

Chapter 11 ~ The Best Laid Plans



Satisfied that his appointment had gone well, and bolstered by Sir James Braden's firm handshake, Lord Whitfield donned his hat and coat to go.

"Can I say nothing more to dissuade you from this reckless course?" asked Braden, his flaming red hair and icy blue stare all the more pronounced when he looked as if he wanted to engage in an argument.

Lawrence smiled confidently at the former soldier and adventurer, who also happened to be one of the greatest explorers in the Kingdom. "We've gone over this before, Braden; my mind is quite made up on the matter." Lawrence casually put on his gloves as he waited patiently to hear what more his friend had to say.

Braden squinted at his friend through bushy red eyebrows. "And the children; what will become young Edward and poor little Delphie?"

Lawrence regarded his hands, believing it was best not to look his friend so squarely in the eye just then. His own unease concerning his children's welfare was foremost in his thoughts. His mother, he was certain, was quite capable of looking after her own grandchildren as she had done many times before for a month or two. He just did not know how she would feel about the prospect of raising them for a year or two. Yet, it was a wonderful opportunity for the discovery of new plant and animal species. And really, what was the use of being considered a naturalist if one never went anywhere to further a study on the subject.

"They will go on much the way children have gone on before. While living at Matlock they will grow, go off to school, fall in love, marry, and then," he added wryly, "they will probably leave me to rot out my miserable existence at Grimsby, tending to my plants and frightening away small children."

Braden scoffed, folding his burley arms across his broad chest and becoming thoughtful. "I would certainly like to be there when you tell your father what you are up to. I can well imagine old Matlock's face when you inform him that his son and heir plans on following me into the wilds of South America." He scratched his chin. "What was it that he once called me—Ah!" he said snapping his fingers at a vague recollection, "Something like: Braden, that ridiculous rouge!"

"No," Lawrence chuckled, "he called you *that balmy buccaneer*."

"I knew it was something like that," he laughed. And as quickly as he had found humour in the situation, he frowned and turned to the window to stare out across the city, just able to make out the dome of St. Paul's. "Let me just emphasize to you one last time the extraordinary circumstances you have now placed yourself in. You will have an extremely rough time of it with the storms at sea, the heat, the natives, and my God, man, the insects! If you make it back in one piece or even alive it will be through no effort on my part, I assure you. Even with our close

connection, as my god-daughters husband, I can offer you no assistance. I will have to treat you exactly as I treat all my other men. I hope you understand and hold no grudge if I have you swabbing the decks!”

Lord Whitfield laughed while saying, “Braden, why would you assume I would want it any other way?”



As afternoons would have it, Mary Bennet was having an extremely agreeable one. She had visited a poor family near Meryton, been to her Aunt Philips home to drop off the soup, and lastly, as a special treat for herself, she had been to the shops to go over all the new sheet music in from town since the month before.

Clutching her purchases, she walked through the town square towards home, idly glancing here or there at whatever caught her eye. It was while she stood staring into the draper’s window that she saw by way of the reflection, Mr. Bingley leaving the provisions merchant opposite. She turned around and looked on in astonishment as he carried an axe and a coil of rope slung over one shoulder.

Bingley himself was no less observant. He had seen Miss Mary as soon as he had exited the shop and he had purposely quickened his step to make his escape. The old Bingley would never have done something so rude, but this new Bingley did not feel quite the same way and any thought of conversation, especially with that particular Bennet sister, made him feel all the more uneasy.

Mary, knowing that the gentleman was trying desperately to get away, hastily crossed the road, narrowly dodging a dog-cart, whilst raising her hand to hail him. “Mr. Bingley! Mr. Bingley!”

Bingley, caught, stopped, sighed, and reluctantly turned round, switching the axe to his left hand while tipping his hat with his right. “Miss Mary Bennet; good afternoon,” he said, bowing and grimacing.

“How are you, sir? Well, I hope,” she said, raising an eyebrow sceptically. Mary could see for herself that he was far from healthy for he appeared as if he had not seen the sun for many days. His clothes, once selected with so much care and attention, now seemed tatty and untidy. Furthermore, he was not particularly well shaven and his hair was unkempt.

“Extremely well, I thank you,” he said, glancing around nervously, wanting nothing better than to be out from under her penetrating gaze.

“We have not seen you of late.” She cast an appraising glance over the rope and axe, lifting one eyebrow, wondering what a gentleman of his wealth and stature would be doing in town on such an errand when he must have any number of servants to come into Meryton to fetch it for him.

“No, I have not. I have been terribly remiss this last week.”

“I suspect your estate keeps you very busy, sir.” Mary was only making polite conversation. She knew Netherfield had no tenant farmers, no crops, and no sheep; it was just a gentleman’s expensive party house stuck out in the middle of nowhere.

“Yes, I *am* very busy and if you will excuse me,” he rushed to say, “I fear I am late for a meeting with my...uh... my steward.”

Undeterred, having much more she wanted to relay to him, and wanting the subject to veer towards *her* family, she asked after his own. “I hope your family is well.”

He didn’t much care whether his family were well or not and simply replied out of sheer habit. “Yes, they are, I believe.” Just as Mary had predicted, this naturally led to him asking after hers. “And your family, they are well, are they not?”

“Yes, they are. Well, I should say, those who are at home are very well.”

“Forgive me,” replied Bingley, his interest apparent. “Are some of your family away from home?”

“Yes, my father and sister are in London. They have been there for several days now.”

He paused as if thinking, and then asked, “Ah, Miss Elizabeth--for the wedding--fittings and such?”

“No, it is Jane who has gone to London,” she said idly, while picking a piece of lint off her cloak. “Oh,” she added with mock innocently, “you have not heard?”

“N-No, I... I had not.” His disappointment was obvious but he rallied as best he could. “And how is Miss Bennet--and your father--enjoying their stay in town?” He searched her face eagerly.

“Very much; I believe Jane is enjoying her stay especially. We received a letter just this morning.”

“Yes—and...?”

Mary fought to control an impertinent smirk for she was enjoying this conversation far more than she ought. “In fact Mr. and Miss Darcy are keeping Jane *highly* entertained.” Mary watched his face closely as she said the next. “Mr Darcy, I believe, is introducing her to some very fine people. She was to meet with some of his cousins; a family called Fitzwilliam, I believe, if I recall the connection correctly from something my cousin Mr. Collins once said. Do you know them, sir?”

Charles Bingley’s mouth pressed into a thin, grim line as he thought of the two Fitzwilliam brothers and all they had to offer someone as sweet and beautiful as his fair Jane. “Oh yes,” he mumbled silently, his lip curling into a sneer, “I know them.”



Jane was extremely embarrassed at all the attention she was receiving. After Lady Adele had informed her mother about what had happened in the park, Lady Matlock, now highly alarmed, had waited on her guest hand and foot. She was offered cups of tea, cake, cold compresses, and anything and everything that would add to her comfort.

“Your Ladyship, you are very kind, but I want to assure you that I am extremely well. It was only a moment’s indisposition; I am now perfectly recovered.”

Lady Matlock stood over Jane, clearly not listening to a word she said. She reached out and felt Jane’s forehead with the back of her hand, saying, “Adele, go down and have Harriet bring up some of the medicinal wine.”

Jane smiled, sighed, and stood. “Thank you both so much, but I believe I should go. I must leave very soon if I am to prepare for Miss Darcy’s dinner this evening. If you will only ask a servant to take me to the children I--”

“Oh no, no! This is nonsense, my dear, sit, you must rest.” Lady Matlock, who was not about to let her guest get away so easily, removed her own Indian shawl, wrapped it securely around Jane and pushed her gently back down onto the chair. “Adele, ring for Kingsley, we will have him send for the doctor.”

As Adele stood up to obey, Jane stopped her by pleading beseechingly. “Your ladyship, Lady Adele, please, it is very, very good of you to offer, but I must insist that your doctor remains where he is; there is nothing whatsoever the matter with me.” Jane’s plea for *mercy* was interrupted by a knock on the door.

“Come,” called Lady Matlock. Colonel Fitzwilliam opened the door tentatively and took a step in, his eyes immediately seeking out Jane Bennet. “Ah, Jonathan, just the man; please come in and reason with Miss Bennet; she insists on going.”

The colonel was extremely pleased that his mother thought so much of Miss Bennet to personally look to her care herself. If his mother liked her already, perhaps she would approve when he finally spoke of his own developing feelings for the young woman.

As the colonel walked in further, Jane, for the first time, could not help but notice that he walked with a marked limp. Her natural compassion was immediately aroused and she was compelled to stand up and offer him her own seat. “Oh, Colonel Fitzwilliam, you are hurt; please sir, take my seat!”

Jonathan’s face lit up and he smiled at Jane so benevolently that he felt his heart would burst; how wonderful and giving she is, he thought. He was about to reply, when his mother came to stand directly in front of Jane.

“No, Miss Bennet, you must remain seated and think no more of him. My son has been walking around on that bad leg of his for weeks now. He will not listen to his own mother concerning his health and I doubt very much if he will listen to you.”

Oh, wouldn’t I?, he thought while smiling rather stupidly at the young lady, causing Adele to roll her eyes in disgust and turn away.

“My dear, you are the one we wish to see well today,” said the countess. Then, turning to her son she said, “John, bring the cushion from that chair; Miss Bennet must be comfortable.”

The Colonel brought the cushion over and his mother snatched it from his hands and placed it gently behind Jane’s back. Jane instantly felt guilty for her own weakness. She had received nothing but overindulgence, and now to receive assistance from an actual invalid--it was almost too much. Ashamed for drawing so much attention to herself, she looked down.

The Colonel noticed Jane Bennet’s heightened colour and the uneasy look on her face. Thinking that he must be standing too near or had done something to give offence, he was about to beg her pardon and to excuse himself from the room, when Delphie ran in and brushed past his legs, crying, “Jane! There you are! I missed you!”

Jane looked up and smiled at the girl. “Hello Delphie, I have missed you, too.” Jane smoothed down the girl’s hair and moved over in her seat to allow Delphie to join her in the chair.

Lady Matlock was slightly shocked, yet if the truth be told, she was also somewhat pleased that her granddaughter had used her guests Christian name. “Delphie, you must not call her by that name; she must be addressed as Miss Bennet.”

Delphie’s look was questioning. “But Edward does.”

“Forgive me, Lady Matlock,” said Jane, “it was I who gave them my permission; I did not think it would do any harm. However, if you prefer—”

“Oh no, my dear,” replied the countess, beaming at this interesting development, “it is perfectly fine with me, I only hoped the children were not taking a great liberty. I was just--”

Delphie interrupted. “Come play with me!”

“Delphie!” exclaimed Lady Adele, “You should not interrupt your grandmother.”

Jane smiled down at the child, saying, “I’m sorry, dear, but your grandmamma has asked me to take tea with her.”

“No--come see?”

“See what?” replied Jane.

“My dolls; come see, please!”

“Well, I—” Jane glanced at Lady Adele uncertainly, “I’m afraid I must be going home, Delphie. I will visit with you and your lovely dolls some other day, if I may.”

Delphie leapt down from the chair, had got hold of Jane’s hands, and was now tugging with all of her strength. “No, please come now! Please, don’t go!”

Adele stepped in to separate her niece from Miss Bennet. “Delphie, dearest, you will hurt Miss Bennet with the way you go on.”

Delphie paid not one drop of attention to her elders; she wanted nothing more than to have her new friend all to herself and nothing else would do. "Please, Jane, please!" At such a heartfelt plea, Jane could do nothing but turn to Lady Matlock for approval.

"Perhaps, your ladyship, I could go with her--just for a few minutes—I will return directly."

The countess, thinking that her guest still looked somewhat pale, deliberated for a moment before finally acquiescing. "Delphie, if Miss Bennet feels up to climbing *all those stairs*," she said, with emphasis, "then she may go with you."

Delphie grabbed Jane's hand, and Jane, wanting no more to be away from so much undeserved kindness, allowed herself to be led away.



Lord Whitfield, having finished with his appointment and wanting to check up on his children, found himself near Matlock House, hoping to join his family in time for tea.

As he handed Kingsley his hat, greatcoat, and gloves, a loud rabble rose up from the west parlour. There was laughter and loud voices and everything that announced a room full of riotous children. He peeked inside, seeing Jonathan and Adele up to their elbows in some odd game with several children he did not know and one that he did, all hopping on one foot, laughing uproariously, and trying not to topple over.

Having a great dislike of noise, he went in search of his parents, finding his mother in her own sitting room, quietly having a cup of tea.

"Lawrence, dear; how jolly of you to call."

He bent down to give his mother a kiss on the cheek. "Where is my father?" he asked.

"Heavens, how should I know? He has probably wandered off somewhere unpleasant to drink port and smoke cigars, in all likelihood. How are Fitzwilliam and Georgiana?"

"Both are well. When I left this morning, Georgiana was beside herself with worry over her dinner tonight. Apparently she couldn't acquire enough of something or something equally disastrous that I am not even going to pretend to understand." The countess laughed as she poured her son his tea. Lawrence gestured in the direction of the west wing of the house. "I assume those are the Gardiner children I saw in the parlour."

"Yes, such lovely, well-behaved little dears. Edward seems to like the two boys very much."

"Yes, I saw Edward when I came in, but I did not see Delphie?"

"Ah, Delphie," replied the countess smiling so hard that it made her eyes sparkle mischievously, "I fear she has absconded with Miss Bennet."

"Absconded? Where?" he said, lifting his eyebrows.

“Not very far, I assure you. I assume your daughter is either showing the young lady the playroom, the schoolroom, or her bedchamber. I was just going to go up and check on them now; they’ve both been gone such a long time.” Lady Matlock made a great show of rising, all the while hoping that her son would offer to go in her place. She was not disappointed.

“No mother, you stay and finish your tea. I will go and rescue Miss Bennet.”

After her son had closed the door, the countess silently clapped her hands, wanting to burst with happiness at how well everything was turning out. And if everything proceeded according to her plans, she’d have her son, Lawrence married to Miss Jane Bennet by Christmas.



Lord Whitfield took the stairs two at a time and soon he was approaching the school room door. Opening it and seeing no one, he made his way to the children’s bedchambers. Delphie’s room was empty and when he looked into Edward’s, he only found the nurserymaid tending to the young boys clothes. This naturally left the playroom at the very end of the corridor.

The door was slightly ajar and he could hear soft humming emanating from inside. He stood quietly for a moment and listened. He knew the tune well; an obscure Scottish lullaby his own wife used to sing to Edward when he was very young.

He grasped the doorknob and slowly and quietly pushed it open. The sight he found there caused him to momentarily catch his breath. He had seen just such a scene before: his wife, nested in the large green chair by the fire, wrapped in an Indian shawl, and cradling their young son to her. Julia would always look up at his approach, smile, and her finger would instantly fly to her lips, indicating that he should be very still and quiet.

Everything played out just the same, only this time it was Jane Bennet sitting in the green chair by the fire. She looked up at his approach, smiled, and brought her finger up to her lips. The only difference: no long auburn curls cascading haphazardly over one shoulder, no bare feet stretched out towards the fire, and no dancing green eyes laughing up at him while he carefully stepped over dolls as he made his way across the room.

“Aye, tis a luvly sight, is it not? The wee one canna keep his eyes open another minute.”

Lord Whitfield blinked as he fought to control his own breathing after hearing his wife’s lilting Scottish brogue. “P-Pardon,” he asked.

“I was saying,” said Jane in a gentle whisper, “that this pretty little one could not keep her eyes open another minute.”



The suspense was killing Lady Matlock so much that she had to see for herself how things were progressing. Upstairs, in the long corridor near the children’s wing of the house, she paused at

every sudden noise or voice on the air as she tiptoed in the direction of the children's rooms. A sudden movement from inside Delphie's bedchamber caught her attention and wild with curiosity, she stepped forward to peer in between the opening of the door and the frame, just in time to see her son, who was cradling his daughter in his arms, lower Delphie into her bed.

Next, he bent down to kiss her forehead and to smooth the hair away from her face. He then stepped aside to allow Jane Bennet the opportunity to place a doll in the bed by his daughter's side. As the two turned to go Jane glanced back and saw Delphie stirring. Sitting up, the child stretched her arms out towards her and Jane walked over and hugged the little girl. Satisfied, Delphie laid her head back on her pillow and closed her eyes. Delphie's nurse pulled the coverlet over her young charge and nodded to them both that all would be well.

Not wanting to be caught spying, Lady Matlock ran across the corridor into Edward's rooms, slid in, and closed the door, leaving just enough of an opening to see and hear all.

Lawrence quietly closed the door to Delphie's rooms after he and Jane stepped from the child's bedchamber. Jane had turned to go, but Lawrence reached out to stop her with a touch to her arm.

"Please allow me to once again beg your pardon, Miss Bennet. My daughter's nurse should have noticed her fatigue as soon as you all returned from your outing. I fear we have imposed upon you far too much today—to fall asleep in your arms—"

It was now Jane's turn to reach out to briefly touch his arm; only, she wanted to prevent him from saying more. "Please, there really is no need to apologize, Lord Whitfield. I was happy to be of service. Delphie was merely tired and looked so peaceful and comfortable that I could not bear to wake her just to summon the servant. She is the dearest little thing and she is a favourite with me already."

"Oh dear," exclaimed the Viscount while smiling and looking down at his shoes, "If my daughter hears that, you will never have a moments peace; she will beg a visit from you nearly everyday."

Jane blushed slightly at the compliment before saying, "It is too bad I return to Hertfordshire in two days time and just as I was getting to know her better. Perhaps, after my sister marries Mr Darcy, we will all be able to meet very often."

Lawrence knitted his brows together, thinking of his plans to be out of the country for the first time with something like regret.

"Yes," he said eventually, "Perhaps."

Lord Whitfield took a few steps forward before Jane laughed and said, "That is a very interesting doll Delphie has. The poor thing has no hair and only one eye; your daughter seems especially fond of it, though. She tells me that someone by the name of *Polo* ruined it?"

"Polo? I'm afraid I don't know any—Ah!" cried Lawrence, halting with the realization, "I believe she meant Apollo!" At Jane Bennet puzzled look, he continued. "Apollo, Miss Bennet, is not a *someone* but a *something*; a very bad dog, as Delphie likes to call him. He is Edward's beagle."

“You keep a beagle—here in London?”

“No, no. He is at my estate—in Lincolnshire. Do you know the country, Miss Bennet?”

“No, I’m afraid I do not—I have travelled but little, sir. Is Lincolnshire very pretty?”

Lord Whitfield seemed to think about her words. “I have never really thought about it; I suppose it is.” At Miss Bennet’s questioning look, he continued, “I have my work, you see; hardly any time for walks on the grounds or along the coast.”

“The coast?” asked Jane, her eyes coming alive at the thoughts of a house near open water. “You live near the sea?”

“Yes, my estate abuts the channel.”

“Oh how lovely; it sounds delightful. The children must enjoy that very much.”

“Yes, I suppose they do.”

They took a few more steps in silence with Lawrence folding his hands behind his back and Jane pulling the countess’s shawl tightly around her shoulders as if a sudden chill had descended down upon her.

“You mentioned your work, sir. Might I inquire what it is that interests you?”

“Well, I consider myself a botanist and a naturalist; I have a particular interest in plants and insects species; all living things really.”

“How very interesting. What is it that you hope to learn from the plants and creatures that you study?”

Lawrence regarded his companion with newfound interest. “You know, Miss Bennet, you are the first person outside of my particular field to question me so.”

“Oh, forgive me, sir; I did not mean to pry—I only wished to understand, to—”

“No, Miss Bennet, you misunderstand; I am honoured that you do question me so—an inquisitive mind is only natural and is nothing to be ashamed of; where would I be without my own curiosity.”

“I have an interest in plants as well, supplied Jane. “My sister, Mary and I collect seeds and cutting and exchange them with several of our neighbours. It is a poor hobby, I am sure, when compared with your great work.”

Lawrence stopped, causing Miss Bennet to stop as well. “Great work?” exclaimed the Viscount, laughingly. “No, Miss Bennet, there is nothing very great about it. My work at this point is only a glorified pastime. I collect rare tropical plants and insects for the greenhouses on my estate-- which others have been so good as to procure on my behalf—and I make drawings of them for a

book I am compiling on the subject. One day, soon, I hope, I will be able to take a more active role in my chosen field. Until then, I must satisfy myself with my studies and observations.”

They were silent for a moment, but Lawrence held out his hand to lead the way and they began to walk again.

“And speaking of curiosity, Miss Bennet, there is one thing that I am extremely *curious* about.”

“Yes,” said Jane, nodding.

“When I was putting my daughter to bed—I could not help but notice—tell me, why are Delphie’s lips so red?”

Jane smiled. “There was a man selling confections in the park. I’m afraid little Delphie’s selection was rather large and rather red.” At Lord Whitfield’s bewildered expression, she added, “Have no fear, my lord, it will soon fade away.”

His eyebrows went up. “I take it that she has had a most eventful day.”

“Yes, indeed,” replied Jane.

“And the other children; how did they all like their outing?”

“Very much; Master Edward especially, I believe; he took great delight in the acrobats.”

Lawrence stopped suddenly, causing Miss Bennet to stop as well. “My mother tells me that he got on very well with the two Gardiner boys. You must understand, my son hasn’t very many friends his own age. Forgive me, I have not yet made their acquaintance, so I do not yet know their names.”

“They are Thomas and Philip, my lord; but Edward has taken to calling them Tom and Phil. Conversely, Thomas and Philip now call Edward, Teddy.” She smiled and then looked down at her hands, wondering how the aristocratic son of an Earl would like having his own son called such a name by two sons of a London businessman.

“Teddy?” he laughed. “I like that. Tell me, how do you think my son would like it if I, his decrepit old father called him by such an appellation?” He smiled at Jane, causing Jane look up to smile right back.

Jane studied his face for a moment. He didn’t seem very old to her, no more than forty, she was certain. He did have a few grey strands running throughout his jet black hair and one or two lines about the mouth and eyes which gave him an air of distinction.

Lawrence was no less busy. He observed her soft, supple form, and her smiling mouth. Everything about her seemed so sweet and unaffected, so kind and patient, all excellent qualities for...

Realizing that he seemed to be staring, Lawrence began to lead them off again. They came to the middle of the corridor and the Viscount, out of long habit, stopped to look up at a portrait there.

Seeing this, Jane could not help but stop and look up as well. It was a portrait of a pretty young woman with red hair and green eyes. She wore an olive green gown with white lace trimmings that was much the fashion several years before. She was holding a cherubic, black haired infant, who Jane correctly surmised to be Edward.

“With the exception of the hair, she looks very much like Delphie,” said Jane, thoughtfully.

The viscount, lost in his own ruminations, blinked back into reality and replied, “Yes, that is Edward and Delphie’s mother—Julia,” replied the viscount in a faraway sort of voice. “I never thought of it before, but yes, now that I look more closely, Delphie is very much like her mother.”

“Edward takes after you, though; I noticed that you both have the same hair and eyes; he is such a handsome boy,” said Jane, quite innocently, only to blush immediately when she realized how what she had said might be taken. “I mean... what I meant to say was, that he looks very much like you and your father, and a little like Mr. Darcy, as well. You three gentlemen all look so much alike.” Her heart was racing after her faux pas and all she could do was look down.

Sensing Miss Bennet’s embarrassment, the viscount wanted nothing more than to put her at ease. He quickly added, “In looks, he is every inch the Fitzwilliam, but in spirit, in wit, he is his mother’s child; Delphie as well, even though she never knew her mother.”

The tall clock at the end of the hall began to chime announcing the arrival of the hour and Jane, turning to read its face, was never so grateful in her life for the means to get away.

“Oh dear, it is four o’clock; where did the time go? I must get the children home; my aunt will be so worried.”

“Then allow me the pleasure of seeing you all to your carriage, Miss Bennet,” replied Lord Whitfield, holding out his arm.

“Thank you, my lord; you are very kind,” she said, taking his arm and unable to meet his eye.

And when they had gone away, Lady Matlock left Edward’s room, striding confidently down the hall. “Yes,” she whispered to herself, “a lovely Christmas wedding.”