

Chapter 5 ~ Scenes from a Family



Colonel Jonathan Fitzwilliam stared down at the balding patch on top of his batman's head. Preston was bent over the trunk, folding the last of his shirts in amongst the other items that would go with him into Kent. The corporal looked up.

“Shall you be wanting your great coat, sir?”

Jonathan thought for a moment, twisting his lips to and fro; everything required so much more thought these days and the heavy coat would probably be more of a hindrance than a help. “No, I think not, my cloak will serve; the fall is still very warm.”

“Very good, sir.” Preston closed the trunk and then, stepping over, turned his attentions onto the Colonel's cravat; these days, his master could not tie a decent one to save his life. Preston added, “I have also taken the liberty, sir, of including your copy of Tom Jones in with your belongings.”

“Good man; what would I do without you?”

“Probably be bored beyond all recognition, sir,” was Preston's stoic reply.

The book would be a great diversion in an idle moment even though a long stay at Rosings was not planned for this trip. The Colonel would simply to see his sister down for her yearly visit with her aunt and cousin and as soon as he saw her settled there, he'd make up some sort of excuse to be away.

“Are we clear on the *other* plan, Preston?”

“Aye, sir; very clear.”

The Colonel became very pleased with himself: let his parents think him at Rosings Park listening to the meddling advice of his aunt and watching his sickly little cousin, if possible, become sicklier. He had a far more interesting place in mind: he was for Brighton; he wanted to see just how much trouble he could get himself into there.

Preston next went to the wardrobe and selected two of the new waistcoats there for the colonel's approval. Again, the gentleman's mouth twisted to and fro, his left hand rubbing against his bushy ginger whiskers. “Might I suggest the green one, Colonel; your mother always likes seeing you in green.” The colonel detested green, but Preston knew he would do anything to make his mother happy.

Jonathan grimaced at the offending article, but nodded and carelessly lifted his right arm to put it through the garments opening. His shoulder immediately protested and the searing pain forced him to sit down for a moment to compose himself.

It had happened several weeks after bidding his downcast cousin, Fitzwilliam Darcy, a farewell after Easter. Colonel Fitzwilliam's carefree existence as bachelor-officer-about-town had come to an end and his life, for a time, was one of action and adventure on the continent. However, his exploits abroad were of short duration.

He had travelled with his regiment to Salamanca and after the first days engagement he had nothing to show for it but a shoulder injury and a leg wound that prevented him sitting atop a horse for any length of time. He was now put to shore at the worst possible moment; while his comrades all enjoying the glory of battle, the only thing he was permitted to do on a daily basis was taking tea with his mother and escorting his younger sister about.

"Shall I fetch more balm for that shoulder, sir?"

"And have Adele wrinkling up her snooty little nose at me all the way from Grimsby to Kent; I think not!"

Grimsby Priory was Viscount Whitfield's sea-side estate on the Lincolnshire coast. Matlock Manor, though complete with all the luxuries and comforts of home, was thought to be too cold and draughty for the recovery of the Earl's favourite child and so with carts full of luggage and carriages of personal servants, the inhabitants of that grand estate in Derbyshire had descended down upon the Viscount for an extended summer holiday without invitation. Here, surmised the Earl, Jonathan could breathe the sea air, heal, and regain some of his amiability, which of late had been so lacking.

"Come; let me have that waistcoat." The Colonel stood and gingerly lifted his arm, this time more slowly and cautiously. Preston settled the article of clothing on his master's shoulders and began cinching the back of it while the Colonel buttoned the front. This process was interrupted by a knock at the door which Preston went to answer. He instantly stepped aside and bowed respectfully in the presence of her ladyship, the Countess of Matlock.

The Colonel followed Preston out of the dressing room and saw who was at the door. "Oh, good morning, Mother; come in, I'm nearly dressed."

"Oh, no dear, I'm in a rush as it is; Lawrence's housekeeper is in one of her uproars, but—" She paused and smiled up at her son, "My, you do look handsome in that shade of green, doesn't he Mr. Preston?"

"Yes, Ma'am." The Colonel thought her heard Preston make a mild snort as he turned to tidy up the nightstand.

Philadelphia Fitzwilliam had a disagreeable task for her son, one she would rather avoid doing at all costs herself; she so disliked disagreeable things before she had had her tea. "Jonathan, darling, do be a dear a fetch your brother down from the attic for breakfast."

John looked up from his buttoning and made a face. He wasn't in the mood for arguments this morning and conversations which began with any kind of request of his brother, usually ended in a quarrel.

"I..."

“Oh, thank you, darling; always so obliging.” And as quickly as she appeared she was off again, leaving the bedevilled Colonel Fitzwilliam in her wake.



Colonel Fitzwilliam was endeavouring to be patient and show some brotherly affection even if his elder brother, Lawrence, hardly deserved it. Unfortunately, when Lawrence was in one of his black moods, as he was that morning, scarcely anyone could speak to him to make any kind of reasonable request.

“Lawrence, you have been in this... *room*” he picked up a jar of something green and slimy with his thumb and forefinger and immediately set it down, “for three days. Mother simply wants you to come down and have... *breakfast*” the green substance was then pushed out of his line of vision lest it turn his stomach, “with us this one morning, as a family. You do remember what that is, do you not? As it is my and Adele’s last day, I personally don’t think that is too much to ask?” The colonel wiped his hand on the back of his breeches.

The Viscount ignored his brother as he peered through his magnifying glass, and then, setting it aside, took the quill out of his mouth and wrote down a notation in his notebook. Colonel Fitzwilliam had his answer and being ill at ease by his surroundings and in no mood for prolonged entreaties to the most stubborn man in all of Christendom, went away.

Lawrence, Lord Whitfield was having a trying day and it wasn’t even noon yet. Someone had been in his room and had moved his things into a state of disarray. He hardly needed to guess who, for the maids were known to go into hysterics to even be asked to step into that dark and foreboding place to bring tea. No, all the particular items which were misplaced, bore all the signs of having been touched by a curious boy of no more than eight years of age.

Furthermore, his little daughter, Philadelphia, had awoken him extremely early that morning screaming at the top of her lungs, wanting comfort and assurances that there were no such things as trolls under beds. This also bore the signs of an eight year old boy having placed notions into his sister’s head. And to top it all off, the specimens that he was to catalogue in between the interruptions of the day before, were all in the process of dying that very morning.

The disturbances, the speeches, the rebukes; all were beginning to wear on him. He ran his fingers through his already wild mass of black hair. He desperately needed to get away, at least a month, he thought, perhaps even for several months, if he could possibly manage it. He had so much work he wanted to complete: plants he wanted investigate; insects he was hoping to dissect, and the drawings for his book on the flora and fauna of southern of England that woefully behind.

No one had ever understood him and of his need to work, except for his Julia. She had been patience itself; she knew exactly when to give him a moment of quiet—keeping the inquisitive Edward occupied with games, tending to the household affairs, even dealing with his man of business, if necessary; all to let him work in peace and solitude. He thought, that if only... but that was no good; thinking of her would only fill him with pain and knowing that her death was of his infliction, filled his breast with guilt.

But thinking on such a subject was hardly worthwhile. Casting these bothersome reflections aside, he picked up another leaf to have a closer look at his specimen: a curious plant brought back from Sir James Braden's last voyage to South America. Lawrence knew he was lucky to have such a friend who brought him such remarkable discoveries and to tell him of his adventures in the great, wide world. And, he also knew that if his luck held out, perhaps on his friend's next sea voyage, he'd be there, right along with him.



Lady Matlock did not look up when she heard Jonathan's limping gait on the marble stairs. She already knew that the fetching of Lawrence was a hopeless case, she was just glad she was spared from hearing her elder son's new excuses. She simply sipped her tea, bit her scone, and kept her thoughts to herself.

Her brow wrinkled slightly when she thought of Lawrence's life. His household was in disarray. The staff were far too undisciplined in her mind and the housekeeper seemed to take offence at being directed by an outsider, even by such a superior lady as the Countess. And Lawrence was of no help, the servants were given free reign, her grandchildren received no special attention, and he closeted away in his rooms with his plants and insects, not to be disturbed.

She also knew that he was far too handsome for such an isolated sort of life. Yes, he was brilliant, too, to be sure--exceptionally brilliant--as she had heard from his tutors all his life, but it was entirely wasted in such self-imposed exile.

Of the handsome part, she could see that with her own eyes; he was probably the most handsome man in her entire family, even handsomer than his younger cousin, Fitzwilliam Darcy, as some were known to say. He would be such a favourite with all the ladies in London with his tall bearing, dark good looks, and arresting grey eyes, that is, if he could pull himself away from his beetles for ten minutes together. He had not even been to London, she was certain, in nearly three years; not since Julia had died years ago.

However, she had to smile wryly when it came to Jonathan; the delights of town were no stranger to her younger son. John had been a charming young man all his life and the ladies in town found him most delightful, especially when he wore his red-coat, engaged them in the liveliest of conversations, and even more so when he just happened to make mention of his single, wealthy, and titled elder brother.

John, though perfectly handsome in her eyes, was not blessed with the fashionable sort of good looks of his brother and cousin. Yet, where his brother had the tendency to hide away and brood, John had reason to go out into the world. He had his profession as a Colonel of Dragoons, which kept him from home far oftener (and in certain precarious situations that she did not like to think on) than a mother would wish. However, he was with her now, on the mend, and as his mother, she was well satisfied.

Thoughts of her younger son usually led her to contemplations of the youngest and only daughter of the family, Philadelphia, the second. Adele, as she preferred to be called, was a very sensible, thoughtful, though, somewhat lonely young lady. With her tall build, ginger hair, and brown

eyes, she favoured her brother John in many ways. But where John tended towards gregariousness, Adele made up for in caution.

Many thought her manner cold and aloof. She was not exactly unapproachable, but she did not usually warm to people right away. She was one to sit back and observe; noticing manners, habits, and traits; wondering if she could trust a person or not. She had never been one to make any particular friend, and for this reason her mother worried for her. It was not thought right that such a well brought up young lady should not have any special close friend; her only confidants were her cousins, Anne de Bourgh and Georgiana Darcy, and those two young women did not exactly overflow with high sprits.

Lady Matlock's ponderings were interrupted when her son began to speak. "He's not coming down, Mother, and I am done." Jonathan took his usual place at the breakfast table, adding, "But it is no matter, I have left it to Adele, and if I know my sister, I am certain he will come down just to get away. Where is father by the bye?"

Lady Matlock replied, "Mr. Madison has sent an express from Matlock; something to do with one of the tenants, I believe. Your father is writing his reply."

Colonel Fitzwilliam smiled to himself. There were several advantages to being a younger son and here was the best reasoning of all, for there was nothing as refreshing as a full night's sleep.

"Post?"

"There," said Lady Matlock, nodding her head to the sideboard. "Davis said there is something for everyone this morning."

Jonathan arose and brought the mail over to the table, leafing through the stack until he found one addressed to himself. He recognized Darcy's hand immediately; however, upon turning it over to open, he saw that the seal on the wafer was not one he had seen before as connected to his cousin; he stared at it a moment.

His mother, now having eaten her fill and revived with cups of tea, was now ready to take on the familiar demands of the day. She outstretched her hand and gestured for the post with her fingers as she noticed her son still puzzling over his letter. "Oh, sorry," he said handing over her letters, then walking around the table, depositing everyone else's at their usual seats.

"Let's see," she said more to herself than to her son, "One from Fitzwilliam, and one from dear Georgiana. She was reaching for her letter opener to attend to her niece's missive first when she happened to look up long enough to catch her middle child using the edge of his butter knife to break the seal on his letter; she hated it when her children did that with the silver.

"Sorry," he said smilingly, noticing the set of her mouth, "Bad habit."

James Fitzwilliam, the third Earl of Matlock, strode purposely into the room. He had had one of the worst mornings imaginable since he had begun to keep track of "worst mornings."

"Is everything all right, dear," questioned Lady Matlock, not looking up from her task of letter opening but noticing from the sound of his steps that all could not be well. "Is it bad news?"

“Robert Barnaby was taken to his bed last night,” said the Earl, taking a seat at the head of the table. “Madison says that he is very ill.”

“Capital!” shouted Colonel Fitzwilliam, looking up and smiling with excitement.

Both parents stopped what they were doing and turned to look at their son, both seriously unamused by his conduct. Jonathan noticed his parent’s stares and quickly looked down and amended his statement.

“Oh, sorry, that is bad news, Father.”

The Earl grimaced at his son but addressed his wife. “And you know, Phil, he is the farm manager in the valley and now what am I supposed to do? Madison writes to tell me that the son will now step in to replace his father during the harvest. That boy is completely incompetent. I don’t know what Barnaby was playing at by sending him off to that school in Devon; the notions he learned there about farming will be the ruin of me. We need to go home today!”

The Earl sat down in his chair and impatiently flung open his napkin and laid it across his lap as the footman set coffee before him.

The Countess replied, “When we return home next week,” she saw her husband’s look, “as planned,” she added with emphasis, “I will call and take him some of cook’s beef broth and it will do him a world of good.”

Lady Adele now arrived for breakfast with a smug look on her face. She felt triumphant as she had her eldest brother following petulantly behind her. She sat down next to her father.

Lawrence didn’t enter; he just leaned against the doorframe of the breakfast room and stared gloomily past the table and out the rear window. Damned Adele, he thought, with her way of making one feel ashamed over the simplest of transgressions; he wished he could tell his father to put her name up for Whitfield in the next by-election instead of his own; she could persuade anyone to do as she wished just by the disapproving look on her face.

“Do you intend to stand there all throughout breakfast or will you be joining us?” asked Lord Matlock who had watched his ill-tempered son since he began leaning against the door.

With what seemed like the greatest effort on his part, Viscount Whitfield shifted his weight from the door frame and took a seat next to his mother since his own seat had been commandeered for the last several weeks.

Lady Matlock leaned in to whisper. “We were just speaking of Mr. Barnaby, Lawrence; he took ill last night.”

Lawrence nodded stoically and waved away the footman with the coffee as he stared down at his letters.

“And that boy of Barnaby’s,” added the Earl who was determined to get his point across, “is not what I would call any kind of farmer; he has the oddest notions on crop rotations and threshing

implements. I heard him one day down at the exchange telling the assembled fools about this new kind of wheat they are growing in America. Did you hear that, Phil? *America*, indeed!”

“They call it winter wheat, Father, and I have read much on it myself,” said the Viscount, the expert on all things botanical. “They say it is the future.”

“He speaks!” was Lord Matlock’s sarcastic reply; he had never known Lawrence to take so much as a passing interest in the farm. “I thought your interests lied solely in bugs and beetles, sir.”

“Father, you may choose to think that I care not for Matlock or Grimsby or its tenants, however, I assure you they are never far from my thoughts. I have some interesting ideas on farming of my own.”

“I expect you and this boy, Gerald Barnaby, would get along famously, if you ever met.”

“Actually, Father, I have met young Mr. Barnaby several times on my visits to Matlock and I must say that he is an excellent student of land management and animal husbandry. This boy, as you call him, has shared many edifying thoughts with me on the direction Matlock valley should take in the future to increase its yield. You’d serve yourself and the manor extremely well if you give him a moment’s consideration.”

“Until I am gone, sir, I run Matlock. You and your friend *Gerald* may do as you wish when I am dead.”

At that moment Adele coughed softly; she hated talk of death and loss and the two gentlemen checked their heated conversation.

“There, there, dearest,” said Lord Matlock reaching over and taking his daughter’s hand, “Your papa has many years left in him yet, no matter how much the black prince there plots my demise.

Lawrence arose and went to the sideboard for water, wondering when he could make his escape back to his rooms. Arguments with his father only made his escaping to his work all the more appealing.

Colonel Fitzwilliam, who had been sitting by patiently ignoring both his father and brother and caught up in his own pleasant thoughts, now entered the conversation. “May I now tell you all the good news?” All eyes turned on him. “I have had it in a letter, Mother, that your favourite nephew intends to turn husband.” Jonathan watched as surprise descended around him and all but one of the faces took on a look of astonishment. Lawrence just raised one eyebrow and returned to his seat as if nothing interesting had happened.

“Is this true, Jonathan; Fitzwilliam has finally decided to marry Anne?” was Lady Matlock’s question, knowing full well that her nephew and niece were not suited in the least. She looked to her daughter for confirmation knowing that she kept up a correspondence on that end, but Adele looked just as shocked as everyone else.

“No, Mother,” replied the Colonel, smilingly “we all know your opinion on that match. No, I am in the happy position to inform you that Darcy marries a woman, who, I am pleased to say, is his true match in every way... well, save one.”

“How so?” asked his Lordship.

“She is his equal in taste, good humour, and judgement, but I must say she is not quite his equal in consequence; then again, neither am I, so it can be no matter to me; I find her infinitely charming.”

“I take it that you know the lady. Who is this paragon of loveliness?” asked the Earl, his eyes sparkling, “for I know your taste, sir, and high praise from you could only mean that she is all that is beautiful.”

“She is a Miss Elizabeth Bennet of Hertfordshire and you are correct, father, she is all that is lovely.”

“Bennet? Bennet? Hmmm? How do we know them, John?” asked the Countess. “Where did we meet these Bennet’s? In town? Bath?”

Jonathan smiled at his mother naïveté; it always amused him to think that his mother thought that everyone, with the exception of servants, moved in the first circles of society.

“We, don’t know them at all, mamma; *I* met the young lady at Lady Catherine’s last Easter.”

“Oh, so she is a friend of the de Bourgh family?” This puzzled the Countess exceedingly for she would have never expected her sister-in-law to brook the intrusion of an outsider over Anne for the favour of Fitzwilliam’s hand.

The Earl, ever on guard for fortune hunters asked, “And her father’s estate is called...?”

The Colonel perused the letter again, “Ah, Longbourn is the very place; quite near a place in Hertfordshire where Darcy’s particular friend Charles Bingley now resides. Darcy is there now.”

Adele had dropped her scone and blushed scarlet from the top of her head to the tip of her toes at the mention of Charles Bingley; she remembered the charming Mr. Bingley very well. Lawrence eyed his sister and saw her heightened colour but made no mention of it.

“Splendid,” cried Lord Matlock, having made up in his mind already that if the young woman was an intimate of his sister’s and her father was a landed gentleman, then that was good enough for him. “What do you say to my matched bays as a wedding present, eh, Phil? The four of them are nearly trained up.”

“Perhaps something else dearest; perhaps Miss Bennet’s father will make a gift of horses and carriages. I will consult Catherine as to the tastes of this Miss Bennet; I am sure she would know what the young lady would like.”

Colonel Fitzwilliam wondered momentarily if he should let his parents labour under the misapprehension of Miss Bennet’s connection to his noble aunt.

“So, tell me, son, what is this Miss Bennet like? What are her accomplishments and her tastes? Does she ride?”

The corners of Jonathan's mouth quirked up; riding was his father's greatest passion and being a horsewoman was the only accomplishment in a woman that garnered all of his respect.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Father, but from what I remember, Miss Bennet is a very great walker and endeavours to engage in that pursuit everyday that she can.

The Earl mumbled something about "walkers" and instantly lost interest on the subject and began railing on about young Mr. Barnaby again: "New fangled threshing contraptions and confounded reaping implements; all nonsense!"

His mother ignored her husband and asked, "Tell us about her family, dear?"

"Her mother and father are both living; five daughters in the family; no sons to inherit. I understand that Lady Catherine's clergyman is some sort of cousin and is Mr. Bennet's heir. Miss Bennet is the second of the five daughters and I know very well that Georgiana will like that; we all know how lacking in female company her bringing up entailed; now she will have five sisters."

Adele looked up at that.

"Five daughters?" asked Lady Matlock, her sympathy instantly aroused. "What are their ages?"

"All well above fifteen, as I have heard Aunt Catherine grieving over everyday that I was at Rosings."

Adele bit her lip.

Lady Matlock then asked, "Are any of them married?"

Adele was all attention.

"From what I remember, Miss Elizabeth shall be the first."

"Really?" said her ladyship, her eyebrows shooting up. "I must say that I do not envy Mrs. Bennet her task in the slightest; four daughters unmarried; the poor thing; the poor thing. What a task she has ahead of her."

Colonel Fitzwilliam became incredulous. "Why is it, Mother, that women are so intent to see everybody matched and settled? A chap doesn't stand a chance these days. I think I can speak for most men when I say we would very much like be left alone."

"As we have daily proof," said Lady Matlock rolling her eyes, thinking of her two sons. She now became impatient as an idea suddenly struck her. "You know, John, you might go over to Hertfordshire yourself; it's barely a day's ride from Kent. I am certain your aunt can spare you for a day or two."

Adele scoffed silently; she knew very well that her wayward brother had other plans that did not involve Kent and being *spared* by Lady Catherine in any way shape or form. She was sure that he'd be long gone from Rosings even before Lady Catherine's head hit the pillow that first night.

The Countess continued. "Why don't you join Fitzwilliam and Mr. Bingley for some shooting for a few days? Even though I have only met Mr. Bingley once or twice, I know that he is just the sort of well brought up and informal young man who would not mind in the least to have an unexpected house guest for a day or two. And while you are there, it would not hurt you at all have a look at Mrs. Bennet's four daughters; the poor dear, how she must feel; thirty-two next month, John; thirty-two!"

All during this impassioned speech his eyes grew large and it was all he could do to keep from laughing out loud. His mother always brought up his age when she was concerned about some imagined milestone he had not yet accomplished. "I just might take up your suggestion, Mamma," he lied. And then, turning to his brother and winking cheekily, added, "Perhaps I'll drag Lawrence along, as well. What say you, Lawrence; thirty-six in December; thirty-six?"

Lawrence had no ideas of reacting to his brothers salvo but his mother sat up straighter, smiled, and looked well pleased with herself, saying, "Yes, yes, a splendid suggestion, John!"

Colonel Fitzwilliam, however, had no intention of ever marrying, going into Hertfordshire, or telling his parents that none of the Bennet girls dowries could hardly keep him in watch fobs and cravats.

Adele, who had been silent up until then, now spoke in such a disinterested manner, that when closely examined it could only prove her acute interest. "Does my cousin Fitzwilliam's letter say if Mr. Bingley is well?"

Lady Matlock looked at her daughter with curiosity. Adele had just turned twenty-four and she knew that her daughter had never indicated any particular interest in any particular gentleman before. How odd that she should now ask after Charles Bingley. Now, if there was only some way she could get Adele into Hertfordshire, then everything could possibly be settled to her satisfaction by the end of the year.

Colonel Fitzwilliam perused his letter for a moment. "Ah! It would appear that that Bingley chap has some sort of mild complaint and Darcy is only there to keep a look out for him."

"Odd fellow, that Bingley," said the Earl, rejoining the conversation after hearing something that he did not like. "Always following after Darcy, like a puppy, needing his approbation, looking to him as some sort of father figure; nonsensical fool. But one thing I have always observed, that Bingley fellow has a way of drawing in the pretty young ladies, does he not? I remember Lady Carteret's ball last year, he was never without a partner. There was Darcy, standing in the corner, glowering, throwing all the young ladies and their matchmaking mammas into hysterics and up steps this Bingley fellow, just the opposite; all smiles and pleasantness and drawing them all over to his friend. What a scheme those two have; they should write a book."

Lady Matlock now remembered her letter from Georgiana. She instantly saw that it was four pages long and seemed to have been written in a flutter of excitement, for her nieces usual tidy hand had taken on a sprawling, flowery flow. After reading a few lines she broke out in a broad grin. "Listen to this..."

You will understand when I tell you that I am in no way disappointed in my brother's choice. I love Anne dearly, but am well aware that her preference lies elsewhere and I would go as far as to gently hint that it does not stray far from outside our own intimate circle.

“Oh, dear,” said Lady Matlock, “perhaps I should not have read that last bit aloud.”

Colonel Fitzwilliam just raised one eyebrow as he cut his bacon; he knew full well what Georgiana meant and there was really no need to keep it a secret; everyone knew Anne's preference save her own mother.

Miss Bennet is so very charming and so very beautiful that I can easily believe that my brother was sincerely attached to her from nearly their first meeting. I can not wait until you all meet her, although I know that John is an admirer of hers already.

“Just how much of an admirer of her are you, John,” asked the Earl, now showing more interest in the conversation again; his second son did have the tendency toward flirting with the ladies.

“She is a perfectly pleasant, appealing, and accomplished young lady; one could not help but fall a little in love with her. But Darcy has nothing to fear from me on that score, I assure you.”

Lord Matlock and Lord Whitfield each shared a glance; they had both seen Jonathan and his cousin at odds over a lady before; neither of them were truly convinced by his words.

Fitzwilliam says that no particular date for the wedding has been selected, but I am to understand that Miss Bennet and her mother are to make the journey to town in a few weeks for the shopping. I am all anticipation that Fitzwilliam will come to Pemberley and take me down to London, but I do not know when that will be. Oh how I long to be there as it would be a wonderful surprise. I would do anything to come to London just now.

“Well John, what say you to that? Will you grant your dear cousin this one wish? You know that she never asks for anything for herself.”

“Perhaps,” said Adele before her brother could answer, “I could even postpone my trip. I would enjoy having Georgiana for company on the journey south.”

John considered his options for a few moments before he spoke. “As much as I would love to see Georgiana, I don't really see how I can do it. To add the journey up to Derbyshire and down again would be extremely difficult; I must think of my shoulder and leg, you see.” He wasn't concerned about his aches and pains in the slightest; he was thinking on his plans for Brighton.

“Yes, you are right, dear, and Adele, you know how your aunt is about punctuality. There will be no end to her complaints if you arrive a week after you are expected; no, you and John should leave today as planned. Perhaps your father and I will have a look in at Pemberley on our return to Matlock next week. Who knows, Fitzwilliam may have come up to fetch her by then.”

Adele looked at her elder brother, silently communicating her displeasure with him for not offering to be of use. She could see very well that he had nothing of great importance to do with himself over the next few weeks except to make a nuisance out of himself by poking about other peoples gardens and trampling mud into the house.

Lawrence knew what a magnifying glass could do if left out in the sun. Adele's disapproving stare was having just such an effect.

"You know, I was thinking Mama," said Adele strategising, "perhaps you and Father might like to take the children with you on your return. Matlock will be so quiet with all of us away. But then, now that I think about it, my dear brother might not like to have his own house so quiet and *empty*."

The Countess immediately cottoned on to what her daughter was conveying and Lawrence could plainly see the great advantage of having time away from his children; it just galled him to the core to accept such a charitable suggestion from his sister knowing full well what she really expected him to do; she had done it to him again.

"I shall do it; I shall travel up to Derbyshire myself and be at Georgiana's disposal."

Everyone was happy with Lawrence's statement. He was not one to go out of his way for anyone, but the Countess was quick to take advantage of her son's generosity before he changed his mind.

"Splendid! I shall send an express off to Georgiana at once telling her to expect you in a few days." She smiled at her daughter proudly; since childhood, Lawrence had always been like clay in Adele's hands. "Then it is all settled; Jonathan will take Adele into Kent, Lawrence will take Georgiana to London, your father will settle his business with young Mr. Barnaby, and I will look after my grandchildren until we all meet again."

Each member of the Fitzwilliam family sat around the table contemplating the task set before them. However, one Fitzwilliam alone was of a mind to get into Hertfordshire as soon as possible and the sooner they could accomplish it, the better.