

## Chapter 21 – Sons and Daughters



Georgiana Darcy stood impatiently at the drawing room window of Purvis Lodge awaiting her Cousin Lawrence's return. Naturally, she hoped to see her brother, but in truth, it was Elizabeth Bennet who she longed to meet and Lawrence, who was headed thither, would likely return with news of her, though not soon enough for her.

There were so many things Georgiana wanted to say to Elizabeth in person that could not be said in a letter: How happy she was and how happy her brother was and how her aunt and uncle longed to meet her and the two housekeepers, Mrs Reynolds and Mrs Blandings, as well. How Georgiana longed just to be able to take her hand and welcome her as a sister, would more than make up for their extended parting.

She had imagined how their reunion would be: she would meet the rest of Elizabeth's family. Mr. and Miss Bennet had proved most agreeable that the others must be more of the same. She would visit Longbourn and see for herself were Elizabeth had grown up. Then, she would present her new sister with gifts: the music box that she had only purchased a few weeks ago; a lovely pair of silver hair ornaments that she thought would look well in Elizabeth's dark hair; and the charming lace shawl which had all but leapt up into her hands when she had been shopping with Adele the day before.

She knew that her brother was of the same mine where gifts were concerned and that he too anticipated showering his intended with the many treasures of Pemberley. But Georgiana had felt that her more personal tokens of esteem, would not at all go amiss and the sooner her cousin returned, the sooner she could make her way to her brother's rented house, the sooner she could go to bed, the sooner she could arise and the sooner she could be at Elizabeth's door!

Lady Adele and Mrs Annesley, more reserved in their emotions, sat quietly at the table in the drawing room enjoying cups of tea and exchanging glances at every one of Georgiana's faint sighs and the nervous flutterings of the hands.

"Looking out at the window will not hurry their return," said Adele, with all the wisdom of her twenty-four years showing.

"I can not help it," said Georgiana, bobbing up and down and twisting the ends of her shawl while glancing left and then right down the drive, not quite sure which way her cousin would approach. "I so long to hear news of Miss Elizabeth."

"So you have said," exclaimed Adele, laughingly, "at least a thousand times already."

The housekeeper, a Mrs. Warren, came in with a plate of sandwiches. She did not quite know what to make of the three ladies as she had never before seen such elegant creatures in her life. Granted, the neighbourhood boasted of five or six families of rank and importance, but these were obviously fashionable London ladies (with one of them titled and her new master's sister) and their elegant finery spoke volumes of their obvious wealth and importance.

“The cook thought you might like some sandwiches, ma’am.”

Adele, as a way of taking the measure of a person, tilted her head to observe the woman before her. The plate had been sat directly in front of her as if the housekeeper had expected Adele to serve them to the others.

Mrs Warren, thanking that she must have done something wrong, added, with a slight halting quality to her voice, “To go with the tea, my lady—cucumber... and cheese.” Warren smiled nervously.

Lady Adele nodded, thinking that, as this was her brother’s home, the housekeeper had naturally thought of her as her the lady of the house. A new plan began to immediately take hold.

“How very thoughtful, Mrs—? I did not catch your name when we were first introduced.”

“Warren, madam.”

“Yes, of course. Tell me, Warren,” said Adele in a confidential, yet, authoritative tone, “Since my brother saw fit to dash away almost at the moment of his arrival, he did not acquaint me with the necessary particulars, how many other servants are here in my brother’s employ?”

“For now, just the three of us together, my lady: myself and Mrs. Grange, the cook and my son, the footman.”

“Is that all?” exclaimed, Adele, incredulously.

“There was also meant to be a housemaid and an under maid, ma’am, but his lordship hasn’t said anything to me as yet, so I have not engaged them. One doesn’t like to take liberties.”

“No butler, then?”

“Oh no, ma’am, not since Mr. Lancaster passed on. Mr. Milton was butler here then, but he passed on not long after Mr. Lancaster did. The house has been empty since.”

“I see. And how many bedrooms, did you say, are in the lodge?”

“Six principle bedchambers, ma’am; not including the old nursery which I’ve readied for his Lordship’s children. Other than the servant’s quarters above, there is only the attic room, but nobody goes up there anymore.”

Adele did some quick calculating in her head. That meant that five bedchambers were to go empty. She smiled broadly.

“I see. I know that Longbourn is quite close to the Lodge, but where, exactly, is this Great House in Stoke that we have been hearing so much about?”

At the mention of her brother’s lodgings, Georgiana turned away from the window to attend to the rest of the conversation.

“Oh, that’s a ways off, my lady; about five or six miles on the other side of Meryton, going north on the Bedfordshire road.”

Georgiana's brow wrinkled; she had not thought that she would be situated so far away.

Lady Adele fought to hide a blush as she asked the next. "And Netherfield Park; our friend Mr. Bingley's house; where is that exactly?"

Mrs Warren did not consider Mr. Bingley as a friend to anybody, especially after he had dismissed her own son from his employ for no good reason. However, it wasn't her place to speak ill of the quality; these London people could think of Mr. Bingley as they wished.

"Quite close, ma'am. You can see the chimneys from the upstairs windows; not more than two miles west," she said, gesturing in a westerly direction with her hand.

Adele was quiet for a moment as she turned to stare at her cousin whose own eyes had grown quite large with all she had heard and taken in.

As the two younger ladies communicated silently, Mrs Warren thought it best to get on with her work. "Does my lady require anything else?" asked Mrs Warren, hoping that she had conveyed everything to the lady's satisfaction.

"No, nothing more; but do thank Cook for the sandwiches, they look delicious. That will be all, Warren."

Mrs Warren then remembered that she had one more matter to speak of, but hesitated before she spoke. "Begging my lady's pardon, but his lordship has given no instructions about the supper."

"Supper?"

"Yes, ma'am, Mrs Grange will need to know what to do. His Lordship did not send word ahead of him, you see."

Adele turned an incredulous grimace in the direction of the other two ladies knowing it was up to her to save her elder brother from his own stupidity. With this new information, her plan was now complete.

"Tell her there will be six, plus the two children."

"Very good, ma'am." The housekeeper bobbed a quick curtsy and exited the room.

Adele turned to look once more at her cousin. Georgiana merely looked her agreement and a slow satisfied, cheeky sort of smile now graced Adele countenance.

"I've been thinking, Mrs Annesley," said Adele, with a mischievous grin on her face, "How do you feel about us all stopping here with *my* brother instead?"

"Oh?" said Mrs Annesley, highly amused at Lady Adele's machinations, as she always was. And even though she had a very good idea of what the lady was about, she asked anyway. "What exactly did you have in mind?"

"You heard the housekeeper yourself: five bedrooms just going begging; there is plenty of space. My brother can not object to our taking up residence here and only putting him to the trouble of a

few extra rooms. Our three maids will hardly take up any space at all. A very agreeable plan, if I do say so myself.”

Georgiana was amenable to any plan of Adele’s and if it put her that much nearer to Elizabeth, all the better.

“Lady Adele,” said Mrs Annesley, knowing that it was up to her interject some wisdom into this ill-conceived scheme, “Surely my employer expects us to stay with him. Besides, I am certain that his lordship would not wish to be put to the inconvenience of additional guests in his home.”

“Lawrence?” she waved her hand dismissively, “I know very well how to deal with him. My brother will, most likely, be so caught up in digging up the garden that he will not spare us a moments thought.”

“But Mr. Darcy--”

“And I dare say my Cousin Fitzwilliam will have his mind on his fiancée and not on us at all. Quite frankly, I can not understand why Cousin Fitzwilliam did not take this house instead; so closely situated to the Bennet family as it is. But then, it is a little gloomy; just the sort of place that holds manifold attractions for my gloomy brother.”

The three ladies cast their critical eyes around the large room. The broad planked oak flooring was scattered with a few faded rugs. The panelling was covered in several aged tapestries depicting some sort of bloody, long ago battle. Everything about the room spoke of masculinity, manliness, and the last century.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Georgiana, cocking her head to one side. “It is not so *very* gloomy. We could put flowers in every room to cheer the place up... and perhaps some new hangings and some prettier china,” she said hefting up the heavy clay teacup.

Adele, now clearly excited about her plan, sat up a little straighter in her chair. “I will even send to town for a new rug or two. Mamma will only be too happy to provide any extra table linen or a servant or three. I’ll even ask for my mother’s old breakfast service; she hardly ever uses it anymore.”

“And I will write to Mrs Blandings in London,” added Georgiana excitedly, “asking her to send the Darcy summer crystal and the spring dinner service.

Mrs Annesley felt that she needed to be the voice of reason. “Your plan, however agreeable it seems to you both, can not be but disagreeable to me until we have the approval of others. I would advise Miss Darcy to seek the approbation of her brother and his lordship before considering such a scheme. Young ladies ought not make a habit out of inviting themselves anywhere.”

Georgiana felt both shame and disappointment at once. Of course her companion could not ere and would only steer her on the right course. She bowed her head, nodded, and decided to wait patiently.

Adele, however, who always did as she pleased and thought about the consequences later, moved to the desk in the corner and took out a sheet of paper to write a nice, long news-filled letter to her mother...

*Dearest Mama,*

*We have arrived at Purvis Lodge safe and sound. And not a more dreadful house is to be found in all of Hertfordshire. I do not know what possessed my brother to settle for such a shockingly desolate abode. If only I could get your Molly and your Harriet here, the house would be presentable in no time at all.*

*And the awful china and the linen, Mama, I do not think a woman has ever lived had a hand in fitting up such a place--well, a rational in any case.*

*I have been thinking that with your help, this is what ought to be done...*

***Authors note:** I know it's not fair to stop there (for there is another ten pages to this chapter) but it is so full of atrocious type-o's and other oddities, that I can not possibly post it today. It will be at DWG in it's entirety in a few days, until then, I hope this will tide some of you over...*

*Teresa AF*