

Chapter 16 ~ Startling Discoveries



Jane adjusted the pillow behind her aunt's head and tucked the coverlet in all around her.

"There, is that better, Aunt Philips?"

"Much better, Jane, dear. You are so good to come see me today, especially since you have only just arrived home."

"It is my pleasure, Aunt. Now, if there is nothing else you require, I will see if Clara needs any help in setting the table for my uncle's dinner."

"Oh, no dear, your uncle will be attending to an important business matter for most of the afternoon, I believe—I do not know with whom—but he told me that he will not be home until much later."

Jane surmised that her Aunt Philips was not fully apprised of the particulars, which, now that she thought of it, was just as well. If her aunt knew that Mr. Darcy was this *important matter*, then surely all of Meryton would soon know.

"Well then, I will step out to the shops to purchase those items that you mentioned earlier and then come back and read to you from Mr. Blake. Would you like that?"

"Such a good, sweet, girl."

Jane closed the door, went down the stairs and came across the Philips' maid. "My aunt is resting comfortably and I am stepping out to the shops, Clara. I shan't be long."

"Very good, Miss."

Jane donned her bonnet, wrapped a shawl around her shoulders, and stepped out of the door. She was busy unlatching the gate when she was suddenly startled by the dark shadow of a horse and rider going pass. She looked up, and gasped.

"Mr. Bingley!"

"Miss Bennet!" he said, no less surprised. He reined in the animal.

They stared at each other in astonishment, each thinking that the other was the last one they expected to see that day.

“Hello,” he said, lifting his hat.

“Hello,” she said dropping a curtsy.

“Your sister, Miss Mary said--I thought you were in London.”

“Yes, sir. I mean, no, sir. I mean, I was in London.”

“And you arrived home—?”

“Just yesterday, sir.”

He stared at her long and hard without making a sound and secretly rejoiced in his good fortune.

“Excuse me,” he said, recollecting his manners, “Are you well?”

“Perfectly so, sir.”

“Yes, I can see that.” He tilted his head sideways and smiled crookedly.

Jane blushed and looked down.

Mr. Bingley, taking her heightened colour as sufficient encouragement, dismounted. Holding onto the reins, he stepped forward. “Are you now on your way home?” then he added quickly, “May I escort you?” *‘Please, oh, please, say yes,’* he silently prayed.

“No.”

“Oh.” He fought to hide his disappointment.

“I am visiting my aunt,” she said, gesturing to the house behind her. When he said nothing more, Jane continued to speak to fill up the empty void. “She is feeling rather unwell at present. She has no children to help look after her, so I am to stay with her for several days.”

He still looked at her, his expression nondescript. But then, putting two and two together and realizing that she would surely be out of the way of the visiting Fitzwilliam brothers, the largest of smiles suddenly suffused his once handsome face, returning a warm, youthful glow to his slightly sunken cheeks. He soon remembered that he probably should not smile at all, considering her news and quickly schooled his features.

“Nothing too bad, I hope,” he asked as gravely as he could manage.

“No, only a slight cold and headache; you are very kind to ask.”

His eyes softened at the remembrance of Jane's own ill health the year before. "You will take care--take care not to catch it yourself, I mean. We would not want a repeat of your illness of last year when you stayed with me--and my sisters--at Netherfield."

The introduction of that particular topic caused Jane to blush even deeper and she thought it best to go.

"It was a pleasure seeing you again, but I am on an errand for my aunt. You will excuse me?" She tried to hurry off but Clara's sudden opening of the front door prevented her.

"Miss, Miss, you must take your coat; your aunt says you must; there is a nip in the air!"

Clara came running out to her mistresses' niece and began helping her out of the shawl and into the coat. In her rush to be of service the maid had neglected to shut the door and like a shot, two mischievous little pugs ran out after her, yapping happily on gaining their freedom. One of the dogs ran round to the back of the house and the other out the unlatched gate and darted off down the road.

"Oh, dear!" cried Jane. "Clara, you fetch that one, I'll go after the other. Jane was just about to pursue the errant dog, when, quick as a flash, Bingley dropped his reins and ran after it. He was not ten feet away when he tripped on some loose pavement and went crashing to the ground. Righting himself as best he could, he scampered along the path on his hands and knees, reached out and was just able to grab the animal's hind leg and scoop the wriggling creature up in his arms. The dog, not liking its situation, clamped its teeth down upon the gentleman's fingers.

"Mr. Bingley!" cried Jane running after him. "Are you all right? Did he bite you? Have you injured yourself?"

"Only my pride," remarked Bingley sitting up with a smile and shaking his free hand to stave off the pain.

"Your hand, oh dear!" cried Jane, seeing the nasty red mark forming. Reaching into her purse she pulled out a handkerchief and knelt down beside him to bind his wound. "What trouble we have caused, I am so sorry, Mr. Bingley."

As she worked, her face was only inches from his own. Bingley stared freely, thinking to himself that he was just close enough to lean in and kiss her with hardly any effort at all.

"It is barely a scratch; hardly worth noticing. Do not trouble yourself on my account."

"But how could I not, it is my fault for leaving the gate open. Please forgive me, sir." She turned to him with eyes full of remorse.

He looked deeply into her eyes with a plea of his own. "There is nothing to forgive, so please do not reproach yourself. If anything, I am to blame--for everything." His throat

felt extremely dry as he pressed on. “It is you who must forgive me.” He swallowed deeply, struggling with everything that was within him not to move the few inches that separated them to take her into his arms. “Please forgive me, Jane; forgive me for... distracting you from your errand.”

Jane tried to speak but the words refused to come forth. She was saved from having to say anything by the return of the servant who called out to her.

“I got ‘im, Miss; bad, bad, dog, aren’t ya? Aren’t ya?” She turned to Jane. “Shall I take that one, as well?”

Jane could now not be insensible to her proximity or to her situation. She stood. “Yes, Clara, yes.”

Bingley escorted Jane to the gate and handed the wriggling pug over to the maid. Clara returned to the house with the two animals tucked under each arm.

“Well,” said Jane, desperate to get away less anything else happen to prolong her meeting with Charles Bingley. “I should get myself to the shops now.”

Bingley impulsively asked, “Might I call on you—call on you *and* your aunt one day soon?”

“Well—I--”

“Of course I mean when your aunt is feeling better or when you return home to your family--some time next week--perhaps?”

“My parents are always happy to see you, Mr. Bingley.”

“Aye, very true, your mother and father are far too kind. But I should like to know if *you* would be happy to see me?”

Jane hesitated; she didn’t know how to respond. She eventually managed to nod and replied, “Yes, we would *all* be happy to see you at Longbourn at anytime.”

As vague as her statement was, he would take that and any small trifle she would ever care to throw his way. She looked so beautiful, so irresistible that he just had to press his luck one more time. He took another step forward and reached out to touch her cheek, whispering breathily, “Oh Jane, how I have missed you.”

“Mr. Bingley, please,” she exclaimed, stepping back and wanting to cry.

Bingley bowed apologetically. “Forgive me, forgive me—I do not know what came over—forgive me.”

Jane, seeing this as her means of escape, rushed off in the direction of the town, and did not look back. And if she had cared to glance back, she would have noticed that there were two sets of eyes watching her retreat.



Trent Hall, though large and spacious, was too far away and took a journey of some seven or eight miles to reach it. Darcy rejected it out of hand.

The Great House at Stoke, elegant and handsome, seemed a good choice at five miles away, but seemed much too small to accommodate all those family members coming down for the wedding. Darcy wished to view the only other house available in the neighbourhood before he made a final decision.

Purvis Lodge had the advantage of sitting less than two miles from Longbourn. However, after inspecting it, it proved just as unsatisfactory in Darcy's eyes being no more than a glorified cottage which had leanings very closely to that of the large, rambling, and rustic variety. However, one person of the party found it fascinating.

"*Cassiope tetragona*,* growing here?" Lord Whitfield asked of Mr. Philips.

Mr. Philips had absolutely no idea what the esteemed gentleman could be talking of and could only apologize. "I am so sorry," said, Mr. Philips. "I apologize for the state of the gardens," which were wild and overgrown and extensive. "The previous owner fancied himself a bit of a... *plant collector*, I'm afraid; his tastes were rather odd."

"No, no, you mistake me, sir," said Lord Whitfield, his eyes glowing. "What I mean is this is truly a rare find; I thought these plants only grew in colder climes."

"Oh here we go," mumbled the Colonel to Darcy, sarcastically.

"Mr. Harold Lancaster, the previous owner, was a great traveller, sir. I believe he spent quite a few years in Sweden before he passed away, which is how the Lodge came to be in such disuse. The house is perfectly sound, though... as long as no one ventures into the attics."

Lawrence's surprise was great. "You don't mean Mr. Harold Lancaster, the great naturalist lived here? I have all of his books."

Mr. Philips merely nodded. He really had no idea what Mr. Lancaster did with all his time; almost everyone in the neighbourhood thought of him as the local eccentric.

"Extraordinary! And look there, *Gaultheria humifusa!*"** said Lord Whitfield, while wandering off on his own.

Colonel Fitzwilliam leaned forward towards Mr. Philips and asked, "How did he die?" But then, thinking of something highly amusing, turned, and whispered a comical aside to Darcy. "He probably got tangled up in his own plants."

Darcy barely heard him; he was staring off into the distance, fancying that he could see the smoke rising up out of Longbourn's chimneys. He had had enough of houses today and all that was on his mind was seeing Elizabeth as soon as possible.

Mr. Philips answered the Colonel's question, "I believe he caught an infectious fever on the channel crossing home, Colonel."

"Mr. Philips," said Darcy suddenly interrupting, "The Great House at Stoke will suit my needs somewhat adequately. When may I take possession?"

"Oh," said Mr. Philips, surprised at the gentleman rapidity. "At any time, sir; you only need to allow for the drawing up of the papers. If I set my clerk to work as soon as I arrive back at my office, I could have them very soon. Would sometime this evening be convenient?"

"Yes," said Mr. Darcy, "that will be perfectly fine. Bring them over to the inn. Leave them with my man if I am not there." He checked his watch and moved off towards his own carriage as Mr. Philips stepped up into his gig.

"Excellent choice, sir, if I may be permitted to say so." He was just about to drive off when he paused and asked, "How long, sir?"

"Pardon?" said Darcy, turning to look up at the portly little man.

"How long would you like the lease be? One month or two, perhaps?"

Darcy reflected for a while. He and Elizabeth had not, as yet, fixed a wedding date. And when he properly recollected, he recalled that Elizabeth always seemed to avoid speaking on the subject all together.

"Make it for-- two months, yes, two months will do."

Mr. Philips bid the gentlemen a good day and slowly moved his vehicle off.

Darcy looked at his watch again, impatient to go. He then looked around and turned to the colonel. "Where the devil has your brother gotten himself to?"

There was a rustling in the bushes behind the two cousins. Both turned round on hearing the noise and observed Lawrence, hatless and coatless, emerging from the overgrown hedge. Lawrence looked all around as if searching for something, then suddenly dashed out into the lane after Mr. Philips, calling out behind, "This place is astonishing, Darcy! I hope you haven't taken it."

“What? What was that, Lawrence?” Darcy shouted after him, trying to remember the last time he had seen his elder cousin act so irrationally.

Lawrence did not respond; he was far too occupied with chasing after Mr. Philips in his gig before he got too far away.



Having been Longbourn’s designated herald since the age of twelve, Kitty cried out from her usual post by the window. “Mama, the most enormous carriage is just coming up the lane.”

“Who is it, my dear?” exclaimed Mrs Bennet jumping from her chair and running to the window for a better view.

“I think it’s that man from before, you know that tall, handsome one; the one engaged to my sister.” She smiled pointedly at Elizabeth.

Elizabeth’s mouth opened in bewilderment and her face brightened visibly. “He’s early!” Her father simply smiled when she turned to look at him. “Did you know about this, papa?”

“Perhaps I did, perhaps I did not,” he said, not looking up from the paper.

“Oh papa!” exclaimed Elizabeth as she looked down at her apron and gown both covered in bits of thread (for she had been embroidering “E-D’s” on the new handkerchiefs Jane had brought her from London). She leapt out of her seat and began brushing herself off violently. “Why did you not mention this before?”

“And spoil Mr. Darcy’s surprise--nonsense!” He winked. “Besides,” he added out of pure mischief, “I have a co-conspirator in on the secret; Jane knew as well.”

“Oh, Mr. Bennet!” shrieked his wife as she ran from the window in high flutter. “How could you do this to me?”

“To you, my dear; how can this affect you?”

“You must know that I have not ordered a very good dinner today. Oh Lord, and not a bit of fish to be got! Kitty, run along and ask Hill if she can put a roast in!”

Glancing once more to the window and seeing the carriage fast approaching, Mrs. Bennet hurried about arranging everything in the room to the best advantage. She fluffed up the cushions where her esteemed future son-in-law would sit, positioned Elizabeth in the seat opposite so her esteemed future son-in-law could see her in all her beauty, and pulled the bell to warn the kitchen to have tea at the ready for her esteemed future son-in-law.

Mr. Bennet, observing his wife's crazed actions, took his newspaper and made to exit the room.

"Where are you going, Mr. Bennet?" she shouted. "Stay where you are! Can you not see that Mr. Darcy will be here at any moment?"

Mr. Bennet was incredulous. "I just saw the man not two days ago and I hardly think he comes here this day to see me." He left the room to his wife and daughters.

Mrs Bennet sighed heavily and stamped her foot, irritated with her husband and with his fondness for escaping any visitor who should come to the house. But there was nothing she could do at that time other than to entreat Elizabeth to pinch her cheeks and to abuse Kitty.

"Kitty, why do you stand there? Run along and find Hill at once and tell her to get out all the best linen and silver!" She then set out to smooth Elizabeth's hair to her own satisfaction.

"Mother, please," pleaded Elizabeth, in vain, using her hands to shield her from her mother's bothersome ministrations. She returned to her chair just to get away.

"And why do you say that, Miss Lizzy; I'll not have Mr. Darcy see you with ill-groomed, blowsy hair."

Kitty, the romantic, unheeding her mother, simply smiled at her sister. They had both not long ago come in from a stroll in the garden and thought Lizzy was in her best looks. Her cheeks were still quite rosy from the exercise.

Mary, in her sensible and more rational way, thought Mr. Darcy would not care three straws how she looked in any case; the object of his visit was to be in Elizabeth presence, no doubt.

A noise from the opposite side of the door alerted the occupants of the drawing room that the great moment bringing Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy back to Longbourn had arrived. However, upon Mrs Hill opening the door, there, to Mrs. Bennet's utter amazement, instead of the one she expected, stood three very handsome gentlemen ready to enter her parlour.

The Fitzwilliam brothers looked to their cousin to lead the way. They both instinctively held back as Darcy was admitted to the drawing room first.

Elizabeth came to her feet in a instant and stepped forward as was her right and received a loving kiss upon the hand as her reward.

"Dearest, dearest, Fitzwilliam. What a wonderful surprise!"

“Dearest Elizabeth.”

Their eyes locked onto each others, communicating silently that more private endearments would have to wait. They settled with meaningful grasps of the hands as the rest of the ladies arose and made their curtsies.

Forcing himself to remove his eyes from Elizabeth’s, Darcy turned somewhat reluctantly to his future mother-in-law, bowed and added, “Mrs Bennet, a pleasure, as always.”

Mrs. Bennet, sneaking glances at the two gentlemen at the door and momentarily struck dumb, said nothing. All she could manage at present was to giggle, flutter her handkerchief unnecessarily, and curtsy quite unsteadily; her good luck in marrying her daughter to Mr. Darcy was beginning to pay dividends.

“Darcy continued. “Might I trouble you with an introduction--two of my cousins from London, ma’am?”

All eyes moved to the drawing room door as the gentleman in black and the gentleman in scarlet entered the room and bowed handsomely.

Kitty stood transfixed while watching the army officer. Nothing was more handsome to her in her young life than a man in a red coat and an injured man in a redcoat was all that was dashing. Her brother Wickham could not even begin to compare.

“Lawrence, Viscount Whitfield and The Honourable Colonel Jonathan Fitzwilliam,” said Darcy, “I have the greatest pleasure of introducing you to Mrs Bennet, and her daughters, Miss Mary Bennet and Miss Catherine Bennet.”

Lawrence bowed again, this time more deeply. Jonathan followed suit, adding a click of the heels. A quick intake of breath was heard from the area near the window.

The Fitzwilliam’s each stepped forward in turn to kiss Mrs Bennet’s hand, but not before each of them swept their eyes across the room in search of Jane.

Mrs Bennet could hardly contain herself; to have two such fine and courteous gentlemen in her home in the company of Mr. Darcy was most overpowering. Her words stumbled out.

“W-Why L-Lord Whitfield, (giggle) C-Colonel Fitzwilliam, (titter) what a great delight. I—I—I...” it was all she could manage, overcome as she was and on the verge of hysterics.

After Darcy had made his introductions he turned back to his intended to present her next. However, he got so caught up in Elizabeth’s beautiful face and pleasing figure that he could only stare and smile stupidly.

Elizabeth, drawn to Darcy in a similar fashion somehow managed to step forward to greet Colonel Fitzwilliam.

“Colonel Fitzwilliam, it is such a pleasure to see you again.”

His smile lit up his face to be in the company of a woman he regarded so very highly. “The pleasure is all mine, I assure you, Miss Bennet. I bring greetings from my mother, father, and sister. They are most eager to make your acquaintance.” He looked to his cousin to see if he intended to perform the final introduction; but he was far too mesmerized by the mere sight of Elizabeth to speak at present. “Permit me to introduce my bother to you specifically. Lawrence, this is Miss Elizabeth Bennet.”

Lawrence smiled, again bowed deeply, and gallantly taking Elizabeth’s hand said, “The highest honour, ma’am.”

Elizabeth smiled apologetically at the two gentlemen. “I am sorry to say that my sister Jane is not here to greet you both. She has told me of her meeting with your entire family, especially how much she enjoyed your two children, Lord Whitfield. She talks of them both with a great deal of delight.”

“Please, call me Lawrence, and I assure you it is exactly the same where my children are involved. They have talked of nothing else since making Miss Bennet’s acquaintance. It was all I could do to keep my young daughter from crawling into my pocket to come with me today.”

Elizabeth laughed; she was immediately charmed by his Lordship. There was something courtly and elegant about him, and she was struck that there could be so much male beauty in one family.

Lawrence liked what he saw as well. There was so much intelligent and good humour behind Miss Elizabeth’s striking, dark eyes that he immediately looked over to Darcy and smiled his approval of so fine a young woman.

Darcy was full of pride of Elizabeth and his chest swelled with happiness.

Elizabeth continued. “My sister, Jane, went to be of assistance to my aunt this morning or she should have been here. We do not expect her back for several days. She will be so sorry to have missed your visit today.”

Lord Whitfield and Colonel Fitzwilliam each hid their disappointment as best they could; the former thinking it a great shame, the latter wanting to do someone a great harm.

Mrs. Bennet managed to bring herself back into reality and offer her guests a seat. The gentleman all went to take a chair and that was the first time Elizabeth noticed the Colonel’s gait.

“Colonel Fitzwilliam, forgive me, but you are injured. Please, take this seat, sir.”

“A mere trifle, Miss Bennet,” he said waving her off. “Do not trouble yourself on my account.”

“Were you injured in a battle, Colonel?” asked Kitty, forgetting herself and boldly stepping forward to take the gentleman’s arm to help him into the chair. Just from the mere sight of him she was breathless, mesmerized, and totally in love.

Colonel Fitzwilliam, highly amused at the young lady’s actions, could never resist telling an amusing story to a captivated audience of pretty young women, so he obliged. “Yes, a terrible battle, Miss Catherine, one that I daren’t speak of in the company of young ladies.”

“Oh dear!” said Kitty, dropping the pillow she had reached for to offer the Colonel for his comfort. Her hands flew to her cheeks. “Was it truly horrid?”

“Oh yes, a very horrid battle indeed; well, what I saw of it... in half a day. Not exactly the heroic sort of tale you were probably expecting, but a humorous one. You may now laugh at me if you like.”

“Oh no, I would never laugh you,” said Kitty in all earnestness. “Just think, if you had not been so afflicted, you might very well still be there and that could not be good for you... or anyone.”

The colonel, expecting to be laughed at, was touched by the young woman’s thoughtful and kind speech. He smiled at her benevolently, thinking her a pretty little thing.

However, Mrs Bennet, never one to allow Kitty to monopolize any conversation, interrupted.

“How long shall you be here on this visit, Mr. Darcy?”

“As long as you will have me, ma’am.” He paused dramatically and looked at Elizabeth’s eager and expectant face. “I have taken a house in the neighbourhood.”

All the ladies exclaimed in pleasure but it was Elizabeth’s silent smile of utter joy that was all he cared for.

“Oh, I hope the house is to your liking,” asked Mrs Bennet, gushing enthusiastically. “What house have you taken?”

“I viewed several houses today, ma’am, for your good brother, Mr. Philips, was kind enough to spare me some of his time. We first viewed Trent Hall, near Watford.”

“Oh no, Mr. Darcy, Trent Hall is much too far off from us.” Why it’s nearly ten miles, I am sure. Please say you did not take that one.”

“I am quite of your mind, madam, and did not take it.” He looked to Elizabeth whose face was all that was curious. “After that, I went to see The Great House in Stoke.” Elizabeth eyes brightened.

“Great House, indeed. Such a small, poky little place,” said Mrs Bennet testily.

“My sentiments exactly.”

“What about Purvis Lodge, Mr. Darcy?” added Kitty, quite emboldened from her short conversation with the colonel. “It is so very near us. My uncle should have taken you there. Then Lizzy could see you everyday.”

Mr. Darcy smiled at Miss Catherine and turned to see Elizabeth’s reaction. Elizabeth smiled broadly at thinking of him so near.

“Purvis Lodge!” cried Mrs. Bennet, “Oh for heaven sake, Kitty, I don’t know why on earth you are always in such a rage about Purvis Lodge!”

Mary added her opinions into the conversation. “It is a very pretty place, Mamma and so close to Longbourn. You don’t like it because you fancy the attics bad.” She turned to the gentlemen. “Jane and I often walk there just to see the beautiful grounds and to collect seeds. Mr. Lancaster was so kind to let us have access to his gardens; he was such a lovely old gentleman. He always had us stay for tea on the lawn after our excursions.”

“Your uncle did take us to view Purvis Lodge,” said Mr. Darcy.

“What on earth could my brother be thinking in taking you to such an awful place? I am sure I heard that the attics are filled with bats! Purvis Lodge, indeed!”

“I believe Mr. Philips thought it would be the best place to accommodate me since it is so very near Longbourn.”

“Well, if your mind is made up to take it, then I hope you will be able to take possession of it soon, Mr. Darcy.”

“Unfortunately, Mrs. Bennet, I am sorry to say, that it is now impossible for me to lease in any case. Someone else has taken it.”

Darcy watched each of the ladies expressions for a moment. Mrs. Bennet seemed highly put out, almost as if she was determining who the offending personage was so she could put a stop to it. Elizabeth eyes reflected her disappointment. She had hoped he would be settled so very near her once again. Mary and Kitty’s looks were both questioning.

Mrs Bennet was incredulous in behalf of Mr. Darcy and rallied to Purvis Lodges defence even though only moments ago she hated the very thought of the place. “I do not see how that can be so! Who would be so malicious as to take the perfect house out from under so fine and rich a gentleman as my future son-in-law?”

Elizabeth was mortified at her mother’s loud talking and wished for the return of her speechlessness. “Mother, please let Mr. Darcy finish.”

“The Great House at Stoke, though small, will suit my needs adequately. My sister will come down for a visit soon, bringing along her companion, Mrs Annesley and her cousin, Lady Adele Fitzwilliam, the sister of my two cousins here. It will be a bit of a squeeze, but Mrs Annesley will be leaving us for Devon soon after and all will be well.”

Darcy looked to Elizabeth as if asking her approval of the scheme. “It seems a very prudent plan, sir, and I am delighted that you will still be quite near.” With Elizabeth’s smiling approbation, Darcy let out the breath he had not realized he had been holding, adding, “And now with things nearly settled, I was hoping to finally fix upon a wedding date.”

Hill was bringing in the tea things at that exact moment and Elizabeth, disconcerted with her fiancé’s last statement, moved off with alacrity to pour out on the opposite side of the room. Her actions unnerved Darcy and he stared after her as she seemed to be purposely avoiding meeting his eye.

Mrs. Bennet had latched on the idea of Purvis Lodge and would not let it go. “Imagine, someone as thoughtless as to snatch away Purvis Lodge right out from under you, Mr. Darcy! I should like to give this person a piece of my mind! I should like to see this pirate for myself!”

Viscount Whitfield smiled. “Well ma’am, this is a first. I have been called many things in my lifetime, but no one has ever called me a pirate before.”

Mrs Bennet was just about to respond when she suddenly realized exactly with the Viscount was saying. Her mouth gaped open for several seconds out of sheer embarrassment.



Charles Bingley had returned home to Netherfield with a heart so full he was sure it with burst. He had seen his beautiful Jane and for that short visit he would be eternally grateful.

His servants all noticed their master’s changed countenance and each one wondered silently if this meant that his recent bad temper would now be at an end.

Bingley called for tea and shortbread to be served in his library. Fossett, so used to serving his master several potent spirits of late, was all amazement at Mr. Bingley's sudden about face and hurried off to the pantry as fast as his legs could carry him.

Bingley set out to peruse his mail more cheerfully than he had in the last several days. He sat back in his leather chair and admired the handwork which Jane Bennet had performed on his injured finger, touching the fine, brilliant white linen of her handkerchief.

He knew he should not keep such a treasure; it would be very wrong of him, but keep it he would, glad to have anything that belonged to her.

Slowing unwinding it from round his finger, he was just about to summon the maid to take it away to be laundered when he noticed the elegant gold embroidery in the items corner. He smiled happily as he traced the stitching of the "J" with his index finger.

J for Jane.

His finger moved next to the "B". However, upon closer inspection he found that it was not a "B" embroidered there at all.

It was an "F".

Furrowing his brow, he mumbled to himself, wondering what it could mean.

"J. F."

He looked up to the ceiling, thinking.

"J. F."

He looked out of the window, thinking.

"J. F?"

It suddenly hit him like a ton of bricks and he shouted at the top of his lungs.

"J. F!"

Fossett, standing just outside of the door with the tea tray, turned round immediately, stepped into the drawing room, set the tray down, and opened the liquor cabinet.



**Cassiope tetragonal: Arctic Mountain Heather*

***Gaultheria humifusa: Alpine Wintergreen*