least in the eyes of Nature! It came suddenly but not entirely unexpected for my friend Katie had warned me in great detail about what every girl must endure when crossing (as she put it) the Jordan that separates childhood from the beginning of womanhood. I suppose it must be somewhat shocking and frightening for those little girls who have not been forewarned that there is more to life than playing with dolls. I was told nothing of such matters by Mamma, Lizzie or Jane. I was fortunate to have an experienced older friend such as Katie, and because of what I learned from her I was able to speak of it to Bessy – for she has always been more friend to me than our house maid. So when I felt the onset of what she calls 'the curse of Eve' I went immediately to her and she took care of me.

October 20

Papa has heard from our cousin in Portugal with Wellington. The English and their allies have won a great victory at a place called Busaco. Our cousin says some of Wellington's staff are calling the battle a turning point in the war. Papa says no one taking part in a battle can truly judge its long- term consequence. He says only historians now unborn will be able to decide on such matters.

November 16

Caroline Marples, 22, the oldest of the five Marples girls is to marry! There is an announcement in the press and the lucky man is a captain with £600 a year. The girls are not close friends of ours but we do meet at balls and other social occasions. They are all, it must be admitted and without wishing to be cruel, exceedingly plain.

Mamma has always doubted that any of the Marples girls can marry and prophesises, with great relish it seems, that the mother and five daughters will end their days in poverty.

News of the marriage has come as a great surprise to Mamma, for Caroline is the plainest of the girls and at 22 approaching that age when desperation for *any* husband is not far distant. Mamma said, 'Some men – and of course I am referring to men of some fortune – can overlook such ill-features in a young woman as plumpness, poor teeth, a sallow complexion. But a very large nose is an almost universal barrier to any kind of proposal – even of the £300 a year class! And Caroline, poor creature, has been singled out to inherit the Marples Monstrosity!'

Papa, who had been reading the paper while listening to Mamma's disquisition stood up and walked to the door. He said, 'I have always thought Miss Marples one of the most charming, kind and intelligent girls of my acquaintance – and I am not surprised that there is a man of intelligence who wishes her to be his wife'

As he left the room he added, 'The worst deformity in a young woman, and one that would be the greatest impediment to marriage if observed in time, is something that you have *not* mentioned – a cruel and constantly wagging tongue. It is one that many a man would gladly pay £1,000 a year to avoid being entangled with.'

Mamma murmured, 'I wonder to whom your father can be referring – for we know of no-one of that kind in this neighbourhood.'

(Lydia's diary 16 June, 1818)

I have recently developed a new passion – horse racing. Today was my first visit to Epsom to witness the running of the Derby – as a guest of the Royal brothers, the Prince Regent and my friend Willie, The Duke of Clarence, and his mistress, Dora Jordan.

I was able to win a little money and altogether it was a most enjoyable day – spoiled only by a remark I overheard concerning myself. Lady Jermingham, for it was she who made the comment, said to a friend: 'That girl has forgotten the lessons she learned on her mother's knee!'

At that moment I was sitting on Willie's knees, but no one else seemed to find this remarkable, including Dora –and as the mother of several of his children I would have thought that if anyone had the right to object to my use of the Duke's knees as a resting place it would have been *she*. Indeed, rather than object, Dora sat next to the duke laughing and exchanging pleasantries with him and me.

No, I can only assume that Lady Jermingham's unwonted rude words arose from her jealousy. I have found favour with the royal brothers and their friends – and it is obvious they prefer my company to hers!

Thinking on the matter there *are* some lessons I have learned from my mother's behaviour – but not necessarily at her knee – *she never sat still long enough for that!*

Money: Mamma's constant refrain is acquire it, count it, hoard it! I soon learned her philosophy is faulty. I believe money's greatest value is in the spending of it!

The bedroom: With their concerns for the entail of the estate I suspect the shadow of lawyers hung over Mamma and Papa's love making for years – if sour desperation for a male heir can be described in terms of *love*. So – leave the lawyers outside the bedroom door.

Attitude to life: My Mamma engenders little true respect – indeed, it is contempt that she arouses in some. How describe her? Cheese and pickles may do. If my mother is served cheese and pickles she invariably complains: there are too many pickles or not enough pickles; too little cheese, or the flavour of the cheese is too mild – or too strong. She has not the grace to accept what is offered – or the intelligence to realise that silence may be a tool to social acceptance.

(Lydia's diary – undated)

Spent the day with their Royal Highnesses. I sometimes think it a remarkable thing, as the poet might say, that Fate has enabled me to walk with Princes. I am happy to say *walking* is all I do. Unlike *some* people, Lady Jermingham comes to mind, I do not *lay* with Princes!

(Copy of a letter – Lydia to the Prince Regent – undated).

Although my Memoirs are likely to be some years in the completion, and delivered in instalments, I thought the work ought to be privately dedicated now to those who inspired it – you, Your Royal Highness, and your Noble brothers.

I was astonished when you first suggested, and then commanded, that I should write a sort of personal history for an eventual limited distribution. I am honoured to think anything in my drab, uneventful life should be of such interest to you and the distinguished members of the Silk Garter Society.

In compliance with your wishes I have made the journal *intimate* – but only as is publicly permissible for a lady. Of my more recent life you are only too aware. You have suggested I give a few details of my family.

In the absence of a male heir, Papa's estate was entailed to a distant male relative. Poor mother and father made strenuous efforts for years to secure fiscal peace of mind through birth of a son, but failed most miserably. What they did achieve were five girls – the Five P's. Jane, Lizzie, Mary, Kitty, and finally, your humble servant. The five Ps? From oldest to youngest – Prissy, Prudish, Peculiar, Passive. And myself? When I made up the 5 P's list I was but 10 – and at that age I thought of myself as

Passionate. Now, of course, I am known to some as Cherie-kin – a name the emperor gave me!

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