

**The
Brothers'
Fitzwilliam**

Prologue

My Dear Lord Matlock,

It is with great regret that I write you today on matters concerning your eldest son, Young Lord Fitzwilliam. It pains me greatly to inform you that your son excels in none of his subjects, constantly torments his fellow classmates, and to put it quite frankly, is rather lazy.

With consideration to the greater good of this noble institution, we regretfully must expel him. In cases such as these we often permit our young gentlemen to finish the term. However, due to circumstances beyond our control, we feel it best to send him home immediately.

*I am your most sincere and humble servant,
Edmond Predelow
Headmaster, _____ School*

P.S. Your younger son, Master Montgomery Fitzwilliam, carries himself just as a young gentleman ought. He is a great favourite with all his peers, has the respect and admiration of all his masters, and is an outstanding addition to _____. Furthermore, he has been moved up to the sixth form's cricket team, where, he has been a welcome addition.

It has been a great pleasure having him here and I hope that the unfortunate circumstances regarding your elder son will not force you to discontinue our very happy relationship with regards to providing young Montgomery's education.

"CASSIE!"

Chapter One

The Boys of Summer

1799...

"ONE-HUNDRED-FORTY-SEVEN POUNDS! ONE HUNDRED FORTY-SEVEN POUNDS! WOULD YOU KINDLY TELL ME HOW YOU HAVE SPENT ONE-HUNDRED-FORTY-SEVEN POUNDS IN YOUR FIRST YEAR AT OXFORD?"

"Really, Father; it's quite simple; first, I needed a boat!"

"A BOAT, SIR?"

"Yes, Father! All the fellows up at Oxford have their own boat. Tell him Rushworth, old chap!"

"Yes sir, he needed a boat. I have a boat. Actually, I have two; one for the river and another for the lake."

"MR. RUSHWORTH, YOU SEEM TO FORGET THAT YOU ARE AN INDEPENDENT YOUNG MAN WITH YOUR OWN INCOME! MY SON, LORD GOOD-FOR-NOTHING HERE STILL DEPENDS UPON ME TO LINE HIS POCKETS! NOW ANDREW, TELL ME HOW YOU SPENT IT ALL! DID YOU SPEND YOUR ENTIRE YEARLY ALLOWANCE ON BOATS?"

"Really, Father! I didn't spend it all on boats!"

"AND WHAT, IF I MAY ASK, DID YOU SPEND IT ON, SIR?"

"Firstly, there was that fifty pounds for the gig."

"YOU SPENT FIFTY POUNDS ON A GIG?"

"It came with a horse, too!"

"I DON'T CARE IF IT CAME WITH... !"

"Christopher, dear! Please lower your voice! Remember we have a guest!"

"ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT! WHAT ELSE DID YOU DO WITH MY MONEY!"

"Then I needed to spend forty-five pounds on that other gig."

"WHAT! YOU BOUGHT ANOTHER GIG?"

"No Father, I spent it on the Dean's gig."

"PLEASE, NO MORE! CASSIE, YOU ASK HIM. I-I JUST CAN'T."

"Andrew, my darling; what your father wants to know is, why did you buy two gigs?"

"Mother, I did not *buy* two gigs, I only bought the one. I gave Dean Phelps forty-five pounds for his gig that somehow... ended up in the river."

"AND HOW, IF I MAY ASK, DID DEAN PHELPS' GIG END UP IN THE RIVER?"

"Well Father, it was on the day that I bought my new boat... "

§

After I finished that particular story (and several others), Father continued to prattle on about nothing...

"FIFTY AND FORTY-FIVE PLUS EIGHTEEN PLUS TWENTY-TWO AND THIRTY-FOUR THAT MAKES... CARRY THE ONE... THAT MAKES ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-NINE... ONE HUNDRED SIXTY NINE POUNDS... STERLING ! ANDREW, BY YOUR OWN ACCOUNT BOOK ... WHICH, QUITE FRANKLY, I'M AMAZED YOU EVEN CONDESEND TO KEEP. YOU ARE TWENTY POUNDS OVER YOUR YEARLY ALLOWANCE!"

"Nineteen, dear."

"WHAT? ARE YOU SURE, CASSIE?"

"Yes, dear."

"ANDREW, YOU'LL SEND ME TO MY GRAVE OR TO THE POOR... "

Father was now so red with anger that I saw only one course of action before me; and as luck would have it, Mr. "Stupidness" Fitzwilliam is doing the one thing that I knew Father could not abide...

"I say, old brother of mine, what have you there?"

LA! I am so clever!

"MONTY!" Father bellowed at the top of his lungs, turning all of his attention onto my dim-witted younger brother.

"Hmm, what... y-yes, F-Father."

"PUT THAT BLASTED LETTER AWAY AT THE DINNER TABLE, BOY!"

"S-Sorry, F-Father. Yes, F-Father, s-sorry!"

Of course Mother could not bear to have her dearest boy scolded in such a manner... "Christopher, dear, please calm yourself."

"HOW CAN I CALM MYSELF IN THE PRESENCE OF THESE PITIFUL SONS OF YOURS!"

Of course Mother ignored him completely and put all of her attention on her dearest boy.

"Is it a letter from your Uncle Lewis, Monty?"

"Y-Yes, Mother."

"What does your uncle have to say, Dearest?"

Oh lord! Not this, please, not this. We now have to listen to him speak... this is going to be appalling!

"H-He says h-he has three n-new horses, a br-brown mare and t-t-t-two hunters! H-He asks me to v-visit h-him s- soon so I can h-help train them! M-May I go, M-Mother? P- Please! I'm old e-enough now to r-ride Claudio down myself. Per... Per... maybe D-Darcy and I can go down t-together!"

That was excruciating.

"I think you'd better ask your father, dearest."

Hello... this is going to be entertaining!

"Um... F-Father... "

"WHAT?"

"M-May I g-go to R-Rosings for a visit?"

"YOU WERE JUST THERE AT EASTER! YOU NEED TO SPEND THE SUMMER WITH YOUR MOTHER, BOY!"

"Y-yes, F-Father."

Of course he looked down into his plate as if he were ready to cry, bottom lip almost quivering. It almost made me want to feel sorry for him... almost!

"Oh, Christopher, let him go. He can visit until the end of July and spend all of August with us. You know how much Lewis loves having the boys."

Hang on... that was plural... I leapt from my seat.

"I'm not going! Rushworth and I are going to... " (think man) "... Brighton for the summer! Isn't that right, Rushworth?"

"AND HOW, IF I MAY ASK, ARE YOU GOING TO PAY YOUR WAY IN BRIGHTON, SIR?"

"With my allowance, Father."

"ALLOWANCE! ANDREW, YOU'VE ALREADY SPENT YOUR ALLOWANCE!"

"Christopher, I just had a wonderful idea. Andrew can drive Monty down in his new gig."

I whispered, "Mother, I don't have a gig."

She whispered back, "But my darling, you just said..."

I whispered back, "We'll talk about that later, Mother."

Oh heavens, must turn conversation... Ha! Stupid Monty has picked up a book... Perfect!

"I say, what book have you there, Brother?" Clever, clever, clever!

"MONTY!"

"Y-Yes, F-Father."

"PUT THAT BOOK AWAY THIS INSTANT, BOY!"

"Y-Yes, F-Father."

"What were you reading, Dearest?"

"It's a b-book about P-Pirates, M-Mother. I thought I'd better r-read it before I gave it to Anne for her b-birthday. I d-don't t-think I'll give her this one. It's a-a-awfully h-horrid."

"You're such a good boy, Monty."

"WHAT? WHAT ARE YOU SAYING TO YOUR MOTHER, BOY?"

"He was telling me about the pirate book he's reading before presenting to Anne for her next birthday. Seven, what a lovely age!"

"INSTEAD OF READING SILLY BOOKS, BOY; YOU NEED TO BE STUDYING FOR YOUR OXFORD ENTRANCE EXAMINATION!"

The look of panic filled my brother's eyes.

"B-But F-Father, Uncle Lewis s-says he c-can get me into Clare College. We've discussed my going at length. Uncle Lewis s-says they have the best... "

This gets better and better by the minute; Father cannot abide talk of Cambridge.

"CASSANDRA FITZWILLIAM, WILL YOU KINDLY TELL YOUR SON THAT NO SON OF MINE WILL BE GOING TO CAMBRIDGE!"

"Christopher, will you please lower your voice!"

"WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THAT RUSHWORTH? YOU'RE A FELLOW OXFORD MAN! WHAT WOULD

YOU SAY TO YOUR SON IF HE TELLS YOU HE WANTS TO GO TO... CAMBRIDGE!"

"I'd say... I'm sure I'd say... I'd say... "

"YOU'D SAY: NO, YOU WILL NOT GO TO CAMBRIDGE!
YOU'D SAY: OVER MY DEAD BODY! YOU'D SAY: NO
FITZWILLIAM EVER WENT TO CAMBRIDGE IN HIS
LIFE!"

"Rushworth, sir... my name is Rushworth."

"WHAT?!?!"

"Umm... Christopher, my love. I don't see the harm in him going."

"CASSIE, IF I'VE SAID IT ONCE, I'VE SAID IT A
THOUSAND TIMES, CAMBRIDGE IS FOR... "

"Noooo dear, I meant to Rosings. We could take that trip we've always talked of... to Scotland. How I've dreamed of Scotland."

"SCOTLAND?"

Mother then blushed and slowly looked up into my father's eyes and beamed brilliantly. Father faltered.

"Eh... er... yes, Scotland."

Father, never able to resist the charms of his wife, fell silent. He was now caught up in the rapture of her dark eyes and I, my brother and our problems were, for the present, forgotten.

My mother has to be the most brilliant person I know, especially when it comes to handling father. When I marry it will be someone exactly like her. Well, I should say if I marry. There are not half a dozen women in England I would condescend to look at let alone give the time of day. Besides, I have so little patience with them, especially since I am bound to be the handsomest of a couple.

Rushworth shifted uncomfortably in his chair. My parents had now taken this spectacle of theirs a little too far. Father had pulled his chair nearer to Mother and was now kissing her hand. Mother was giggling like a schoolgirl. Really... how gauche.

"I say, Rushworth, old chap! Fancy going down to the village? Old Mr. Hutchinson promised me first choice of the new shipment of gloves in this afternoon."

"M-May I come along, Andrew? He m-might have some new b-books, too."

"No you may not! Rushworth and I have little time for pimply faced brats!"

Monty looked away, hurt. Oh Lord, I cannot bear this! He looked as if he would burst into tears at any moment.

"Oh let him come along, Andy, old chap! I want a chance to see that Claudio of his. We can all ride down together."

"Ride? A horse? Rushworth, I told you, I don't ride horses anymore; nasty things! A clean pair of breeches haven't a chance of remaining clean half a day. And lets not even talk about the smell! We can go in my new curricle."

As soon as I said it I wished it unsaid.

"CURRICLE!?!?!"

"I meant gig, Father! Yes, yes, gig!"

For some reason Monty chose that particular moment to smile slyly at me. He was up to something, I could just tell.

"F-Father," said my brother looking at me the entire time, "Andrew d-doesn't have a... "

"I say, Monty, old chap; do hurry along and saddle Claudio if you're coming to the village with us!"

I'll pay the little brat back, with terrible interest I'll pay him back!

§

Suffice to say after that I beat a hasty retreat from the dining room and Rushworth went upstairs to retrieve his hat and gloves. As I walked to the stable yard I reflected; here I was home from Oxford barely a day and I had already gotten on Father's bad side. This curricle business will have to be eased upon him slowly, when he's in a better mood... if there is such a thing. And speaking of bad moods, Monty ran pass me into the carriage house. When I entered, there he was (the little twerp) hitching up my new curricle. He must have known that my next step with him would be revenge and was only doing this to stay in my good graces. Little does he know; I'm simply waiting for nothing more than opportunity.

"Thank you, Brother," I said, "You are so very handy at things involving the dirt and muck. Next time, though, give the seat a wipe down; there's a good chap."

He slowly walked forward, wiping his grimy hands on the back of his breeches, "May I ride with you in your new gig, Andrew?"

"What do you think?" I said, adjusting the cushions. Monty went into the adjacent stable and began to saddle his horse. "Here, here," I called out across the length of the building, "saddle Rushworth's mount first. And if you do a

decent job, perhaps he will permit you to perform that task for him his entire visit."

"HA... HA... HA, very funny," exclaimed my brother as he led Rushworth's horse out the stall.

Big Jacob the head groom came in. "I can do that, Master M'gomery. Tis my job that is. His Lordship, your father, will have my 'ed ifin he sees you doin' my work."

"Oh, I don't mind, Jacob! I like being around horses!"

"That's not a job for the young master. You let ol' Jacob take care of that."

I walked over to the door, careful not to cross the threshold to keep my shoes from being muddied and remarked, "Oh do let him saddle the horse, Jacob. Father always says that hard work cleanses the soul or the mind or some such thing. I really don't recollect which because, to put it quite frankly, I wasn't listening."

Rushworth came in next and stopped suddenly. "Hang on, why is your little brother saddling my horse, Andy?"

"Little? Look at those feet! He hasn't been little since he was four years old. He's nearly five foot ten now."

"I would say he's closer to six foot. He's going to be as tall as me, perhaps even taller then you."

Really... I thought, Rushworth can be so trying at times, but he was my best friend and he must be tolerated.

When my wearisome brother was finished he called out, "There you go Mr. Rushworth, all done!"

"You can call me just plain Rushworth. You'll be seeing a lot of me at Oxford next term."

That seemed to make Monty's day. My brother perked up immediately and in his overly enthusiastic way said, "Gosh thanks, Rushworth," as if he were one of the fellows.

"Yes, Rushworth. You will be seeing a lot of him as my father says... " I doubled over in laughter "... at Oxford!"

My brother then exclaimed loudly, "At least I will get into Oxford without having to take the entrance examination four times."

Humph! I rolled my eyes. I had no patience for my brother's cheeky little remarks, "Come on Rushworth, old man, it's nearly one o'clock! Father will have our necks if we are not back in time for afternoon tea." Rushworth quickly mounted and I urged my horses into motion.

"Hey, wait for me!"

My half-wit brother raced to finish saddling his horse. By the time he rode up beside the curricle we were half way down the road to the village.

"That must be a very fast horse. Do you race him?" asked Rushworth, admiring the 'oh so perfect' Claudio, a horse that the irksome little upstart wouldn't even have if I had not intervened.

"Yes... I mean no, not in a proper race. Sometimes I race him with Darcy's horse."

"Darcy?"

"My cousin," said my brother, "He lives at Pemberley, about twenty miles from here. You'll meet him next week when he comes up for a visit. He doesn't leave Eton until tomorrow."

I rolled my eyes. "Rushworth doesn't want to meet silly little boys, do you Rushworth? Especially silly little boys as annoying as you and Darcy."

"I should say not! Especially when I came expressly into Derbyshire to meet young ladies. Northampton is so lacking in that area. My mother wanted us to stay with her a little while longer to meet some young ladies thereabouts, but your brother wanted to get home. He promised me a look at the Miss Adams. Come on Andy, tell me more of the Miss Adams!"

"As I said before, Miss Adams is hardly worth your notice. Miss Patricia Adams is tolerable... I suppose and Miss Emily, who I am told is the prettiest, if there is such a thing, is barely sixteen. Besides, I don't think she is out yet."

"Oh, she's out," offered my annoying brother.

"And what would you know about the outs and not outs! You cannot even speak to a girl without stuttering her name!" When I said that I immediately thought to myself how much I really dislike saying hurtful things to my brother, but sometimes he brings them on himself.

"You take that back!"

"Take it back? I will not! It's true isn't it! Last year at Stephan Hawthorne's birthday party I introduced you to Miss Beatrice Witherspoon and what did you say? I am h-h-happy t-t-to make y-you're a-acquaintance M-M-Miss W-W-Wit-t-ther-s-s-p-poon. Lord, I still shudder at the remembrance of that horrid scene to this day!"

As soon as I said it, I wished it unsaid. My brother, with cheeks flushed red, stared away into nothingness.

"Your brother doesn't stutter. We've been talking these last ten minutes and he speaks very well. You mistake yourself, Andy."

"Oh he speaks perfectly well in front of you or me and my mother. But get him in front of my Father or a young lady and he falls to pieces!" Monty urged his horse into a faster canter as I yelled after him. "I only tell you these things for your own good, you know. Girls don't like bumbling idiots. And if we can't get you married off to someone with a good dowry, I'll be the one looking after you the rest of my life!" By the time I said the last words, my brother was at a full gallop and had disappeared over the next hill.



When Rushworth and I reached the village, my brother's horse was already tied up outside of Mr. Hutchinson's shop. We walked inside and there was my tiresome sibling entrenched in the bookshelves. He said nothing upon our entrance. Either he was too caught up in the flowering patterns of the Arctic lily or he was intentionally ignoring me.

"Lord Fitzwilliam, welcome back," cried the elderly shopkeeper, "You are looking very well!"

"Thank you my good man. May I introduce my very particular friend, Mr. James Rushworth of Northamptonshire? I know you will assist him in any way during his visit with my family."

"Certainly sir! Consider me at your service Mr. Rushworth as well as his Lordship here. I assume you are also one of our fine Oxford men?"

Rushworth said proudly, "I should say so!"

"As I was just telling Mrs. Hutchinson this morning, Oxford certainly has a way of adding a certain air of sophistication to a young man."

"Quite right," I said. I did have a certain degree of sophistication, but I think Oxford hardly gave it to me; it is a quality that I possess naturally. The old man smiled up at me expectantly and I then thought it best to ask after his family, "And Mrs. Hutchinson, she is... ?"

"Oh yes, thank you for asking. She would have been here to greet you herself but old Mrs. Morgan developed a chill and my wife is taking her some soup. She will be so sorry to have missed you and your brother. Young Master Fitzwilliam is turning into such a fine young man." Here he turned and nodded towards my brother. "He was just telling me that he will be joining you at Oxford for the Michaelmas term. I'm sure you will be so pleased to have him with you there. Your mother was in here just last week telling me that she expected him soon from school and here he is! You all must be very proud that he won the Latin prize and the Mathematics Prize! Such an excellent young man!"

"Um... yes... very... um proud ... well, about those gloves...
"

"Yes certainly sir. I received your letter just last week and as you asked I have set aside all my newest gloves and leather goods for your perusal. I won't be a moment, let me just step into the back room."

Off he went and I turned to Rushworth. "You see how it is Rushworth, old chap, they all just love me in here!"

The shops bell rang out, as the door was pushed open, "MASTER MONTGOMERY! You're here at last! Come give your old friend a kiss!"

It was the jovial Mrs. Hutchinson.

"Hello Mrs. Hutchinson," said Monty, stepping forward and placing a kiss on the old lady's chubby little hand.

"Such a gentleman, as always!"

"Dear Mrs. Hutchinson, I thought I had missed my chance seeing you today. There is no need to ask if you are well, I can see that for myself!"

"Oh Master Montgomery, you are a sight for sore eyes! Give us a hug!"

He hugged her... Oh really... If there's one thing I hate, it's public displays of affection.

"Mr. Hutchinson said you were tending Mrs. Morgan. I do hope that she is well. I would very much like to pay her my respects."

"That is most kind. Your mother sat with her yesterday and that did her a world of good. When she sees you I fancy her cure will be complete. Now, let me look at you. My, my, such a handsome young man. When did you get home?"

"Last evening."

"And you've found the new books already I see. I told my husband just this morning that when Master Montgomery comes home, he'll make a b-line straight for our new books!"

From my vantage point I could see the old lady pinch his cheek, which made my simple-minded brother blush.

"Have you had your tea, dear? Of course not, what was I thinking. Come in the back. I have those current scones that you fancy so much and blackberry jam, wouldn't that be lovely!"

"Oh, I don't wish to be any trouble."

"And when have you ever been any trouble; never, not my little Monty." He blushed again, smiled shyly and looked down at his feet. "Oh, dear, I am sorry. I guess I cannot call you my little Monty any more; you're no longer a schoolboy. You've grown into such a fine young man now, seventeen next week. Yes, a young man now, and on his way to college. Your parents must be proud; I know I would be. We hear nothing but the best sort of news from your mother concerning you. I heard about the Maths first and the Latin first. I said to myself, I said, that's our Monty for you; he'll make all of Derbyshire proud. Too bad about the History prize, but like I was saying to your mother yesterday, I said, our Monty has to leave something for one of the other boys to take home and knowing our Monty he did his best."

By now I had heard quite enough of this tedious conversation. It was past due for me to receive some attention. I cleared my throat... "A-hmm!"

Mrs. Hutchinson started and drew back. When she recovered, she gave me a stiff curtsy and said, "Your Lordship. How... nice... to see... you... again," and she looked at the floor, wringing her hands.

At that moment old Mr. Hutchinson returned. "Sorry it took so long, but I remembered you took a very narrow fitting in your glove and I wanted to make... Ah, Liddy! I see you're back. Look who have come to see us; the Fitzwilliam brothers."

"Yes, I've seen them, dear."

Silence.

"Ah yes," I finally said, "Lets have a look at those gloves." With one more pinch of the cheek Mrs. Hutchinson went into the back of the shop. My odious brother followed after her, Rushworth went to inspect a bolt of pink satin cloth and as I turned to inspect the gloves the bell on the shop door sounded.

"Lord Andrew Fitzwilliam, as I live and breath! Fancy meeting you today!"

Finally, someone excited to see me. I turned around at the feminine sounding voice. Oh great Scott! It was Miss Adams, the ugly one.



As usual she thrust her hand into my face, expecting me to kiss it. There was no way on this earth I was going to do so. I just said plainly, "Miss Adams, a pleasure."

"I saw your mother in the village last week and I told her to extend my good wishes to you the moment you returned. Did you receive my message?"

"Well... I... ah! May I introduce my particular friend to your acquaintance? Rushworth. RUSHWORTH!"

Rushworth severed his attention away from the fabric and approached. "Miss Sophia Adams may I present Mr. James Rushworth. Rushworth, Miss Adams."

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Miss Adams," he said taking the proffered hand that was being thrust into his face.

"The pleasure is all mine. Any friend of Lord Fitzwilliam is... you know. Do you attend Oxford with his Lordship?"

"Yes, I do."

"And you are from...?"

I knew what she was digging for and I wanted to make a long, unnecessary story short. "He is from Northamptonshire, a place called Sotherton."

"I do not recollect a town called... "

"It is his estate," I interjected wearily, sick of these foolish games women play, "Sotherton Court in Eastern Northamptonshire. Surely you have heard of it!" I could just tell by the gleam in her eye that she was well aware of the property and at this very moment was trying on his last name for size and wondering how on earth she was going to spend twelve thousand a year.

"Ooooh, Mr. Rushworth!"

Rushworth started to smile at the rather plain Miss Adams. I was not going to stand about another minute and watch him make a fool out of himself with the ugliest lady in all of England so I said, "See here, Rushworth, isn't it time that we headed back?"

"Oh, going so soon," she asked. "What a shame! I do hope I will see more of you two in the coming weeks, Lord Fitzwilliam."

"Well," I smiled knowingly, "Rushworth and I are for Brighton. You will have to do without us, isn't that right old chap!"

There now, all Rushworth has to do is back me up and this can all end pleasantly.

"Brighton?" questioned Rushworth, "I don't know about Brighton. My mother wants me to take her to... " His mother... indeed. "... Bath for the summer. And then I need to take her up to London for... " Really... how gauche.

As luck would have it my obnoxious brother exited from the back room. He was quite unaware of what was going on at our end of the room because he was busily licking the drippings of jam from his grimy little fingers and eating one of the two scones that he carried in his grubby little hands. Here was my way out.

"I say Monty, come here."

He walked over quickly not looking up once from the feast that he was eating like a savage.

"Are you not going to say hello to Miss Adams?" As soon as I said Miss Adams, Monty looked up and froze. "Miss Adams, you remember my younger brother Montgomery don't you?"

She performed her part perfectly and just as I predicted she would, she thrust her hand into my brother's face.

"Mr. Montgomery Fitzwilliam, what a pleasant surprise." Her white-gloved hand was poised in mid air in anticipation; my brother could only stare. "I promise not to bite, Mr. Fitzwilliam," she said.

I could tell by the colour in my silly brother's cheeks that he was in a state of complete alarm. He looked up at me, then to Rushworth and then he looked back to me again.

Miss Adams asked him, "Is there something the matter, Mr. Fitzwilliam?"

I knew perfectly well that he could not speak because his mouth was stuffed with scone and jam.

She turned to me, "Is your brother quite alright, Lord Fitzwilliam?"

"Brother," I said, not a little amused, "it is customary to take a lady's hand when she offers it."

Slowly Monty began to take her hand, the hand that I knew perfectly well was covered in jam. This was too ridiculous for words.

When he released her hand Miss Adams shrieked. "Eck! What in heavens name is this? Oh dear... Oh... Oh dear me!" She looked for somewhere to wipe off her glove, dropping her white parasol, only to have my brother bend down to retrieve it, getting blackberry jam stains on that as well. "Oh... dear me... Oh... I uh... Oh dear!"

I was in hysterics and Rushworth looked as if he would burst out in a fit of laughter at any moment as well.

"I must... excuse me... Oh dear!"

Out of the shop she ran. Half a second later my insipid brother, realizing that he was still holding the parasol, ran off after her, crying, "M-Miss Adams w-wait... your p-p-parasol!"

Suffice to say, I made a hasty retreat from my scene of public triumph. But not before purchasing three pairs of new gloves, a box of handkerchiefs and a walking stick, billing it all on my father's account.

§

When we returned home, Rushworth excused himself to make ready for tea and mother ushered me into the drawing room.

"Andy, where is your brother?"

"I'm sure I don't know. The last I saw of him he was chasing down some lady in the street." I turned away from my mother to hide my smile.

"Chasing a lady? Are you sure? Preposterous!"

I rolled my eyes and said, "It was just that wretched Miss Adams. He was..." I started to snicker, "... he was... returning her parasol!" I flung myself down onto the settee in a fit of giggles. Mother eyed me suspiciously and waited patiently for me to stop.

"Are you quite finished, Andrew?"

"Mother you should have seen Miss Adams' face when your precious son made a ninny out of himself in her presence. La! It was too comical for words!"

"Andrew, you know perfectly well that your brother is ill at ease around young ladies! I don't know why you insist on putting him in situations that you know will only

discomfit him. I had hoped you would show him some compassion. Now I see that you are not to be relied on."

"As I said before, Mother, it was only Miss Adams, the ugly one. If Miss Adams frightens him, God save him when he goes out into the real world."

"Andrew, please try to be a kinder and gentler person when it comes to Montgomery's feelings!"

"Mother, I only treat him as he will be treated at college. Do you all think my first year away from home was easy? I was taunted and bullied too my first weeks there. If the little scamp can not take some innocent, brotherly sort of teasing, he'll never make it at Oxford."

"Andrew, my darling boy, all I ask is that you try to be a little nicer."

Mother sat down beside me, touched my hand softly and implored me with her eyes and I melted. I then raised her hand to my lips and kissed it. "Alright mother, anything for you."

§

Monty was late tea. Father cannot abide tardiness. Suffice to say, Monty will never be late for tea again.

§

When tea was over and Father had calmed down, we adjourned to the drawing room. Monty sat over by the window staring out as if he lost his best friend. Mother did her needlework, now and then looking to her dearest boy with concern. Father as usual was perusing the papers and grumbling about the latest bit of news from London. Rushworth was reading some silly book of plays that he purchased at the shop. I on the other hand was involved in a worthwhile pursuit, wondering if I should take my new green coat with me to Brighton.

Out of nowhere father said, "I WAS JUST THINKING CASSIE, SINCE DARCY IS COMING FOR A VISIT NEXT WEEK AND RUSHWORTH IS HERE, WE MIGHT AS WELL HAVE A PARTY FOR THE BOY'S BIRTHDAY, EVEN THOUGH HE DOESN'T DESERVE IT!"

"P-P-P-Party!" Monty stuttered, spinning around, eyes wild.

"Now Christopher dear, you know perfectly well that Monty doesn't like parties."

"NONSENSE! EVERYONE LIKES PARTIES. IT'S HIGH TIME HE STARTED MEETING MORE PEOPLE! HE'LL BE SEVENTEEN, HE'S A MAN NOW, YOU CAN'T HIDE HIM IN YOUR SKIRTS FOREVER!"

"N-No p-please, F-Father."

"RAN INTO OLD HAWTHORNE YESTERDAY WHILE HE WAS SHOOTING GROUSE. HE SAYS THAT MISS SUSAN WILL BE FOURTEEN THIS YEAR AND IT WAS HIGH TIME SHE STARTED GETTING TO KNOW ALL THE NEIGHBORS."

"Fourteen is a little young to be out, Christopher."

"I KNOW, I KNOW! BUT ALL THE SAME IT WOULD BE NO HARM FOR HER TO COME TO A NEIGHBORHOOD PARTY. IT WILL BE SOMETHING FOR ALL THE YOUNG PEOPLE TO DO BEFORE EVERYONE SETS OFF FOR THEIR SUMMER HOLIDAYS. WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THIS SCHEME OF MINE, ANDREW?"

"Well Father, I'm sure you know my opinion on such things!"

"YES! WE ALL KNOW THAT THE IDLE, GOOD-FOR-NOTHINGS OF THE WORLD LOVE PARTIES! AND WE ALSO KNOW HOW MUCH THEY LIKE DRIVING ABOUT IN THEIR FANCY NEW CURRICLES!" Father then glowered at me meaningfully. "AND DON'T TRY TO DENY IT, BOY!"

Why that little... I glared at my brother, thinking of where I could take him so no one would hear his screams.

"WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT HIM FOR? FOR ONCE YOU ARE NOT GOING TO PALM YOUR CRIMES OFF ON YOUR BROTHER! YOU GOT YOURSELF IN YOUR OWN SCRAPE THIS TIME! I RECEIVED THE BILL FOR THAT CURRICLE OF YOURS IN THIS AFTERNOONS POST!"

I was forming my lips to say something witty to take the edge off of Father's harsh words. "Funny you should mention that, Father; because, I was just about to tell you all about it."

"WHEN? WHEN I WAS OLD AND SICKLY AND COULDN'T REACH FROM MY DEATH BED TO STRANGLE YOUR FOOL NECK!"

"Oh really, Father; you and your dramatics."

"OH SHUT UP, ANDY! NOW LISTEN... "

"Christopher, my love, I believe I said before, Monty would prefer a quiet evening at home for his birthday, won't you, dearest?"

"Y-Yes, F-Father. P-Please d-don't go to any tr-trouble for m-me."

"DID I SAY IT WAS TROUBLE, BOY?"

"N-No, F-Father. I j-just w-wanted you t-to know that I d-don't m-much care for p-parties."

"WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT A PARTY! THIS WILL BE A BALL!"

"A ball! Oh no you don't, Christopher! I put my foot down! I don't have time to plan an entire ball!"

"WHO SAID YOU WOULD HAVE TO PLAN IT! IT WILL BE ALL MY OWN UNDERTAKING! BESIDES, I HAVE HELP!"

Something told me to keep my mouth shut. Why oh why did I not take my own advice. "Who will help you, Father?"

"WHY YOU, YOU LAZY, NO-ACCOUNT BUM! I WANT YOU TO GO INTO CHESHIRE TOMMORROW!"

"To Cheshire?"

"ARE YOU HARD OF HEARING? NOW PAY ATTENTION, BOY! AS SOON AS YOUR MOTHER MAKES OUT THE INVITATIONS... "

"Christopher, I'm not making out any invitations to a party Montgomery and I don't want to have!"

"ALRIGHTY THEN WE'LL PUT IT TO A VOTE! ALL THOSE IN FAVOUR OF A PARTY... "

"Ball, Father."

"ALL THOSE IN FAVOUR OF A BALL, SAY AYE!" Father raised his hand and said, "AYE!"

I raised my hand and repeated what my Father said.
"Aye!"

"ALL THOSE OPPOSED... "

"Nay!"

"N-Nay!"

Mother smiled slyly, "Well as you can perfectly see, Christopher, there is a stalemate and we can not possibly...
"

"SEE HERE RUSHWORTH, WHAT SAY YOU?"

"Say, sir? About what, sir?"

"WOULDN'T YOU FANCY A EVENING FULL OF MUSIC AND DANCING? ALL OF THE MOST DELICIOUS DELECACIES SERVED WITH MY BEST WINE! YOUR GLASS OVERFLOWING WITH BURGUNDY AND CLARET! AND TO TOP IT ALL OFF, THERE WOULD BE

A BALLROOM FILLED WITH THE SURROUNDING COUNTIES PRETTIEST GIRLS. WOULDN'T YOU FANCY THAT, MAN?"

"Oh Aye, sir!"

"THREE TO TWO, WE WIN, CASE CLOSED!"

§

The next day, Mother was pressed into service despite all her protests. I knew perfectly well that since Mother had no chance in winning this particular battle she would most assuredly win the next. She did not like the idea of a ball any better than my brother, but for the present her hands were tied. I saw them with their heads together later in the music room. Mother seemed to be providing words of comfort and reassurance and my tiresome brother seemed to be reluctantly agreeing to what ever it was she said.

Mother, even though disinclined, made out all the invitations and after my tedious day spent delivering them, I came home to a most surprising change of events. At supper mother announced that since the Darcys would all be coming to bring Fitzwilliam for his annual visit, she decided to invite the De Bourghs as well. I momentarily recoiled in horror. Aunt Catherine, here? Oh Lord no, not here! Then it hit me! If my Uncle Lewis were somehow to come, Monty might be a little more at ease. If Monty were

in better spirits, perhaps Father would not be so hard to bear. But Aunt Catherine? Ugh! We could not stand the sight of one another. Then again, Uncle Lewis did have that calming effect on my brother. In his eyes Montgomery was the brightest, cleverest young man of his acquaintance and my brother's confidence always improved for the better.

Uncle Lewis never cared three straws for my cousin Fitzwilliam or myself. Well, to tell the truth he liked us somewhat, but we had so little in common. We neither of us read the same books or took delight in the same pursuits. To our uncle, Monty was far more our superior. I can understand that in comparison to cousin Fitzwilliam; but me, nonsense? Where I am so uniformly charming, Darcy is gauche, uncouth, and unseemly; and as far as who is the handsomest... well, no contest!

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Father staring into nothingness. I instantly knew what that meant; he never could abide Uncle Lewis. They were always perfectly cordial in each other's presence, but to my observation, I could just tell this news was having an adverse effect on my father, and the telltale sign: Father's his left cheek was twitching involuntarily, imperceptible to all but me.

Even though I knew better, Father vocalized that he had no objection to the change in plan and the express was sent out the following morning. Two days later, an express arrived from Rosings Park addressed to Montgomery.

Seeing that her dearest boy was about to burst, mother asked that he read it aloud at the table. I braced myself for the trying speech that I knew would come. Monty looked cautiously toward my father for his approbation. Father gave a quick, slight nod of the head and my brother eagerly tore open the letter. My brother's eyes seemed to devour every single line, his eyes glowed, he smiled broadly and surprisingly enough, when he read it out, he did not stutter once...

My dear Nephew,
I would be delighted to come to your birthday celebration. Unfortunately your Aunt Catherine has a prior engagement in town that week and will be unable to attend; something about Lady Metcalf and governesses.

Hello... this was excellent news. I must drink to that. I hoisted my glass and toasted my good fortune in silence. Mother rolled her eyes.

If it would not be an inconvenience to you or your parents, I would like very much to bring your cousin Anne along. She has so few opportunities to travel and at present is enjoying an unprecedented month of fair health. The air in Derbyshire being so mild, it can do nothing but benefit her greatly. And as you know I cannot bare the thought of leaving my precious daughter on her own with only her governess and the servants for company.

"Y-You don't mind if s-she comes, M-Mother?"

"Of course not, dearest! It has been too long since we have seen our sweet, little Anne."

Oh great Scott, I thought, a sickly child... perfect!

"And you know dearest," continued Mother, "perhaps you might travel back with your uncle to Rosings, if your father agrees, that is." Here Mother and her dearest turned their eyes expectantly to Father, who chose not to notice them. With no answer forthcoming, Monty continued to read.

Well I must close now, if I am to prepare for our long journey. Expect your cousin and me on the Wednesday before your birthday. Your cousin Anne has been most helpful in picking out your birthday gift this year and absolutely insists on giving it to you in person.

"Gifts?" I said, "Aren't you getting a little old for gifts, brother? And quite frankly, I must confess, I have not had a moment to turn my mind to the purchase of a gift!"

"NOR THE MONEY, YOU LAZY BUM!"

Mother shook her head and said; "Now Andrew, Monty gave you a perfectly lovely gift for your birthday. If he had time whilst he was away at school, you have time whilst you're at home on holiday."

"Yes, I have so much use for the book, The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire. I was just saying to Rushworth this morning, wasn't I Rushworth, old chap; I was telling him how I have so little time for conquering these days!"

I tilted my head back and chortled heartily. When I realized that I alone was amused, I ceased my laughter and happened to glance at my brother and could see the hurt and pain in his eyes. I cleared my throat and felt almost wretched... almost.

"Y-You d-don't like it Andrew? I-I th-thought you w-would like it. It is one of my f-favourites," he said.

Mother was giving me one of her looks which reminded of my promise to be nicer to my brother. It also told me that I'd better give the correct answer or I would get no peace; neither night nor day.

"I was only joking. Yes, yes, of course I like it!" I lied, "I can't put it down," I mentally ran over the possibilities of it's whereabouts. Once located, I would lay it out on my dressing table tonight in plain view. That should satisfy the little ninny.

With that matter settled, a brilliant idea sprang into my head, "See here, Father, since you brought it up, I am a bit short in the funds department. Could you see your way clear to increasing my allowance? That would be awfully decent of you, old chap!"

"OLD CHAP?!?!?!?!?"

"And you know Father, I am an Oxford man after all. A yearly allowance of a hundred and fifty pounds a year is a nice, tidy little sum for school boys and curates, however, we Oxford men have to have a little more money to spread about."

"YOU DO WELL ALREADY IN THE SPREADING MONEY ABOUT BIT! I RECEIVED THE BILL THIS MORNING FOR YOUR LITTLE SHOPPING EXCURSION AT HUTCHINSON'S. WOULD YOU KINDLY TELL ME WHY YOU NEEDED THREE PAIRS OF GLOVES?"

"That reminds me, Father, I simply must have a new suit of clothes for Monty's Ball. Everything I have I've worn to death!"

"But Andrew my darling," said my mother, "You have that lovely new green coat."

"Green? At a ball? Mother, you and your odd notions!"

"THE BALL IS NEXT FRIDAY SIR, THERE'S NO TIME FOR ANOTHER ONE OF YOUR LITTLE SHOPPING TOURS OF BIRMINGHAM!"

"Birmingham? Really, Father! As much as I want to dress like the more fashionable farmers this summer, I hardly

think that Birmingham will have all that I require. I thought I'd pop down to London for a few days."

"LONDON?"

"Yes. Rushworth was just saying to me this morning how much he'd like to pop into his tailor; isn't that right Rushworth, old bean?" Now all Rushworth has to do is agree and Father will never turn me down.

All eyes turned to our guest who was busily devouring a bowl of strawberries and cream with a fair amount of the cream trickling rather unattractively down his chin. When he felt all eyes upon him he looked up and wiped the dribblings away with the back of his hand. Oh really! He squinted, unsure what to say and for some reason, looked to my father.

"Uh... you were saying, Sir?" he said, quite unaware that my fate lay in the palm of his hand.

"ANDREW WAS JUST SPEAKING OF YOUR TAILOR, SIR!"

"Oh yes, sad isn't it... afflicted with the gout and has gone away to Bath for the whole summer, so my mother tells me in her last letter."

Oh honestly!

Mother lifted her napkin to cover her smile, Monty turned away but I saw his shoulders quivering in silent laughter, and Father bored his eyes into me and said, "YES, SAD!"

Rushworth can be so tiresome at times. I must get myself a new friend next term, hmmm... perhaps that Robert Ferrars chap? I would not be too ashamed to be seen with him, he dresses rather well... but not as well as...

"AND SINCE YOU WON'T BE TOO BUSY OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS, ANDREW; PERHAPS YOU CAN HELP MONTGOMERY ALONG!"

My brother stopped his giggling fit and turned around in all seriousness at the mention of his name.

"Help him do what pray?" I exclaimed in disbelief.

"HELP PREPARE HIM FOR THE PARTY! HELP HIM WITH HIS CLOTHES, SINCE YOU'RE SO GOOD AT THAT SORT OF THING! HELP HIM UNDERSTAND HIS ROLE AT THE BALL!"

"M-My rr-r-rr-ole?"

"YES, YOUR ROLE! HOW TO GREET YOUR GUESTS, HOW TO MAKE THEM FEEL WELCOME IN OUR HOME, YOU KNOW, YOUR HOSTING DUTIES, BOY! IT IS YOUR PARTY FOR GOODNESS SAKE!"

I thought my brother would burst into tears at any moment; Mother must have too, because she reached over to gently touch his arm.

"COME TO THINK ABOUT IT BOY, WHO HAVE YOU SET YOUR EYE ON TO ASK OUT FOR THE FIRST DANCE OF THE EVENING?"

"D-D-D-Dance?"

"I'LL BET IT'S ONE OF LORD TALBOT'S DAUGHTERS. LADY ALICE IS A PRETTY GIRL, BUT THEN AGAIN I EXPECT BEING THE ELDEST, LADY CHARLOTTE EXPECTS TO BE ASKED FIRST. NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT I SUPPOSE YOU'D LIKE TO DANCE WITH SOMEONE YOU KNOW A LITTLE BETTER. MISS HELENA GRESHAM IS A NICE SORT OF GIRL, NOT HALF BAD WHEN SHE GETS UP THE NERVE TO SPEAK. NO, NO, YOU'D BETTER ASK MISS... MISS... OH, WHAT'S THE NAME OF THAT ADAMS GIRL, CASSIE? YOU KNOW WHO I'M TALKING ABOUT; YOU KNOW THAT DARK HAISED ONE!"

"They all have dark hair, Christopher"

"YES, YES, BUT WHICH ONE IS THE ELDER?"

The colour in Monty's face changed several shades of red during the entirety of Father's speech. A more tender soul would feel sorry for him. I have never been what you

might call tender. I formed my face into a set smile and cried triumphantly, "Miss Sophia, Father!" Smirking, I looked over to my silly little brother, thinking of the jam-glove-parasol fiasco.

"N-N-No p-p-lease, Father! She w-would not wish to d-d-dance with m-me. L-Let A-Andrew d-do it! I-I-I can't!"

"NONSENSE! IT'S EXPECTED OF YOU! YOU CAN'T BACK OUT OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES NOW, BOY! YOU ASKED FOR A PARTY, DID YOU NOT?"

Mother, instantly incredulous, leapt from her seat, crossed her arms, and yelled in full voice, "Christopher, I don't believe you! You know perfectly well that you yourself wanted this ball! We told you time and time again that we did not want it! How dare you turn the tables on your own son! How dare you be so... "

Mother stopped herself and glanced in Rushworth's direction, pinching her lips together, unwilling to say anymore. She needn't have bothered herself with concern over having a scene in front of my friend; he was too busy scraping his bowl of the last remaining remnants of cream. Instead of saying anything more, Mother simply gave me the look and I instantly knew what to do.

"I say, Rushworth old bean, do come along. I simply must show you all my new hats!"

§

On Monday, my cousin Fitzwilliam Darcy arrived in company with his entire family. Everyone was on hand to greet the Darcys, except my tiresome brother who was nowhere to be seen. Knowing Father cannot endure tardiness, especially tardiness when guests arrived, I made it to the door first. My brother's absence showed a lot of promise; it assured me of a very entertaining scene later. I was there though, trying to stay on Father's good side, since he had been in such a foul mood of late, especially after he and mother had their little discussion.

However, knowing what was to come, I had the good sense to stay back in the shadows of the doorway with Rushworth as we both observed the carriage pulling up to the front steps. Mother and Father ran forward waving.

"HELLO GEORGE! HELLO FITZWILLIAM! WELCOME!"

"Hello Uncle Christopher! Hello Aunt Cassandra," cried Fitzwilliam, waving vigorously out the window of the carriage like some eager lad of fifteen. Hang on; he is fifteen.

As he stepped down, Mother placed a kiss on each of Fitzwilliam's cheeks and said, "Oh nephew, you are looking very well." She kissed him again and hugged him so tightly that I thought he would break.

And that is one of the reasons that I always hang back, until the initial greetings are over, that is. I always think that greeting ones relatives would not be so ghastly if there wasn't so much hugging and kissing going on. All that grasping and touching, I always feel so tumbled about, not to say to the condition of my new brown coat with ivory waistcoat. I am an Oxford man after all; we have so little time for such displays.

"Now, where is my little treasure," exclaimed my mother, "where is Georgiana?"

At the mention of her name the child's head slowly poked out from the carriage. With the aid of her brother, she descended slowly, almost unsure if she wanted to come out at all. Georgiana was about four and so painfully shy and quiet that I sometimes forgot that she was around. But I felt sorry for the little motherless child and always took great pains to be civil towards her even though her brother vexed me greatly.

As my uncle descended Georgiana said, "Hello," with an unsteady, yet passable curtsy, which made her father, George Darcy, smile with pride. After a moments hesitation she said, "I am... I am happy to see you," and she curtsied again.

"And we are very happy to see you, too," replied my mother, returning her curtsy and smiling from ear to ear, which usually meant she was thinking how much pleasure

she would have had if she had had a daughter. It was now Georgiana's turn to be covered in kisses.

From my post I observed my cousin Fitzwilliam Darcy looking around, wrinkling his brow, no doubt searching for my odious brother.

"Where is my cousin, Aunt?"

I knew he didn't mean me!

"THAT'S WHAT I'D LIKE TO KNOW! I TOLD THAT BOY TO BE HOME FOR YOUR ARRIVAL! WAIT TILL I GET MY HANDS AROUND... "

"Ah, Nephew," said my mother, interrupting before father could finish his tirade, "Come greet Andrew and meet our guest." She turned, walked over, grabbed me by the elbow and pulling me forward said, "Andrew, say hello to your cousin."

I eyed Darcy. Darcy eyed me. We had not seen each other in ages with me at Oxford and he at Eton. Hmmm... Darcy had grown rather tall and handsome in this last year, though not as handsome as me. However, he was clean and tidy, quite the young gentleman, and the more I considered it, I would almost not be ashamed to be seen with him... almost.

"Fitzwilliam."

"Andrew."

Silence.

I then recollected my guest, "This is my good friend, Mr. James Rushworth. Rushworth, may I present my Uncle, Mr. George Darcy of Pemberley." My uncle turned away from my father for a moment and they bowed to each other. " And this is my cousin, Fitzwilliam Darcy and his little sister, Georgiana."

With the introductions out of the way, Father took Uncle George over to the side to point out a few improvements he had made to the park and Mother was making a complete fuss over Georgiana and some silly doll. In the awkward silence between us younger men, Rushworth, ever eager for conversation stepped forward.

"I am very pleased to meet you all," said Rushworth offering his hand.

"Likewise," said Fitzwilliam taking it.

Rushworth said, "I hear you have a very fast horse and sometimes you race him."

Momentarily confused, Fitzwilliam then smiled and said, "Oh yes, he is very fast. But not as fast as Monty's horse, Claudio."

"Yes, I've seen him in action. I have a fast horse, too."

Darcy then said, "When my father has my horse sent over from Pemberley, we could have a race, perhaps."

"I do so love a horse race," offered my simple-minded friend.

I stopped listening at that point. What was it with these horseback riders? A clean waistcoat has not... Oh la! Here comes my insufferable brother. This is going to be good!

Monty rode swiftly into the paddock at breakneck speed and dismounted. Jacob took his horse's reins and Monty came running as quickly as his legs could carry him. As he came closer I winced. His boots were muddy, his face dirty and his hair was a mess. Out of breath and panting like a dog, he managed to stutter out, "F-Forgive me. I-I'm s-sorry for being l-late." My eyes instantly flew to my father, hoping for an ugly scene. However, I was disappointed. Father said not a word but communicated everything he was thinking by the expression on his face.

My ever diplomatic Uncle George, eager to put his favourite nephew at ease said, "Not to worry, Nephew. We've only just arrived, no harm done. I know how it is when you're out riding, it's easy to lose track of time, is it not?" He smiled good-naturedly and slapped my brother on the back. Oddly enough, Uncle George never comes to

my defense in similar situations; I wonder what can account for it?

Seeing that my Father was about to explode, mother seized the opportunity to usher us all inside to take tea. My brother excused himself to change and ran up the staircase with Fitzwilliam following after him. No doubt the two silly little boys had much to discuss... whatever silly little boys do discuss... as if I care. A quarter of an hour later the boys came into the morning room just as my father brought up the subject of the ball.

"I HOPE YOU'VE BROUGHT YOUR DANCING SHOES FITZWILLIAM! WE'RE HAVING A BALL THIS FRIDAY FOR THE BOYS BIRTHDAY; EVEN THOUGH HE DOESN'T DESERVE IT!"

Fitzwilliam looked confused and asked, "A ball? What do you mean? Here?"

Father, ignoring his nephew said, "SORRY FOR THE SHORT NOTICE GEORGE, BUT I KNEW THAT YOU WERE DOWN SOUTH FETCHING THE BOY FROM ETON. BUT SINCE YOU'RE HERE ALREADY, YOU MIGHT AS WELL STAY ON TOO."

"I mean ... a ball? Surely you're not serious," continued Fitzwilliam in a state of shock. Apparently in their intimate little boy conversation upstairs, this particular subject was not brought up. The look on Fitzwilliam's face was almost

as amusing as my brothers. Where my brother disliked balls because he could not endure notice, Fitzwilliam disliked balls because he simply could not dance.

"I would love to stay, Matt, but the affairs of Pemberley call me home."

"NONSENSE! YOU MUST STAY! WE OLD FELLOWS NEED JUST AS MUCH ENTERTAINMENT AS THESE YOUNG FELLOWS!"

"No indeed, Pemberley cannot run itself! I have already been away too long. I'll return home in the morning as planned."

"Um... Father," stated Cousin Fitzwilliam, "Now that I think about it, I think I have changed my mind. I would much rather go home with you. You'll need my help with the property."

"No, that will not be necessary, when young Wickham comes back from visiting his friends he will be there to help! You stay on and enjoy your good cousins company for a few weeks."

"Really Father, I don't mind! Really!"

My father shook his head and turned to his brother-in-law.
"WHAT IS IT WITH THESE TWO LADS OF OURS
GEORGE? IN OUR DAY A BALL WAS LOOKED

FORWARD TO LIKE NO OTHER EVENT IN THE COUNTY. WHY IT WAS AT A BALL HERE AT MATLOCK THAT YOU MET MY SISTER, ANNE. DO YOU REMEMBER THAT GEORGE?"

"Why, certainly! Like it was yesterday. I'll never forget it. She was the belle of the ball... eyes like stars... turned me down for the first two dances, you know. But the next time I asked, she said yes, it was the minuet. Lord, those were the good old days. These new dances today, how can anyone ever fall in love with all that hopping about? Yes, give me the old dances any day. I was so in love with her. If any of you young fellows ever come across a treasure, marry her! Don't take no for an answer. Oh Anne... Anne... my Anne... "

Uncle George, for the present, was gone. When he got like this it was best not to disturb him. As my uncle continued to walk down his road of remembrance, I turned to speak to my cousin. It was now up to me to liven things up.

"Fitzwilliam, you have not asked me about my first year at Oxford yet. Marvelous place! I was quite a favourite there, wasn't I Rushworth? When you come to Oxford, the first thing you're going to need is a boat. I might let you have one of mine if you give me a good price for it, that is!"

La! I am so clever. And now all Cousin Fitzwilliam has to say is...

"Oh Andrew, I thought you knew. I am for Cambridge."

Father said with a sneer, "CAMBRIDGE!"

People are so easily led.

Uncle George snapped out of his reverie.

"And, what pray, is wrong with Cambridge, sir?"

I smiled knowing where this conversation would eventually lead. However, my Mother, being much more clever than I, seized the opportunity to say...

"Oh, George dear, Lewis is coming up on Wednesday and he will be bringing Anne."

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Cousin Fitzwilliam give a slight start and Uncle George's eye twitch, distinguishable only to me of course.

Mother then said, "Unfortunately, Catherine will be in London and cannot come to the party; she has a prior engagement in town."

I heard my cousin give an almost inaudible sigh of relief.

Mother then said, "I have just had the most wonderful idea, George! You can leave Georgiana with us. Wouldn't you like that Georgiana?" Georgiana's eyes grew large and

she looked back and forth between her father and brother, unsure how to respond. Mother then said, "I am sure Anne would love having her little cousin as a playmate."

Mother smiled triumphantly at me. Oh great I thought! A pimply faced brat, an uncoordinated cousin, Rushworth and now two little girls! I cannot believe my luck!

§

Uncle George left us on Tuesday, leaving behind all his progeny. I knew perfectly well why he would not stay on; my Uncles George Darcy and Sir Lewis de Bourgh could not abide to be in each other's company for more than two minutes. Story has it that they were once great friends but quarrelled over some young lady long ago. Hmmm? I wonder who it was? Aunt Anne or Aunt Catherine... Hmmm? Definitely Aunt Anne!

So, on Wednesday, when the De Bourgh carriage was spotted entering the park, it was now time for all of us to reassemble on the front steps. And wouldn't you know it, there was my ridiculous little brother leading the way. When the carriage came into sight Monty shouted, "There it is! There it is!" Oh really!

I heard my mother say quietly to my father, "Do be nice, Chris."

"I'M ALWAYS NICE!"

A moment after the De Bourgh carriage entered the paddock, a large wagon followed with a large load. Oh wonderful, the present, I thought to myself with disgust. Uncle Lewis could not just bring something simple such as a timepiece or a walking stick. For Monty it always had to be the biggest and the best, nothing was too good for his favourite nephew. I knew this because I was not his favourite nephew I thought to myself as I toyed with my timepiece, my uncles present to me on my last birthday.

The servant rushed forward to open the carriage door. And who should step out first? My mouth dropped open in horror when I saw who it was...

"Christopher, I see that Cassandra has been feeding you very well! What have you done to the approach to the park? It looks like a old briar patch. Come give your sister a kiss!"

Oh great! A pimply faced brat, an uncoordinated cousin, Rushworth, two little girls and now Aunt Catherine! This promises to be a summer that I'll never forget!



To say that I was surprised was an understatement. I did not expect her, of all people, not Aunt Catherine. My uncle

had most definitely assured us... I remember the wording most specifically... in his last letter he assured us most readily that Aunt Catherine would not be here.

Mother regaining her wits first said, "Oh? Catherine! What a welcome... surprise. Is it not, Christopher?"

Surprise my foot; I'd call it a dirty trick!

And Aunt Catherine being who she was immediately said, "Have you been walking out of doors without your parasol again, Cassandra? I know that walking is very good exercise; I exercise regularly myself. However, you will never find me out of doors without my parasol, my complexion would be ruined! Well, isn't anyone going to give me a kiss?"

Mother hesitated briefly and then placed a quick kiss on her sister-in-laws cheek. Father, stepping forward did so as well.

"Now, where are those nephews of mine?"

None of us wanted to move; we each stood there, horror struck. I gave my brother a gentle push and he went forward to make his greeting. "H-Hello, Aunt C-Ca-ther-ther-rine. W-What a p-pleasure it is t-to s-see you l-l-looking s-so w-well."

"I can see you still have that stammer, boy! Cassandra, I thought I told you that he would never get rid of it if you continue sending him to that school of his. This boy should be tutored here at Matlock!"

"Well, it is a little late for that, Catherine dear. Monty has finished school. He starts at Oxford next term."

"Oxford?" questioned my uncle laughingly while exiting the carriage and walking up behind his wife.

Sir Lewis de Bourgh was about forty, extremely gentlemanly in appearance and possessed a manner so easy and had a smile so engaging that one could not help but warm to him instantly. He was tall and handsome, possessed dark, compassionate eyes and had jet-black, shoulder length hair that he tied away from his face with a black ribbon. During my childhood I always fancied he had the look of the Barbary pirate from one of my books; all he needed was the wooden leg.

"I thought that Monty wanted to go to Cam... " My uncle stopped himself as he saw the expression on my father's face.

Mother went forward with open arms to make her greeting. "Lewis, what a pleasure!" He had to bend down quite a ways as mother stood on her toes to kiss him on both cheeks.

"The pleasure is all mine, dearest Cassandra. And might I add that you are looking more radiant than ever. Matlock there must be doing an excellent job to keep you looking so beautiful."

Mother started blushing and giggling like a schoolgirl and out of the corner of my eyes I could see my father rolling his eyes. Composing himself, he reached forward to shake his brother-in-law's hand. "AH... YES! WELCOME! IT IS... NICE TO SEE YOU, DE BOURGH."

My uncle then nodded a polite hello to me and Darcy and then turned toward his favourite nephew and held open his arms and shouted, "Monty!" My brother ran forward eagerly into my uncle's fatherly embrace. "No need to ask how you are, son, I can tell by your face that you are well!" They stood there momentarily grasping each other's elbows like a couple of long lost friends who had not seen each other in years, when in fact my stupid brother had just seen him this past spring. Father heaved a silent sigh and stared away into nothingness.

"I am so glad you could come, Uncle! M-My birthday would not be the same without you!"

My uncle reached over and tousled my brother's hair and Aunt Catherine interjected, "When are you going to cut that boy's hair, Cassandra? He looks like some kind of sheepdog!"

I had to admit to myself that that comment was rather amusing and I snickered loudly, drawing my Aunt's notice. "And I see that your manners have not improved, Andrew? I have been standing here a full ten minutes and you have not said a word!"

"And hello to you too, Aunt Catherine."

She squinted at me and mumbled, "HmMMM... yesss!"

Cousin Darcy, who had been standing like some kind of ninny at the sight of Aunt Catherine, made no movement in her direction, so, I saw fit to give him a little assistance too and I nudged him forward ever so gently. Once he was before her he took her hand, and bowed over it. Aunt Catherine smiled for the first time since her arrival. This left little doubt in my mind who her favourite nephew was. It definitely wasn't me; I wasn't anyone's favourite.

She practically cooed, "Hello Darcy, what a pleasant surprise. You are looking very well. You were missed at Rosings this past Easter."

"I'm... I'm sorry. Aunt. I would have come up but I.. uh... I had to... uh... make up some lessons at school."

Liar, liar... pants on fire!

My uncle, who until now, had been talking quietly with my brother and parents suddenly turned to the carriage at the sound of a small voice.

"Papa, may I come out now?"

"Oh, sorry dear; of course."

I moment later he lifted his daughter out of the carriage and set her on the ground. Little Anne looked small and fragile compared to her two tall parents. Her complexion for once had a soft rosy glow and not its usual sickly colouring. She managed a small, weak little smile and curtsied politely. Mother instantly rushed over to cover her with the usual kisses.

"My, my, how you've grown Anne. You're at least a half a head taller than the last time I saw you." Mother kissed her again.

"Hello Aunt Cassandra. I am so glad to see you."

"And such a little lady you have become all of a sudden, is she not Christopher?"

Father smiled broadly placing a kiss on Anne's forehead and pinched her cheek to which the child giggled. Cousin Darcy, fidgeting nervously and having nothing of importance to say to my aunt came over and kissed Anne on the cheek. When Fitzwilliam turned away Anne wiped

the kiss off her face with an upturned nose. Monty then released his hold on my uncle and stepped over to our little cousin as well.

Anne's face lit up instantly and she held out her hand and smiled mischievously as only a six-year old could do. My silly brother just shrugged with a teasing grin of his own spread over his face and shook his head. Anne stuck out her bottom lip, pouted and looked at the ground almost as if she were about to cry. Seeing the pained expression on Anne's face, my brother knelt down in front of her and lifted up her chin and winked. This must have been some sort of secret signal between the two because Anne instantly lunged at my brother, knocking him down to the ground and began to search the pockets of his coat. I recoiled in dismay.

Aunt Catherine instantly shouted, "ANNE! What are you doing to your cousin? Stop that, stop that this instant!" She moved swiftly to extricate her daughter from my brother's person.

As Aunt Catherine pried her daughter fingers away, my Uncle Lewis laughed heartily, "Oh leave her be, Cathy! It's just a sort of game that they like play. Anne knows that her favourite cousin always has a surprise for her in one of his pockets, just a harmless confection."

"A harmless confection? Lewis you know perfectly well that she is not allowed sweets. It will not be endured! I will

not have my noble daughter acting like a common gutter child!"

I began to laugh hysterically at the scene and Anne seeing this, got up and came over and kicked me in the shin while her parents were having their discussion.

"OW! Why you little... " and I reached out with both hands to grab the child around the neck.

"Andrew!" My mother shouted, spinning around not fully aware of the situation, "What are you doing to Anne?"

"Nothing!" I said, withdrawing my hands quickly.

"WHAT!" Father also turned to face me, shouting, "ANDREW, I'M NOT HAVING IT THIS TIME! YOU ARE NOT TO TORTURE YOUR COUSIN! DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME, BOY! I'M NOT HAVING IT!"

I couldn't believe it. I started to explain, pointing in Anne's face, which had turned instantly angelic. "Father, I didn't do anything! She... she... "

Anne's lips started to quiver and she looked as if she were about to cry any second. Monty, seeing this, got up and came over and shoved me in the shoulder. I shoved him back. His face turned red and with both hands he pushed me back into the door. I could see that my odious brother was just about to make a fist to hit me in the face when

Uncle Lewis stepped in between us and smiled. "Come on fellows, shake hands and be friends. No harm done!" We observed each other momentarily unwilling, but my uncle, squeezing his favourite's shoulder caused Monty to reach out his hand, and I took it, grudgingly.

Cousin Darcy, curious as to the other conveyance asked, "What's in the cart, Uncle?"

Anne's continence again changed and she started jumping up and down, laughing with glee. "Let me tell, papa! Let me tell!" She grabbed my brothers hand and pulled him over to the cart where the workman where starting to remove the ropes. Uncle Lewis smiled broadly and gestured for all of us to follow. Oh perfect, time for the gift, I thought. I turned to follow, limping the entire way, only to see Anne turn around, grin at me and stick out her tongue.

My uncle started to give out commands to the workman and Anne giggled all the more. When the coverings where removed it revealed to us the most handsome curricle I ever saw, even handsomer than my own. My brother gasped and looked all amazement. Anne shouted while jumping up and down, "Do you like it! Well, do you? I picked out the colour myself!"

"I... I... don't know what to say! I... I... Oh, Uncle!"

"I think he likes it, Anne," said my uncle smiling from ear to ear."

"Oh Uncle... I... "

Father then said, "IT'S TOO MUCH DE BOURGH, I CAN'T ALLOW HIM TO HAVE IT!"

"Nonsense," cried my uncle, "just the sort of thing for a young man on his way to Cambridge."

Father snapped, "OXFORD! QUEENS COLLEGE, OXFORD!"

"Ah yes, sorry... sorry Matlock, of course."

For a few awkward moments there was silence. Monty continued to stare at the curricle, too overcome to speak. I looked on, not a little jealous of my brother. Cousin Darcy and Rushworth stepped forward to examine the equipage more closely as the workmen began to assemble it on the ground and mother looked back and forth nervously between her husband and brother-in-law.

Aunt Catherine spoke first, "I told him not to purchase it, Christopher, but you know my husband. I told him he spoils that boy of yours too much! I cannot understand why!"

"It's perfectly lovely, Lewis," said my mother, trying to keep the moment light, "What do you say to your uncle, dearest?"

"Oh... uncle," said my brother breathlessly, still staring at his birthday gift.

Uncle Lewis chuckled, bowed and said, "You're welcome."

Anne said, "And me, don't forget me!"

My brother bent down and kissed little Anne on the cheek. I waited for her to wipe it away, but she did not. She just held up her arms and hugged my brother around the neck. Then Montgomery lifted her up and carried her over to inspect the carriage himself. She was busily telling my brother all sorts of things about the curricule and pointing out several things that she herself thought were important. Cousin Darcy and Rushworth were touching it and stroking it as if they had never saw such a thing before in their life. I remained where I was, staring with envy, every now then rubbing my shin.

A short while later we all began to assemble to drink tea. My brother and cousin remained outside going over the curricule and the rest of us adjourned to the drawing room.

Mother turned to Anne and said, "Anne dear, we have a surprise for you up in the nursery."

"Oh, a surprise? For me?"

"Yes, my love, a wonderful surprise. I hope you like surprises!"

Aunt Catherine then said, "I hope it is not something that will tire her out, Cassandra. She may look tolerably well to-day, but I assure you, she could very well have a relapse tomorrow."

Mother handed Anne over to the care of her nurse who led her away. When they were gone she said to my aunt, "Georgiana is upstairs. She and Anne see so little of each other, I thought it would be nice for them to have a visit."

"And I say again, as long as my daughter is not made ill by such a visit. Her health could turn for the worse at any moment."

As mother rolled her eyes, I took the opportunity to introduce my friend.

"Uncle, may I introduce my friend Mr. James Rushworth. Rushworth, my uncle, Sir Lewis de Bourgh." Uncle Lewis shook hands warmly with my friend and joined my father on the other side of the room. "Aunt, may I also introduce my friend to your notice. Lady Catherine, Mr. James

Rushworth of Northampton. Rushworth this is my aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

"Hmmm... Rushworth," said my Aunt, not giving my friend time to respond, "are you by chance part of the Sotherton family?"

"I should say so, madam; one in the same. Do you know of my family, your ladyship?"

"I make it my business to know all of the great families in the first circles. What I want to know is, why in heavens name are you friends with Andrew, of all people?"

I was incredulous and before Rushworth could respond I said, "I would think you'd ask me why I'm friends with him!"

Mother, sensing the tension that always charges the air whenever Aunt Catherine and I are within ten feet of each other, immediately interrupted. "What brings you to Matlock, Catherine? We understood from Lewis' letter that you were to be in London."

"I find the air of London often disagrees with me at this time of year. I postponed my journey until the fall." The whole time my Aunt was saying this she was busily glancing about the room, "What have you done to this room, Cassandra? In my day we always had the sofa

facing away from the windows. The afternoon sun will only fade the furniture."

"We like it this way, don't we, dear?"

Mother turned to father, who was sitting off to the side with my uncle and not having a conversation with him. "WHAT DID YOU SAY, MY LOVE?"

"I was just telling your sister how much we prefer having the sofa facing the windows."

Father did not answer and I could tell that something was on his mind. My uncle sensing this too, decided to speak.

"I guess I should have consulted you first about the curricule. When I saw it I thought it would be perfect for my nephew. I remember when I went away to Cambridge, I so longed for a carriage of my own. My father saw fit to deny me that pleasure, saying that it would only make me idle and useless and I had much better walk."

"YES!" said Father, glaring at Sir Lewis, "I ALWAYS ADMIRE YOUR FATHER!"

Uncle Lewis glanced out of the window to look to my brother and undaunted, he pressed on, "Oh let the boy have it, Mat. I so love giving him pleasure. If I had had a son, I would shower him with gifts as well. I always like to think of Montgomery as my own son."

"YES, BUT HE IS MY SON!"

"Oh... of course," he said, and quickly changed the subject, "So, how's the sport lately? I'd love to take a gun out in the morning."

Father obliged him by talking pleasantly on that neutral subject. Being of no interest to me and I once again turned my attentions to my mother's conversation.

"Marry? Don't be ridiculous, Catherine. He's much too young to consider such a thing!"

My ears instantly perked up and I hoped they were not talking about me.

"All the same, this would be a perfect opportunity to look over his prospects. Half the girls in the county are most likely dying to come to this ball of yours. If I were you, I'd be watching closely. The right girl just might present herself."

I added, "Let me assure you Aunt, I have no intention of marrying anyone, especially not these silly, flighty, horrid, Derbyshire girls!"

"Who said anything about you, Andrew?" replied my aunt, "We were speaking of your brother's marriage!"

At that precise moment in walked my brother and Darcy. The look on my tiresome brother's face was priceless. Aunt Catherine continued to talk, unaware of his presence behind her.

"Now take those daughters of Lord Talbot's. I hear they each have a fortune of fifteen thousand pounds; a nice tidy little sum, respectable, good enough to marry the younger son of an Earl. You should be looking out for a wife for him as soon as may be or you'll have him on your hands forever. It's his duty to marry a girl of fortune!"

"But what of love, Catherine? Wouldn't you rather see a nephew of yours happy in his future life with someone to love and cherish? I wouldn't care if he married the poorest girl in England, as long as she made my son the happiest man imaginable." Here, Mother looked into my brother's eyes and smiled softly. The apprehension on my brother's face softened and he was once again at ease.

"Nonsense! If I were you, Cassandra, I'd make sure he leads one of those Talbot girls out first. Then he should dance with all the daughters of all the better families. He can ignore the ones that are practically penniless! Now, as to Darcy he doesn't have to dance at all, his future is already planned out, but Montgomery has to take advantage where he can!"

Mother began with, "Catherine, I think... "

Father cut her off as he entered the conversation even though I knew perfectly well that he had not heard the entirety of their discussion. "My sister is right! It was high time he started meeting the neighbours. You've had him tangled in your skirts long enough, Cassie. I want him to get to know Lord Talbot better as well as Sir Reginald Hawthorne. You never know who may be of use to him in his future career."

My brother and Darcy slipped into chairs on the opposite side of the room as Aunt Catherine followed them with her eyes. I could not help but laugh. The scene was becoming too ridiculous.

"WHAT DO YOU FIND SO AMUSING, BOY?" asked my father, boring his eyes into me. "IT'S HIGH TIME YOU MINGLED MORE YOURSELF! I GROW TIRED OF HAVING TO EXPLAIN WHY MY ELDEST SON IS A GOOD-FOR-NOTHING! I'D LIKE EVERYONE TO SEE WHY THAT IS FOR THEMSELVES!"

"Oh father, you are too comical for words! But, I believe we were talking of my brother." La! Clever as usual! Aunt Catherine then turned to my brother. "And who will you lead in out for the first dance of the evening, young man?"

My brother opened and closed his mouth several times before he could speak, "I... I... th-think, that is t-to say, I... I b-b-believe... I... don't kn-know who I sh-should... "

Aunt Catherine rolled her eyes and said, "Spit it out, boy!"

"Catherine dear, have another biscuit," said mother trying to draw her attentions away from her dearest boy. "Try a shortbread, our cook does make wonderful shortbread!"

"YOU HEARD YOUR AUNT, BOY, SPEAK!"

We all waited with baited breath. This was too funny for words. Rushworth stared, Darcy fidgeted, Mother wrung her hands, Father drummed his fingers and Uncle Lewis looked as if he wished he could help. My brother's face turned white as every looked to him for some kind of answer. I thought I'd never seen such a humorous spectacle.

Achoo, Achoo, cough, cough, cough! "Mama, Papa, I don't feel so well."

We all turned to see Anne standing at the doorway looking slightly feverish. And with the commotion that ensued, my brother, for the present, was safe.

Two days later, the morning of the ball found my brother sequestered away only God knows where. Mother was after me all during breakfast to find him. The eminent terror of asking a lady to lead the dancing had no doubt scared him out of his wits, enough for him to remain

hidden for most of the morning. With no appearance just before the midday dinner hour my mother sent me in search of him. This made me extremely cross. I had planned to begin my toilette and any delay was an inconvenience. As luck would have it, I ran into Big Jacob coming from the direction of the paddock.

"Ifin you're looking for your brother, he'd be in the stable tendin' his horse, your Lordship." And with a tip of his cap Jacob was gone. I wrinkled my nose and steeled myself for the unpleasant smell of horseflesh as I peeked into the odious outbuilding.

"I say, brother are you there?"

Silence.

"Do come out brother, there's a good chap."

Another pause.

I heaved a sigh of vexation and walked in, carefully placing my feet along the safest path.

"Come on out you little runt, mother wants you."

"What for?" came a voice from somewhere.

"To eat your dinner, you idiot. What do you think?"

"Tell her I am busy."

"You can tell her yourself! I have more important things to do than delivering your silly messages."

"Then be on your way. Don't let me keep you from your toilette."

I huffed. "Look, you know perfectly well that I'll never hear the end of it unless I bring you in. Father is an absolute bear today so do come along."

A long moment of silence followed in which I knew what was expected of me. I sighed and said, "Please." My brother's head slowly appeared from one of the far stalls. "Well, are you coming or not?" I asked.

Out he came and he slowly sauntered in my general direction, dragging his feet through the muck and straw. I rolled my eyes and turned to make a swift departure from that disgusting place.

"Andrew," said my brother, stopping me with a hand to the shoulder, "Have you... I mean did you ever feel... "

"Yes?" I said turning, wrinkling my nose at the scent emanating from his hand on my new brown coat.

"I guess what I'm trying to ask is, was there ever a time when you were so scared of doing something and you

knew that the only way to get over that fear was to do the thing but you are so petrified that you will make a mistake and everyone will laugh."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"I mean... tonight... at the ball. When I... as I must according to Father, when I must choose a lady to lead in the dancing... "

"So, you're worried about the dancing. Is that all?"

"No... I mean... as you said before... when you said that young ladies don't like young men who... I mean I have been practising and I think I have it right. I try so very hard not to talk that way, but as you know... it's just when they look at me... I can't say the right words."

My brother's face was etched with so much concern that my heart couldn't help but to go out to him. As trying as he could be sometimes, I couldn't very well desert him in his hour of need.

"So, my tiresome little brother is all a twitter about talking to young ladies, is it?" Monty nodded and looked at the floor. I drew in a breath. "Well, its all quite simple you know. Talking to young ladies is no different then talking to bunch of chaps. Talk to them about themselves and you can't go wrong."

"But what do I talk about?"

"Oh, I don't know... the weather, the roads, the price of muslin, anything!"

"But if you tell me how to start... I mean what do I say first."

I huffed again, "Well first, if it were me doing the talking, I'd pay the lady a compliment, regardless of if she deserved it or not, and in my opinion they often do not! For practice sake lets pretend you're talking to say... the eldest Miss Adams."

"Oh no! Not Miss Adams... I mean... no, not her!"

I snickered remembering the great blackberry jam debacle. I cleared my throat and straightened up, "Very well then! What about Miss Witherspoon? No, no, not her either. Ah! Miss Helena Gresham, even you cannot mess up when talking with the mouse-like Miss Gresham, even though she's practically penniless, which, now that I think about it, might be kind of fun just to see the expression on Aunt Catherine's face." I snickered again, but one look at Monty forced me to be serious again. "Well, the first thing you say is something complimentary. See here," I said, turning into the tack room to sit down on one of the saddles stored there, "I'll pretend to be Miss Gresham, and you be you." I fixed my body just like the shy and retiring Miss Gresham, whose only asset was a feeble mind and said in a high-

pitched voice, whilst batting my eyelashes, "Hellloooo, Mr. Fitzwilliammmmm!"

"She's not going to say it like that!" said my brother.

"Believe me, they're all going to say it like that. Alright, now you bow and say something complimentary."

"Hello Miss Gresham. How nice to see you this evening."

I raised my hand to my mouth and pretended to yawn. "If you talk to her like that, you'll have her sleeping at your ball instead of dancing." I arose and pushed my brother down onto the saddle and said, "You be the lady this time. Now watch, listen and learn! Now, say hello."

"Hello," said my brother plainly.

I instantly made a face. "No, no, no! Say it like a lady would say it!"

"Oh, sorry." And in a high-pitched voice my brother said, "Hellloooo, Lord Fitzwilliammmmm!"

"Much Better! Now, I'll be you. You'll say 'Why Miss Gresham, what a great pleasure to see you here tonight! Is that a new fan? It makes you look so charming!'"

My brother yelled in disbelief, "You've never talked to a lady like that in your life, Andrew!"

"Never mind what I do, just listen!" I continued, "Miss Gresham I hear that you are a very exceptional musician and excel most prodigiously at the pianoforte."

"Thank you, Lord Fitzwilliam, you are very kind."

"NO, NO, NO! She won't say that! She will say, "Oh no, I am not so very good."

"What do you mean? I don't understand. Why would she say that she is not very good, if she is? No, I don't believe you."

"She will say that, exactly that! And after she says that, it's time for you to turn on the Fitzwilliam charm!"

"What's the Fitzwilliam charm?"

I rolled my eyes. My brother was now in great danger of vexing me. If he did not know what the Fitzwilliam charm was, God help him.

"The Fitzwilliam charm is... is... saying a bunch of things you don't mean so weak-minded females will like you."

"And what of strong-minded females?"

"In my experience there is no such thing!"

"No, no! This is all wrong, Andrew. Besides, I could never say anything I didn't mean, that would be like telling a lie."

"I'm not asking you to lie you silly fool! I am asking you to... to embellish! Now pay attention! I'm still you remember. After she says the thing about not being a good musician, you say... (Here I lowered my voice dramatically and said very suavely) 'I'm sure you are too modest. I'm very fond of music; especially when it is played by someone as... charming as you.'"

My brother stood there all wide-eyed, blushing furiously. "I can't... I just can't... she'll laugh at me!"

"No one's going to laugh at you! As silly as girls are, you should laugh at them! Now, enough of this nonsense; go up to the house and see Mother before she sends out a regiment of dragoons in search of you." I slapped my brother on the back, and sent him on his way, and with one whiff of my hand called after him. "And do take a bath; there's a good chap!"

After the meal, we all gave my brother our gifts. A double barrel shot-gun from father, a musical clock from mother, some silly book about Fairies and Mythology from Rushworth, a walking stick from Aunt Catherine, an absurd drawing of his horse Claudio in crayon by Georgiana, a new bridle from Fitzwilliam, a new saddle

from Uncle George, and three pairs of gloves from me. He thanked everyone profusely again and again and mother then sent everyone away to make ready for the evening's festivities.

§

Father and mother were waiting at the foot of the stairs as I descended that evening.

"Well?" I asked as I stopped at the bottom, "How do I look, as if I need to ask."

"You look very good, my darling."

"Mother! Only good?"

"I said you look very good, darling."

"YES, GOOD-FOR-NOTHING!"

I rolled my eyes and glanced around. Fitzwilliam was in the mirror, desperately trying to smooth down a cowlick that he had developed in the last three days, Aunt Catherine was watching the servants closely as they scurried about making that last few preparations, and Uncle Lewis was putting on his gloves. I happened to look up and I could see Anne and Georgiana peeking over the landing at all the goings on below. When I caught Anne's

eye she immediately made a face and stuck out her tongue at me. I then stuck my tongue out at her and looked over to the stairs just as Rushworth came down wearing the oddest-looking cravat that I have ever had the misfortune to see. I was just about to laugh when my brother appeared. He was dressed in his new evening clothes that lent him an air of decided fashion. As he moved closer I could see for the first time in my recollection, that his hair was immaculately groomed, he didn't smell of horses and looked remarkably handsome, though obviously not as...

"NICE TO SEE YOU ON TIME FOR SOMETHING FOR A CHANGE," said father.

"Christopher, please, not tonight!"

"WHAT DID I SAY NOW, CASSIE?"

Mother ignored him and said, "You all look very well. I am so proud to have such handsome young men in my own family."

"Yes, mother but who is the handsomest, as if I need to ask."

Mother just rolled her eyes and said, "Before the guests arrive, just promise me you will all do your best to make this a pleasant evening for everyone." However, when she said that she was looking particularly at me.

"Why do you look at me that way, Mother?"

"Oh, no reason." She said, raising her eyebrows and turning to my father to adjust his wig. Even without an explanation I knew what she meant. Stay close to your brother and help him along.



One by one, the guests arrived as my family greeted them in the foyer. It was nothing more than a bunch of tedious people, making a bunch of useless conversation and then presenting their ugly daughters to our notice. Aunt Catherine made sure she was in the line, pausing between introductions to say a word or two into my mother's ear about a certain family or a particular young lady she thought seemed well bred.

Since I was trapped, I cast envious glances into the direction of my Uncle, Darcy and Rushworth who were having by all accounts a very humorous conversation at the far end of the room. Sir Lewis was gesturing grandly and Cousin Darcy and Rushworth were laughing heartily at everything my uncle said. Monty stood to my right, politely greeting guests and barely saying anything. Every now and then when a young lady was presented to him he manage to say a quiet hello and bow.

The Adams Family were part of the last group of guests to arrive. The family consisted of Mr. Oscar Adams a prominent landowner from Bakewell, his wife and their three daughters. The elder, being one Miss Sophia Adams was presented first. After she greeted my parents and Aunt and made idle small talk with them, she stepped before me. She curtsied entirely too low whilst thrusting her hand in my direction. I took her hand gallantly, kissed it as I bowed and directed her before my brother. This was the first time that Monty and Miss Adams had seen each other since the blackberry jam incident and I was curious as to how they would each react. If Monty was embarrassed he showed no signs of it and bowed to the young lady graciously. She was just about to offer him her hand, when a sudden realization came over her and she seemed as though she were going to draw back. However, my brother anticipating this, held out his hand, looked at her and nodded. A slight smile seemed to touch her lips and she reached out and placed her hand in his and he kissed it. For some reason my heart softened to the lady who until now I had described as the ugliest lady in all of England. I appreciated what she did for my brother and decided she would be my choice for the first dance of the evening.

Miss Patricia Adams was presented next. She curtsied clumsily and made her way through the line without much to recommend herself to anybody. Mr. Adams then presented his younger daughter, Miss Emily. As she made her way through the reception line I could hear my

brother's nervous breathing. I shot him a look, wondering what he was about. His eyes followed her closely as she made her way towards us. I turned to see what he was looking at so intently and I stopped cold.

Every time Miss Emily curtsied, she'd bob up and down in such a delightful way that the curls piled on the top of her head jiggled. I could not explain the feeling that came over me as I stared at her. The young lady had grown into such a comely young woman with beguiling charisma. I felt myself becoming drawn to her and wondered if I should ask her for the first dance instead.

Monty whispered into my ear, "She is so very pretty, don't you think so Andrew?" I instantly saw how it was and I reined in my thoughts.

"She is tolerable, I suppose; but not tolerable enough to draw my notice. She's just a silly little girl." It was a lie of course, but I continued to stare at that head full of bouncing curls as she slowly walked up to me; that was until I heard my father clear his throat, which awakened my brother and me out of our trance.

She smiled at me so delightfully and said, "Hello Lord Fitzwilliam. How very nice to see you. It has been far too long. My sister tells me you just completed your first year at Oxford. How very interesting! Before the evening is done, you simply must tell me all about it."

My mouth went dry, "I... I... I... yes. But I... I don't think I... I have anything very interesting to tell."

She smiled at me so bewitchingly that I felt my knees weaken, "Oh, you're just being modest I am sure," she said, casting me another devastating smile in my direction, "I would love to hear all about it."

She stepped before my brother next and smiled again. "Hello, Mr. Fitzwilliam. I hear you are to journey to Oxford for the next term. The neighbourhood is so lacking in gentleman these days. Oxford and Cambridge seemed to have swallowed you all up!"

My brother for the moment was stricken and could not say a word. I gave him a gentle nudge and he burst forth with the most ridiculous thing he could possibly say, "Music!"

"Excuse me, sir"

"Play music? I mean, do you... do you play... music?"

She came to some sort of realization and laughed so infectiously that I thought I was going to throw myself at her feet and beg for mercy.

"Yes, I play. Unfortunately not the pianoforte, as so many young ladies are supposed to be proficient at. I play the harp. Do you like the harp, Mr. Fitzwilliam?"

"I... I... I don't know. I think so. Yes! Yes, I do! I love the harp! We have a harp! My mother plays the harp!"

She giggled softly again in that way of hers and I thought my head was going to explode."

"Well, perhaps later, if time permits, I will play for you all!"

"So lovely," said my brother going all breathless and stupid.

"Excuse me, sir."

"Oh I... I mean, that would be l-lovely, Miss Emily."

She paused for a moment, and then flashed that smile again as her father led her away. My brother and I both turned to follow her with our eyes as she entered the ballroom. We both then looked at each other, and I knew we each had exactly the same thought in our heads. The only thing that remained to be decided amongst us was: which one of us was going to have to die first so the other would have the pleasure of leading out the captivating Miss Emily Adams for the first dance of the evening.

We both turned about to follow the young lady in question into the ballroom when our father cleared his throat again

and said, "AND JUST WHERE DO YOU TWO THINK YOU ARE GOING?"

I started to gesture frantically as my brother stammered. "I...I w-was going into the b-ballroom father, I m-must see to m-my guest... I mean guests."

"AND WHAT OF YOUR GUESTS HERE?"

Father stepped aside to reveal one Miss Helena Gresham who stood staring at the floor. She was in attendance with her aunt and uncle, the Browns, well known in the neighbourhood as a family of little fortune and no connexions. We returned to our places in line and while Aunt Catherine gave a civil yet inferior greeting to Mr. And Mrs. Brown; I spoke to Miss Gresham.

"Hello, nice to see you, Miss Gresham. Do enjoy yourself." I was about to hand her off to my brother while I scanned the room for any sign of those curls.

Miss Gresham opened her mouth to speak. "I was just telling my aunt, how it is always a delight to be at Matlock. The house looks lovely."

"Hmm? What? You were saying?" Miss Gresham pursed her lips together and looked away as I looked for any signs of Miss Emily Adams. "Yes, quite. But if you will excuse me, Miss Gresham, there is someone over there that I simply must talk to." I bowed and again tried to hand her

off to my brother. I started to walk away just as I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“HOLD STEADY THERE A MOMENT, ANDREW. MR. BROWN WANTS TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR FIRST YEAR AT OXFORD.”

Mr. Brown began to talk in his usual droning, monotone way. I was so bored that I thought I would shrivel up and blow away.

“Yes, I went to Oxford too, Oriel, you know, we had foot races every year around the quad during the spring term. Beat a few Queens' College men in my day. Do you race Lord Fitzwilliam? Foot races I mean. Do you race in foot races, sir?”

“No, I...uh...I uh haven't the time...I have a boat you see.”

“Spectacular boat races in the fall! I had a boat! Sunk it during Guy Fawkes Day, you know. Mighty clumsy of me wouldn't you say?”

Miss Gresham said shyly, “No uncle please don't say such a thing, I think you are very clever. I wouldn't have you think my uncle clumsy Lord Fitzwilliam, he is very good, especially to me.”

“Hmm? What? You were saying?”

She sighed and said, "Nothing, I said nothing."

"Oh yes, clever. Ah, and here is my brother, Miss Gresham. He is very clever. I'm sure you two have so many clever things to talk about."

And before anyone could stop me, I took off for the ballroom. Once I was inside I looked about me and I could see the other chaps circling my prey. Lord Michael Henderson was rubbing his chin, trying to build up his courage; John Dixon was smoothing down his hair; Lord Peter Stanmore was nudging Stephan Hawthorne, Stephan Hawthorne was nudging his brother William; and James Rushworth bumped into people whilst busily adjusting that stupid cravat. Before that bunch built up their nerve and before I approached the fair Miss Emily, I went down my mental checklist: Breathe? Good! Ensemble? Stunning! Teeth? Dazzling! Hair? Perfect! Fitzwilliam Charm? No need to ask!

I stepped forward in complete confidence only to have Rushworth grab my arm.

"I say, Andy old chap, what is your opinion on this cravat of mine? I say it is no advantage at all. I think it makes me look fat!"

Out of the corner of my eye I spotted my brother entering the ballroom. He began to search desperately throughout the crowd for a certain young lady. I had the advantage

over him of having the lady in question within my sight; that is if only Rushworth would move his tiresome person from within my line of vision.

“And what of this colour, Andy? That tailor of mine assured me that all the young men would be wearing this colour this summer. I've looked around and I'm the only one wearing an orange cravat. Does it look all right, Andy?”

Monty began to move with deliberation in Miss Emily's general direction. Such a feeling of sibling rivalry came over me that I thought I would kill Rushworth if he did not let me go and get out of my way.

“I paid three shillings for it. That seems like a great deal to me now that I think about it. Do you think three shillings is too much? I guess I should not have paid more than two shillings; actually, I should not have paid more than one shilling. What is your opinion, Andy?”

“I think that if you don't unhand me this very moment, you'll pull back a stub when you do.”

“Oh Andy, you do say the funniest things!”

As Rushworth was laughing I extricated myself from his grasp and moved swiftly through the crowd of people only to be stopped once more by another grasp of the arm.

“Andrew, where are you going in such haste?”

It was my Uncle Lewis.

“If you will excuse me, Uncle, I see someone that I simply must talk to.”

“Hold on, we have hardly had ten minutes together since my arrival. Why don't you humour an old relation and talk to me for a moment.”

“Uncle, I would love to stop and talk of smelly horses some other time. I am very eager to secure a certain lady for the start of the ball.”

“Yes, I know!”

I looked at him and narrowed my eyes, “You know? What do you mean you know, Uncle?”

“Andrew, you have every advantage over your brother that life has to offer, why don't we let him win this round for once.”

“Win? Win what? Uncle you do say the most interesting things, however I have business that cannot be delayed.”

“I know and I also know that your brother seemed quite taken with this business of yours as well.”

“Well, good for him, but, if you'll excuse...”

He grabbed my arm again.

“Andrew, there comes a time when you must choose your battles and choose your victories. But this is one war you should sit out.”

“You know, Uncle, I would love to spend the next hour with you deciphering these rather odd riddles of yours, but I haven't a moment to...”

I was just about to pull away when I saw my brother approach Miss Emily Adams, say something quickly and then appeared to be awaiting nervously for her response. I looked at my Uncle as he nodded and it all became clear; I had to let my brother have his victory.

My uncle and I both turned to watch the rest of the exchange. Miss Emily smiled politely and seemed to be saying something to the negative whilst shaking her head. What was the silly girl about? A sharp pain coursed its way through my heart and I felt my back stiffen as I watched my brother bow and step away.

I exchanged a quizzical glance with my uncle and our eyes turned to follow Montgomery as he made his way to the other side room. Another silent communication between my uncle and myself told me to make my way to speak to my brother. As I walked up to him, my brother noticed my

approach, blushed and turned away. Undaunted, I felt the need to question him although I could not come out and ask him such an obvious question that would only heighten his embarrassment.

"I say o' irksome brother of mine, have you ever seen so many ugly girls in one room?"

"No indeed, brother; they are all very pretty. Several of them exceptionally pretty."

"Oh really, who? Enlighten me."

"Miss Campbell is very pretty as well as Miss Lawrence."

"You must be joking! They are two of the most unfortunate girls in the room, blessed with neither beauty nor brains." Here was my chance to turn the subject onto what I wanted to talk about, so I casually mentioned..." I'd put them up there with all of those Adams girls, not a tolerable face amongst that entire family."

"Oh? Do you think so," said my silly brother, who was too stupid to realize how easily he was being manipulated.

"Heavens yes! Now take Miss Emily for instance, very inferior if you ask me."

"Oh? I can't really say that I would agree with you there, she is...she is ever so pretty."

“Well, if you believe that brother you should make haste and secure her for the first dance of the evening.”

I cast my eyes about the room, pretending that I was not interested in anything else he had to say. In actuality I was waiting anxiously.

“I have asked her already, but...”

“Well then I congratulate you on securing one of the most undeserving females in the room.”

He looked away again, “No, it seems...I mean I fear someone has already bested me in the asking.”

“Really! Who?”

“I'm afraid I don't know.”

Before I could pry any further, Cousin Darcy walked up.

“Uncle Christopher sent me over. He wants to know why you have not opened the ball, Monty.”

My brother again looked away and said, “I haven't a partner.”

“Oh?” said Darcy, “Whom do you think you shall ask?”

“I don't know. I'm not quite sure how to start.”

“Do you want me to ask someone for you?” said Darcy,
“It's ever so easy.”

I turned to look at Darcy in disbelief. “Do you expect my brother and me to believe that you, who I might add cannot even dance, have already secured a partner for the first dance of the evening?”

“Actually for the first two. Hey, wait a minute! I can dance!”

“Says you!”

“I can!”

“Don't be silly! You're a clumsy oaf.”

“I take issue with that statement, Andrew!”

“Take issue all you want, it doesn't make you a better dancer.”

“What proof do you have that tells you that I cannot dance?”

“I have the proof of it with my own eyes. You move like a great, lumbering, beast!”

Darcy's eyes flashed dangerously and I could see I was on the point of pushing him past his anger threshold. I turned

back to my brother. "Say the word, brother, and I can have at least ten young ladies over here at once," I said, snapping my fingers above my head for emphasis. "With my help you could have your pick of any lady in the room."

"Well, not every lady," said Darcy, smiling like an idiot. "At first I thought it would be hard, but then I walked over and asked and she said yes!"

"Oh! And who might this be?" I laughed, "Do tell us who you managed to bribe to dance with you. No, let me guess, Georgiana!" I threw back my head and laughed again at my clever remark.

"I take issue with the word bribe, Andrew."

"OK, here's a better word, tricked then!" I get cleverer by the minute.

Darcy pushed me in the shoulder. I was just about to push him back when Uncle Lewis arrived and stepped in between us.

"Gentleman, is everything alright here?"

"Darcy was just telling us the most fantastic story, Uncle. You'll never believe it; he's somehow managed to get someone to dance with him. I wonder who the unfortunate

lady is? Who is she Darcy so I can give her my condolences?"

"Miss Emily Adams."

And in unison we three shouted, "MISS EMILY ADAMS!"

Darcy tugged at his lapels, stuck his chin in the air and walked away as we stared after him with our mouths wide open.

I turned to my brother and said, "You didn't want to dance her anyway. Any lady who goes in for that tall, dark and silent type is not worth your notice."

My brother just turned away, looking as if someone had belted him in the gut.

Uncle Lewis cleared his throat and said, "Oh never mind that, son; plenty of young ladies left in the room."

"But Uncle, I..." My brother stopped and frowned.

My Uncle winked at me and simply smiled in that knowing, reassuring way of his, turned, caught the eye of Mr. Brown and gestured for him to come over and join us.

"Ah, Mr. Brown," said my Uncle. "Perhaps you can settle something for me. I was going to mention to my nephews here about a delightful piece of music for the pianoforte I

heard played just last week at my friend, Sir Harold Metcalf's home. For the life of me I cannot seem to remember the name of it. I think it is by Haydn; I'm not sure. Do you know anything of music, sir?"

"Oh dear me no, Sir Lewis. I am no musician. My niece, Miss Gresham is the musician in the family. Do let me summon her and I am sure she can tell you all that you require." A few moments latter after her uncles urging, the shy young lady approached, looking entirely at the floor.

"Yes, Uncle?"

"Helena, my dear. May I present Sir Lewis de Bourgh? Miss Helena Gresham, this is Sir Lewis.

She curtsied, looked up cautiously and said, "Delighted, sir," then returned her eyes to the floor.

"The delight is all mine. Your uncle tells me that you are a very accomplished musician."

She glanced up momentarily, "Oh no, I am not so very accomplished, sir."

A small explosion went off in my head and I smiled knowingly at my uncle and said, "Do you hear that brother, Miss-Gresham-says-that-she-is-not-a-very-good-musician." I hoped he understood my meaning.

Montgomery looked confused and said, "Huh?"

Oh Lord!

My uncle repeated himself, "I was asking Miss Gresham if she was an accomplished musician." My uncle then nodded his head slowly and expressively.

I then added, "And I was thinking she is just being too mod-est."

Mr. Brown looked left and right watching our performance with humour; Miss Gresham continued to stare at the floor; and my uncle and I waited for what felt like an eternity for my brother to catch on.

"Oh? OHHHHHH! I'm sure you are too modest!"

Geesh!

Here Miss Gresham hazarded a quick glance up. "Mr. Fitzwilliam, you are just being kind."

Now, if I have instructed my brother correctly, the next thing he will say is...

"I'm very fond of music; especially when it is played by someone as...as...as..." (I slapped him on the back) "...as charming as you."

She slowly looked up from the floor and revealed the most stunning pair of green eyes that I ever beheld. Then she smiled shyly at my brother and I could see my brother's face light up instantly and he was lost in those green eyes himself. I furrowed my brow and asked myself why I never noticed how really pretty she was.

I moved forward slightly and was just about to ask her for the first dance when my uncle placed his hand on my shoulder to lead me away. When we were a good distance away, we turned to watch my brother as he initiated a short conversation with the lady. She seemed to be curtsying in agreement to something my brother was saying to her, which made my brother smile broadly. My uncle then turned to me and said, "You are a good brother, Andrew."

"Good? Foolish more like! Here I had ample chance to dance with two of the prettiest girls in the room and who did I loose them to; Fitzwilliam and Montgomery! I'll never live it down. At least there is still the elder Miss Adams."

"Miss Patricia?"

"Lord no! Miss Sophia is the one I had in mind. I can always ask her to dance with me. Now, where is she?" I scanned the room but my uncle caught sight of her first.

"Isn't that her; the one talking to your friend Rushworth?"

I swung myself around. Yes, it was indeed she and if I was not mistaken she looked if she was agreeing to partner with Rushworth for the first dance herself. This is just my luck, at my own brother's birthday ball; I had no one to dance with.

In the very next instant the violins sounded to signal the beginning of the ball. All around me I heard our neighbours applaud as my brother led out Miss Helena Gresham to open the ball. I could see her Aunt and Uncle beaming with pride at having their niece distinguished in such a way. Mother and Father nodded their approval also and I could see my mothers eyes glistening with tears as she watched her "dearest boy" take his first steps into manhood.

Uncle Lewis stepped over to his wife as she pinched her lips together tightly which usually meant she was seriously displeased. I sighed heavily as I watched Fitzwilliam and Miss Emily Adams take their place one couple down from my brother and Miss Gresham, followed closely behind by Rushworth and the eldest Miss Adams. The floor was quickly filled to capacity with every eligible dancing partner taken. I looked all around and felt a little obvious standing about in such a stupid manner as the dance began. I made my way over to the ballroom doors and looked up and caught a glimpse of Anne and Georgiana still peaking from their perch on the landing. I went up the stairs to ask them what they were about.

“What do you two little ones do her all alone? Should you not be in bed?”

“We can be here,” said Anne defensively, “Aunt Cassandra said we could watch the first dance if we were very quiet.”

I set down on the top step and watched as my brother led his partner through the first series of steps.

“Very well, I will not quarrel with you, but as soon as it is finished, off to bed with you.”

Georgiana and Anne grinned at each other and came over in their bare feet and sat down on one side of me. I could tell they were a little cold so I removed my coat and placed it around both their shoulders. Georgiana gave a great yawn and laid her head down on my knee and within minutes was fast asleep. Anne remained wide-awake, staring fixedly at my brother and his partner. He was beaming from ear to ear, as if he had never felt so fortunate in his life.

“Andrew?”

“Hmm?” I said as I watched Fitzwilliam twirl his partner expertly about the floor. Hmph!

“Do you...do you think...does my cousin Montgomery like her very much?”

"Like who?" I asked as I caught a fleeting glimpse of Rushworth going the wrong way.

"Her; that lady he dances with."

"I don't know. I guess so. Why?"

"Because."

I looked down at her as she stared fixedly on the goings on in the ballroom and I asked, "Because why?"

"Because he keeps smiling at her, that's why. I hope he shan't be long."

"What do you mean?"

"He promised me!"

"I don't understand; he promised you what?"

She began to whine. "He promised me that he would come put me to bed and read me a story. How can he read me a story when he keeps smiling and dancing with her?"

Tears began steadily to course their way down her cheeks. She then began crying pitifully. I had no idea what to do or what she could possibly be about.

I said, "There...there," and I patted her back lightly, looking about wildly for someone to help me and trying to keep the panic that I was feeling from overtaking me. She continued to cry and for a brief moment I contemplated yelling desperately for help. Somehow, I managed to lift Georgiana up and lead Anne by the hand up the second flight of stairs into the nursery, putting them both to bed. After Georgiana was tucked in I retrieved my coat from Anne as she used the sleeve to wipe away her tears.

I yelled, "Heavens, Anne! Don't you realize this is silk, you silly girl?"

She began to wail uncontrollably and I hoped the nurse would come in to rescue me from my predicament. No one was forthcoming so I was left to the task of soothing the distraught child.

"What on earth is the matter with you?"

"I want my Papa! I want my Papa!"

"Alright, I'll go and fetch him, I won't be a moment!"

Suddenly she yelled, "Where are you going? Don't leave me! I'm afraid!" More incessant crying followed.

"But, Anne dear, you asked for your Papa. I was only going to fetch him for you!"

“I want to go home, I don't like Matlock anymore, I want to go home! I don't like you! I want my Papaaaa!”

As if on cue, Uncle Lewis walked in and was instantly sitting upon Anne's bed. “Dear, what is wrong, my love? Why these tears?”

“Andrew was being mean to meeeee!”

I threw my hands up, “Uncle, I didn't do a thing, honest!”

My uncle turned around and smiled good-naturedly. “I know; she's just over tired. Please return to the ball and enjoy yourself. I'll see to this. And if you would be so kind, send your Aunt Catherine up.

I did what I was bid and Aunt Catherine rushed out of the room and neither my Aunt nor Uncle returned to the ball all evening.

§

I sat down in the alcove on the far side of the ballroom away from the orchestra and revellers. Unfortunately Rushworth saw me and instantly rushed over to accost me.

“Miss Adams is such a superior young lady! She says that I am the best dancer she has ever seen; she says she could dance with me all night and never tire. Why did you never

say she was such a charming lady, Andrew? I'd better go. I am sent to bring her a cup of punch."

I had not the heart to tell him that his twelve thousand a year made him the best dancer in every womans eye.

Fitzwilliam casually walked past whilst deep in conversation with Miss Emily and happened to look over, scoffed and continued strolling about the ballroom occasionally throwing me more sarcastic smirks.

And I'm quite sure his ten thousand a year made him think that women thought he was a brilliant conversationalist as well. Then again, here I sat with the future prospect of twenty thousand a year, and I was all alone.

My brother happened by a moment or two later and sat down beside me and exclaimed excitedly, "Did you know that Miss Gresham reads Shakespeare and her favourite play is Hamlet, just like mine.

I feigned interest, "Really?"

"Yes! Is not that interesting?"

"Wonders never cease to amaze me."

"And to top it all off she also plays the pianoforte and the harp, just like mother! Is not that grand?"

"Really?"

"She said that her aunt and uncle would welcome me at their home most any day."

I yawned. I was in no humour to talk about another persons enjoyment, especially when I was not enjoying myself. A few moments of silence followed where I kept noticing out of the corner of my eye that my brother kept looking at me as if he wanted to say something. After a few times this started to annoy me.

"All right, Tedious; what on earth is the matter with you!"

"I-I just wanted to say... T-Thank you, Andrew."

I turned to him and furrowed my brow. "For what?" I said crossly, hating it when people thanked me, especially when I had no idea what they were thanking me for.

"For helping me today, you know, this morning in the stables, and just now, you know...getting me a partner. I could not have gotten through this day without you. And one thing more," he said, turning away and looking off into the distance, "I'm glad...I'm glad you are my brother."

I was taken aback. I blinked at him then looked at the floor, then looked at him again. I didn't know what to say. I was so choked up with emotion at that moment that I couldn't utter a single word.

“You don't have to say anything, Andrew, I know how you feel. He turned to look me in the eye in that way of his and smiled slightly and changing the subject said, “Do you think it would have a very odd look if I asked Miss Gresham to dance once more?”

I studied my brother for a long moment. His face was filled with so much happiness that I felt that one of my usual flippant remarks just would not do. “If you like her, then no, I don't think it would have a very odd look at all.”

Our parents joined us and we both stood. They both regarded us and I could tell they were curious as to what had just passed between us. My brother feeling slightly uneasy under my father's gaze stepped hesitantly before him.

“F-Father?”

“HMMM,” said Father, looking about the room.

“T-Thank you; f-for the b-b-ball.”

For a moment my father said nothing and was silent. Mother looked up and we waited to see what my father would say. Father did not turn around. He just said softly, “You're welcome.” I could tell from the sound in his voice that he was smiling.

Montgomery's face flushed momentarily. "Well," said my brother, slightly overcome with emotion, but keeping his feelings safely reined in, "I think I should see to my guests."

"That is an excellent idea, dearest," said Mother, a touch overcome herself.

My brother walked away to rejoin the guests and Father wondered off to talk to a few of the neighbours. Mother looked at me strangely. She said nothing, communicating to me with her eyes only.

"Mother," I said, "Monty just told me that he was glad that I was his brother."

"Why does that surprise you?"

"I don't know, it just does. I mean, I've teased him, I've taunted him, I've argued with him, and then he goes and says something like that. I didn't know what to say to him."

"I think you do, Andrew," said mother."



The ball ended and the guests went away exclaiming to themselves that it was the finest event of the year.

Somewhere between the last dance and the last carriage slipping away into the night, my brother disappeared. I went to my room, untied my cravat and stood staring at myself in the mirror thinking over what my brother had said to me earlier that evening. I wasn't sleepy, so I decided to go and say goodnight to him.

I knocked softly upon his door and entered his room. There he was, curled up in his favourite chair, sleeping comfortably. His right arm dangled over the edge, clutching a book and his left arm was holding securely onto Anne, who was nestled safely on his lap, fast asleep. It was just like my brother to remember a promise. I gently removed the book from my brother's hand and took his other arm from around Anne. She awakened and looked up at me with her drowsy eyes.

I put my finger to my mouth and said softly, "Come with me, Anne. Let Montgomery have his rest, he's had a big day. I'll put you to bed."

She hesitated for a moment and then slipped quietly off his lap. I then lifted her up into my arms and as she laid her head sleepily on my shoulder she yawned. When we were in the corridor she spoke into my ear, "He always keeps his promises to me."

I put her to bed. She yawned and stretched as I tucked the blanket around her. She looked up at me with her innocent

little face and said, "He also said that when I grow up he promises to marry me."

I laughed slightly at the nonsense of a six year old. "And why, if I may ask, do you want him to marry you, Anne?"

She narrowed her eyes at me in disbelief as if I had just said the oddest thing imaginable. "Because, I love him, that's why."

She rolled over and closed her eyes. I smiled and said to myself, "Not as much as I, not as much as I."

Authors note: From now on, new additions to this story will only be posted here. I am not deserting my usual haunts; on the contrary, I still mean to post stories at Austen.com; just not this story.

Chapter Two

Legends of the Fall

Part 1

1802

And I was packed off into the army. Well, not exactly packed off. As my father put it, "NO SON OF MINE IS GOING TO BE IDLE AND USELESS." It stuck me as odd that my brother, Andrew, was permitted to be the idlest man in all of England. He and Rushworth spent more time on the road to Brighton or Bath than they actually spent in either of the two towns. I suspect that was the privilege of being first born, something I would never know about. Anyway, I had no such inclination for idleness; after college a commission had been speedily procured for me in a regiment at present garrisoned at Gibraltar.

As my father put it yet again, "IT WILL BE THE MAKING OF YOU! CAN'T HAVE YOU WASTING AWAY YOUR DAYS AT OXFORD FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE!" Little did father know I was extremely keen to be away from home and to put it quite frankly, I was chafing at the bit to travel more than ever since I returned from my grand tour.

I spent the week before my departure in Derbyshire, putting in appearances at the local balls, telling my friends goodbye, and spending time with Darcy, who told me of his first two years spent at Cambridge and the scandalous exploits of George Wickham.

Also, during that last week in England, my entire family made their way to Matlock to issue their collective farewells. Even my eccentric Uncle Andrew, my mother's brother, the Duke of Worthing, came; telling me all about tropical diseases or his latest inventions, offering me shillings, then tousling my hair and pinching my cheeks as if I were still five years old.

"Ow!" I said because he had me by both cheeks this time.

"How old are you now, Monty?"

I somehow managed to say, "Twenty, Uncle Andrew."

"Twenty? Twenty!" He called across the room.

"Cassandra!"

"Yes, Drew," said my mother.

"When the devil did this happen?"

"When the devil did what happen, dear?"

"When did this boy of yours turn twenty?"

“The same day every year, the eighth of June.”

He released me.

“Damned impertinence! Give me back my shilling!”

I gave him back his money and began to rub the life back into my flesh as he wandered off to the dining room mumbling something about cheeky, floppy-haired upstarts.

Since it was my last evening, and because I dearly loved them all, I wanted my younger cousins to dine with the rest of the family in the formal dining room. My uncle Andrew's two youngest sons, sixteen and twelve year old Lords Harry and Thomas Montgomery were acting somewhat civilized this evening; they only *almost* broke mothers favourite vase three times this visit.

Aunt Catherine and Uncle Lewis had come; with Aunt Catherine keeping a watchful eye on the exuberant Montgomery boys making sure that they did not trample her daughter, my little cousin, Anne.

The Darcys' dined with us this evening as well. There was cousin Fitzwilliam, eighteen and recently past the tall, skinny, and awkward stage. He was standing in the far corner speaking with Uncle Andrew's eldest son, Lord Fairford; both were pointing at Andrew and laughing at some private joke.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, Anne stepped before me with her hands on her hips. At that very moment I recollected our earlier appointment and proceeded to slap my forehead.

"Where did you go today, Montgomery Fitzwilliam? You said you were going to let me see your rock collection. I looked for you everywhere."

"Oh, I am sorry Anne, I forgot. I'll make it up to you, I promise. I know, I'll send you something pretty from Gibraltar."

She didn't seem impressed.

"How could you forget, Montgomery? You've never forgotten your promises to me before. Where were you?"

"I had to go out." I didn't tell her or anyone for that matter that I was visiting with Miss Gresham, saying goodbye.

"Out? Out where?"

"I was visiting a friend."

"For five hours?"

"And afterwards, I went to my secret place."

"It seems that I'll never get to see your secret place!"

"Anne, as I explained before, several times, I can not take you there."

"Why ever not?"

"It wouldn't be a very good secret place if I shared it with everybody, now would it?"

"I'm not an everybody."

"I'm sorry Anne, you know I've never taken anyone there, not even cousin Darcy. It's my own secret paradise."

"I can keep a secret."

"I'm sure you can, but it's also a long way away; two riders would tire Claudio if we went that far and then there is a steep climb up a hill and a long walk through a wood... Besides, I leave for Gibraltar tomorrow afternoon."

"You can take me in your curricle first thing in the morning!"

Anne was certainly being unusually persistent today. I sighed and said, "The curricle has a broken axel; anyway, aren't you just getting over a cold, little one?"

Her face twisted into a frown and she cried, "Don't call me that! I'm not little anymore, I'm nearly eleven!"

“Nearly eleven, eh? My, my, aren't we the young lady all of a sudden.”

“Don't make fun of me!”

“You know that I would never make fun of my favourite cousin. I believe that you confuse me with Andrew?”

She smiled up at me, took both my hands and said, “I would never confuse you with Andrew.” She then looked back down to my hands and asked, “What do you do there, all alone?”

“I think.”

“Think about what?” she asked as she dropped one hand and examined my signet ring with her small fingers.

“Things.”

“What sort of things?” she asked as she removed my ring from my right ring finger to my left.

I laughed and replied, “Nothing that would interest someone like you.”

Her face became all seriousness. “But, if a person assumes that the first person doesn't take any interest in the things that interests the second person and if the same person keeps secrets, wouldn't you think that the first person

would begin to think that the second person has no real interest in the first person at all and now," her voice dropped off to a whisper, "it's too late."

"Pardon?"

"Montgomery, why do you always get to do all the fun things; I never go anywhere." As her bottom lip protruded, I gently tugged at her braids and patted her on the head to sooth her indignation. "You know that I don't like being patted on the head, Montgomery."

"I apologize. To make it up to you, may I have the honour of escorting such a delightful young lady into the dining room?"

"Oh yes, please," she said with that wide grin of hers that always melts my heart.



At dinner I sat at the end of the table to my mother's left and Darcy sat to my left. During the dessert course, I turned when my cousin addressed me.

Darcy asked, "When do you think you will be able to come home for a visit, Fitzwilliam?"

"Not for at least two or three years, I suspect."

I lifted my spoon to take a bite of my custard and caught a fleeting glimpse of my mother's heartbreaking facial expression. I reached over and patted her hand and that's when I noticed Anne looking at me as well, thoughtful. When she saw me look in her direction and smile, she quickly looked away.

I asked her, "Have you something else on your mind, little one?"

Her eyes widened and she said, with a touch of impatience in her voice, "Didn't I ask you not to call me that?"

"Sorry."

She then looked left and right and asked, voice barely above a whisper, "I've been wondering, do they have pirates in Gibraltar?"

"Pardon?"

She beckoned to me with her finger to come closer. I leaned across the table and she whispered in her mouse-like voice, "Are you very scared of sailing? I would be."

I said, "Of sailing on a ship? No, I'm not scared of sailing at all."

She peered around for some reason and said even softer, "Noooo, of pirates!"

This time I bellowed loudly, much like my father,
“SCARED OF PIRATES... IN GIBRALTAR!
HAHAHAHAHAHA!”

I doubled over in laughter at the nonsensical remark. Everyone else, hearing my expressions of amusement, turned around and started laughing, too. Anne's face flushed a deep shade of crimson; she gave me a very stern glare and pinched her lips together. Thinking that I had embarrassed her made me instantly wretched. I immediately said, “Anne, what I meant to say, was...”

It was too late; she turned away from me towards my mother and said, “Aunt Cassandra, may I be excused? I've had enough.”

“Very well my love. Why don't you take Georgiana into the drawing room and you both can help Helen with the tea things. The other ladies will join you in a moment. I'll even let you pour if you like.”

She smiled at mother, rolled her eyes at me and left the table.

§

When the gentlemen joined the ladies later on, I instantly walked up to Anne, who was busy pouring out, for a cup of coffee and to offer her my apologies. She took the

opportunity to totally ignore me. She sat the pot down and turning on her heel, made her way over to the settee, sat down with a thud, folded her arms and stared off into nothingness. I was left with the distinct pleasure of pouring my own coffee and just as I was about to go to her again with some sort of explanation for my behaviour, my uncle Lewis approached and grasped me by the shoulder.

"You will be sadly missed, Monty." My uncle squeezed my shoulder and looked into my eyes as if... I can not quite put my finger on it... but the look was filled with so much emotion that I had to reassure him with a squeeze of the hand myself.

"Uncle, all will be well, I find myself quite looking forward to it, actually."

"I was so hoping to see you put that magnificent mind of yours to work. You would have made an excellent barrister. I hate to see your education wasted."

"My dear Uncle, you always say that. As you know I want to travel and see more of the world. I cannot very well do that sitting in some stuffy office with no window. No, the more I think about it, the more I realize I was made for the army."

"I wish your father would have let me get you a posting with my cousin, General de Bourgh. I'm sure he could always use a clever young fellow like yourself."

"You know my father, Uncle. He is convinced that a post at court is a little too comfortable for any son of his. Besides, Gibraltar will be very interesting."

His countenance changed and looking at me slyly he grinned slowly he asked, "Have you said goodbye to your Miss Gresham?"

I felt myself blush and I looked at the floor. "She is not my Miss Gresham, Uncle."

"Oh, this is news to me. I have it on good authority that you danced two times with her at the Derbyshire assembly the other evening."

I threw my head back and laughed, "Let me guess which one of your spies gave you that bit of information: Andrew or Darcy?"

"Andrew and Darcy as spies? Don't make me laugh! Andrew is too busy worrying that he will miss out on the latest fashions and Darcy has always been a little too closed mouth for me to get any information out of. Let me just say a certain lady of my acquaintance took great delight in the telling of such a story when I took tea with her last evening."

"Remind me never to go to assemblies with my mother again, especially if I want to keep a secret." Uncle Lewis

furrowed his brow and studied me for a long while.
"Uncle, is something the matter?"

"No, no, indeed. Well, I am curious, it seems... I mean, is there something there you feel you need to conceal?"

"No, not at all."

"You've always had a soft spot for Miss Gresham. It would be understandable if you have developed certain... feelings where she is concerned." I was about to say something but hesitated. Uncle Lewis seized the opportunity to finish his thoughts. "How long has this friendship lasted? About four years, I believe."

"Uncle, I do like her very much. W-We are great friends; will always be great friends; she is a very special person."

His eyebrows shot up. "Oh, I see now!"

"No, Uncle, you misunderstand me... we just think... I have to make my way in the world... it wouldn't be fair to her... we are only friends... we don't think..."

"Hmmm? There are certainly a lot of 'we's' in that last sentence."

"No. You mistake me, Uncle. What I meant to say was... nothing could become of it, I'm sure." I became a little

uneasy and started to stutter slightly. "S-she tells m-me that Mr. H-Henderson has been v-very attentive of late."

"Henderson? Henderson? Is that the family up near Winford?"

"Yes."

"Yes, good family, nice little estate. He inherits?"

"Yes. Michael is the eldest son." I took a quick sip from my cup.

"Didn't I meet him here a few years ago, at your birthday ball?" I nodded. "Yes, now I remember; nice sort of chap, tall, strapping fellow, smiles a lot, not too bright, but you know me, I was always partial to clever young men."

Sir Lewis said nothing and slowly smiled. I was perplexed and asked, "What is the smile for?"

"Oh nothing; I was only thinking that she will be well taken care of and not taken away too far from her family. I always liked her. Good for her!" I looked off into the distance, feeling a little unsettled and uncomfortable. My uncle quickly added, "Have no fear, son; one day it will be your turn. You'll meet some young woman who will think you are the slay dragons for a living and then you will be done for!"*

"Slay what?"

"Ask me again in about ten years." He turned to look at his daughter and then turned to me and asked, "You will remember to write to... "

"... to Anne. Yes, of course. However at the moment I don't believe that she likes me very much."

"Nonsense, she adores you! Why just this morning at breakfast she said that she hoped that pirates would not attack your ship and throw you into the sea. That is high praise from my little girl."

I again looked towards my young cousin, who, upon seeing me look at her, turned completely around and looked the other way. "I'm afraid I've hurt her feelings. I didn't mean to."

"We'll just see about that." My uncle turned again to his daughter, "Anne, come here, please."

She did not move but I could see her shoulders shrug.

"No, uncle, do not disturb her, she does not hear."

"Of course she hears; she hears everything. Anne, dear."

She hesitated momentarily before saying, "Yes, Papa."

"Come here for a moment, my love."

"What for, Papa?"

"What for?!?! Because I wish to speak to you, that's what for!"

She hesitated again, but eventually arose, only she took her own sweet time coming to her father; her eyes were averted from me all the while.

"Yes, Papa."

"Anne, your cousin here says that he will write to you from Gibraltar, if you wish." She said not a word and her father huffed and asked, "How would you like that, my sweet?" Anne only twitched her lips causing her father to impatiently ask, "Well?"

She vacillated a bit more before saying in a highly impertinent manner, "You can tell my cousin that he needn't bother. I know that I shan't have the time to read any of his letters even if he does write to me."

Uncle Lewis, looking exasperated said, "Shan't have the time? What on earth will be occupying so much of your day, miss?"

"Cousin Darcy says he will send me a rabbit, if I like. I'm sure that I will be very busy with that."

Hearing his name spoken, my cousin, Fitzwilliam Darcy walked over. "Did you want me, Anne?"

Anne's entire expression changed and she became a completely different little girl, complete with a newly acquired smile.

"I was just telling my Papa that you said you would give me a rabbit for Christmas. I think I shall call him... Little Fitzwilliam!"

She grasped Darcy's arm and looked up into his face, batting her eyelashes. I had no idea that little girls knew how to do such things. Darcy immediately felt self-conscious and my uncle gave a slight cough. A moment later Georgiana ran up to her cousin, grabbing her by the hand and pulling her away to follow her. "Come Anne, quickly! I have something to show you!"

"Slow down, Georgiana," cried my Aunt Catherine from across the room, "You'll break Anne's arm. Remember her health!" Aunt Catherine nodded in the direction of my cousin's governess who sat quietly at the side of the room. The woman, recognizing the look, was immediately on her feet, rushing after the delicate girl. Seconds later my father and uncle, George Darcy, turned to join us.

"They grow up so fast, do they not de Bourgh," said my Uncle George, laughingly. "Next thing we'll know, those two young ladies of ours will be breaking every heart from

here to Lands End and there will not be a thing we can do about it."

"I WISH I WOULD SEE SOME CHAP SNIFFING ROUND MY NIECES," interjected my father, "I'LL BREAK THEIR NECKS! I WILL BREAK THEIR NECKS AND BOTH OF THEIR MISERABLE LEGS, WHOEVER THEY ARE!"

At that moment my uncle Lewis gave me a peculiar little smile, which puzzled me exceedingly. "Uncle" I questioned, "Is something the matter? You look strange." He just shook his head as my father continued with his speech.

"AND WE DON'T WANT SOME TRIFLING, NO ACCOUNT BOUNDER TO LATCH ON TO THEM, EITHER! I WON'T HAVE IT!"

I watched as my father gave my elder brother, Andrew, who was standing in the mirror, a wary sideways glance. My Uncle Lewis suppressed a smile and turned away.

"Well, Matlock," continued my Uncle George, "What about your sons? How are you going to defend them? Why, the way Monty here looks, you'll have young ladies beating a path to his door at any moment! Why is it that ladies always prefer a gentleman in his regimentals?"

"WHAT? MONTY?" My father looked at me up and down as if he did not believe him. "HADN'T GIVEN IT A

MOMENTS THOUGHT! I SUPPOSE SOMEONE WILL TAKE HIM OFF MY HANDS... ONE DAY!"

I looked down at my boots feeling a little uncomfortable. I added, "N-No one w-wants the younger s-son w-when the elder is s-single and available."

We all turned to look at my brother who was busily adjusting his cravat and picking imaginary bits of dust off of his new grey coat. Feeling all eyes on him he suddenly stopped what he was doing, turned toward us and said, "Yes, I know, stunning isn't it!"

We all rolled our eyes and returned to our conversation. Uncle Lewis was the first to speak in my defence.

"This is nonsense! Why, no one can touch Monty in manners, intelligence and brilliance, no one. His understanding is excellent, his taste superb. Only the other day my neighbour, Harold Metcalf, said to me that no one could spot good horseflesh as well as my nephew here, isn't that right, George? I envy you your son, Matt; I have always envied you your son."

"YES, SO YOU ALWAYS SEEM TO SAY."

"What I mean is, Monty is not given much credit for his judgement. I value his opinions on things more than most."

"AND I DON'T?"

"I didn't say that, Matt."

"WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU MEAN, THEN?"

Uncle Lewis sighed and said, "Nothing. Nothing. Let's just forget it."

"Of course," said Uncle George, interjecting and playing peacemaker as usual, "They are all fine boys; men I should say now, and I am proud of them all."

Over the years my uncles George and Lewis had grown to tolerate each others company for the most part, but the tension between my Uncle Lewis and my father remained. Silence followed where no one said a word. My father's face was filled with colour and he looked off into nothingness. I could never understand why there was always animosity between them. Here Darcy and I exchanged glances. This look between us was our mutual signal to excuse ourselves to another part of the room.

To be continued...