

Chapter 14 ~ Coming and Goings



Just before his departure from the Gardiner's home that morning, a note had been delivered to Mr. Henry Bennet from Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. However, during the typical fuss and bother over the trunks and bandboxes, the missive had been slipped into a pocket and forgotten. Mr. Bennet now recollected it and with Jane busy reading a book on the other side of the carriage, it was taken out and read over.

It contained all of the usual good wishes for a safe and pleasant journey and when those items were dispensed with, the note concluded with a surprising declaration from the young man:

...so, with my business in town not being very pressing, I have some idea of following you and Miss Bennet into the country almost immediately. When this sudden change in plan has been disclosed to my two cousins later this evening, I hope that they will be willing to be at my disposal.

I have written to Mr. Philips so that he might arrange matters on his end. I have also taken a great liberty and have written to your daughter of my coming in three days time. Naturally, I would consider it a great favour if you would be so good as to not mention my coming sooner nor my interest in a house to Miss Elizabeth; it will make the surprise all the more enjoyable.

Fitzwilliam Darcy

Mr. Bennet chuckled to himself. Mr. Darcy had all the nonsensical characteristics of impulsive folly generally found in most young men. The gentleman proved that he was unable to distance himself from a woman's charms for more than a fortnight and thought nothing of those he inconvenienced in the process. Heaven and earth preserve us, he mused, from all young men in love.

He looked up from the note and was just about to make some sort of sarcastic remark at that gentleman's expense, when he noticed that Jane's eyes were now closed. He tucked the note away and unfolded a newspaper, saving that bit of humorous news for later.



On the opposite side of the carriage, Jane's eyes were closed, but she was not asleep. She was far too busy thinking over all the events of the previous week.

It had been such a pleasure for her to meet with the Darcy's in town. Mr. Darcy had been all that was charming, thoughtful, and obliging; and even Miss Darcy, who Jane could tell was exceedingly shy, especially so with her, was a lovely girl. She briefly wondered if that young lady had ever *really* formed an attachment to Mr. Bingley. It had certainly been hinted at--for if she had, it just might explain away some of the coolness she initially felt being in Georgiana's presence.

The Fitzwilliam family were another matter. They all had been exceptionally kind to her from the start and she liked them all immensely. She thought fondly of the opportunities her sister's marriage would give in bringing the two families together in future. She especially looked forward to getting to know the Viscount's two children and smiled to herself when she thought of the three of them coming to the Gardiner's that morning on purpose to send them off.

"How very good of his Lordship was in thinking of me," she thought. But he was a kind man; she could see that for herself. Perhaps a little lonely and busy with his work, she surmised, but with two children under foot, it wasn't hard for her to have just a little sympathy for his situation.

And the watercolour; how very talented he was, she reflected. Jane wondered why he had not mentioned that it was his own creation when they stood looking at the piece together. It surely must be a credit to his modesty, she mused; a very thoughtful and generous gift, especially to someone he had only known a short time.

A sudden rut in the road jarred the carriage and Jane opened her eyes. She glanced out of the window to ascertain her whereabouts, and immediately saw a lone horse and rider trotting past. The gentleman passing by sat tall in the saddle with his blue eyes shining brightly in the sun. When he saw the pretty face looking out of the window at him, he tipped his hat and smiled. Something about the gentleman caused her to stiffen. Perhaps it was the rider's large, genuine smile, or the cut of his coat, or the shade of his hair, for

when he glanced back, it made her instantly think of another who looked somewhat similar to him.

Almost as soon as she thought of Charles Bingley, she tried to force it back down someplace deep inside her, but it kept pushing to the surface. Oh why, she asked herself, could he not be the sort of gentleman like Colonel Fitzwilliam: brave, generous, and thoughtful. *He* would not make some poor woman fall in love with him and leave her broken-hearted and alone; *he* would not purposely seek out a young lady at every ball in the county and then leave her to be the subject of idle gossip and pity before all of Hertfordshire.

True, Charles Bingley, for all his faults, still did own a part of her heart; yet, it was not so great a portion that he could have once commanded. Everyone in her family would soon see that she was not so weak as to be in any danger from any further attentions from that quarter. And then, one day soon, she hoped, it would be publicly seen on all sides, that from now on they would meet only as common and indifferent acquaintances.



Charles Bingley, covered head to toe in mud, let himself into Netherfield after his ride. With no servant at the door, he threw his hat, greatcoat, and gloves down into a pile on the floor and immediately began calling for his servant.

“Fossett! Fossett!”

Upon hearing her master’s loud voice from the floor above, the cook ran after her son.
“Jack, Jack; that be the master calling for you!”

A skinny footman of no more than sixteen or seventeen years old came scurrying out of the butler’s pantry and paused to listen.

“Fossett! Where the devil are you, man?”

The young man made for the stairs, only to turn round when his mother called him back to retrieve his new white gloves. He used his teeth to pull one glove on one hand as the other hand adjusted the white wig on his head.

“How do I look, Mother?”

“Fine and dandy, Jack; only hurry along; you know how cross the master be these days.”

“Fossett!”

Jack hurried through the doors at the top of the stairs and regulated his pace when he saw the agitated Mr. Bingley in the front hall. He bowed.

“Who the devil are you?” asked Bingley, crossly.

“Williams, sir,” replied the young man, his voice breaking slightly.

“Williams? Where did you come from?”

“From downstairs, sir; just now.”

“Why the devil is there no one at the door? Where is Nelson or Warren?”

“I think--” Williams stopped as he did not know how to phrase his answer. Both Nelson and Warren had been dismissed at the master’s insistence and Jack wondered how Mr. Bingley could forget so soon. And besides, what could he say, just three days before he had only been the hall boy.

“*You* think? Just what is it that you *think*?”

Jack’s cheeks turned bright red against his pale skin. “I mean, I believe-- I don’t know, sir.”

“Where is Fossett?”

“I think—I mean, I believe he is indisposed, sir.”

“Indisposed? What does that mean?”

“I believe he has a cold, sir, and has taken to his bed.”

To Charles, Fossett had certainly grown remarkably touchy the last few days and this sudden cold was probably nothing more than some ruse. If he had not been his father’s favourite servant and not been with the family for so long, he would almost entertain thoughts of dismissing him, as well. Bingley was just about to protest this minor inconvenience, when he spotted a letter in a familiar hand upon the tray. He snatched it up and stared at it.

“Here,” he said, not troubling to look up at the boy before him, “help me with these boots.”

Bingley sat down and lifted one muddy boot in the air. Jack looked down at his new gloves and then at the mud covered boots and had no other choice but to pull them off. Grasping one foot in his hand, he pulled and pulled and pulled without much success.

Meanwhile, Bingley opened his letter. Realizing his boot had not been removed, he yelled to the footman to turn around. He braced his other muddy boot on the footman’s backside, smearing mud on the livery. His eyes quickly read over the letter and when he got to one point down the page that he did not like, he pushed the footman forward, propelling him violently ahead, boot and all.



“The more I meet her the more I must say I like Miss Bennet. And, do you want to know something else, Georgiana?” she said, lowering her voice, “I think I have a secret to tell. Would you like to hear it?”

Instead of answering her cousin, Georgiana fidgeted with her shawl, stood and walked to the morning room door, paused to listen for something, and then sat back down and fidgeted some more.

Lady Adele could not make her cousin out. Georgiana clearly wasn't attending to anything she had to say, and she had come specifically to talk of all those they dined with just days before.

“Georgiana, what has gotten into you today; you've hardly heard one word in ten I've said?”

“Oh, I am so sorry,” she fretted. Looking up, she asked, “You were saying?”

“I was going to tell you about my silly brother; something I suspect him of. Oh how we shall laugh at him; it will make the joke from the other night look like child's play.”

A slight noise on the other side of the door drew their notice. Adele correctly surmised that it was a servant passing on some errand, but Georgiana's eyes showed her particular interest as she stared at the door as if willing it to open.

Adele sighed heavily. “Georgiana, you might as well tell me what is going on. It is obviously something of great import for you have gone quite distracted.”

Grateful to finally have a sympathetic ear, it all tumbled out in a flurry of words.

“Fitzwilliam has told me that he is to take a house in Hertfordshire until his wedding. I am to go down to stay very soon after. I will see Miss Elizabeth Bennet again and I long to see her.”

“Pardon me for saying so, but this seems such an agreeable scheme that I don't see what it is that troubles you so.”

“The only thing, Mrs. Annesley saw some sort of difficulty and asked to speak to my brother in private. I hope she will let me go and will allow me to put off my studies for a few weeks. They have been locked up together for half of the morning; well, not half of the morning, it just feels that way. I do not know what they can be talking of so long.”

“Oh, I see,” said Adele, her mind racing with all she had just heard pertaining to Hertfordshire; for thinking of Hertfordshire naturally brought Mr. Charles Bingley into her mind.

Footsteps were heard and in the very next instant, the door finally opened. Mrs Annesley, followed by Darcy, entered. They both greeted the newcomer warmly and Adele noticed

that her cousin, as he bent down to kiss her cheek, had a very serious expression upon his face.

Georgiana, seeing his look as well, stood up, slightly alarmed. Mrs Annesley went directly to her, took her hands, and urged her to sit down again.

“Georgiana, dearest,” said Darcy, clearing his throat and slightly out of sorts, “Mrs Annesley and I have had a very long discussion. It would seem that she has come to the decision to leave us very soon.”

“On holiday,” said Georgiana, nodding to her companion, trying to make that outcome a reality, all the while knowing exactly what her brother meant. “Yes, you have been with me an entire year already; of course you must want time away to visit your family.”

“No, dear,” said Gloria Annesley, sadly, “It will be--.” Her words stopped in her mouth; she couldn’t finish and she looked to her employer for assistance.

Darcy cleared his throat again, tipping his head sideways in the way he always did when he was uncomfortable. Turning back to look his sister in her eyes he finally said, “No, Georgiana, this will be a *permanent* removal.”

Georgiana’s mouth formed several words before she gathered her wits about her enough to speak. “No! Oh no, impossible! Tell me this is not true,” she exclaimed, searching her brother’s face. “Fitzwilliam, what does this mean?” With her brother not being immediately forthcoming, she turned to her companion. “Mrs. Annesley, surely you can not be serious!”

Adele stood to go and to give the little group some privacy, but Darcy, standing behind her chair, reached out and lightly touched her shoulder, pushing her back down to prevent her.

Mrs Annesley spoke in her usual calm and reassuring way. “Now, Georgiana, my dear, as I have told Mr. Darcy: now that you have become such a grown up, proficient young lady you no longer have need of me. Soon you will have a sister to take my place and from what your brother tells me of the young lady’s accomplishments and character, I have no doubt that from now on you will be well looked after.”

Tears flowed freely down Georgiana’s cheeks; the thought of losing such a one as Mrs Annesley was devastating.

“But-but you will come with me into Hertfordshire, will you not? Oh please, say you will stay with me for that,” she whimpered.

Mrs. Annesley’s heart was breaking as she said, “Yes, my dear, I will see you safely and comfortably situated in Hertfordshire. However, once you are settled, I will travel on directly to my sister’s home in Devonshire.”

Georgiana had fought to hold it all in, but now she cried openly. Darcy, unable to bear so many tears, withdrew. Adele followed soon after to give the two ladies some time alone together. She found her usually stoic cousin in the library, pacing and running his fingers through his hair; he looked defeated.

Being a realist, Adele spoke up to reassure her cousin. "I suppose it had to happen one day or another. Eventually Georgiana will be easy with the idea." Darcy glanced at Adele almost as if to say he didn't believe her. She, seeing his look, continued. "Yes, cousin, truly; Georgiana will get over the loss and learn to accept it. Her affection for Miss Elizabeth Bennet will soon outweigh her sadness at the loss of so good a companion as Mrs. Annesley. So, as you see, I have settled the matter for you. You can now take that ghastly look off of your face!"

Darcy, seeing the truth in her words, finally nodded, saying, "Of her fondness for Elizabeth, I have no doubt. It is just--Georgiana has come to depend on Mrs. Annesley almost as a mother figure--ever since that business in—" he paused as something painful darkened his face, which Adele, as always, saw. "Well, they are very close."

With Darcy's change in countenance, Adele decided to lighten the conversation. "And speaking of Miss Elizabeth, Georgiana tells me that you are to take a house in Hertfordshire until the wedding. This is good news! I expect you are overjoyed see your fiancée again and to visit with your good friend, Mr. Bingley? That's must please you, surely?"

Adele saw her cousin's eye twitch. Darcy became even more uncomfortable and twisted his signet ring.

"Y-Yes, Mr. Bennet's brother-in-law has found a few properties for me to look over. I go up a day earlier than previously planned, as a surprise for Elizabeth; I doubt if I will see much of Mr. Bingley."

"Oh, I see," said Adele, her instincts telling her that her cousin wasn't exactly telling her the whole of the story, but she knew better than to press the matter.

"And now," he said, turning to stare out one of the windows, placing his hands behind his back and standing tall, "with Mrs. Annesley leaving us, I don't know if it is very wise for my sister to come along after all. She did very well with the dinner the other night--but to run an entire household--even for a few weeks, without another woman's guidance may be too much for her."

"Very true," said Adele, her interest immediately arrested, but schooling her features well enough to hide her feelings.

Darcy became thoughtful for a few moments, then he slowly turned round and stared at his cousin with curiosity. He always found her practical and level-headed, and she was definitely very accomplished and wise. A bold plan was forming in his mind.

“Adele, you may not be aware, but I have also asked both of your brothers to travel down with me. I was wondering--would it be too much to ask--I know I have no right to inconvenience you so, but would you consider—?”

Adele stopped him from speaking further, for she had a bold plan of her own, only hers was not of a new creation.

“Do you mean, traveling into Hertfordshire to be companion to my cousin Georgiana? Fitzwilliam, do not concern yourself another minute.” She smiled broadly and said, “I would be delighted!”



Jane Bennet was gone from town and Colonel Fitzwilliam had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with himself. As exercise for his leg, he slowly roamed the streets of London, stopping here or there as the mood fancied him. Once, he even looked into one of the officer's clubs (which he despised) and found everyone thither tedious, boring, talking of bawdy women, and gaming.

Eventually, he directed his steps over to his parent's house and spent the rest of afternoon lounging about his mother's sitting room, reading the newspaper sporadically while sprawled across the settee.

After he had sighed heavily for, she was sure, the hundredth time, Lady Matlock remarked wearily, “What on earth has gotten into you today?”

“Nothing; I am perfectly fine,” he mumbled peevishly, turning over to lie flat on his back and positioning the newspaper over his face. He remained in that attitude for several minutes before again sighing greatly. He eventually lifted himself off the sofa, cast the newspaper to the floor, and limped over to the window to stare out, just in time to see one of the family's carriages pulling away.

“Who had the barouche out today; Father--Adele?” he asked, turning round to look at his mother.

Lady Matlock smiled enigmatically. “Your brother borrowed it for the morning to take the children out. I presume he has just brought them home.”

This seemed strange to the Colonel as he had never before heard of his morose brother going on *outings* with his own children before.

The countess leaned forward to set out another teacup for her eldest son. She could not wait to hear how Lawrence's visit went, but Jonathan was now unfortunately in the way.

“John, dearest, why don't you go and seek out your father; play backgammon with him... or something; there's a good boy.” She flicked her wrist to dismiss him.

“Backgammon?” he blanched. He wondered why his mother would say such a ridiculous thing, for she had to know that he and his father could never play that game together without wanting to kill each other.

There was a knock on the sitting room door.

“Come,” called the countess.

Kingsley opened the door and Lady Adele stepped in, saying, “Well, here I am again!”

“Adele,” exclaimed Lady Matlock, “You sent your carriage back so I did not expect you so soon! Did Lawrence bring you home?” Lady Matlock tried to look around her daughter to see if her eldest was there.

“No,” said Adele, turning to see what it was her mother was looking for. “Cousin Fitzwilliam sent me home in his carriage; but Lawrence and the children will be up shortly; they were removing their coats as I came up.”

Lady Matlock, although she loved all her children dearly, now wished another one of them away.

“But I thought you were spending the entire day with Georgiana?”

“Far too many tears and wringing of hands over there for me; I would much rather be home.”

Adele sat and was silent for a moment, anticipating her mother asking about Georgiana’s troubles. Instead, out of the corner, someone unexpected spoke.

“What is wrong with Georgiana?” asked the Colonel, concern evident in every feature.

Startled, she spun around in her seat, noticing her other brother for the first time. “Oh, hello, John; I did not see you. Why are *you* here?”

The Colonel fixed his dismissive sister with a steely glare. “I ask again; what is the matter with Georgiana?”

Ignoring her brother’s look and tone, she turned to her mother, “Mrs. Annesley is leaving; naturally Georgiana is upset.”

“Oh, is *that* all,” said Lady Matlock, nonchalantly. “I always say that Mrs. Annesley is a wonderful woman; perfectly refined and respectable, but I never understood the need for Georgiana to have a companion in the first place. Fitzwilliam and Jonathan should have sent her to me—or to Catherine. We’ve both raised daughters; we know very well what is required.”

And that is exactly why she was not, mused the colonel, thinking of the disobliging nature of one and the insipidness of the other.

“Oh mamma, did you have to mention Aunt Catherine!” exclaimed Adele, with a disapproving air. “Please remember that we are all very, very angry with her?”

Lady Matlock acted as if she had not heard her daughter, and in fact, she had not.

“I thought you said Lawrence was coming?” she asked impatiently, the countess’s mind focused solely on that which concerned her most at present.

Adele regarded her mother with astonishment, noticing that her eyes had not moved from the door. She had a sudden feeling of déjà vu.

“He *is* coming, Mamma! He told me so himself.”

Edward and Delphie entered the room just then, with their father following silently and moodily behind them. The Viscount sat as the two children ran up to their grandmother, bursting with all they had to tell. The chatter was so loud and animated that Lady Matlock could not make out one word in ten as they each talked over the other.

To garner herself more attention than her brother, Delphie pulled herself up on the settee next to her grandmother and tugged violently at her sleeve. “Gand-mama, I saw Hen’etta and Riya! And then she gave me a hug. And then she went away! And then—and then—and then I eat staw-berries!”

Lady Matlock looked to her grandson to see if he could decipher this little speech of his sister’s.

“She means Henrietta and Maria, Grandmamma,” he said, testily, thinking that his sister was all that was ill-mannered and that everything about himself was very superior. “And Delphie made a nuisance out of herself, as usual!”

“I not!” yelled Delphie, trying to defend herself, only vaguely knowing what a nuisance was.

“You were so!” And turning back to his grandmother, he exclaimed, “You should have seen her, Grandmamma; Mrs. Gardiner cut up an apple just for her and Delphie acted like a baby and refused to eat it.”

“I not a baby!”

“Yes, you are!”

“I not!”

“Baby, baby, baby!”

“Edward, please,” exclaimed his father dangerously. “What did I say to you before about speaking to your sister in such a way?”

“You know she did, Father; she always does! She won’t eat anything unless she asks a thousand questions beforehand. You would think she never saw an apple before in her life.”

“I take it,” said Lady Matlock, raising her eyebrows as Edward took his right hand and reached for a biscuit from the tray, “that the children have had an agreeable outing.”

“Lord, yes; your grandson ate so much that we shall never be invited back. I don’t know where he puts it all,” said Lord Whitfield, grabbing his son’s left hand and forcing him to drop the second biscuit he had snatched from the tray in as many seconds.

“And Grandmamma, guess what? Tom and Phil say that they are both going to Merchant-Taylor’s? I should like you to go there; I shan’t know anyone at Eton.”

“Edward, enough,” sighed the Viscount, who had grown tired all of a sudden because Edward had talked of nothing else since getting into the carriage to come home.

“But why do Tom and Phil get to go and not me?”

Lord Whitfield suddenly stood, moved to the bell pull, and gave it three sharp, angry tugs.

Colonel Fitzwilliam, who had been listening to this entire conversation and not actually comprehending, suddenly asked, “Pardon me, but you have spent the whole morning... with the Gardiner’s?”

Lawrence turned suddenly, surprised to see his brother in the room. “Well, not the whole morning—more like part of it—which, now that I consider, probably felt more like the whole morning to people who most likely wished us away.” He chuckled.

Jonathan, thinking his brother’s statement flippant and evasive, asked irritably, “Which is it, the whole of the morning or part of it?”

“Forgive me brother, but why is that important, exactly?” asked Lawrence, his voice tinged with impatience.

“I only meant—” The colonel took a steadying breath, “--I would have liked to have been at least included in any leave taking.”

“I didn’t ask because I was under the impression that you,” he paused and looked at his children, “were not—exactly... enamoured with certain members of the family.”

Alarmed, Lady Matlock looked up from the tea things. “Why should your brother not--?” she too paused before saying the full sentence in front of the children.

“That is something you will have to apply to him for, Mother.”

“John?”

The colonel huffed. "Lawrence speaks nonsense, Mother. My only concern is that it may have appeared very rude... my not being there to say goodbye. We are staying in the same house after all; you could have easily said something this morning, at breakfast."

"It was all very last minute and very spur of the moment; when I spoke with Miss Bennet yesterday--"

"Yesterday? Yesterday!"

"Yes, yesterday, when I went to Spring Gardens; I entered a few--" he flicked his hand dismissively. "There was a watercolour exhibition, nothing interesting. Miss Bennet and her father just happened to be there." Lawrence paused and his demeanour suddenly calmed. He continued, his voice taking on a tender quality. "She seemed to like the paintings she saw very much, and--" he stopped himself again, recalling her admiring look at his work, and, of course, her having no idea at the time that it was *his* work. He had found that very gratifying for some reason. He smiled and his mind wandered.

Adele's eyes widened. Lawrence, usually so dark and brooding about anything and everything now smiled pleasantly at the mere mention of seeing Miss Bennet. Lawrence's future behaviour around the lady would now warrant her closer inspection.

Edward also looked at his father curiously. Only a moment ago his father was gruff and angry, now he had suddenly started smiling. Not being able to understand and not sure if he wanted to, he continued speaking to his grandmother.

"And, Grandmamma, Jane liked her presents so much that she hugged Delphie!" Naturally Edward was far too embarrassed to mention that he had received a hug *and* a kiss.

"Presents?" asked Colonel Fitzwilliam, bewildered.

Delphie, tugged once more at her grandmother's sleeve, telling all, "Teddy got a kiss!"

"Did he, my dear; isn't that lovely."

Edward, mortified, erupted. "Oh, shut up, Delphie! And stop calling me Teddy!"

"Please, stop yelling at your sister," exclaimed Lady Adele.

"Teddy, Teddy, Teddy!" Delphie stuck out her tongue.

To Lady Matlock, even though parts of the story were disjointed, she could plainly see that things were going very well. Now, if only she could think of a way to put Lawrence back in Miss Bennet's way.

"I should have liked to have visited them myself, but Mr. Bennet was so adamant about putting me off the idea. It's such a pity we will not be seeing the Bennet's again until the

wedding,” she said. “I so delight in Miss Bennet’s company and the children seem to like her very much, too.” The Countess looked at Lawrence pointedly and raised an eyebrow.

Adele looked to Jonathan who was busy berating himself for not thinking of visiting the Gardiner’s himself.

“Oh, mother,” said Lord Whitfield, “Did you not know? I will be seeing her in several days, in fact; Darcy has invited me to go into Hertfordshire; he goes down to look over a house he might be taking until the wedding.”

Lady Matlock’s eyes widened at this piece of good news. “Fitzwilliam is to take a house? W-When did this all come about?” she asked excitedly, nearly leaping out of the chair.

“At Georgiana’s dinner; did not father tell you; he was there when we made the plans.”

“Your father never tells me anything; you should know that by now. Did you know about this, Adele?”

“Fitzwilliam told me of the plan just today. He has even invited me to go down later with Georgiana once things are settled.”

“May I go, oh, please, Father,” asked Edward. “I should so like to see Jane very much!”

“Me, me, me!”

“No, you may not. You will both stay here with your Grandmother.”

Edward, extremely disappointed, went off to pout in the corner.

Lord Whitfield, turned back to his brother, saying, “Actually I do have a very important message for you from a certain young lady in that very household. Just because you were not there does not mean that you were not missed.” He winked at his mother mischievously and said, “A young lady, mother, who, I believe, is quite taken with your youngest son.”

Colonel Fitzwilliam, thinking only of Miss Bennet, paled. “Yes?”

“She asks that you come for a visit very soon.”

“Did she; did she really?” he asked, the beginnings of a smile brightening his face.

“Yes she did; for she says that you are very jolly and know all the best games.” Lawrence smirked; it was rare that he poked fun with either of his two siblings; he had no idea that he was inadvertently giving pain.

Colonel Fitzwilliam, disappointed, turned away and sat down in the nearest chair with a thud.

“Who is this,” asked Lady Matlock.

“The eldest Gardiner girl; I can not seem to recall which is which at present.”

“Maria,” said Adele, noticing Jonathan’s sombre countenance.

“Yes, yes, Miss Maria; the delightful one who chatters so,” said Lawrence laughing. “Young Miss Gardiner is quite taken with John, and talked of nothing but Colonel Fitzwilliam this, and Colonel Fitzwilliam that. I expect in two or three years, she will have my brother wrapped around her little finger.”

Edward, looking up between pouts, having no idea what his father could mean, asked, “But why should Maria want him wrapped around her little finger, Father?”

Thankfully, Lord Whitfield was relieved of having to answer by the entrance of the children’s nurse come to take them away.

After the children had gone, Lord Matlock sauntered in, reading the newspaper.

“James, there you are!” cried the countess. “I never seem to know where you are from one moment to the next.”

“Oh, I’ve been about; just catching up on all the news... in with the paper.” He looked pointedly at his second son.

“That’s nice, dear.” She poured him his tea. “Is there anything interesting in the paper?”

“The usual clap-trap,” he replied, “Those come to town, those in debt, which son besmirched the family honour, people getting married, and who’s got their eye on whom. He again fixed his eyes on Jonathan. “Are you staying for dinner, Lawrence?”

Lawrence pulled out his pocket watch and exclaimed at the time. “Sorry, Father, I must be going before all my beetles die. Fitzwilliam and Georgiana must be wondering if we have deserted them. Another time, perhaps. Coming John?”

“No, John won’t be coming,” replied Lord Matlock, pushing his second son back down in his seat just as he started to rise.

“Oh, I won’t,” said the colonel, wondering what it was his father wanted.

“No, you won’t,” replied the earl. And turning to his eldest, he added, “Make his excuses to Darcy and Georgiana, will you; for Jonathan and I have much to discuss tonight.”



The sun was moving lower in the sky when the Bennet carriage arrived back in the vicinity of Longbourn. Mr. Bennet took out his pocket watch.

“We have made very good time on our journey. I believe that we are in excellent time for afternoon tea, Jane.”

Jane, who had been thoroughly engrossed in her book during most of the journey, suddenly looked out of the window and noticed the familiar surroundings of home.

“It is good to be home. I have missed mamma and my sisters;”

Henry Bennet became thoughtful. “Before we go in Jane, there are some things I wish to speak to you about.”

“Yes, Papa.”

“I have not mentioned it before, but Mr. Darcy means to take a house in Hertfordshire before the wedding. In fact, that was the business I had with him in London. Your sister believes that he is coming down in a few days, but, I expect we will see him much, much sooner. Also, Lizzy does not know about the house as yet. I know it will be hard to keep anything from her, but do try. Let us not be the ones to ruin Mr. Darcy’s notions on how to please ladies.” He smiled and thinking of his gossiping wife and daughters, added, “And, I think it would be wise not mention it to anyone else until things are finally settled.”

“Oh, yes, how lovely, Papa; of course, of course I will keep your secret. Lizzy will be so delighted.”

He now thought about the newspaper article and of the Fitzwilliam family. “And it’s probably a good idea not to mention too much about meeting the Earl’s family, either. Your mother can hardly contain herself with her thoughts of Mr. Darcy’s ten-thousand a year and great estate in Derbyshire. Unless you mean to be plagued into giving detailed descriptions of them and all their finery, I suggest you keep what you say to your mother on that subject to a minimum.”

She nodded. “Yes, papa; I agree.”

Several minutes later the carriage stopped at the front door to Longbourn House. The steps were let down and Mrs Bennet instantly ran out of the house to accost the weary travellers before they even had a chance to disembark. She was followed by Elizabeth, Mary, and Kitty.

“Why are you so late? I was sure you were attacked by highwaymen up to all manner of mischief!”

Mr. Bennet immediately stepped down and reached back to assist his daughter in getting out. “As you can see, Mrs. Bennet, we have arrived none the worse for wear.” He then quickly kissed his wife and each of his other daughters.

“But we expected you hours ago.”

“I can not think why, madam; my letter specifically stated that we would be home well before dinner.”

Mr. and Mrs Bennet entered the house, with the latter complaining loudly about the time and the former doing his best to ignore her. Mary and Kitty came forward to claim their own kisses from Jane, tell her how well she looked, and about the latest Hertfordshire news.

“—and, William Goulding will need to stay abed until he fully recovers,” said Kitty, secretly delighted. “Mr. Jones told Mrs Long and Mrs Long told Lady Lucas who then told mamma that he was very fortunate not to have killed himself.”

“Oh dear,” cried Jane, concerned at this terrible news about their neighbour. “I do hope he improves quickly; his mother must be beside herself with worry.”

They all turned towards the house, but Elizabeth, who had missed her sister exceedingly, held Jane back a few moments longer to let the others enter the house before them.

Elizabeth looked over her sister carefully. A week in town had certainly brightened Jane’s countenance considerably for her sister was in especially good looks. Elizabeth noted that she was wearing an expensive new hat and seemed rested and glowing.

However, what Elizabeth was most concerned with was an account she had read in the newspaper just that morning. Of course Jane’s name was not mentioned, but it took very little to deduce who was the “*beautiful and captivating young lady*” in the company of the Fitzwilliam family with Colonel Fitzwilliam being at her disposal.

“Jane, you look remarkably well. But before I question you mercilessly as to why you look so and where you bought that lovely hat, you must satisfy me immediately, how do the others so very dear to me fare?”

“Very well, too,” replied Jane, kissing her sister’s cheek. “There, that is from your Mr. Darcy.” Leaning in again to kiss the other cheek, she added, “And that is from Aunt and Uncle Gardiner.”

Several of the servants approached the carriage and began to remove the trunks, bandboxes, and other items to take inside. “I will take those, Hill,” said Jane, indicating her bouquet of flowers and the flat package containing her watercolour.

“Very good, Miss.”

Elizabeth, seeing the items and doing a dead-on impression of her sister Lydia, asked archly, “Have you brought us some presents?”

“No,” said Jane smiling shyly and looking down, “I mean, yes, only, they are all in my trunk. I received these gifts just as I was coming away.” Jane said nothing more as they stepped towards the house.

“It all sounds very mysterious,” replied Elizabeth, raising an eyebrow and smiling.

“Oh, it is nothing of the sort; merely a present, a very lovely present from Edward and Delphie Fitzwilliam,” replied Jane, glancing up, her cheeks rosy.

As they entered the house, Elizabeth’s look appeared questioning so Jane continued. “They are Colonel Fitzwilliam’s nephew and niece, the children of his brother, Viscount Whitfield.”

“Oh,” said Elizabeth, sensing her sister’s uneasiness and wondering why Jane appeared to blush so as she spoke of it. She must have gotten to know the Fitzwilliam family quite well, she thought; well enough for the children to bring her presents after only one week’s acquaintance.

“And how did you like them?”

“They were all that were kind and obliging. Papa and I agree; you are very fortunate to belong to such a family; they will welcome you most readily.”

“As you know, I have only met Colonel Fitzwilliam. I am inclined to believe his family a good one based solely on his excellent manners. How did you like *him*?” She watched her sister closely.

“Colonel Fitzwilliam was very kind. I found his manner quiet at first and he drew back from me several times and did not seem inclined to speak. Yet, once he overcame his shyness, he proved a very pleasant gentleman.”

To Elizabeth, this description of Colonel Fitzwilliam did not satisfy her. The man she had met in Kent was nothing of the sort and shyness would never be an attribute she would have painted him with.

“And the brother you mentioned, the Viscount?”

Jane face glowed as she spoke. “Oh Lizzy, his children are such little dears. I can not wait for you to know them; the poor things, they have been without a mother these last years. In fact, I do not believe Little Delphie has ever known the love of a mother; she is only three years old.”

Elizabeth knew of Jane’s affinity for children and concluded that two motherless children must have inspired an almost immediate devotion. She had noticed that her sister had purposely not mentioned the father and as she was just about to question her further, her mother, having finished chastising her husband for adding to her miseries, came out of the library in search of her eldest daughter.

“There you are, Jane! My, my; what a pretty hat; come into the drawing room at once and tell us all about the fashions you saw in town for your father says that he will not.”

Elizabeth happened to glance into her father's book room. She noticed him sorting through the collection of newspapers that had collected on his desk in his absence.

"Very well, mamma," said Jane as Sarah helped her remove her outer garments.

"I'll join you in one moment, Jane," said Elizabeth, "I wish to speak to Papa about something in particular."

Henry Bennet looked up and saw Elizabeth look at him and then look at the newspapers most pointedly. He instantly knew what she wanted to talk about.

"Come in, Lizzy and close the door."



With the others out of hearing, Elizabeth immediately began her interrogation. "So, it was Jane that the paper mentioned."

"Yes, it was Jane who was mentioned. Your sister does not know of it, as yet; your Aunt, Uncle, and I have kept the news from her. Although there was nothing untoward written, it does seem to state that all of London suspects some sort of intrigue. Luckily we are all so little known in Town that nothing will ever be attached to us."

"And Colonel Fitzwilliam--?"

"All blown out of proportion; he is a very chivalrous gentleman—for a redcoat—he had only offered your sister his arm in the park when she became overheated. She was on an outing with his sister, Lady Adele, your cousins, and the children of Lord Whitfield—all above board and respectable. You know these London papers; they have nothing better to do with themselves before the season starts. An illustrious family such as the Fitzwilliams—in town at this time of the year—it was bound to draw some notice and naturally notice to those moving in their circle."

Elizabeth signed, but was hardly contented.

"Do you intend to show the paper to Jane? I think she should know."

"I can't see why. This paper is already three days old. My main concern was keeping this from your mother; she'd only make more of it than it deserves. By now it has all blown over and the Fitzwilliam's have all probably had a good laugh at our expense. Mark my words, Lizzy; no one cares three straws about some idle report in a newspaper from several days ago."

No longer concerned, he wadded the newspaper up and threw it into the fire.



Lady Catherine de Bourgh was very concerned with what she had just read in the newspaper.

“I knew it!” she erupted, her mouth twisting with displeasure. “You see, Anne, do you see? The men in this family can not control themselves. Your cousin Darcy has already brought shame and disgrace upon this family and I will not stand by and see some other fortune-seeking upstart let in!”

“But Mamma,” said Anne, barely above a whisper, “it does not say anything about who she is or where she comes from.”

“Exactly! Who *is* this person? Where *does* she come from? If the London newspapers can not identify her, then she is, no doubt, from some lowly family of ill repute. And I would not be surprised if this business had something to do with that Elizabeth Bennet person!”

“But mamma, why do you care so? Cousin John--” she paused to breathe in, “--knows what he is about. And when have you ever known John to be interested in such a thing; he only cares to be seen as a bachelor about town.” She stopped again to catch her breath and wipe her nose; saying so many words together taxed all of her strength. “All the paper says is that Cousin John was in a young lady’s company.”

“I know,” grumbled Lady Catherine, irritably, “and that is how it all begins!”