

## Chapter 13 ~ The Pleasure of Your Company



With all due alacrity, the gentlemen joined the ladies in the music room. Mrs. Gardiner, who was sitting with Lady Adele and Miss Darcy while admiring that young lady's design for a small table, noticed the girl's sudden stricken look to Mrs Annesley as the gentlemen entered. That good woman directed her eyes towards the coffee and the girl excused herself from her two companions and went directly to the table to pour.

Lady Matlock, since leaving the dining room, had busied herself by questioning Jane Bennet about her home, her pursuits, and her sisters.

"And your sister, Mary, does she play well?"

"She--" Jane paused, thinking for a moment, "--practices a great deal."

Having heard the gentlemen enter, Lady Matlock now turned, smiled, and nodded at Mr. Bennet. Excusing herself from Miss Bennet's company for a moment, she arose to speak to Jane's father to persuade him that she needed his daughter's company on the morrow.

Lady Adele, having liked the sensible disposition of Mrs Gardiner, found the good-natured and jovial manner of Mr. Gardiner just as attractive and beckoned him over to join herself and his wife on the sofa.

Mr Darcy, sensing some nervousness in his sister and wanting nothing more than to put her at her ease, moved towards her as she and Mrs Annesley poured the coffee.

Lords Matlock and Whitfield followed Darcy into the room, with Matlock pausing to pick up a cup of the steaming beverage as he spoke to his son.

"I saw old Joseph Gordon this afternoon."

"Yes," said Lawrence, noticing the quizzical look in his father's eye and turning away to pick up his own coffee, wondering where this conversation would eventually lead.

"He swears he saw you near Harley Street this morning. What could you possibly be doing in that part of town as you appear to be in health? I can only surmise that if you weren't visiting your physician you were visiting that balmy Sir James Braden."

Lawrence looked heavenward. He was in no mood for any of this. "Father, you know perfectly well that he was my wife's godfather. Just because Julia has been taken away from me—from us--does not mean that I wish to sever the connection."

"I hear talk down at the club that he has got another fool scheme up his sleeve; something about crossing the Isthmus of Panama or some such nonsense. I hope he wasn't trying to talk you into financing him on another one of his hare-brained adventures."

Lawrence, his countenance darkening, signed heavily knowing that his father was nearer the truth than he probably knew.

“Ah! Miss Jane, there you are,” cried Lord Matlock, suddenly distracted and breaking away from the sudden gloomiest of his eldest offspring for the delights of speaking with someone vastly more interesting. “What do you do here sitting on your own?”

Jane smiled. “I was just speaking with Lady Matlock, my lord; as you see she now speaks with my father.”

Lord Matlock, not waiting for permission, sat down directly and asked, “Tell me, Miss Jane, what kind of horses to you prefer?”

Lady Matlock was doing her best to appear all that was pleasing and accommodating, but doing nothing more than giving her companion a reason to think her very sly. She asked Mr Bennet about his plans for the next day and did a fair job of pretending to be interested in his pursuits, but Henry Bennet could see that what she was really after had nothing to do with him.

Mr. Bennet liked nothing better than a challenge and thinking of Lady Matlock’s manoeuvrings nearly caused him to laugh. He answered her roundabout questions with questions of his own. The more she tried to politely pry into his private actions, the more amused he became with his own cleverness in dodging her answers.

“Or perhaps, Mr. Bennet, you and Miss Bennet would prefer to walk out? Now Hyde Park is a very pretty place to take a walk and so near my own house. Why, I just had a very good thought, why don’t you and Miss Bennet come by and take tea with...”

“Jane is not a very great walker,” interrupted Mr. Bennet, his eyes glowing with mischief, “Now my other daughter, Elizabeth, she is the walker in the family. I remember once she walked three miles...”

Jane was having trouble attending to her conversation with the Earl. She saw that her father was doing nothing but amusing himself at Lady Matlock’s expense.

With a quick glance in the direction of his daughter, Mr Bennet could see plainly that Jane saw what he was doing and he checked himself.

“Oh,” Mr Bennet exclaimed suddenly, seeing Jane’s pained expression, “where are my manners? Please allow me to help you to more tea, your Ladyship.” He led her away, feeling a bit guilty for partaking in his favourite sport especially with people he had only just met. He winked to his daughter with a look that said from now on he would be on his best behaviour.

Lord Matlock, having nearly exhausted the topic of his horse, Hector, and seeing his second son now entering the music room, called out to him a little more forcefully than was necessary. He was impatient to begin his matchmaking machinations on John’s behalf and who better to entertain a lovely young lady with an amusing story than a dashing cavalry officer dressed in his regimentals.

“Ah! Jonathan, my boy; come and tell Miss Jane about that time you were thrown from the back of Hector. Of course, Miss Jane,” he said turning back to the young lady, “being a great horsewoman yourself, you will like the story immensely as it is considered highly amusing. Imagine, a cavalry officer who can not sit atop a horse.” He laughed loudly.

“Oh, yes, father!” said Colonel Fitzwilliam sarcastically, while taking a cup of coffee from Georgiana’s hands, “How I do love telling that story just to embarrass myself.”

Jane smiled a welcoming smile and bid the colonel to take the seat beside her. She then looked from father to son and back to father again, waiting to see which one would start the story.

Lord Matlock, seeing that his son had no thoughts of being forthcoming, initiated the story himself.

“You must understand, Miss Jane, my son Jonathan there fancies himself as the greatest horseman who ever lived.”

Colonel Fitzwilliam eyes widened. This smacked of boasting and he would never wish Miss Bennet to think of him in such a way. “Father, please, I never said anything so ridiculous in my life.”

Lord Matlock, thinking that he was helping matters and having no idea how mortified his son was, talked on. “I tried to tell him that my horses do not take kindly to spurs. John broke his arm that day and nearly his fool head!”

Jane briefly wondered what on earth the amusing part of this story was supposed to be. Finding none, she could only voice her concern. “Oh, dear; how awful for you, Colonel Fitzwilliam; I feel badly that you were so injured.” Her eyes were brimming with sincere anxiety as she reached out, quite unbeknownst to herself and placed her hand on the colonel’s sleeve.

“N-no more than usual,” he said, struggling desperately to keep the moment light. “It is the way with me, I’m afraid.” He laughed as causally as he could and blushed, all the while his arm tingled madly just from the warmth of her soft touch. When she withdrew her hand he added, “But, I thank you for your concern, madam.” And to appear calm, he took a long sip from his cup.

“He is reckless; always has been, Miss Jane. I tell him all the time that he needs to *settle down*, find himself some *nice* young woman to raise a horde of children with; that will cure him of all thoughts of killing himself before he reaches forty!”

Colonel Fitzwilliam gagged and nearly spat out his coffee as it all became clear! His father was matchmaking! And this was his father’s idea of what: *Helping him*? If there was a hole in the vicinity in which he could crawl, he wanted nothing more than to be able to crawl into it now.

Lawrence, who had been hovering about the edges of this conversation, recognized his brother’s look of quiet desperation and stepped in to put a stop to his father’s nonsensical talk.

“Lucky for us all, is it not Father, that my brothers head is harder than it appears?”

Lawrence moved to take the seat directly across from the lady and before Lord Matlock could form another embarrassing statement, Colonel Fitzwilliam called to his young cousin. “I heard you practicing a wonderful piece on the piano the other day; I hope we are to hear it this evening.

Darcy could feel rather than see Georgiana’s apprehension in performing before so large a gathering, so he looked to Lady Adele to begin the evening’s entertainment, hoping that perhaps his sister would eventually warm to the idea of playing.

“Adele, our harp is sadly ill-used of late; would you kindly honour us with a selection?”

Lady Adele, not nearly as shy as her cousin Georgiana was when performing before others, but no more used to the idea of being stared at for five or six minutes together, swallowed deeply but willed

herself to move toward the instrument. Mr. Bennet helped the lady with her chair and when she nodded to thank him, Henry could have sworn he saw a slight nervousness about her eyes.

Adele plucked a few strings to gauge the harp's tune and then stilled herself for a moment to breathe in before beginning Handel's Harp Concerto in B Flat. She closed her eyes and played with such skill and emotion that Jane thought she had never before heard anything so beautiful and angelic. Lady Adele, she presumed, had most likely had only the best of masters to instruct her and it showed clearly in her performance. This was no schoolroom Miss performing a passable selection for her family to fawn over; no, this was something of the quality one would hear in the concert halls of the nation.

When Lady Adele finished, she silenced the strings with the palms of her hands. She had so stunned the Darcy's guests not used to such a performance that the Gardiner's and Bennet's applauded appreciatively and enthusiastically. Adele's cheeks flamed and she moved quickly to return to her seat.

"Lady Adele," said Mr. Bennet all smiles and offering his arm, "I must congratulate you on such a capital performance; I have never before heard anything so lovely."

"Yes, oh, yes," agreed Jane and both of the Gardiner's while nodding in agreement.

"Thank you," said Adele, her eyes lowered demurely as she sat down.

Darcy looked next at his sister and bent down to whisper into her ear. Jane detected a slight shake of the head, but with a gentle squeeze to her hand, Georgiana finally agreed and moved towards the pianoforte.

"Cousin," said the girl looking to Colonel Fitzwilliam, "Would you be so kind?"

"Of course," said the colonel rising to sit next to his cousin on the bench, knowing what she required.

A few moments passed by as the colonel leafed through the selection of music available on the stand. Georgiana, apparently looking for something in particular to play, declined all those offered. After a few more sheets of music were presented to her, one was eventually agreed upon and Georgiana nodded in satisfaction.

She had selected the first movement of Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata and as she played, Colonel Fitzwilliam turned the pages effortlessly, requiring no nods or directions from his cousin at all. He seemed quite skilled at reading music himself and his face revealed a great deal of pleasure in what was being performed, especially after hearing his cousin execute particular passages of the complicated Beethoven sonata with ease.

Noticing that the lady beside him was enjoying what she heard, Lord Matlock took an opportunity to lean forward to quietly say to Jane, "My son Jonathan is an excellent musician himself. When you come up to Matlock I will be sure to ask him to play for you."

Jane smiled, nodded politely, and directed her attention back to Miss Darcy.

As she came near the end of her performance, Georgiana was able to relax from the tacit encouragement and gentle nods from the one by her side. As the tempo increased to its inevitable crescendo, her fingers flew effortlessly over the keys; Georgiana, it appeared, had almost entered into another realm.

The music ended and Georgiana received such a thunderous round of applause from everyone in the room that she blushed furiously and turned her face away for a moment. Colonel Fitzwilliam whispered something into her ear which caused her to smile brightly and hold her head up proudly as she curtsied.

Jane noted how very good the colonel was to Miss Darcy. He helped her, encouraged her, and made her feel that she was something special. Jane thought to herself how good such a man would be with children; she could now see plainly why her cousin Maria liked him so much.

Lord Matlock next looked round to Jane Bennet, wanting nothing more than to see what talent that lovely young woman possessed. However, Georgiana, so caught up in the moment and appreciative of the colonel's efforts on her behalf, spoke up and asked him to be the next one to entertain.

"John, will you not read for us?"

Colonel Fitzwilliam shook his head, replying, "Georgiana, my dear, I am certain no one wants to hear from me this evening." He arose from the piano bench and made for his chair.

"Oh, please, John," said Georgiana, taking his arm, her expression all that was pleading and innocent. "Do it for me. I have already told Mrs. Gardiner and Miss Bennet all about your talent for reading. You must perform something for them or they will think I was telling a falsehood."

It was one thing to read and do silly voices for children or his nearest relations, thought the colonel, quite another to behave like a simpleton in front new acquaintances, especially the beautiful ones. However, looking at his young cousin's childlike and trusting face, he knew he was done for and heaved a sigh of submission.

"Well, we can not have that, now can we?"

Georgiana had already planned everything perfectly. She walked directly to a corner shelf and her fingers immediately settled upon a thin volume there. It was presented with a grand flourish to her cousin.

Colonel Fitzwilliam opened it and his head lulled backwards; his face took on a look of disgust just from reading the title page. "Please, please, please, dearest Georgiana, anything but this. The title alone announces it as nothing but a preposterous piece of nonsense."

"Oh no, John, it is my favourite book, you will like it, I promise; just read a chapter... or two." She took her own seat and shared a brief conspiratory smile with her cousin Adele.

As a servant was directed to move a chair in front of the pianoforte, the colonel looked round at all the eager faces and ran his fingers through his hair. "Lord," he mumbled under his breathe. He sat down and turned to the first page, reading:

"The Enchantress--Chapter 1."\*

The colonel coughed and cleared his throat, knowing full well that he was probably about to make a huge fool out of himself.

In the most fashionable newspapers in the month of March, appeared, for several successive days, the following advertisement: A MAN wants a wife. If any woman of sense,

virtue, and spirit, will venture to answer this notice to Q—, at the — Coffee-house, — street, she shall have no reason to repent her condescension."

Darcy, unable to help himself, snickered so loudly, that everyone else in the room joined him in kind. Incensed, the colonel immediately snapped the book shut and stood.

"That does it, Georgiana; I knew this would happen; I knew your brother could be relied upon to be the first one to make sport of me."

"No, no, dear cousin, please continue," she pleaded. "He did not mean to laugh at you; you just read it so well that all the others could not help themselves." Georgiana turned and gave her brother an impertinent sort of look, hoping that he would do better next time to hold his tongue.

Colonel Fitzwilliam ran his hand across his ginger whiskers nervously, sat down, and again opened the book to the first page, sighing heavily before again clearing his throat.

Sir Philip Desormeaux, the writer of the foregoing paragraph, had fortune, knowledge of the world, and the manners of a gentleman. His first wish had been for domestic happiness; but his most earnest search among the females he met with in his line of life had been unsuccessful.

It was Lawrence's turn to laugh. He had the good sense to do it as quietly as possible and to turn away, yet his shoulders shook with so much violence as he tried desperately to suppress his laughter that he had to set down his cup of coffee. He was so amused at what he had heard that more than one of the Fitzwilliam clan called to him to be still.

At the age of thirty-five, despairing of meeting with a woman whose character would assimilate with his own, he adopted the above singular and rarely respectable mode of enquiry."

A little noise escaped Adele's mouth and she pressed her lips together so tightly that her eyes began to water. Lord Matlock stared at his daughter with eyes twinkling with so much merriment that Adele was forced to turn away as well lest she too began to make a spectacle out of herself like Lawrence and Darcy.

The colonel, thinking that he had heard yet another laugh, paused, looked over the edge of the book, and around the room at all his family. The Fitzwilliam's all made to look as serious as possible while the two Darcy's sat up as straight as they could. The Bennet's and Gardiner's did their best to behave as good guests ought as this was clearly some private family joke that they were all taking part in.

The usual tenor of advertisements for partners for life is so very dissimilar to the style of Sir Philip's, that it caused a laugh at many a tea-table in all parts of the town. Addresses of this kind always catch the female eye, and Sir Philip's abruptness, conciseness, and energy, created a wish in many a female heart to reply to him.

Darcy could stand it no longer and had no choice but to stand suddenly and remove himself from the room. Every eye followed him as he bowed, walked out of the music room, and closed the door. The Colonel shifted in his seat, but pressed forward even though there was ill-will oozing from every pore.

In many, no doubt, the wish was all; yet the number of billets addressed to Q—, at the — Coffee-house, seemed to prove, that every one whose notice it had attracted, had seized the pen to answer it. Sir Philip snatched up the billets, and eagerly retired to his own house to peruse them. He read, and tore, and burnt, and exclaimed— "Surely the whole female world is made up of sentiment and stuff, or levity and assurance! I must die a bachelor."

Lord Matlock could contain himself no longer and he laughed so heartily and so loudly that the entire room broke into hysterics. Even the Gardiner's and Mr. Bennet, gave up all pretence of politeness and joined in to have their share in the amusement themselves even though they had no idea which parts of the colonel's reading had set the others off.

Colonel Fitzwilliam was now obliged to wait until the entire room could compose itself again before he would continue. Perturbed, he folded his arms across his chest and looked round the room from face to laughing face. The more the look of impatience crossed his features the more the Earl laughed and the more the Earl laughed, the more everyone else joined in.

Jane was just as amused as everyone else; only, she was more able to check her laughter and settled for nothing more than a ladylike smile behind her hand. She now looked upon Colonel Fitzwilliam with undisguised delight. Removing her hand from her face she instantly met the eyes of the very person she had hoped to conceal her amusement from. She looked closely to determine if any of his ill-will was directed towards her. No, there was no malice there, she determined, but clearly, there was something else in his look that she could make out.

Having laughed to their hearts content, the room was on the move once again. Miss Darcy began pouring more tea and Lady Adele arose from her seat to sample the shortbread, their heads came together exclaiming over the good joke they had arranged. Lord Whitfield opened the door to the music room and beckoned his cousin Darcy to return. Lord and Lady Matlock quietly explained to Mr. Bennet and the Gardiner's exactly why everyone in the family found their son's reading so diverting.

Jane, slightly unnerved, yet, not knowing exactly why, stood and walked over to Miss Darcy and held out her cup to be refilled. After chatting for a several minutes with the two young ladies about the excellence of their respective performances, the enjoyment of the evening, and the delights of town, she returned to her seat and sat down. As she brought the teacup to her lips she attempted one more glance in Colonel Fitzwilliam's direction.

And still he stared, a slow, boyish smile beginning to defuse his handsome features causing Jane to have no choice to return it with a friendly one of her own.



Darcy had just sent a footman out on an evening errand and was returning upstairs when he heard someone move on the stairs behind him. Turning, he saw that it was his sister.

"Is everything alright, Georgiana?"

"Perfectly fine, Fitzwilliam; I just wanted to let the staff know what an excellent job they did this evening."

Darcy smiled as he waited for his sister to join him on the same tread. Reaching out, he put his arm around his sister's shoulder as they continued slowly walking up the stairs together. "Since you are so busy paying compliments to others, let me offer one of my own. I must congratulate you, Georgiana, on the dinner this evening; you did me very proud."

"Oh, did I?" asked Georgiana, smiling and her eyes wide, always eager to please her brother, "I had hoped you thought so. Everyone did seem to go away quite happy this evening."

"Mother and father would be quite pleased to see you stepping into your role as mistress of this house with so much confidence."

Georgiana laughed and exclaimed, "Well, let that be the very last dinner party I give as mistress. Soon it will be Elizabeth's turn and thankfully I will be able to return to my books and music just as I ought."

"Well, I am proud of you just the same, no matter how short a duration your tenure has been." He kissed her forehead as they reached the top landing. As his sister turned to go away, Darcy stayed her with a touch to her hand. "Sister, would you mind coming into the sitting room for a moment, there is something of great import I think you should know."

"Of course brother, what is it that you wish to speak to me about?"

Darcy only smiled as he opened the door, thinking that this would be the second opportunity in as many hours to make one of the two women in his life extremely happy.



Colonel Fitzwilliam loosened his cravat and threw himself back into a chair. He closed his eyes, but they were instantly open again when he recognized the unmistakable sound of Georgiana's squeal of delight from down the hall. Darcy, no doubt, had just told his sister of his plan for visiting Hertfordshire. And knowing Georgiana as he did, he knew that her very first request would be to journey there herself.

He closed his eyes again, eventually drifting off in a light slumber, thinking of dewy grass, country lanes, freshly mown hay, the fall colours just beginning to show itself amongst the trees, and standing in the middle of this bucolic paradise was Jane Bennet waiting only for him.



Lord Whitfield entered the room that his cousin Darcy had given him for his study. He shuffled the papers on the desk, a paper he was in the process of composing on the gestation and growth of his tropical plants. He just needed to check his notes and opening the desk drawer he withdrew his tattered leather-bound sketchbook. Looking over several of the drawings of flowers that he'd made in it, he thought about the Watercolour Society exhibition in Spring Gardens and how he'd been meaning to stop by.

Setting these thoughts aside, he removed his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and settled down to the desk, preparing to make a few minor corrections to the manuscript. Soon, he hoped to produce a fair enough copy to present to some publisher or another, briefly flirting with the idea of even showing it to Edward Gardiner.

Dipping his pen in ink, he set about to work. Blotting out the odd word here and there and adding several new ones, or redrafting entire paragraphs. He worked intensely and before he knew it the clock on the mantle chimed the arrival of the hour. He blinked: five in the morning? *Was it really five in the morning*, he asked himself.

He pushed back from the table, leaned back in his chair, and rubbed his hands across his face, feeling the first sign of his beard coming in and determining then and there to go to bed. And while sitting thusly he allowed himself a moment to think on other matters: His trip to South America in two months time, Edward and Delphie, and just how much he missed Julia.

Rising from the chair, his legs protested the fact that they had been idle for more than four hours. Walking across the room as a means of bringing back his circulation, he caught a glimpse of himself in a nearby mirror. He paused, staring, seeing for himself the first signs of aging and fatigue. This trip to London had been a means to get away from the concerns of home, and now here in London, the concerns had just followed after him. Perhaps, he thought, he would accept his cousin's kind invitation and go with Darcy into Hertfordshire. A few days in the country couldn't hurt.



Elizabeth Bennet, as was her habit, was up with the sun to take her morning walk. When she reached the bottom of the staircase Mrs. Hill was passing by on her way to the kitchens, noticing that the young lady was dressed a little lightly for walking out.

“Shall I have Sarah fetch your pelisse, Miss Elizabeth? There is a bit of a nip in the air this morning; you'll catch a chill.” However, before Elizabeth could respond, there arose a great commotion at the front of the house. Hoof beats were heard on the gravel out front and moments later someone was pounding upon the door.

Hill ran to answer it and discovered an express rider with a letter. When the fee was paid and the door was closed, Hill brought the letter directly to Elizabeth.

“Is it for my mother, Hill? I hope it is not bad news from my father or Jane in London.”

“No, ma'am; it is addressed to you.”

Hill placed the letter in Elizabeth's hands, curtsied, and went away to see to the breakfast.

Elizabeth stared down at the elegant and familiar handwriting on the outside of the letter and knowing who it was from immediately broke the seal.

*Darcy House,  
London*

*My dearest, loveliest, Elizabeth,*

*I have spoken with your father and he has my undying gratitude. If it is not asking too much, would you find it a great inconvenience for me to impose upon you in three days time?*

*Yours, ever,  
Fitzwilliam Darcy*

Moments later, when the young lady passed by the kitchen window, Mrs Hill chanced to remark to cook just how wonderful it was to see that a certain spring has returned back into Miss Elizabeth's step.



Charles Bingley stood atop the rise holding the reins of his horse as he surveyed the landscape. To his left was Netherfield House at the highest point in the valley. His eyes naturally moved from this vista down into the lower part of the valley into the large open fields below. His new steward suggested that he plant a crop next year; rye perhaps or maybe even barley. He knew nothing whatsoever about farming but that didn't matter as his new steward came highly recommended and he could run a farm with one hand tired behind his back.

A sudden movement on the next rise caught his attention. He stared for a long moment at a lone figure of a woman who he eventually determined it to be one of the Miss Bennet's, but unfortunately not his particular Miss Bennet. By the way this young woman ran down the hill with her hands moving freely through the air, he could tell it was none other than Miss Elizabeth. And no good could possibly come of that, for thinking of Miss Elizabeth naturally made him think of Jane and thinking of Jane made him remember his loss, and his loss made him recall the instigator of his misery and thinking of Fitzwilliam Darcy was unacceptable.

He mounted his horse and turned in the opposite direction and his mind turned to more pressing matters. As soon as his house in London was sold he would buy Netherfield Park outright and finally do as his father had wished: put down roots, deep roots--then Jane would see—she would know his devotion, she would witness it in every action and expression—he would never leave this place again. It was now his only home and soon, he determined, it would be hers.



In the mornings when the house was quiet and still and there was not a sound to be heard, Jane would spend it in deep thought. These reflections usually centred on one person and one person only: Charles Bingley. And when she thought of Charles she would only end up crying.

Reaching under her pillow she pulled out the handkerchief there and used it to wipe away the tears. Composing herself, she sat up in bed and thought about the day before her. Her father had mentioned the night before that he wanted her to spend the day with him and that was a very agreeable plan. It would give her an opportunity to think of someone else besides herself and her troubles, she thought.

Moving to the dressing table, she reached for her bottle of rosewater, sprinkling a few drops on the fine fabric square. Bringing it up to her face, she closed her eyes and refreshed herself, letting the soft fabric glide over her forehead and caress her cheeks, comforting her and helping her to relax to be able to face the day.

She had not remembered her own handkerchiefs before feeling quite so silky and comforting. Curious, she opened her eyes and studied the brilliant white fabric with new eyes and immediately recognizing it as not one of her own. Turning it over, for a moment, she wondered at the initials she found in one corner: a large gold F embroidered with a smaller J intertwined around it.

Jonathan Fitzwilliam.

A moment later, a smiling and chatty Maria knocked, and without waiting to be granted admittance, burst through the door, full of questions about the evening before, all having to do with Colonel Fitzwilliam. And Jane, not even realizing what she was doing, hid the handkerchief away.



Having heard of nothing else but of the previous days shocking incident in the park, Chetwyn Hurst grimaced after reading the latest gossip in the morning paper.

Interesting developments in the family of Lord M. Very important personages in that quarter have been seen recently about the town; most particularly Lord and Lady M themselves, the illusive Lord W, and the lately engaged Mr. D. Additionally, Lady A, the regal and gracious daughter of Lord and Lady M has been seen in the company of a beautiful and captivating young lady currently unknown to this publication. Lord M's dashing and chivalrous younger son was seen being of assistance to the young lady during an outing with Lord W's children. Speculation is high about town as to the identity of the lady and what her connection might or soon will be to this illustrious and noble family.

He looked at the door to the breakfast room, hoping that neither his wife nor his sister-in-law would enter to interrupt him as he hurriedly fashioned the newspaper into a tight ball, heaved it onto the fire, and watched as it turned completely black.



When Jane joined her family for breakfast she found them whispering together over the morning paper. Seeing her enter they all immediately drew back.

“Good morning aunt, uncle, papa; I trust you all slept well.”

“Very well, my dear,” said Mrs. Gardiner. “And you, Jane dear, how are *you* this morning?”

“I am very well, thank you for asking.”

Everyone around the table, with varying degrees of trepidation and anxiety, watched as Jane poured milk into her tea. No one wanted to mention the contents of the morning paper.

“What an enjoyable evening, last night, was it not?” said Mr. Gardiner suddenly, nodding his head towards the newspaper and smiling somewhat tensely.

“Yes, very enjoyable” said Henry Bennet, seeing what his brother was doing and folding up the paper, setting it aside, and placing his tea cup on top of it.

“What a delightful family the Matlock’s are; not as high as one might think they have a right to be,” said Mrs. Gardiner. “And Colonel Fitzwilliam, so affable, is he not; I quite enjoyed his reading last night.”

“Yes, yes, very entertaining--for a redcoat.” said Mr. Bennet, adding, “But then again, we have no shortness of entertaining redcoats of our acquaintance.”

“Oh, Papa,” said Jane, suddenly smiling brilliantly, “please, don’t say such a thing. He added to the pleasantness of the evening. The entire party was all that was delightful and charming; I do hope we are able to meet again and very often.”

The mere mention of Colonel Fitzwilliam had changed something in Jane and more than one of those sitting around the breakfast table took notice of her suddenly brightened countenance.

Seeing his daughter’s happy face, Henry Bennet decided to add to her happiness by telling her of the special outing he had planned for her. His plan was twofold: to give her a little bit of pleasure on her last day in London without social obligations and the encumbrances of other peoples children and more importantly to keep her out of the way of the entire Matlock family, not wanting to add to the unwanted speculation or the attention from that quarter would inevitably bring. Fortunately they were so little known in town, that the gossip in the morning paper, he knew, could never be connected to her.

“Tell me, Jane, what do you say to a watercolour exhibition in Spring Gardens? I hear that it is not very good, but what do we care, we may go and laugh at all the paintings displayed with impunity.”



Jane stepped back to take in the large portrait above her. The woman had a very stern face and looked ill at ease, starched up as she was in what looked to be a very uncomfortable and heavy black gown. Jane read the card displayed with it: *Mrs. Harriet Porter by Harold Smyth* and then moved on, leaving her father to the gallery of oil paintings and his contemplation of an imposing, and in his opinion, a rather incompetent painting of the Prince Regent's horse.

Presently, she came into the room with a collection of watercolours: Flowers and fruit arranged together or apart; large apples and oranges heaped one on top of the other or vases filled with various flowers in every shape and colour imaginable.

Several other people milled about as she walked among them for a few minutes. She was all that was admiring and appreciating when one small painting in particular drew her notice. It was not very large, but it was a delightful arrangement of pink rosebuds. She looked at the card: *Rosebuds in White Vase by L. W. Field*. She stared at the painting for a long moment and then moved next to an arrangement of pears on a green saucer. Reading that card she brought her fingers up to her lips as she quietly laughed at it.

"Yes, my feelings exactly; a very sorry attempt, do you not think?" said a deep voice from above her head.

Surprised, Jane spun around and looked up in the direction of the familiar sounding voice.

"My lord, how do you do, sir," she said smiling as she made a low curtsy to Lord Whitfield.

"Miss Bennet, how pleasant to find you here this afternoon," he said, tipping his hat. "Are you well?"

"Yes, very well, my lord, and you?"

"Very perplexed."

"Sir?"

"I was wondering at your reaction to—" he paused and read from the card displayed, "--*Arrangement of Pears on Green Plate*. Yes, now I see why you laugh; not a very imaginative name for such an unaccomplished work."

Jane disagreed. "No indeed, sir. It is not unaccomplished at all, it is very nicely done. I like it very much."

He quirked his mouth to one side. "It appears that the artist has found a friend; it is perhaps fortunate that he does; it prevents him from the possibility of staving in his garret."

Jane smiled at his joke, saying, "I found the artist's other work very pleasing, as well."

"Which?"

Jane's eyes lit up as she nodded towards the small painting of pink rosebuds.

Lawrence leaned forward reading that card. “I see, *Rosebuds in White Vase*, very original.”

“But is it not very, very, pretty?”

“Shabby, if you ask me, shabby and sentimental. What in the world was the artist playing at?”

Mr Bennet, just entering the room saw his daughter laugh with her companion and became somewhat alarmed. Several passers-by had even noticed the two standing and talking together and many of them were whispering with each other or either pointing openly. He acted swiftly.

“Well Jane, I fear we must be must be off. I have grown very tired of the tediousness and hypocrisy I find in what passes for art London.”

Jane could not believe her father’s rudeness and quickly brought Lord Whitfield to his notice.

“Papa, look, it is Lord Whitfield. Is it not good to see him again so soon?”

“Hmm, yes, Lord Whitfield, how’d you do? You will forgive us, I hope, but we must be off; my regards to your family.” He took his daughters elbow and began to lead her away.

Lawrence stood there in disbelief. If he had not known any better he would have sworn Mr. Bennet wanted nothing but to remove himself and his daughter from his sight. He wondered what he could have possibly done to offend him and was desperately trying to think of a way to delay there going, if only for the opportunity of speaking with Miss Bennet for a moment longer, when Miss Bennet herself, turned back suddenly.

“Oh, my lord, it seems I must go, but please, please tell Teddy and Delphie goodbye for me. I had so hoped for a chance to see them before I leave tomorrow. I will miss them very much.”

Jane had such a look of beauty coupled with entreaty on her face that it could do nothing in Lord Whitfield but inspire all his compassion. His lips parted and a place in his heart, which he long thought dead, opened. Unfamiliar sensations coursed through his body just at the thoughts of the lady actually going away, that he had to take a long moment to catch his breath. He felt rather than knew that from that moment on he could never deny her anything.

Stopping briefly to speak with the exhibitions curator, he quickly left the gallery and made his way straight to the Matlock townhouse. He needed to see is children.



The portmanteau was being hoisted up to the servant just as Jane kissed her aunt and uncle and all the little Gardiner’s goodbye. Her father reached for his brother-in-law’s hand and shook it firmly, thanking him and his wife for their hospitality. He grasped his daughter’s elbow and led her down the steps to their awaiting carriage.

Just as Jane was to step in, there came such a clattering of hoof beats around the corner that it caused every eye in that part of Gracechurch Street to look round. A large, elegant, open carriage pulled up behind Mr’s Bennet chaise and a boy of no more than nine years old called out excitedly.

“Jane! Jane! Wait! Please wait!”

A little head full of golden curls also popped up and Jane immediately saw that the two children were Delphie and Teddy.

The Gardiner children flew down the front steps hurriedly, excited to greet their friends. Lord Whitfield, stepping from the carriage had to dodge several little bodies moving around him in several different directions as he moved to speak with Mr. Bennet.

“Forgive me, sir; I will not delay you one moment more than necessary, but my children so wanted to be able to say goodbye to Miss Bennet.”

Mr. Bennet, by the gentleman’s flushed appearance, suspected it was not merely the children who only wanted to say goodbye to his eldest daughter, but he smiled kindly upon the flustered Viscount.

“Naturally,” he said somewhat sarcastically, but thankfully due to the general commotion no one seemed to notice.

Lord Whitfield turned and called to his two children who were equally excited to see Jane as they were to see their Gardiner friends.

Edward, being the faster of the two, came forward to shake Miss Bennet’s hand in greeting. Bowing formally at the waist he stepped forward and presented her with a small flat package of brown paper tied with string. “I brought you something, but don’t open it now, it is a surprise.”

Jane was astonished at the kind gesture of the child, but managed to thank him, “How very thoughtful of you, Teddy; you shouldn’t have.” She then kissed him on the cheek causing Edward to go all pale and pink in the span of a few seconds.

Delphie ran up next, lifting up a small bouquet of pink roses which Jane accepted just as graciously, and reached down to accept a hug.

“Thank you so much, Delphie; they are very pretty.”

Jane was so touched that she nearly cried. She looked next to Lord Whitfield, desperately trying to form the words in which to thank him for his kindness.

“My lord, how can I thank you for bringing your children. If only...”

“Oh, Miss Bennet, please do not thank me as it was entirely Edward’s idea.” It was a falsehood of course; he had led Edward to believe it had been his own idea when he’d visited his children the evening before to inform them both of Miss Bennet’s imminent departure. Of course he would never let on to anyone that he wanted to wish Jane goodbye just as much as the children.

Lawrence and Jane stood there staring at each other for a moment, each not knowing exactly what to say. They were both awakened from their reverie with Mrs. Gardiner inviting Lord Whitfield and his children into the house for some refreshment. All the little Gardiner’s exclaimed excitedly in happiness at this unexpected treat.

“Yes, we would be delighted, madam,” replied Lord Whitfield, turning suddenly with embarrassment and acknowledging Mr. and Mrs Gardiner’s for the first time since his arrival and then hurriedly introducing his children to Mr. Bennet.

“Well then, come along Jane,” said her father who was very amused with this new development; and to think, he had just come to the conclusion that he’d try his best to like the second red-coated admirer of one of his daughters, and now he had to contend with an actual peer of the realm. “We must be off if we are to be home in time for dinner.” And being the clever man that he was, he stepped into the carriage first, leaving his daughter’s latest admirer to hand her into the carriage himself.

The Viscount grasped Miss Bennet’s hand and held it firmly until she was safely deposited in the carriage. He then lifted the rug and laid it across the lady’s lap.

Edward watched blank-faced and perplexed at his father for a long moment watching him going through these polite little courtesies and trying to make him out. There was definitely something different about him today--had been different about him since yesterday. He seemed, softer somehow, if that were possible; pleasanter even; almost obliging in his manner. Edward had never seen his father’s behaviour to anyone else excepting the family and servants. His father then did a very curious thing. He watched his father as he placed a kiss on his friend Jane’s hand. He had never seen his father do that in all his life to anyone, he thought, not even to Aunt Adele or even to his Grandmother.

The door was closed and the carriage with the two Bennet’s turned from Gracechurch Street out into Oxford Road. Mr. Bennet watched his daughter closely as she slowly brought the flowers up to her nose to breathe in their heady aroma. There was an almost wistful quality to her as she laid the flowers on the seat beside her and smoothed her hand across the brown paper of the package.

“Well, my dear, aren’t you going to open it?”

“Sorry?”

“Your gift, from your young man; he clearly likes you very much.” Jane’s look was questioning so Mr Bennet decided to stop teasing, “His Lordship’s son; young Edward, is it not?”

“Oh yes, Teddy; such a dear, sweet boy.”

“Let me see what your admirer has brought you. Open it.”

“Oh, do you think I should?”

“No better time than the present, I should say.”

Jane slowly untied the strings holding the package together. Setting the strings aside, she removed the paper to reveal the back of a small canvas. Turning it over, she smiled and her eyes widened in surprise.

“What is it my dear,” asked her father, curious.

“Rosebuds in White Vase, by L. W. Field,” said Jane as she read the enclosed card.

“Hmm? Very nice,” said Mr Bennet, who, no longer interested, opened his book and began to read.

For Jane, it was indeed a very nice gift and she moved her gloved fingers over the line now crossing out the name on the card that she had previously seen displayed with this painting the day before. It was obvious that the artist himself had made this new mark, and she thought it best to keep to herself that the artist, L. W. Field was none other than Lawrence, Lord Whitfield.

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\*The Enchantress – available at [Chawton.org](http://Chawton.org)

*Author's note: This chapter has a few minor (very minor) changes from the original posting at DWG. I was late for a flight that day I posted it there rather hurriedly without going over it very well. It had a lot of type-o's in it, which I have since corrected. Thanks for your understanding and for all of your kind comments; they are both appreciated. –Ed.*