

Chapter 9 ~ An Intimate Understanding



Mrs Gardiner and Jane each took a seat on either side of Miss Darcy who was set to pour the tea. The Fitzwilliam family, wanting to appear friendly and interesting in the eyes of the newcomers, arranged themselves in various chairs and sofas about the room, all the better to look over their guests and to satisfy their individual levels of curiosity.

Lady Matlock sat directly in front of Jane on the settee opposite, wanting the opportunity to converse to gain a better understanding of the young lady.

The Earl wanted to know more of her family, as one's family reflected on one's desirability of being invited to supper versus merely tipping one's hat to them on the road.

Adele, as was her custom, wanted to scrutinize Miss Bennet's interactions and manners, for she had the singular talent of judging a person's sincerity by something as trifling as the way they held their cup of tea.

Lawrence wanted nothing more than to seem agreeable to the ladies and then find some way to slip quietly upstairs to his rooms.

Colonel Fitzwilliam separated himself from the group altogether and found himself a chair the furthest away and one that commanded a view of Jane's fair profile for he wanted nothing more than to be able to stare.

The countess, knowing her nieces disposition well, did not wait upon her to introduce a topic of conversation. "Miss Bennet, I understand that you reside in Hertfordshire. As I have never been to that part of the country you must tell me whether or not it is a pretty place."

Jane, delighted to enlighten the countess on her home, smiled. "I think it so, ma'am, but then, I have lived there all my life so I am naturally a little prejudiced." Georgiana handed Jane a cup of tea and Jane thanked her for it.

"My son, Jonathan there, has been to Hertfordshire several times; have you not, John?"

As Lady Matlock turned to point him out, Jane also turned to look at him and smiled. The Colonel's eyes widened, his breathe caught in his throat, and he only managed to nod.

"He has also told me that you are from a family of five daughters."

"Yes, indeed, ma'am."

Jane again looked at the colonel, a little confused as to how he knew so much about her family.

Darcy, seeing the puzzled look on Jane's face stepped over to help her to understand. "Before you think my cousin a mind reader, Miss Bennet, I believe I should point out that he has already met your sister, Miss Elizabeth during our stay in Kent."

"Oh yes, I believe she has mentioned you before; it quite slipped my mind."

Jane's face instantly softened and she favoured the colonel with another one of her gentle smiles which caused the colonel to feel a wave of warmth rush throughout his body. Those attending to the conversation waited for some sort of response on his part but he felt himself tongue-tied and stupid in the presence of one so beautiful and said nothing.

The countess spoke rather loudly to draw the conversation back to herself and away from her silent and uncommunicative son. "And with the exception of your sister now engaged to my nephew there, they are all unmarried?"

Momentarily caught off guard by the suddenness of Lady Matlock question, Jane replied, "No, my youngest sister is lately married."

Here Jane stopped herself, remembering in whose company she was. She and Darcy shared an almost undetectable look of silent understanding which Adele, who missed nothing, immediately saw and wondered at. Georgiana remained composed and unaffected and handed her brother a cup of tea.

Jane's momentary discomfort was deflected when Delphie chose that moment to run over to demand her father's attention and to climb up onto his lap. "My, what an adorable child," said Jane. And looking down at her, she tipped her head to the side and asked, "What is your name, dear?"

"Pildelpeepuh," said the girl smiling shyly, covering her eyes with her hands, and burying her head against her father's chest.

Lord Whitfield, who was sitting next to his mother and across from Mrs Gardiner, spoke, "Her name is actually Philadelphia, which, I am sure you will agree, Miss Bennet, is a mouthful for someone so young. We all call her Delphie to avoid the confusion of having three Philadelphia's in one family."

Lady Matlock wondered at her son's behaviour. She had never before known him to string together so many words in the company of stranger. She cut her eyes to her daughter and could tell by Adele's raised eyebrows that she was thinking along the exact same lines.

Lawrence, noticing his own daughter's shyness, whispered something into her ear which caused her remove her hands.

"How old is she," asked Jane.

Again he whispered to his daughter and the girl held up two fingers. "Try again, Delphie" said her father sternly. Delphie then manipulated her own fingers with her other hand until she held up three fingers.

"Charming," added Mrs Gardiner, setting aside her tea. "She is at such a delightful age."

"And she can be a handful," added Lawrence, sighing and tickling the girl in her side, making her laugh and squirm wildly.

“I have a daughter very near her age,” replied Mrs Gardiner, “and I can attest to that myself.”

“Oh?” asked Lady Matlock, suddenly realizing how rude she must have seemed by only conversing with Miss Bennet. “You have just the one, then?”

“No, your ladyship, I have four children altogether; two boys and two girls.”

“My, what a fine family,” said Lord Matlock who now, having received his tea, stepped over to better hear the conversation between the ladies. “They must keep you very busy.”

“When my husband’s business allows him time away, my lord, he is a great help and Jane also assists me with them when she is in town; she is a favourite with my children.”

“And what is your husband’s business,” asked Lord Matlock raising his eyebrows, taking another step forward, and full of interest as this was not something he had expected to hear.

Mrs Gardiner replied proudly, “My husband is a publisher, my lord.”

Delphie, who had been exchanging surreptitious smiles with Jane all during this exchange, had now climbed down from her father’s lap. She wandered over to have a closer look and Jane took one hand to smooth down the girls tumbled curls and used the other hand to touch her softly on the cheek, earning one of Delphie’s broad grins.

Lady Matlock’s interested eye caught every gentle movement that Jane Bennet made and she and Adele shared a quick glance of silent approval.

“Is he now?” asked the Earl, who was still speaking with Mrs. Gardiner. “And what kinds of things does he publish, ma’am.”

“Atlases and maps; anything in the geographical vane, sir.”

“Really? How extraordinary! And is he --” Lord Matlock grasped for the words, hoping not to offend Darcy’s new relation, “successful in this line of commerce?”

“I believe so, my lord,” said Mrs Gardiner, smilingly.”

Darcy added, “Come, Uncle, I have one of Mr Gardiner’s new atlases just here. Please join us Mrs. Gardiner so that you may show my uncle your husband’s fine craftsmanship.” Mrs Gardiner was happy to oblige and she arose to join the two gentlemen by the window where Darcy had placed the large, handsome volume in a stand made up especially for its viewing.

Through another door at the far side of the room, two maids now quietly entered pushing a cart laden with fruits and cakes and began setting up one of the tables. Young Edward, a great lover of sweets was at the table like a shot, reaching for a plate.

“Edward, not too much,” said Lord Whitfield from his seat, horrified by his son’s barbaric manners in front of company.

Georgiana arose to be of assistance to her guests and Lady Adele followed to help her nephew to a plate.

The viscount, satisfied that his son was no longer made a spectacle of himself, turned back, only to observe his daughter's interactions with Miss Bennet. Delphie touched Jane's soft gloves, examined all the buttons on her pelisse's sleeve, but when she looked as if she would invade the contents of Miss Bennet's reticule, her father raised his voice to put an end his daughter's increasing mischief.

"No, Delphie, leave Miss Bennet's things alone." The child looked at her father and placed her hands guiltily behind her back, recognizing by the seriousness of his voice that he meant what he said. She then climbed up on the settee just to be near her new friend. "You must forgive my daughter, Miss Bennet; I have never been able to curb her curiosity."

"I have four younger sisters and have known of nothing but curiosity all my life; she can do no harm," replied Jane patiently. She set her tea down, held out her hands, "Come and sit here with me, Delphie," and lifted the child onto her own lap. She then placed her bag before them both, opening it to show the child its contents. "Let us see what I have in here that you might like." Jane removed a small tortoise shell comb and hand mirror, showing the young girl her reflection as she arranged the comb at the top of her head. When Delphie saw herself in the mirror she called for her father's approval.

"Look, papa, look!" she said smiling widely while she reached up to touch the ornament.

"Yes, very pretty, Delphie; now let Miss Bennet have it back."

Jane seeing how much the child enjoyed it, protested. "Oh no, please let her keep it, my lord; it is my gift to her."

Lord Whitfield was ready to protest, but there was something in Miss Bennet's look, something about her gentle sweetness and captivating manner that caused him to hold his tongue. "You are very kind, Miss Bennet." His lips parted, he felt compelled to say more, but had no idea what, and he stared at her for a long moment as if seeing her clearly for the first time. Delphie, he thought, would benefit greatly from such a patient, thoughtful—then suddenly recollecting himself, he blinked several times to clear his head, adding, "What do you say, Delphie?"

Surprisingly, instead of saying the words *thank you*, Delphie reached up and placed her arms around Miss Bennet's neck and Jane, caught so off guard by such a touching gesture, looked at the viscount in smiling astonishment.

The viscount was no less surprised and would have returned her smile, if not for his eyes being drawn to his cousin Georgiana, another motherless child, going about her duties as hostess competently, but more often than not, somewhat awkwardly.

Lady Matlock sat as if transfixed. She had never seen her granddaughter take to anyone so quickly. The more she watched Miss Bennet's steady, patient way with Delphie the more she liked everything she saw. She immediately made it up in her mind that she would be the perfect wife for Lawrence.

All thoughts of Jonathan as a husband for Miss Bennet were quickly put away. She felt that for all his initial admiration, he had said nothing to her whatsoever and sat against the far wall as if determined not to speak to her. In her mind, Lawrence was by far the better choice; he had two motherless children, an estate in near chaos with no wife to manage the servants, and money enough to please any woman that he would choose. Unfortunately, he showed no signs of any particular regard for their guest other than to keep her from being tormented by his daughter.

She quickly came up plan in order to give Lawrence and Miss Bennet an opportunity to have a few moments conversation alone together. “Georgiana, my love,” said the countess standing and stepping over to the refreshment table, “I wonder if you would help me to a plate of fruit.”

Georgiana, happy to oblige said, “Of course aunt, what can I get you?”

The countess purposely took her time going over every single selection, asking her niece which fruit was which, where it had come from, and how much it cost, all to give Jane and Lawrence an opportunity to get to know each other a little better.

Jane, with Delphie still in possession of her lap, talked quietly together with Delphie entertaining Jane with the various names of all her dolls. Lord Whitfield, all compassion for Miss Bennet, took out his pocket watch to check the time, wondering when the children’s nurse would make an appearance to take them away.

He sighed. “Miss Bennet, I am sure you would like to have refreshments. I shall ring for my daughter’s nurse; you should not be inconvenienced so.”

Jane favoured him with yet another smile. “I am fine, Lord Whitfield; I assure you that tea is all I want. And please, don’t remove the child on my account; we are just now becoming good friends.”

“I have a pony,” exclaimed Delphie suddenly, reaching up to touch Jane’s chin to turn her face down towards herself.

“Do you now? And what is the pony’s name?”

“Pony,” said Delphie laughing, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

“Really,” replied Jane in mock surprise, looking up at Lord Whitfield with amusement. “What a charming name for a pony.”

The Viscount blushed slightly at Jane’s gaze. “I have tried to tell her to give it a proper name, but she does not yet understand.”

“Do you have a pony?” asked Delphie excitedly, wanting all of the visitor’s attention for herself.

“No, I’m afraid not; I am far too big for a pony, but I had one as a little girl; his name was Chester. He would eat my mother’s roses and try to bite my hand.”

Lawrence smiled at so charming a picture that it caused Jane to smile in return. They looked at each other for another long moment. As she looked deeper, she could see some sadness there and wondered what so fine a gentleman would have to regret.

The viscount sensed that Miss Bennet was, in a way, taking the measure of him. There was nothing predatory in her look, he could see that easily for himself as he had seen a ladies admiring look before many, many times. This was no look of desire; no, it was more a look of compassion than anything, almost as if she saw straight into to his desolate heart.

Delphie eager for more attention began to toy with the ribbons on Jane's bonnet and this naturally forced Lord Whitfield into action. "Please, Miss Bennet, this will never do. You are very good to entertain her, but please allow me to remove my inquisitive daughter from your person before she taxes all of your patience." He arose from his own seat and came to sit next to Jane, removing Delphie from her lap once and for all.

"Really, it has been no trouble at all."

"I'm afraid she finds you extremely fascinating." He hesitated, and then added, almost whispering, "You must understand, Miss Bennet, other than my mother, sister, and her nurse, Delphie does not meet with very many other women; my wife being gone these three years."

Jane immediately recognized what the sadness in his eyes meant but she did not quite know how to answer such a speech. For herself, she could never imagine growing up without a mother. Mrs Bennet, for all her nerves and tremblings really was affectionate and attentive to all her children. Jane's kindly heart naturally went out to Edward and Delphie, but sensing someone to her left she turned to discover Lady Adele watching her closely.

To Lady Adele, Miss Bennet's manners were gentle, pleasing, and agreeable. She saw no signs of pretentiousness or looks of predatory admiration directed at her handsome brother. Now satisfied with Miss Bennet's temperament, she came over to join the young woman and her brother and took the seat vacated by her mother.

"Forgive me for staring so, Miss Bennet, but I was just admiring your bonnet. If you would be so kind, I simply must have the name of your milliner."

Jane, ever ready with a smile, replied, "Thank you, Lady Adele, but I made the hat myself."

"How charming and so very accomplished, is it not Lawrence?" Her brother began to answer, but was forestalled. "I am all thumbs; I'm afraid I lack the talent and the patience for anything that requires me to sit for long periods of time."

"I am sure you are being modest," said Jane.

"And I assure you that I am not. My mother quite despairs for me and," she continued, spying her mother and Georgiana grinning at her, "I rather think she wishes that I was more like Georgiana," Adele leaned in as if sharing a secret, "who, I must tell you does everything perfectly."

"I heard that," said Georgiana laughing. "Don't believe a word she says, Miss Bennet; Adele is a very accomplished young lady and plays the harp beautifully." Noticing her other cousin's long silence, Georgiana tried to bring him into the conversation, "Does not your sister play well, John?"

This naturally drew everyone's gaze to the Colonel who seemed thoroughly surprised that he was being asked a question. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat and observed them for a moment, having no idea what to do or what to say. Again, he chose to nod, feeling that a far safer choice instead of the alternative: proving himself a bumbling fool in front of Miss Bennet.

Adele found John's behaviour exceedingly strange. He was never one to let an opportunity to make a joke at her expense pass, especially after Georgiana had so innocently laid down such a tempting gauntlet. She

hoped with everything that was in her that he was not letting whatever prejudice he had against George Wickham colour his views on Miss Bennet and her aunt. She could plainly see that they were both extremely genteel people and worthy of knowing better. John, she decided, must somehow learn to get on with them or she would make his life miserable.

The countess now returned to the settee, eager to know how everybody got on. "Now, are all you young people acquainted; are you all to be the most intimate of friends?"

The three young ladies all smiled at each other; however, the two young men seemed lost in their own thoughts.

"Aunt Gardiner," said Jane, turning to Mrs. Gardiner with sudden, happy thought, "What her ladyship has just said has put an idea in my mind. Would it not be lovely if Lord Whitfield's children were to meet with your children in the park tomorrow? I am sure they would all become such good friends."

"What an excellent idea, Jane," replied Mrs. Gardiner now walking over to gauge Lord Whitfield's agreeableness to the plan. "Tomorrow, in St. James Park, there is to be an entertainment. They are to have puppets and a pantomime and every enjoyable thing. My children go every year and I am sure they would love to make the acquaintance of yours."

Hearing that, Edward, who was licking jam from his fingers, suddenly ran over. "Oh, may we go, Papa, will you take us as well? Oh, please!"

The Viscount thought for a long moment. "Not tomorrow, Edward, I have an appointment; some other time, perhaps."

Not to be deterred, Edward next went to his uncle. "Might you take us, Uncle John?"

Colonel Fitzwilliam thrilled at the thought of meeting Miss Bennet in the Park; however, he was far too stricken by her suddenly looking to him for a response, that Adele, seeing what she assumed was a hesitation on his part to meet with Miss Bennet, was quick to speak in his place. "How would you like it if I take you, Edward? We will make a day of it?"

His uncle, instantly forgotten, Edward rushed to his aunt's side just as Delphie slid off of her father's lap to come to her also. "Me, me!" said Delphie jumping up and down with excitement, naturally wanting to do everything that her elder brother wanted to do.

"Yes, you may come, as well; that is if your father has no objection. What say you, Lawrence? The children have so few opportunities for amusements."

"Adele, you spoil them enough as it is. Delphie will only become tired and overwrought and I am certain that Edward is behind in his lessons; I have not seen him pick up a book since the start of the summer."

Adele wanted so much to say something very cutting and very unkind to her elder brother as she herself was quite certain Lawrence had never cared three straws about Edward's lessons before. But as they had guests, she stayed her tongue. "If Delphie lies down directly on our return and if Edward promises to read twenty pages of his book after breakfast, might they be allowed to attend?"

Edward's face instantly fell. *Twenty pages?*

“Oh, let them go, Lawrence,” added Lady Matlock, now thoroughly caught up in her schemes and stratagems for her eldest son’s marriage and desperately wanting to know how well Miss Bennet got on with her two grandchildren on her own. “No harm will come from it.”

Incredulous, Lawrence asked, “Am I the only one thinking of Miss Bennet?” And turning to the young woman asked, “Surely, Miss Bennet, you do not wish to have the care of *six* children all at once? Two are more than enough for me.”

“It is no trouble to me, I assure you,” said Jane reassuringly. “I would be delighted. The elder will help with the younger and we will all have a wonderful time.”

“You see, brother,” Adele chimed in looking very satisfied, “There is nothing at all to worry about. And since we are now to be family, it only makes sense that the children be allowed to know one another.”

Lawrence glanced around; everyone’s pleading eyes undid him instantly. “Very well then, since I am besieged on all sides...”

“Splendid,” exclaimed Lady Matlock over the noise of everyone’s sudden exclamation of happiness, delighted to see her plan take root. And before her eldest could descend into one of his contrary, black moods or suddenly change his mind, she turned to Mrs Gardiner and asked for her card.



The two Gracechurch Street ladies departed not long after and between the Darcy’s and Fitzwilliam’s there was much talk of those they had met.

“What a sensible woman Mrs Gardiner seems to be and Miss Bennet, too; so pleasant; I can not express to you how delighted I was to meet with her,” said Lady Matlock pink with pleasure. “Nephew, you are indeed a very lucky man.”

Darcy replied, “Aunt, I thought that was all settled before; Miss Jane Bennet is to be my sister-in-law, not my wife.”

“I know that dearest, what I mean is, you are very lucky to be married into a family of such delightful daughters.” And turning to her own daughter, asked her opinion.

“I found her agreeable and pleasing, Mother; I believe she has not a malicious bone in her body, for, as she was going away she pronounced everyone she has met with today as charming and kind and we *all* know that is definitely not true.” She cast a contemptuous look at her brother Jonathan.

“Oh, yes, Miss Bennet is exactly how you find her,” supplied Darcy. “I hate to admit it, but once I found her a little too complying and smiling for my taste, but I begin to love her as if she were my own flesh and blood sister.”

Georgiana, though she liked Jane, felt a little jealous of all the attention that the elder sister was getting in the absence of the younger and was compelled to say something complimentary of Elizabeth. “But, Miss Elizabeth Bennet is a most agreeable young woman, as well. She plays the pianoforte beautifully, sings

like an angel, and has the most engaging personality you will ever hope to meet.” And again turning to the Colonel, she asked, “John, you tell them, tell them all how charming Miss Elizabeth Bennet is!”

The Colonel could not answer as for again he was not attending.

“John!” cried Georgiana.

The Colonel looked up from his reverie to see who was addressing him. “Pardon?”

“I asked you a question.”

“Yes?”

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet!”

“Sorry?”

Georgiana simply huffed and turned away.

Lady Matlock spoke, taking her nieces hand. “I’m certain she is all that is good and fine, but we were speaking of Miss Jane Bennet, who I must say, begins to be a favourite with me. James, tell me, how did you like her?”

Lord Matlock rubbed his chin. “I wonder if she rides.”

“I’m going for a walk,” said the Colonel suddenly standing, frustrated with himself and everybody else and not quite sure why.

“A walk!” cried Lady Matlock. “What about your leg?”

“Don’t fuss, Mother; best thing for it. Only once around the square, I shan’t go far.”

“Don’t be too long; we all must be getting ourselves home.”

Between Georgiana’s entreaties that they all stay, to his mother’s explanation as to why the Fitzwilliam’s should all go, the Colonel slipped silently from the house. Out in the square, he pulled his great black cloak closely around him and limped along for a few steps only to give up when he found himself in front of a bench.

“What is the matter with me?” he silently asked himself. “How could I let her effect me so? I mustn’t give in to this; stop thinking on her, John; a beautiful girl like her, she’d never look at you.” He forced himself to turn his mind to his regiment and wondered what they were all up to, hoping to banish the face of Jane Bennet from his mind. However, the face of Elizabeth Bennet now came to the fore, laughing, and asking him: “*And pray, what is the usual price of an Earl’s younger son?*”

“Apparently, it is fifty pounds per annum,” he said as if answering her.

He thought of his prospects: they were not so bad, a lot better than many of the other younger sons he knew--a very generous allowance from his father; his army pay; a house promised to him on an uncles

estate in Bedfordshire, and come to think of it, it was not too far from Hertfordshire; Miss Bennet would surely like that, he thought; she would be able to see all her family at any time--plenty of room for children to play and an enclosure for several horses..."



Adele watched her brother from the drawing room window, sitting below and having a conversation with himself. He had all the appearance of a man half-mad and apparently several of the Darcy's neighbours thought so as well, all giving him a wide berth as they walked passed.

She turned around and found everyone else in the room deep in conversation about the next evening's dinner and she quickly slipped from the room unnoticed, gathering up her coat and bonnet.

Outside, she silently crept up unnoticed behind her brother. She was going to enjoy this as she had never been able to have the upper hand on him and she took a devilish kind of delight in being able to poke fun at his talking to himself on a public street.

"Brother, what do you do here talking with yourself and embarrassing all the family with this extraordinary public performance?" She sat down next to her brother on the bench.

"What do you want, Adele?" replied the Colonel moodily, not looking at her and sounding, for a moment, uncannily like Lawrence than his usual cheerful self.

"I am come to speak with you about your unpardonable behaviour today."

He scoffed, "And what is it about my behaviour that you find so offensive?"

"How very rude you have been to our new friends today; how silent and disapproving you seem to be. You hardly said a word to Mrs Gardiner or her niece this afternoon." He remained silent and this was enough to spur Adele on. "I can not say I know what George Wickham's crimes are against you, Fitzwilliam, or Georgiana, but even you must see that Miss Jane Bennet is a terribly nice young woman and could not hurt a fly. She deserves none of your censure for the actions of her brother."

"Are you quite finished?" he spat. His sister, for once in her life, was so off the mark that he almost laughed.

"Stop all this nonsense, John. For our dear cousin's sake you must find some way to like his new family. You must have heard him say that he loves Miss Jane Bennet as if she were his own sister. Even you have said yourself how delighted you were to meet with Miss Elizabeth Bennet in Kent. And now that you have learned of their connection with Mr. Wickham, I hope you will not persist in holding this grudge against the Bennet family."

The Colonel rose to his full height and stared down at his sister, his eyes full of ominous black clouds and flashes of thunder and lightning. "You know, Adele, for all of your lofty and high-handed claims of being able to discern a person's true nature by something as silly as the set of a brow or the tilt of the head, I wish you could see that in this instance you are completely and most assuredly wrong. I hold no *grudge*, as you call it, against someone as kind-hearted and gentle as Miss Jane Bennet, nor could I ever!"

With a sweep of his cape, a sharp soldier's turn, and hoping he had not said too much, the Colonel stormed off, leaving his sister sitting on her own.

Adele was amazed at all she had just seen and heard. It was clearly written on his face and she had seen it instantly no matter how much her brother had tried to hide it. She now truly understood all her brother's recent reticence and marvelled at the fact that Colonel Jonathan Fitzwilliam, for all of his previous declarations on the absurdities of marriage, had finally found himself in love.



After much negotiating and promises of visits, it was finally decided between Georgiana and the Countess of Matlock that all the Darcy's company would not be removed. Adele, Edward, and Delphie would go home to the Matlock's large London house, leaving the two Fitzwilliam brother's behind.

Lawrence, instinctively knowing that he would get no peace in his parent's household, chose to remain where he was in relative calm and quiet. Besides, he wanted to finish his chess match with Darcy, who, at the time was ignoring the peril to his knight, while, yet again, reading a scented pink letter.

The Colonel, hardly himself over the last few hours and still somewhat upset with his sister, also chose to stay. All thoughts were now focused on Jane Bennet and how he would go about getting Georgiana to place him directly across from her at dinner the next evening without raising any suspicions.

"Fitzwilliam!"

The Colonel looked up. "What—yes--."

"I asked about your plans for tomorrow," said Darcy, finally putting his letter away in his pocket.

The words *proposing marriage* had nearly tumbled carelessly from his mouth, but he rallied at the last moment and replied, "I hadn't really turned my mind to it; why do you ask?"

"Your brother says that he has an appointment to see Sir something or other and I thought you might like to get in a little exercise--work that arm a little--what do you say to a bit of fencing?" The corners of Darcy's mouth turned up slyly when he added, "I promise to take it easy on you."

The Colonel rolled his eyes knowing that if he was in full health Fitzwilliam Darcy would never be able to so much as touch him. "How charitable of you Darcy, but no, I don't think so."

Darcy watched the colonel for a moment, shrugged, and turned back to his match. Jonathan stood and walked over to the bottle of brandy sitting on the table in the middle of the room and poured himself his forth drink for the evening. The glass went instantly to his lips and the warming liquid slid easily down his throat, numbing a little the tightness there that had so recently taken up residence in his chest.

He casually walked over to the book shelf, running his thick fingers along the spines of a few of the more starchy and serious tomes he found there. The glass went back to his lips and he took a long, deep swallow thinking that if Darcy had got his Bennet sister with such boring reading material rattling around in his head, he imagined his success with the fair Jane with his much more diverse range of topics in his own.

“Actually, I’ve been meaning to look in at my tailors.”

Darcy glanced up almost startled. He had noticed his cousin’s wanderings around the room for the last ten minutes, picking things up and putting things down, and saying nothing. It took Darcy a moment to remember what he and the colonel had been speaking of all those long minutes ago.

“Oh, your tailor; I see.”

“Yes, I find myself with nothing decent to wear to your wedding.”

“You haven’t anything to wear?” Lawrence exclaimed incredulously upon hearing his brother’s nonsense. “You already have more coats in various shades of red than you know what to do with now! I hardly think that the denizens of Hertfordshire much care whether you wear scarlet or crimson.” He cast a critical stare at his brother and spied the now near empty glass of brandy; clearly his brother was almost three sheets to the wind.

“No, I thought I might like to go with something different; I often hear that ladies like men dressed in blue.”

Darcy and Lawrence shared a curious look which had all the appearance of asking: *since when did you care so much about any ladies opinion*, but these thoughts were soon interrupted by Georgiana’s gentle tapping on the library door.

“I’ve come to say goodnight, gentlemen,” she said stepping in to gently kiss her brother on the forehead so as not to disturb him from his game.

“Everything ready for your dinner party tomorrow evening, I gather?” asked her brother, not looking up as he moved his king, knowing that his sister had been closeted up with their housekeeper since supper.

“Oh yes, I believe I’ve chosen the perfect china for tomorrow evening.”

“China?” laughed the Colonel, “Is there such a thing as the perfect china? Do people really notice such things?”

“Of course they do,” replied Georgiana, impatient with her cousin for being so obtuse, especially whenever she found him drinking brandy in the comfortable circle of his male relations. “I’ve chosen my mothers blue Dresden to go with the Darcy silver, which will go nicely with the Fitzwilliam winter crystal.”

“Now you’ve lost me completely,” said the Colonel sliding his muscular body into his chair, laying his head back against the soft cushioned velvet, and closing his eyes at the tender visions of Jane Bennet bringing him his slippers.

“Oh, honestly, John; how dim-witted you can be!”

The Colonel shook his head to clear it. “Well, when I marry, I’ll take care not to select a wife so exacting in her requirements; I’m sorry, but that rules you out, my dear.”

Georgiana simply rolled her eyes, “Why thank you cousin, I feel so much better for having that clarified. Good night, then.”

Darcy and Lawrence didn't even bat an eye at their exchange; Georgiana and Jonathan could at times have such an odd sort of relationship.

“No, no, wait up, my dear,” said the colonel coming unsteadily to his feet whilst laughing. “I'll go up with you, and you can tell me more of your winter silver and Darcy crystal and in exchange I will ask you all about red coats versus blue and you will tell me which ladies prefer.” He bowed to his brother and cousin, “Good night, gentlemen.”

Once the door was closed, Darcy raised one eyebrow at Lawrence, questioning Jonathan's sudden odd and very peculiar manner. Lawrence hardly noticed for he was busy moving his queen. “That's check and mate!”