Mrs Darcy’s Dilemma

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Category: Historical

Description: Jane Austen’s world lives on. Step back into Pemberley with this enchanting continuation of Pride and Prejudice.

Twenty-five years after her marriage to Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth Bennet has become the accomplished mistress of Pemberley and mother to three grown children. As wife, mother, and mistress of one of England’s grandest estates, her life is as orderly as the gardens she oversees — until a letter arrives from her long-estranged sister, Lydia, pleading for help for her two eldest daughters.

Moved by duty more than affection, Elizabeth agrees to host her nieces at Pemberley. But from the moment Betty and Cloe Wickham step over the threshold, they begin to unsettle the careful balance of the Darcy household.

Bettina, bold and breathtaking, soon captures the attention of Fitzwilliam, the Darcy heir. Cloe, quiet but keenly observant, draws the interest of Henry, the second son destined for the church.

As youthful attachments deepen and long-buried scandals stir to life, Elizabeth must reckon with her family’s past — and the price of opening Pemberley’s doors to the next generation of Wickhams.

In a house built on pride, can love still find its way? Or will the past unravel everything the Darcys have fought to preserve?

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Mrs. Darcy was one of the happiest women in the world.

She had, before reaching the age of two and twenty, married a respectable and benevolent gentleman, of the county of Derbyshire, who was possessed not only of a noble estate but a proportionately fine fortune, of ten thousand pounds a year.

Miss Elizabeth Bennet (as she then was) had only a small portion herself, and even that was threatened by an unhappy event: the elopement of her youngest sister, at the age of sixteen, with a young man of exceptional worthlessness, whose debts might nearly have swallowed the whole of her family's resources.

But by Mr. Darcy's kind interference, they were saved from disgrace.

By making up the match, settling money on the undeserving youngest sister, and then making proposals for Elizabeth, he had happily brought prosperity instead of ruin upon the anxious Bennets.

Elizabeth was grateful, and being assured of his own strong attachment to her, and as deeply in love as a girl of sense and spirit could well be, she most thankfully accepted his hand.

At Pemberley, then, Elizabeth found her true happiness and calling in life: as chatelaine of one of the finest houses in the country, wife to a clever, well-informed man who loved her devotedly, admirable patroness and lady of society, who opened a most desirable house in town, in the season.

In time, too, she was a mother; but years and maternity had done less to dull her

beauty and vivacity than usually happens.

Although she was now between forty and fifty years old, Mrs. Darcy was still a handsome woman, known for her wit and good humour; still slender, light of foot, with sparkling eyes and hair that, under her matron's lace caps, was still smooth and abundant.

She was as much as ever the delight of Mr. Darcy's mind and the beloved of his heart, and if she had acquired something of an air of authority with her years at Pemberley, it was no more than was becoming and proper to her position.

Mr. Darcy was, at fifty, very much as might have been expected from a knowledge of him at eight and twenty: a noble man indeed, his tall person, magisterial bearing, and dignified manner were more impressive than ever, as befit a man of great influence in Derbyshire, sometime Member of Parliament and Justice of the Peace.

Yet his lips would relax in an indulgent smile that was good to see, his eyes would gleam with enjoyment, and his face would look really handsome still, when he looked upon his wife, or upon his only daughter, who greatly resembled her.

This only daughter, Jane, was now seventeen, a girl of quick comprehension and movement: light, and airily formed, like her mother, and given to a style of impulsive wit that sometimes, it must be admitted, went too far, as she was well aware that she could beguile smiles from her stern father that he never would bestow on either of his sons.

Elizabeth was too wise to take either her husband's love or his wealth for granted, and she never forgot to exult in all her manifold sources of happiness.

It is impossible for human nature to be altogether without worry or pain, however, and Elizabeth's anxieties were all reserved for her children.

The eldest of her sons, Fitzwilliam, the heir to Pemberley, provided sufficient concern to make any anxious mother happy.

A tall, heavy young man, not uncomely, with well-cut features and dark hair, he had little of his mother's liveliness or his father's cleverness and would sit of an evening, not saying much, but turning over sporting papers.

Horses were his great love and, some thought, his only interest in the world.

He admired his father greatly and thought he desired to be what Mr. Darcy himself was, but he had spent two years at Oxford, with very little learning adhering to him, and he was in no danger of equalling his father's wisdom at a similar time of life.

He had not yet, however, lost more money at racing than was reasonable, and his awe of his father and his own future position kept his behaviour and deportment in check and prevented him from partaking too objectionably of the racecourse.

The Darcys' second son, Henry, was more promising and quick-minded than Fitzwilliam; Elizabeth often thought it a pity that Henry were not the elder, for what would he not have done with Pemberley?

She fully expected Fitzwilliam to turn it into a mere breeding-farm.

With his cleverness, his balanced mind, and generous nature, Henry would have made a fine squire indeed …

but as was the way with second sons, the bulk of the estate must go to the elder, and Henry was intended for the Church.

He did not repine but looked forward to ordination eagerly as a situation that would open a field of useful endeavour to him.

With her two youngest children, Elizabeth felt much more comfortable than with the unsatisfactory eldest. Their tempers were more sympathetic, their minds more developed and like her own.

Her fears for them derived not from their characters, as was the way with Fitzwilliam, but from their situations: where they would settle, and with what partners, was all her anxiety.

A husband for Jane, a parish for Henry, were subjects that occupied many of her thoughts.

On a fine autumn morning, the Darcy family dispersed, as usual, after breakfast. Henry had something to tell Jane and hurried her out for a walk. Mrs. Darcy lingered at the table to hear what would be the arrangements of her husband and eldest son for the day.

“There is no press of business this morning, my dear, only some farm matters, and I may ride over to Lambton on the new mare—unless you would like to try her, Fitzwilliam? It is a commission you understand.”

“I should like nothing better, sir, only I am at this moment going out hunting—’tis Friday, you know.”

“And if it were Tuesday itself, what then? You have been hunting every day this week.”

“But you will acknowledge yourself, sir, that there is nothing else for a fellow to do in this country. Derbyshire is for hunting. And at this time of year, one must do one’s best. I did not think you could object.”

“To be sure not. Only there is such a thing as moderation, and your time might be

better spent giving some attention to the farm and plantations; you never yet have learnt much of their management, and it is time you did."

"Very true, sir, upon my word, very true, and I shall stay at home and take a lesson the next day you name; only this morning, don't you see, Hartley and Davis are waiting, and you would not have me disappoint them?"

Mr. Darcy gave only a slight shake of his head in response, and Fitzwilliam lumbered to his feet and, with an awkward bow to his mother, was out of the room in a surprisingly short space of time.

"The old story again," Mr. Darcy said to his wife. "I begin to think we will never be able to fix Fitzwilliam's mind upon his duties or to make him understand that he has them."

"Ought I to have said anything?" inquired Elizabeth. "To stand between Fitzwilliam and his hunting can only result in being trampled, and I prefer to keep his good will."

The husband's eyes met his wife's, and they both sighed. "I do not know what is to become of him, nor of Pemberley, if he does not learn to consider serious matters," he said, "but it is something, at any rate, that there is no such difficulty with our younger son. I have had a talk with Henry."

"Have you?"

"Yes. He has made his plans, I have approved them, and I believe he is telling the result of this discussion to his sister at this moment."

"That is the function of sisters. Well, Mr. Darcy, do not sport with me. You must know my suspense."

“I had no intention of being cruel, Elizabeth. Henry has decided upon Manygrove, and his ordination will take place in Ember-week. I hope you approve?”

“Manygrove! That is exactly as I hoped. He will not be divided from us. Oh, I am happy, indeed,” she said with a bright smile.

“Now, Mr. Darcy, you need not stay and tell me all the particulars, I will hear them all from Henry and Jane, when they have done being confidential with each other; and you had much better go and see about your mare.”

“And you, Elizabeth? How will you occupy yourself today?”

“Stay until you hear,” she said archly, “it will provide us food for our dinner-table talk tonight. I can make a narrative of my doings go pretty far, you know, but not, perhaps, on this occasion, as I only mean to attend to my correspondence.”

Henry and Jane had by this time reached the lime tree walk, where a scattering of leaves underfoot were pleasingly crunched by her slippers and his boots, while the brother and sister enjoyed their confidential conversation to the full.

“I am rejoiced that every thing is settled for you, Henry. I knew your mind could not be at ease until then,” said Jane.

“Yes. My father is kindness itself. He falls in with my plans, with such sympathy. I look forward to Ember-week very much, Jane, as fixing my destiny.”

“Really, Henry? Will not you mind being a clergyman? Shouldn’t you rather just be a gentleman, and do nothing at all?”

Her brother laughed. “Surely that is not your notion of a gentleman, Jane? Such a life would be very stupid indeed.”

“Why would it? If you were of no profession, you could spend all the days fishing and hunting, and all the nights reading; you never have time enough for those pursuits, I have heard you say.”

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“You paint an alluring picture indeed, but you must know that a life devoted to pleasure only will soon lose its savour. I have energy; I must be doing; and I want to be useful. You talk as if you had not the example of my father, always doing good works, before you.”

“Oh, yes! I only want you to be happy and not have a dreary life.”

“Upon my word, Jane, you are more solicitous for my enjoyment than I am myself. Depend on it, a man wants work.”

“Well! I am glad I am not a man and have to have a profession. I should not like it at all.”

“But you will have a profession, Jane, surely; you will marry.”

“Marry! I suppose I must; but I should much rather live in your parsonage and keep house for you. I cannot care about any man more than I do you, Henry; and I am sure I do not want any lovers. They will only be interested in my fortune.”

“That is a consideration, to be sure,” said Henry seriously, “but my father and my mother will introduce you only to young men whose intentions and ambitions cannot be suspected. Now that you are home from school, you will soon be out; and I promise to waive a brother’s right to quiz his sister and not expose you to unfeeling raillery about how many hearts you will break. ”

“Thank you, Henry. Yes, Papa is to give us a ball at Pemberley, and then we will have the season in London. Only think, I am to be presented at Court. I wonder if I

will see the Princess Victoria.”

“She is only about your age,” said Henry thoughtfully, “and with such a burdensome prospect before her, for so young a woman. How should you like to be in her place?”

“Not at all. But I should like to see her, very much indeed. Well, Henry, do say you will go to London with us. Even if you are in orders, you will dance, won’t you?”

“With the greatest of pleasure. Indeed, being a clergyman shall not prevent me from dancing, I am determined; I do not think I should be one if I could not dance. I have often heard our cousin, Mr. Collins, name dancing as a harmless activity, not incompatible with a clergyman’s duty.

Have you heard him, Jane? It is too bad to make fun, but really my cousin Collins is priceless. ”

“Oh, yes! So great and so fat as he is, to think of him dancing is very ridiculous. It is tiresome when he comes to Pemberley. I am fond of Cousin Charlotte, though, and the young cousins.”

“They are a very respectable family.”

“It is so absurd, the way Cousin Collins is for ever sermonizing about my aunts. I wonder what he means by it. When I was a little girl, he used to tell me to attend to my book and not be like my Aunt Lydia. And last time we visited in Kent, he preached about purity in young ladies, and he took as his text Aunt Mary’s favourite saying—oh!

how often I have heard her say it!—that ‘the loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable, and one false step involves her in endless ruin.’ Goodness, I nearly gaped, I wanted to laugh so much. ”

“That does sound like dear Aunt Mary,” said Henry, smiling.

“Oh, yes. I am so glad she lives at Longbourn with Grandpapa and we only see her at Christmas. That’s quite bad enough; it’s a horrid season to have to listen to her gloomy prosing. Oh! I hope she won’t come this Christmas.”

“Now, now, have compassion, my dear Jane,” said Henry mildly. “Aunt Mary is a poor old widow, and probably looks forward to coming to Pemberley all year. And she is very good to our grandfather.”

“Oh, I know. But now, do tell me what our Aunt Lydia is like. I have never seen her since I was a baby and don’t remember. She cannot resemble Aunt Mary and Aunt Kitty at all. Is she so very wicked? Is that why Mama and Papa never have her to Pemberley?”

“What, now you are a young lady, you expect to be told all the family secrets, do you?”

“Oh, are you going to be a prig, Henry, since you are to be a clergyman? I should think you might tell me, if it is not very indelicate. And I do have a reason for asking, indeed I have.”

“Have you? Very well, then, I shall not insult you by dissembling. And I will make you a confidence, though I hope you will not distress my mother and father by speaking of it. You are grown up enough now to know, I think, that my aunt eloped as a girl with Uncle Wickham, and the family disapproved of it very much.”

“Why? I know he was not rich.”

“No, quite poor; and what is worse, profligate. A very bad sort of man, Jane, gaming, playing, spending … and I believe he has been unkind to poor Aunt Lydia.”

“Oh! Then, I am sorry I spoke lightly. But it makes me more curious than ever about what my mother meant, when she asked me if I should like to see some of my cousins. Do you know, I think she intends to ask one or another of them here, on a visit.”

“Are you sure, Jane? Aunt Lydia has a large family—eight children, you know—and she has never brought them to Pemberley. I believe my father thinks it best that we not be mixed in with any of that set.”

“Perhaps he has changed his mind, now that we are older. I am sure I hope so; I should like to see my wicked cousins. Do you think they are as wicked as their parents? Oh, I should so like to see somebody wicked, somebody really wicked.”

“Now, Jane, you know you don’t mean it. You would not like it at all, believe me. Wickedness is not a virtue. But has anything definite been said, about a visit?”

“No, but I shall tease my father and find out.”

“What an indiscreet girl you are growing. Consider; my dear parents do not keep secrets for their own amusement.”

Mr. Darcy and his wife had indeed been contemplating, for some time, the question of a visit from some of the young Wickhams. The event that had precipitated this discussion was a letter from poor Lydia.

She often wrote to Mrs. Darcy, generally in a baldly begging strain; and her sister usually obliged by sending money or clothing, for she knew well the desperate want and misery, the poverty, in which Lydia spent her life.

Mr. Wickham, once a remarkably handsome, prepossessing young man, was lost to drink; he had coarsened, grown careless of appearance and manners, and Elizabeth

even thought, from the number of times Lydia had written of illnesses and injuries, that he might be suspected of doing her some harm.

This latest letter, however, had no such catalogue of griefs to report.

It was in a different strain entirely, for it described her elder children and pleaded their case, to her great sister and brother.

“My dear Lizzy will, I know, feel pity, when she knows how worried to death I am about all my dear children. I am sure I am quite ill from thinking about them. Life has gone very hard with me, but it always is so for mothers, I do believe. Since our eldest boy, George, went into the shipping office in Southhampton, he never sends a farthing home from one year’s end to another, the ungrateful wretch.

I write him very constantly and order him to do so, but it is all parties and pleasure with him, I daresay.

Charles is at sea, and I am sure it was good of Mr. Darcy to speak to the Admiral and get him such a berth, but his voyage to the South Seas is a four years’ business, and we can expect no help from him.

Then there are the girls, Betty and Cloe, and they are as just as good and pretty, one as the other.

Betty was named after you, you know, and I should think you wouldn’t forget your own goddaughter, now she is near twenty years old and the handsomest young lady that ever was seen.

I can’t think why she isn’t married yet; Lord knows I was a mother twice over by her age.

But there are not enough young officers here in Newcastle for her, and to say the truth, I do not care for her to marry one.

They are all very fine when they are young and handsome, but later on it is something else; they grow dirty and drunken and lazy and cruel, and it is a misery having any thing to do with them.

You can't think what I suffer, for Betty has no nice clothes, and the miserablest life you ever saw for a young lady.

I am quite in despair, and ready to marry her to the very next shop-clerk that offers, only in hopes that Mr. Darcy might be yet prevailed upon to do somewhat for her.

And her sister Cloe is nearly as handsome and deserving, and seventeen, and all that, though she has not such spirit as Betty, and is insipid enough, and as stubborn as the devil.

The younger ones worry my life out, though Tom has his apprenticeship, and poor Sam is quite dead, you recollect, since the scarletina took him off, and you kindly sent linen and jellies.

Then Sally is old enough to help round the house but is too bad–tempered, and the littlest ones are at school.

So, you see, I am quite beside myself with so many mouths to feed and no help at all from Wickham, who I confess is so married to the bottle he has little care for me or the poor young ones, and I am sure I am quite forlorn unless you, dearest Lizzy, can come to the aid of,

"Your poor sister, Lydia."

“Oh, such a letter!” exclaimed Mrs. Darcy, reading it again and putting it from her with pain. She and her husband were reunited, after their morning’s avocations, in her dressing room, a favourite time and place with them for private conferences.

“My dear, I do not know why you torment yourself. You know very well what that letter contains. Why, then, examine it again? Your sister’s style of writing can hardly be any inducement,” said Mr. Darcy.

“No, I should say not; Lydia’s ignorance and illiteracy have always been shameful. But they are nothing beside such want, such forlornness—more than even Lydia deserves. And you have helped her so much already. ’Tis too much to ask. I will put the letter away, before it provokes me.”

“I think you had better, my love,” said Mr. Darcy thoughtfully, “and yet, I doubt you will be easy. These Wickhams are an eternal worry to you.”

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“I confess that they are. And to my sister. Last time the entire Wickham family visited the Bingleys at Swanfield, they came for Christmas and stayed for nearly four months. Such wild, badly- behaved, rampaging, dirty children! Bingley and my sister were quite out of patience.”

“That is hard to believe, knowing the Bingleys. And as they have only one child, and have always wished for more, I suspect they really liked the house being noisy and full.”

“I wonder what the girls are like now. I have not seen them since they were small. Betty is twenty, and Cloe is seventeen. That is right; she was born in the same year as our Jane.”

“No doubt they are much like their mother. Two Lydias, I daresay. And stubborn, the younger one, she says.”

“It may be no such thing. If Lydia says she is stubborn, she probably has the temper of an angel. But I have little hope that Lydia has instructed her daughters any better than she was instructed herself. My poor dear mother, rest her soul, was not a sensible woman, and she unwisely indulged Lydia. You see the result. But I am sorry, I do not mean to bore you with these old rememberings.”

“My dear, bore me! You are speaking of your family,” said Darcy seriously, “and I really believe that the only thing for it is to invite these two girls to stay.”

Elizabeth was rejoiced. “You don’t mean it, dearest Darcy! You don’t know what you are saying.”

“I think I do,” he said with a smile. “If they really are two young Lydias, heedless, husband-hunting, and noisy, we can send them back home readily enough. But if there is something in them, if they are deserving girls, then some time away from their mother, enjoying the advantages of Pemberley, and most of all, of your company, my dear, may benefit them very much.”

“And they really may catch husbands,” said Elizabeth archly. Then she had a sudden thought. “But, heavens! Darcy! Can it be right? They are at a dangerous age indeed. What if they should take it into their heads to fall in love with Fitzwilliam or Henry?”

“Let us flatter ourselves,” said Darcy, “that our sons would never think of making such an imprudent match. They have been properly brought up and know their duty in such matters. They are both good lads in the main, although Fitzwilliam is heedless, and I cannot deny that the younger is the ancienter gentleman.”

“That is right—praise the child, and you make love to the mother,” said Elizabeth, pleased.

Darcy smiled. “I have few fears for them on this point. If anything, they are both too sober in company, as I was in my young days, and having some lively young people about can only be of advantage to them. I am not afraid that they will want to marry their poor cousins, who probably will scarcely know how to comport themselves as ladies.”

“Could you want to see such a mistress of Pemberley!” exclaimed Elizabeth.

“Happily, it is impossible that I ever shall,” said Darcy, coolly.

“And, Elizabeth, although you seldom say or do a foolish thing, if you worry about such an eventuality I shall begin to accuse you of it. It will be pleasant for Jane to have some young women visitors. She is too solitary, with only Henry for company.”

“And he will soon be going away. I am glad he is to have the living of Manygrove, however; it is not as far off as Branton. He shall be very often here.”

“Branton is a larger parish. The living is more remunerative there, but in these reformed days a clergyman must not have two livings, and I am satisfied that Henry has made a wise choice. And some day, of course, he will have Lambton Vicarage.”

“Oh, don’t say so; I hate to think of anything happening to dear Dr. Clarke, he is such a satisfactory Incumbent. I do hope Henry will be at Manygrove for years and years. It is only five miles from Lambton, and I am so thankful there need be no real break-up of our family circle.”

“Yes; Henry is as home-loving as he is sensible. I am sure he pleases you in that.”

“Certainly. To have Henry settled near Pemberley is the most delightful thing that could be. Oh, Mr. Darcy, thank you, thank you for your goodness. It is a real weight off my mind to think that poor Lydia may be cheered by her children’s visit here.

Do you know,” she continued, “when first she brought—trouble—on our family, I really hated her.”

“Did you, Elizabeth? You talk of hate, but I don’t believe you ever felt it. Hate is so foreign to you.”

“It is so obliging of you to invent virtues for me, my love. After five-and-twenty years, you ought to know that I can hate as well as the next woman. But ‘anger is a short madness’ you know, and I was never mad. I did fear that her disgrace would be a perpetual torment for us all and the pain for my poor father not to be done away with in a hurry. But time has done the business; we have not forgotten the past, but we have grown used to its effects. Poor Lydia has paid for her imprudence, over and over again, if ever a woman has. No; for these many years, I have felt only

compassion for her."

"That is right. And her sins ought not to be allowed to spoil her children's lives as well. So we shall be glad to have Miss Betty and Miss Cloe here," added Darcy. "Tell them so."

"Oh, I will! I will!" cried his wife, running away to her writing-desk.

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Elizabeth wrote and enclosed some money, and Lydia answered, as promptly as may be imagined; and in not more than a fortnight from her conversation with her husband, Mrs. Darcy received a note informing her that her nieces would take passage in the railroad from their home in Newcastle to Manchester and that they would travel from thence to Pemberley in the coach that Mr. Darcy would send to meet them.

The railroad line had only been open a twelvemonth, and Mrs. Darcy feared this method of travel for her nieces; but the Miss Wickhams were wild to go, and their indulgent mother had nothing to say against it.

She considered that the railway fare was cheaper than that of the coach and therefore less of an expense on Mr. Darcy’s purse; an argument that would not have had much weight with his wife but that Mr. Darcy himself had taken one of the first journeys to London by the new line and was quite struck at travelling in six hours what used to take thirty.

There could be no questioning it. He assured Mrs. Darcy that her nieces would be quite safe; and as for their travelling without chaperonage, these were quite modern times, and they had one another.

But almost before anyone had time to feel much trepidation over the prospect of such an adventure, the young ladies had made the journey safely and so much more expeditiously than could have been otherwise accomplished, that at four o’clock in the afternoon of the very day they had set out, the two Misses Wickham were arrived at Pemberley.

The gentlemen were not at home, but Mrs. Darcy and her daughter welcomed the young ladies and showed them to a pretty bed chamber, new-furnished and filled with comforts, even to a handsome pair of modern glass astral solar lamps upon the well-supplied dressing table.

The trunk was soon brought upstairs, its contents, which were meager enough, bestowed in a handsome Japan-lacquer cabinet; and it was not long before the girls were dressed for tea.

There was then a little time to look about them, and the sisters' reaction to their new quarters was characteristic enough.

Miss Wickham was tall and well-formed, a bold, handsome young woman who did not know what it was to feel at a loss for words; she surveyed the room and its furnishings at once and quickly gave her opinion.

"My uncle's house is as fine a one as there is in the kingdom, I collect," she said composedly, standing at the large window overlooking the lawns.

"I daresay Chatsworth is nothing to it; but fancy our being put into this poky small room. Quite on the wrong side of the house: the view should be of the sweep, not of the back gardens. And the two of us crammed in here together! Faugh! When they have an hundred rooms at the very least." She fetched breath.

"I do call that mean. I see how it is to be. We will be the poor relations, Cloe, mark my words," and she nodded emphatically.

Her younger sister had grown up with as many disadvantages as Miss Wickham and, perhaps from not being the flattered darling of their mother, had nothing like her elder sister's assurance.

Smaller, and less striking in appearance, though altogether a very nice looking girl, with light hair and eyes and a sweet expression, Cloe never attracted the attention that Bettina commanded wherever she went; and being of a thoughtful disposition, with natural good sense, she had, despite her youth, already quietly drawn the conclusion that the manners of her mother and her sister were not the safest models to follow.

Indeed, she was often distressed by Miss Wickham's opinions and strove to soften them.

"Oh, but my aunt seems kindness itself, Sister," she protested. "Did not you hear her say, we are housed in this wing only because it is near our cousin Jane? And I am sure we are together because she thought we would like it and be more comfortable."

"Very well, Cloe. But you will see what I mean about poor relations."

"Well, and so we are, poor relations."

"That is all the more reason we should not be treated as such. Well, then, are we ready to go downstairs? My India muslin is really shockingly shabby. I don't know why my mother would not have afforded us new dresses out of what Mr. Darcy sent, so we could make better figures here.

I wish I had a Paisley shawl and one of those nice, new-fangled, coal-scuttle, poke bonnets.

Oh! I vow I shall make Mr. Darcy buy us some finery.

I was quite ashamed of my mantle, on the train. "

"The train! Oh, Betty, I could not think of our dresses then. I was not afraid; but I did think, every moment, that it would fall over and we would be crushed, the noise and

shaking were so great."

"You goose, you," returned Miss Wickham amiably. "How is my hair? Gone flat, I see. Oh, Lord, we must tease Aunt Darcy to give us a new curling-iron, so we may have curls like my cousin. Did you see her hair? She must have two French maids working on her, day and night, and you see we have no one."

At this moment there was a knock upon the door, and Cloe opened it to admit a smart young person who said she was Miss Darcy's maid, sent to see if she could help the young ladies to dress.

The girls thanked her, accepted her services for the finishing touches to their toilettes, and soon were ready to join the other ladies.

"This house is as large as a village," commented Cloe. "Now, which way do we go? Past the picture gallery, surely. I wonder if we may see all these pictures some time."

"I don't know," said Miss Wickham indifferently. "Oh! That silver-and-crystal chandelier, I declare I never saw such a one in my life; it must be worth five hundred pounds."

Miss Darcy advanced to meet her cousins and drew them into the grand sitting-room, where Mrs. Darcy and one of her sisters were working.

Mrs. Clarke, the girls' Aunt Kitty, was married to the rector of the parish church, but she contrived to spend much of her time at Pemberley House.

This suited her husband very well, for he was a mild and retiring man, whose reigning interest in life, beside the few needs of his prosperous parish, was his garden, and if such a gentle person could be thought to have any strong dislike, it was for his wife.

Mrs. Clarke's fretful disposition as a girl had brightened nearly to cheerfulness in her young womanhood, during which period she attracted and married her young clergyman; in middle life, however, she lapsed into a solid sourness, and it may be guessed that her husband was thankful that she chose to haunt Pemberley, rather than to disturb his own communion with his flowers.

Mrs. Clarke had no children living, and she doted on her sister's.

Her curiosity to see Lydia's daughters was great, for she was very sure they would be wanting in comparison to Jane, and in her partizanship she disliked them, even before their arrival.

Their mother had been her companion-sister in girlhood, but now she disesteemed her as a lost being and loved her not.

Mrs. Clarke had a weak understanding that her disappointments in life, fancied and otherwise, had not improved.

She considered that her husband had spirit for nothing but to attend to his herbaceous borders; and she resented that her income, though adequate to her needs, was contemptible in comparison with that of her sister Darcy.

Mrs. Clarke had always been used to feel inferior to her sisters, Jane and Elizabeth; and seeing them happily settled in prosperous marriages, with rich and loving husbands, and healthy families of children raised no very charitable feelings in her.

Jealousy and ill-temper were the beginning and the end of Mrs. Clarke, but her pinched features were spread with a smile as she stood to greet the visitors.

"So! This is Betty, and this is Cloe. Let me guess which is which. You are the tallest, my dear—I suppose you are the youngest?"

“Quite wrong, my dear aunt; I am Bettina,” said Miss Wickham, curtseying slightly and turning her back on her Aunt Kitty to gaze upon Mrs. Darcy, who regarded her with a quizzical expression.

“Your Aunt Kitty only says that, my dear, because in our family the youngest was the tallest—your mother, that was. And how is sister Lydia?”

“Oh! Very poorly, but that’s always the way with Mama. She complains from morning until night about her nerves, but we swear that nothing ails her, really.”

“How like my own poor mother that sounds,” said Mrs. Darcy thoughtfully. “You do not remember your Grandmother Bennet, do you, my dears?”

“No; Grandpapa Bennet never invited us to Longbourn, you know,” said Miss Wickham candidly.

The other ladies were reduced to an awkward silence, but Miss Wickham continued, “But ’tis no matter.

Mama always says he is a bitter old man, and I dare say he is, a widower living in that great house.

La! I should think he would like to see his grandchildren round him, to give him some comfort, but that’s the way it always is with such old gentlemen. ”

“My father always liked a retired life,” said Mrs. Darcy reprovingly.

“He has a great interest in books. And he is grown too old to travel, which is to be regretted, for otherwise we would surely see him and my sister Mary at Christmas. Perhaps she may be induced to leave him and come here for a rest, later on.”

“Oh, does she visit?” asked Miss Wickham. “I thought that her late husband was a clerk.”

Mrs. Darcy was surprised. “My sister Mary did marry an attorney’s clerk, a family connection. He was a most respectable man, who died quite young; and since then she has kept house for my father.”

“Oh, then you don’t consider her as too low on the scale to be admitted into the best circles? That is very good of you,” said Miss Wickham with a disagreeable little laugh.

“My sister is a very learned lady,” said Mrs. Darcy, coldly, “very fond of study.”

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“Oh, then, she must be charming, I am sure, if she is a great reader. I always say that great readers are the most charming people of all.”

“Do you like to read?” asked Mrs. Darcy, in some surprise.

“Oh, la, la, no, not me; I would rather do anything than put my nose in a book; but Cloe, there, is different. I do believe she would rather read than ride or dance or talk to gentlemen or anything. She is quite a blue-stocking.”

Seeing Cloe blush, Mrs. Darcy kindly said, “You must spend as much time in the library as you like, while you are here. It is a very fine one.”

“Thank you, Aunt—that would be a great privilege. And—”

“Well? What else would you like to see and do at Pemberley?”

“Please, we passed a gallery of pictures.”

“That is my father’s collection,” said Jane eagerly.

“Oh, he does have so many beauties. Some of the loveliest family portraits you ever saw—Romney painted my grandmother, you know, and Lawrence did my mother. It is very like and so pretty. Quite her lovely expression and dark eyes. Oh, you must see all the pictures, and copy some if you like. Do you draw?”

“A little.”

“Then, we will have good times together, if you like to draw. My drawing-master comes twice a week, and you can join in the lessons. Have you had much instruction?”

“No, but I should dearly like it.” Cloe’s eyes brightened.

“Would you care to come too, Miss Wickham?” asked Jane politely. “If you don’t draw, there are other things—I read French and Italian with the nicest lady.”

“I cannot speak for my younger sister, she may still require the services of a governess,” said Miss Wickham, “but I am out and have been so, these two seasons; and would scorn to be running all day to a governess, like a school girl.”

“That answers the question of whether the Miss Wickhams are out,” said Mrs. Darcy, slyly. “We had hoped to introduce you both to society, when Jane has her ball, and when she is presented at Court, but since you are so long out, Miss Wickham, perhaps Cloe will lead the set with Jane.”

Miss Wickham flushed angrily. “I did not mean—I am sure I am as much a young lady as Cloe and have never yet been to Court,” she said resentfully.

“There is time to think about all these things, for we do not go to London until after Christmas,” said Mrs. Darcy. “In the meantime we must think what else my nieces might enjoy. Do you ride, Miss Wickham?”

“I do dearly love riding,” cried she, at the same moment as Cloe said, “We have never ridden.”

“I’ll thank you to speak for yourself, Sister; I have ridden often and had lessons in the park when we were living at York.

That was after we were at Darlington, but my father has been at Newcastle all this year, and I have had no riding.

But the master at York said I had a noble seat on a horse and was coming on finely," said Miss Wickham.

"Don't you remember, Cloe, how he would not even accept payment for the lessons… " She stopped.

"You are very welcome to ride all you like while you are here," said Mrs. Darcy cordially, "as you are such a proficient. And perhaps Miss Cloe would care to learn."

"Oh! Thank you," she answered, "but to say the truth, I look forward to the lessons in French and Italian, more."

"Do you?" said Jane. "That is surprising."

"Miss Cloe is a blue-stocking," sneered Mrs. Clarke.

"Oh, no, that I am not," said Cloe. "But—if I could speak Italian as well as French, I might be able to obtain a situation as a governess one day and maintain myself. There are so many of us, you know, that we must think about such things."

"A governess! In this family!" exclaimed Mrs. Clarke, shocked. "What ever will Lady Catherine de Bourgh say!"

"Aunt Catherine need have nothing to say," said Mrs. Darcy dryly, "for once. I think Miss Cloe is being very sensible. Are you to be a governess too, Miss Wickham?"

"A governess! Heaven forbid! To put one's self utterly beyond the possibility of ever having any position in society! I do not know how you can say such a thing before

company, Cloe. For shame. It must be only a mad whim."

"You can hardly think that, Sister, when you know as well as I do that we have no fortune and must seek our livings hereafter. That is why I shall be grateful for any lessons that may better enable me to do it."

"But a governess—It is hardly respectable," said Miss Wickham, casting up her eyes. "Surely we need not despair yet, at our ages, of making our fortune in marriage."

Mrs. Darcy laughed. "I am quite sure that both my nieces will do that, so pretty as you are. Now, do pour out the tea, Jane, so we may be finished and dressed before the gentlemen come in."

Fitzwilliam had spent the day with the local hunt—out in the field with the dogs and the horses—while Mr. Darcy and Henry consulted with Dr. Clarke upon parish business, so they first saw the young ladies as the party was assembling for dinner.

Fitzwilliam's usually stolid, inexpressive face brightened at the sight of Miss Wickham, who was looking very handsome, having inveigled the French maid into completely re-arranging her hair.

He did not say much but attached himself to her side, while she regarded him with complacency.

In a remarkably short time, she succeeded in drawing him out more than any other girl had done; and what was his parents' amazement to see him leaning back at ease in his chair and addressing her as follows:

"We found in the spinney near the gardener's cottage—the fox crossed in front of us—had an hour's good work all over the Park—ran into him near the stream—my friend Farley hallooed, the blockhead, and the fox was off.

We had a time of it in Pemberley woods, I can tell you, there was some snow in there, that slowed us considerable—but we got to the waterfall, where my friend Smith nearly fell in, a very near thing—but the pace wound down after that, and the hounds brought the fox to ground in a rabbit-warren.

A brave fox: the finest black bob–tailed vixen you ever saw. ”

“A vixen! Really!” was Miss Wickham’s reply.

While Fitzwilliam relived his day’s sport, and Miss Wickham listened with flattering interest, Henry politely questioned Cloe, receiving at first only shy answers, but she soon was drawn into his spirited conversation with his sister and forgot to feel conscious that the elder Darcys were regarding her.

“My sister tells me you are an eager scholar, Cousin,” he said, turning to her with a smile.

“Now, Henry! I never said such a thing. You know I never did.”

“Well then you said something uncommonly like it, my dear Jane. How else would I have received the impression that Miss Cloe prefers books to balls?”

“I do not know that I do,” she said shyly. “I have never been to a ball.”

“Never been to a ball! Poor Miss Cloe. An unhappy state of things but soon to be altered. I hope your opportunities for reading have not been so limited as those for dancing?”

Cloe had never been spoken to by a gentleman in such a way as Henry’s arch, teasing tone, but she was charmed, though she did not quite know how to reply. “I am afraid so. There were not many books at home,” said she.

“Had you a governess? Did you go to school?” asked Jane.

“Jane, do not be so inquisitive,” said Mrs. Darcy. “Your cousin does not know what to answer.”

“Oh, thank you, I do, Aunt Darcy, and I don’t mind a bit,” said Cloe. “We had no governess, and my mother was too busy with the children to teach us, but when my father was quartered at Darlington, for three years, we went to a dame school, nearby.”

“Your sister attended the same institution, did she?” asked Henry, looking at Miss Wickham, whose dark head and rosy cheek were inclined confidentially toward Fitzwilliam.

“What are you saying, Cloe? Do I hear my name?”

“We are talking of school, Bettina.”

“Oh! How horrid schools are, you cannot conceive. I longed for London and masters to teach me the arts and graces as a girl, for though I flatter myself I have many of them naturally, such lessons could only have added lustre. However, Papa thought it would not answer. I fancy he was embarrassed for the funds: a captain in the Army, retired on half pay, does not have much, you know, and it is of no use to pretend that we could afford such fal-lals. It is a sad thing to be a poor girl. But poor as I am, there is a refinement about me, and I could not bear that common school for very long, I can tell you. Confinement is abhorrent to me. I am a wild creature, Mr. Fitzwilliam, and must flutter my wings.”

“So I should imagine, my dear Miss Wickham.”

“Yes: I feel quite ‘in city pent’ whenever anyone tries to contain or trammel me in

any such situation as that. I long for the wild free country. Riding is the thing for me. It is quite my passion."

"I should take you for a horsewoman. You would appear magnificent upon the right steed."

"I am told that I do."

"I wonder if you would care to ride with me tomorrow? It is Wednesday; I do not hunt on Wednesday. The last bits of snow will have melted by noon. You will be quite comfortable. There is a chestnut mare in my father's stables that would just suit."

"Oh, for a gallop in that beautiful park! Can there be any greater pleasure in the world?"

"You must ride my own mare, indeed, Miss Wickham," said Jane politely, since the chestnut was hers. "Estrella is a sweet little animal, and I very seldom have as much time to take her out as I should, I am so much occupied."

"You must have a great many lessons to prepare," observed Cloe.

"My sister is a busy girl, indeed," said Henry, "like most modern young ladies. There are not only her lessons, drawing, music, and languages, but she has her hours set aside for reading, for work, and for visiting the people round here. Have I forgot anything? You do not paint upon china, to be sure, but it is the only accomplishment you want."

"Do not tease me before company, Henry," said Jane, smiling at him.

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“I should not think that it is necessary for a lady to be so very much occupied,” said Miss Wickham languidly. “I never am, and I am quite as modern a young lady as Jane, I believe.”

“Of course, Cousin Jane is right to be busy,” cried Cloe, “it is wrong not to want to improve yourself; and it is fine to have many pursuits.”

“I must occupy my time somehow,” said Jane with a laugh, “and my lessons are useful and pleasant. I should not like to dawdle about doing nothing as some ladies do.”

“I did not mean that a lady should do nothing,” said Miss Wickham. “That would not be very attractive. But to perpetually be a schoolgirl—faugh!”

“I am sure the time will come when Jane has no time for lessons,” said Henry fondly, “she will be married, and then she will have something else to think of. But you were telling us of the studies of your youth, now so long past, Cousin Cloe?”

“Oh! That is soon told. I was glad when my father’s regiment moved from Darlington to York; there was no school near our new quarters, but there was a circulating library, and when I had a few pence, I could borrow a book, though that was not very often, for I went out to service.”

“Sister! How can you tell such a thing!” cried Miss Wickham, falling back in her chair with real horror.

“A niece of mine, in service,” said Mr. Darcy gravely. “I should like to hear about

that."

"Oh, it was not anything remarkable. I was sewing-girl to a fine lady, that is all," said Cloe in some embarrassment. "I could earn something, in that way, for clothes for myself and my sisters, and sometimes there was a little more—for books."

"I thought your mother received an allowance," said Mr. Darcy gravely. "It should have kept her family from such need. How old were you when you did this service?"

"From the time I was thirteen until we removed to Newcastle, last year. Then I was offered to become a regular maidservant, but my mother would not hear of it."

"I should think not—the shame," said Miss Wickham, with a toss of her head.

Cloe was silent, her face scarlet. Henry observed her with compassion but did not speak, and after a moment she bent her head and ran out of the room in confusion.

"Oh, Mr. Darcy," said his wife, with compunction, "you have distressed her."

"I would not, for the world," he began, much disturbed.

"Miss Wickham, perhaps you will go after her, and make her understand that we meant no harm," said Henry.

"I certainly shall not. My sister is a ninny. Everyone knows my father and my mother have no economy and never had a cross penny to bless themselves with. She need not act as if it had only just been found out."

"Let me go to her," said Jane.

"Yes, do," said Henry, gratefully, and she left the room.

Miss Wickham turned to Fitzwilliam with eager attention, and in a few moments the two younger ladies appeared, their arms around each other's waists. If Cloe had been crying, it had not hurt her looks; her delicate complexion was unmarred, and the shine of her eyes was becoming.

Henry moved to her side and considerately began talking of the language lessons in which he and Jane took such delight. Cloe could read but not speak French, and Italian was beyond her.

"It is such a pretty language," said Jane, "and a knowledge of it improves one's singing—or, rather, one's understanding of music, for I am no singer."

"My sister is being unjustifiably modest; her voice is not a large one, but it is sweet," said Henry.

Cloe expressed an eager wish to hear her, and Jane was making her musical promises, when dinner was announced.

Henry gallantly led Cloe and Jane in the procession, following his parents, Miss Wickham, and Fitzwilliam, while Dr. Clarke, who had accepted an invitation to dine at Pemberley, tardily brought up the rear with his wife.

That lady did not cease complaining to him audibly until they were all seated.

"If you did not waste so much time in the garden, William, but spent more time in the drawing-room, as you should and ought, you would benefit from the society of your betters and not be such a rough old thing. You cut a very poor figure, that you do, by the side of real gentlemen, like Darcy, and you think nothing of shaming me before everybody with your lateness. That is why we are obliged to walk last, even behind the young people."

“He who goes last on Earth, is first in Heaven,” he found spirit to murmur, though nobody else heard this but his wife.

“Well! That is very fine talking, and the way you end everything, by putting on your pulpit-hat,” she retorted, discomfited.

When Cloe entered the grand dining room, the glittering profusion of plate on the long table, the beautiful old wooden wainscotting, and the dignified dark portraits gazing down from the walls, so struck her that she halted for a moment in the doorway, in surprise.

“What a beautiful room! I have never seen such a one before.”

“It is a fine dining-room, seventeenth century, and one of the oldest in the house,” said Mrs. Darcy, pleased. “This table was built specially for the room’s peculiar shape, and you see the ornaments that Mr. Darcy’s father brought back from his world tour, 1790 I believe that was.”

“My dear, you know as much about the house after your five and twenty years’ residence, as the old housekeeper used to do. You must not overwhelm the Miss Wickhams,” said Mr. Darcy fondly.

“Oh, I declare, I can never hear too much about such elegant things,” said Miss Wickham. “I shall tire you by asking about them perpetually. I only hope I shall have a room like this for my own one day.”

No one answered this speech, though Fitzwilliam looked much struck by it.

They sat down to table, and Dr. Clarke, though the quietest of the party, was the first to speak.

“My dear young ladies, it is almost a pity you are here at this season,” he said, “for the gardens are nothing to see. But in spring and summer, it is a very different story. I am not ashamed of my own little garden at Lambton Parsonage—”

“I should think you are not, Brother, people come from all over the country to see it,” interposed Mrs. Darcy. He nodded gratefully at her and continued.

“I do have some very choice pears and peaches trained against the wall—and my borders in spring are very well worth seeing; the hollyhocks and delphiniums put on quite a show, and there are two quite beautiful lilacs, one violet, one white, but it is nothing to Pemberley. The rose gardens here! Well!” He stopped, dreamily.

“Dr. Clarke is a rosarian,” said Elizabeth kindly. “He takes especial care of our walled rose-garden and would be quite jealous, I believe, if the gardeners tried to interfere.”

“Oh! I hope I would not be jealous,” said Dr. Clarke, “not jealous, that would be a sin. But roses are so very delicate. They require more than common care. I am devoted to Flora, you will perceive.”

“Yes, I do believe you care more about them than anything,” said his wife disagreeably, and he lapsed into his ordinary silence.

Fitzwilliam began to talk about fox-hunting again, and before the berry-pies were brought in, Miss Wickham was treated to a great deal of information about the merits of his five and a half couple of hounds, the musculature of their legs, the wetness of their noses, and their ability to give tongue.

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On the following morning, the Miss Wickhams began their lessons.

Cloe read Italian with Jane for several hours, and in the afternoon, as it was a clear and sunny day, Jane and Henry showed her the woods, the maze, and the conservatory.

If their ramble did not convey much solid information to her, at least it had the merit of perfecting their friendship.

Miss Wickham had her riding lesson with Fitzwilliam, but they were not seen by any one else until four o'clock, when they came in for tea with flushed faces, not saying very much.

Mr. Darcy came in from seeing his agent and had changed his boots and was crossing to his library when his wife stopped him. "I should like to speak to you, Mr. Darcy," said she.

"I thought so; is it about your niece? Come into the library, my dear, and we shall be quite undisturbed."

He seated himself at his desk in the long room with its curious white plaster moulding, carved in the seventeenth century and one of the wonders of Pemberley. The late afternoon sun slanted through the diamond-paned windows and lighted up the old, golden-bound volumes.

"Well, what is it? It is not like you to be at a loss for words. Has that baggage, Betty or Bettina or however she calls herself, turned out a second Lydia and run off with

Fitzwilliam?”

In spite of her anxiety, Mrs. Darcy laughed. “That is so exactly what I fear may happen. Really, Mr. Darcy, I do not like her. From observation, I can see that she is certainly very vulgar and very likely without principles. I fear she means mischief.”

“You are decided in your opinions, Elizabeth. But your condemnations are not so extensive as to include the younger sister.”

“Oh, no! Cloe Wickham seems to be everything she should be. I like her not being afraid to work. She is a good little thing and clever, too, I suspect.”

“And a fit wife for Henry? Have you got that far?”

“Mr. Darcy! How can you? They have not known each other two days.”

“But he is taken with her.”

“I have never seen him so interested in a young lady before,” she confessed.

“Then both our lads are in danger.”

They looked at each other soberly.

“I begin to fear it was ill-considered,” said Elizabeth, “bringing my nieces here, and since it was all my own wish, I have nobody to blame for it. Oh! What a pity. How much lighter my spirits would be if only I could blame you.”

“Well, and what do you want to do, my dear? Send them off?”

“Oh, no! That would be too unkind. I think that Cloe, at any rate, will profit from her

lessons here, and her desire to be a governess is so laudable I cannot put obstacles in her way. She will be a real help to her mother. And Jane will so enjoy her company, in the gaieties to come."

"Yes, and the boy is going. He will be in York before Ember-week; that is the thirteenth of December."

"Very true. Henry is safe enough. But Fitzwilliam—that Bettina is a vixen. And her manners! I fear it is a case of courtesy being cumbersome to those that know it not—and with such a father and mother, how should she? Bettina is exactly like Lydia—no, worse, for she has more craft about her than poor heedless Lydia ever had. It is like her father's craft.

Oh, dear, it is horrible to have such suspicions, but I am afraid she is determined to turn Fitzwilliam's head entirely. "

"There is some safety," her husband observed, "in that her methods are so obvious."

"I do not agree with you at all. Fitzwilliam does not see through them."

"I perceive, then, that this is all leading up to a request that I have a word with our eldest son."

"How nice that I do not even have to ask you. Yes, I would wish it. He may listen to you, where he will not to anyone else. He respects you so."

Mr. Darcy's lips curled in diversion, but he only said, "I will do it, my dear; I only hope it may produce the desired result."

Mr. Darcy spoke to his son at breakfast. Fitzwilliam was up early, for he meant to take the train to a race-meeting, and Miss Wickham was so annoyed to learn that her

charms were not sufficient to fix him to her side for the duration of her visit that she made no effort to come down to an early breakfast. Only Mr. Darcy therefore joined his son, and as they helped themselves to chocolate, honey, bread, and cold meat from the sideboard, Fitzwilliam cheerfully opened the conversation.

“Good morning, sir. I’m off to Newmarket this morning, to see a man—early start, you see. Train is a fine invention; only I’m afraid if they ever run it through here, it will disturb the fox coverts.”

“Of course, if the railway ever approached here, the track would have to be concealed, not to ruin the prospect,” said Mr. Darcy impatiently, “but, Fitzwilliam, there is something I wish to say to you this morning. You are getting along well with your cousins—find them pleasant, do you?”

“Certainly sir, certainly. I am not the man to neglect my own relations, even if their station in life is inferior to my own.”

“An elevated sentiment. And the elder girl—you like her, do you?”

“I should be telling an untruth if I said otherwise, sir. I think she is the handsomest girl that ever was seen, and the best natured. Do you know that she took a spill yesterday that was absolutely my own fault, and when I helped her up she only laughed. That is what I call a good spirit, in a woman.”

Mr. Darcy had heard enough. “Fitzwilliam, I must not forbear to say what is my duty. You must not think of Miss Wickham.”

Fitzwilliam looked mutinous but said nothing.

“My reasons for saying this are few, but they are good. First, I cannot approve of cousin matches. They are not absolutely proscribed by the laws against

consanguinity, but they are generally unhealthy and to be discouraged. However, even if her blood were no objection, the girl's family is more disgraceful than you, perhaps, are aware. "

"They are my mother's family," said Fitzwilliam resentfully.

"Unfortunately, that is true, and we have paid for the fact," said Darcy dryly.

"Mr. Wickham has always been totally without principle and has now nothing to look forward to but the last stages of a drunken decline, I comprehend—he is a most revolting and degraded object, and his wife, I fear, is hardly more respectable. We have supported them these twenty years and more, you know. You could not want such as they for your parents-in-law, I think."

"No; certainly not; but hang it, I would not marry them. And I am not marrying anyone at present, for that matter."

"I am glad to hear it, but sometimes, you know, a preference can lead farther than you, perhaps, at your time of life, may realize."

"Oh, damn it, I am not one to be caught. The fox is clever, but more he that catches him, ha? No, no, wedlock is a padlock, as they say, and I have no thought of it, sir."

"Pardon me, but you should think of it, long and seriously. You are four and twenty. Too early, perhaps, to settle; but your means make it highly eligible. I should wish my sons to marry well and wisely, and be happy, as I have been, in marriage."

"Well, but, sir, you chose for yourself. Surely I may be trusted to do the same."

"There is something to that, and your mother and I have no wish to ally you to an heiress or anyone you could not truly care for. Where there is one fortune, that is

surely sufficient; purposely seeking for a rich marriage is hardly decent. But I would hope that you, choosing for yourself, would select a gentlewoman, one brought up so as to be a suitable mistress of Pemberley one day, and everything that your mother is. This, I am convinced, is not the case with Miss Wickham."

"Such a rout," muttered Fitzwilliam. "I hope I can be pleasant to my cousin without being suspected of such designs."

"Certainly. I am glad to hear that you have none. But Fitzwilliam, I would be gratified if you would give me your word in this matter."

"My word? Oh, dash it, yes."

"Very good. I know you do not wish to marry where it would displease me and grieve your mother, by choosing a young woman whom you could not respect, who would not be a fit lady of this house, whose education is scanty, and whose manners are imperfect. You have not been brought up to that. You are our eldest son, but remember well that although you are to be master of Pemberley one day, there are bequests that may or may not go along with it, by my desire, and you are advised to keep this in mind. The word 'disinherit' surely never need be spoken between us. Do you understand?"

"By Gad, yes, I do, very well, I'll swear however much you like."

"That is not necessary. But I do want your promise that you will make no proposals for your cousin, without our consent."

"No, no such thing. Though I do think it is a pity, so handsome as she is, and as jolly as any girl I ever met."

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The family party that gathered at Pemberley each Christmas had naturally grown larger with the years; but the increased number did not induce Elizabeth to anticipate the festivities the more.

“I always said I was an unsociable creature,” she told Mr. Darcy, as she sat in her dressing-room on a bright but cold December morning.

A light etching of snow was crusting the brown fields, and the trees were hung with ice.

“I would rather walk in the fields than sit in the warm house, being civil to my relations.”

“You like your walks. So do I, especially when I am with you. But, consider, Elizabeth, how very cold it is! We have had to have fires in the stables the last three nights.”

“So you turn aside talk about my family with talk about the animals,” said Elizabeth playfully.

Mr. Darcy smiled. “Is it so very bad? But you want to tell me more about the prospect of the festivities of the season, and I will listen.”

“Well, my love, to say the truth, the idea of so many guests oppresses me.”

“That is not much like your rational self, to be sure, Elizabeth. It is more like my unsociable self. However, there will be one number less, at least—Henry leaves

tomorrow and does not return for a fortnight, the day before Christmas. That will thin your feared crowds."

Elizabeth turned from the mirror and laid down her silver hairbrush. "But Henry is the most sensible person in this house, besides ourselves, naturally. I am using modest words to say immodest things—but it is true, when he departs, he takes with him most of the sense at Pemberley."

"It does not strike me for the first time," observed Darcy, "that you have preference for your younger son over your elder."

"I should not like it to appear so. But truly, there is something so amiable about him, coupled with quickness of mind—I do find Henry bewitching."

"And Fitzwilliam dull."

Elizabeth sighed. "It is not dullness I object to in Fitzwilliam—one can be good, and truthful, and virtuous, even if not clever, but I so often fear he is not what he should be. Think of his attachment to Miss Wickham. It is most decided, and it shows a want of delicacy, even of rectitude, that I find most painful."

"I did speak to him."

"I know; and I hope it had its effect. If he does not heed you, he will be absolutely ruined."

"That is a strong speech, Elizabeth."

"Perhaps—but at least it had the happy effect of turning my thoughts from my Christmas guests."

“Well, let us hear who is coming that is so very dreadful.”

“Everyone who has any claim on us, by virtue of relationship by blood or by marriage.”

“Oh, come! I daresay your father will not make the trip at this time of year?”

“No, he is too infirm and does not wish to be travelling. I fear he is declining; Mary writes me word. There cannot be much to hope. She has been very dutiful and will not leave him even for a holiday. I wish I could see them both.”

“We must visit them, in the spring.”

“Yes; that we must. But they will not be here at Christmas, you see, nor anybody else that I really want—such as Bingley and my sister Jane.”

“So far you are only telling me about who is not coming. At this rate the house will be empty. Well, and what keeps the Bingleys away?”

“Why, you must know, they are having company, too, as all the world does at Christmas that is not company themselves—the Gardiners go to them, and Bingley’s sister, and some friends of Jeremy’s.”

“Jeremy! There, Elizabeth, is what will make you less discontented with your own children.”

“Mr. Darcy, I am not at all discontented, you know very well. But it certainly is better to have three children who may be troublesome now and then but are really most satisfying, than one insufferable, spoilt puppy. I am so sorry for my dear sister when I think of Jeremy. She and Bingley—so loving as they are, and with such excellent understanding—but affection blinds reason, I suppose. It is a pity.”

“True. I never see young Jeremy without wishing to kick him. But it seems that I am not to see him, this season. I cannot say I am sorry. Well, Elizabeth: I am still waiting for you to name the fearful list of who is coming to Pemberley.”

“What think you of the Collinses?”

“Our acquaintance with them has been of long enough duration for you to be tolerably aware of my opinion. I have endured your Cousin Collins quite every Christmas for this last quarter of a century. Only tell me, are all the young Collinses coming too?”

“No; only Mr. Collins and Charlotte. There is no occasion for inviting all the children and grandchildren. But there’s one mercy, they do not arrive until after Christmas Day, for Mr. Collins must preach his sermon in Hunsford.

You will delight in him, I know, as much as ever—I am sure you will tell me, as you always do, to beware the man of one book or one idea. That is certainly Mr. Collins.”

“But, Elizabeth, you will be pleased to see your old friend.”

“I cannot tell,” Elizabeth hesitated. “I am afraid that Charlotte is one who has not improved with her years.”

“She never was handsome, and time cannot be expected to have altered that, but you do not refer to her looks. Yet you can hardly complain of her temper, for Mrs. Collins was always a sensible, amiable woman.”

“To be sure, so she was, but I think she is less now. I have lived long enough to observe that when people are thwarted for too great an extent of time, their natures often grow sour, and that may be the case with dear Charlotte.”

“Thwarted? But surely she is satisfied with her marriage.”

“Oh, yes. If Mr. Collins is a piece of absurdity, Charlotte knew it when she made her choice, and she dotes on her fine family of children.”

“Where, then, is the source of the bitterness?”

“I should not say such a thing, but to you,” said Elizabeth, “only I cannot help it, for I feel it. The good Collinses have added half-a-dozen children to their household, yet that house is as small as it ever was. Mr. Collins is my father’s next heir in the entail, but his enduring dream, of inheriting Longbourn, has not come to pass, and in short, the disappointment is keenly felt.

My father still commits the dreadful crime of living, and Mr. Collins has had many years to consider that a gentleman without an estate is like a pudding without suet. He is unhappy and makes Charlotte so.”

“I am concerned to think it, my dear, and wonder if you are unjust. The Collinses have never struck me as designing people.”

“It is just what can never be shown to the daughter of the very person they desire to see in his grave. They must inherit Longbourn, but there is nothing they can do to hasten it short of hanging poor Papa, and until it does fall to them, they must live, cooped up in their inadequate house, in the considerable shadow of their esteemed patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. No wonder they like to visit here at this season, to escape their prison and hate us at close hand.”

“It is well that we can oblige them by having them here,” replied Mr. Darcy, “though I should think it too painful a topic to afford you much amusement. I am surprised that Lady Catherine has not enlarged their house for them.”

“Oh, the more crowded they are, the more satisfaction she has in her solitary grandeur, by comparison. And since her daughter’s death, I believe she has felt herself rather neglected, except for attentions from the good Collinses.

But I will not say a word against Lady Catherine.

She must be getting old at last, poor soul, if it is possible to conceive such a thing. ”

“She must be seventy at least. I am sure she has not changed an atom; age itself could dare make no inroads on Lady Catherine. But we will be able to judge for ourselves, I suppose, as she accompanies Mr. and Mrs. Collins.”

“Yes; and I am glad that at least one of your relations will be here, though it is Lady Catherine; for it consoles me for the intrusions of mine.”

“I have often thought,” observed Mr. Darcy, “that she is more intolerable than the whole dozen or so of them together.”

“You see, I have made you as spiteful as myself. Just in good time for the holiday. Oh! What a Christmas it will be at Pemberley, with the girls coming out. Mr. Darcy, we must make another trip to town, to see about the decorations. Jane has had her gown from London this long time, but I should like to see that my nieces are properly dressed, as well. The dressmaker ought to be able to finish some white gowns in time, but we will have to drive as far as Derby to get proper slippers…”

“Why, Elizabeth, how unlike you to choose me as your confidante about matters of finery—though perhaps with three girls to bring out, it is understandable. But you have not half finished telling me about the party, and I should much rather hear about that. It is a pity that the Gardiners have promised to go to Swanfield instead of to us.”

“Yes, I am sorry for it. So kind and amiable as they are, they would make things go

pleasantly, if anyone could. Your sister, dear Georgiana, or General Fitzwilliam, would have a similar soothing effect, at least on my spirits if not on the ball itself, but they are not to be had."

"Georgiana continues to recover well, I trust?"

"Oh, yes. Lord Neville wrote so kindly, and I have had a note from her as well, now she is able to write, but you know, a confinement at forty, even where there is a fine family of children already, is a very serious matter, and it will take some time for her to recover her strength. No, we must do without dear Lady Neville this season."

"She will not be well enough to go to London, either, I suppose."

"I should imagine not."

"And General Fitzwilliam is still in India. I wish he would retire and come home; I miss my dear old cousin. He will have grown as hoary as myself—hoarier, with the Indian sun, and he is the older of us two. Dear fellow!"

"And he has never married," said Elizabeth thoughtfully. "I suppose he never will, now."

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“No; he will burn himself to death in that climate. He seems to like it, though.”

“Do you remember the bronze elephant gongs he brought the boys on his last visit home—they played with them until I thought I would lose my hearing. How happy they were! I do wish he would come again.”

“Well, he will not be here this Christmas. But we may still have the blessing of quite as many guests about us as can be desired. Well, Elizabeth, it seems that you will have your wish for a lively family party at Pemberley.”

A week before Christmas, the numbers at Pemberley were still small. The ladies sat working in Elizabeth’s sitting room, rather dully, and were grateful, at the end of a long afternoon, to discern, as something to talk about, the appearance of a carriage coming through the park and along the sweep.

“Who can it be, Mama?” asked Jane. “That is not Lady Catherine’s coach.”

“No; I do not expect her yet. Mr. Collins has still his Christmas duties to perform, and she condescendingly refuses to stir without him. It cannot be the party from Kent.”

Restless from a day spent sewing, when she preferred walking or riding, Bettina cast aside her work and stretched her long figure, craning her neck to see down the drive.

“I believe that is a hired carriage, ma’am,” she said, with interest.

“A lady is getting out, Mama, only I don’t recognize her.”

“Do sit down, my dear,” said Elizabeth, meaning that both girls should sit.

Mrs. Clarke promptly rose to her feet, her sewing still in hand. “That cannot be Sister Mary,” said she, “she would never hire a chaise. Is it—can it be? I do declare, it is Sister Lydia!”

“Never our Mama,” exclaimed Bettina and Cloe, neither very successful at concealing the horror in their voices.

Mrs. Darcy said nothing, but it struck her inwardly, with a shock, what unpleasantness Mr. Darcy, as well as herself, would inevitably have to suffer from Lydia’s visit.

“Oh, Sister Lydia!” exclaimed Mrs. Clarke. “How dare she to come here, without being bid? And where shall we put her? Not the Blue Room. She does not deserve it. You will want that room for someone in Lady Catherine’s retinue, certainly.”

“We will settle all that later, Kitty,” said Elizabeth in rather a stifled voice.

Mrs. Wickham was announced, and before the servant had finished speaking her name, she was in the room with her bandboxes and parcels, the many-coloured ribbons on her bonnet atremble, talking incessantly so that the room nearly reverberated from the noise.

Planting herself directly in front of Mrs. Darcy, she stopped short of throwing herself in her arms.

“Oh Lizzy! Dearest, dearest Sister! I could not prevent myself, indeed I could not. I was starving for a peep at my darling daughter and must needs jump into a carriage, to share in some of the Christmas-tide merry-making. I knew how my girls would be missing me.”

Cloe found her voice first. “Indeed, Mama, how can you leave the children at Christmas? And Papa—surely that was not kind, by Papa, to leave him alone?”

“Why, that’s the very thing. Papa has gone to York with his friend Bird for Christmas revels in the old quarters, and they took the little ones.

Never thinking of anything but his own pleasures, and me as forlorn as possible!

But I am not one to be left out when there is a good time to be had, am I?

And so, I came along, all in a mad whirl.

Are you all not pleased to see me? You, my sweetest, are, I am sure. ”

“Indeed, yes, Mama,” said Bettina, with no very gracious look. “Happily, Pemberley is so large my aunt can have no objection, otherwise I should think you had done a very rude thing.”

“Rude thing? Oh, my love, you joke. It is all family. We are all family here. Lizzy does not mind.”

Elizabeth controlled herself and only said, “Is that your coach, Lydia? He does not seem to be leaving. Will the horses require accommodation in the stables?”

“Oh, Lord, no! It is only a hired chaise. Have one of your men send them off at once. They have no right to expect favours from your stable men, with the price they have extracted from me. Ruinous, it was. I told him, how dare you ask so much; do you know who I am? That reminds me—it was a matter of fifteen shillings—and I unhappily did not come away with so much. Do you think, Lizzy, you might advance that on my allowance?”

“I shall have to, or see you in debtor’s prison, I collect,” said Mrs. Darcy dryly. “Jane, ring for Sykes, and tell him to take care of it, before the coachman storms up here, demanding his pay.”

“That is right!” said Lydia in satisfaction, turning away. “It is only a trifle, after all. Let us say no more about it. Oh, my dear Betty! How delightful it is to see you in such fine looks! Sure all the gentlemen hereabouts will fall in love with you. Have you made any conquests yet?”

“Mama, do not talk of conquests,” said Cloe, ashamed to look at Mrs. Darcy and Jane. “We are not here for that.”

“Are you not? Well, I hoped I’d taught you better sense, Missy, for it is the first duty of every young lady in poor circumstances to get herself married, and well married.

Do not forget that. Only look at your poor Mama, and then at your Aunt Darcy, and you will see the truth of what I am saying.

Why she looks ten years younger than me, and she is considerable older, though I was married the first. I might have a better appearance if I’d led such an easy life, for it was thought I was the handsomer to begin with, you know. ”

Even Bettina, though not of a sensitive or overdelicate temperament, was embarrassed by her mother’s observations. “Oh, Mama, don’t say such things. Aunt Darcy can’t help having married rich, and I am sure she has been kindness itself to us.”

“Well, and what else should she do, it is only right. You are her own nieces.”

“They are very welcome here,” said Mrs. Darcy, resigned to Lydia’s outrageous speeches. She might have added something about Lydia’s own appearance at

Pemberley being unaccountable, but she looked at Cloe's face and forbore.

"I must confess, Lizzy, I hope especially to see your menfolks," Lydia continued roguishly. "I have not seen them in years; the boys have grown mighty tall, I daresay."

"Fitzwilliam is tall, quite as tall as Mr. Darcy," said Mrs. Clarke, since no one else seemed disposed to answer, "and a handsome young man, I can tell you. Henry is a little small man and not so well to look at as his brother."

"Oh, Aunt Kitty, how can you say that?" said Cloe, provoked beyond endurance.

"Certainly he is not as handsome as Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy the younger—at first, but the better you know him, the more pleasant his countenance becomes. I have had considerable conversation with him, and now I think him very well looking indeed."

"Is that so! Well! It is easy enough to see how things are. I have not seen you so in love with a gentleman before, Cloe; I do assure you, Lizzy, she is not a girl who falls in love often. Take care Mr. Henry knows it, and I daresay it will be a match. Second son of such a house as this, why, that is doing very well. It is just what I hoped."

Cloe's face was turned away in embarrassment, and she could not reply, Jane noticed with concern. Mrs. Darcy would deign to offer no comment, but Mrs. Clarke was bridling with indignation.

"Lydia! How can you suggest such a thing! Mr. Henry could never marry one of our nieces. Why, they have no portion at all, and they are his cousins beside. Such impropriety could never be borne by the family. The Darcy pride would not tolerate it."

"Oh, heavens, Mama, you are mistaken," Bettina put in good-naturedly. "Cloe has no

designs on Mr. Henry Darcy. You let your imagination run away with you. So meek as she is, how can you suspect her of such schemes?"

"Indeed, I think no more should be said upon this subject," said Elizabeth, pulling the cord to summon the servant and request some refreshment for the ladies.

Fitzwilliam came in while the tea was being poured and was presented to his aunt. Lydia's face brightened with flirtatious smiles, exactly as it had when she was a girl, among handsome young officers.

"So! This is your eldest son, Lizzy! I vow, he is even handsomer than his father—you would think it was Mr. Darcy as a young man, in the flesh, coming into the room."

After making some slight civilities Fitzwilliam seated himself as usual beside Miss Wickham, and Lydia beamed.

"I see how it is," she said in a loud whisper to Mrs. Clarke, "I was mistaken—it is not a match with Mr. Henry and poor Cloe that we may expect, it is a grander one. I shall look for my little Betty to be mistress of Pemberley, one fine day, that I will!"

Mrs. Clarke flushed angrily. "Indeed you must not say such things, Lydia. It is quite out of the question. How can you be so foolish, and at your age? Mr. Fitzwilliam could never marry a pauper, and Betty is as indigent a girl as there is in the kingdom and his own cousin for good measure. For shame!"

"Oh Lord! There's no harm in that. I have seen cousins married forever—as wife of a military man, you do see some strange things, people married, and not married, all living together, as happy as possible.

There's nothing to be said against cousins' being married.

The children turn out neither better nor worse than anybody else's, I can assure you, though sometimes feeble and weakly, but my lovely Betty and Mr. Fitz would have very smart, good-looking ones. "

"Hush, Mama, they will hear you!" whispered Cloe, in an agony.

"Well, then, all to the good. It may give him some ideas and hasten on the match. I declare I am within half a minute of asking him his intentions, as is my duty as a mother."

To this awful speech, Cloe could not reply, and Jane, in compassion for her cousin, hastily inquired if Mrs. Wickham would like to be shown her room.

"Oh, very well," she said agreeably, "there is nothing to be gained by sitting here. I have confidence in my Betty's pretty face, to move things forward as quickly as may be. Isn't she handsome, niece?" she demanded, following Jane out of the room.

"Yes, very handsome."

"She looks quite as I did as a girl, just exactly, for a wonder. You would think it was me grown young again."

Lydia's noisy exit from the room distracted Fitzwilliam from an account of his day's hunting, rabbits shot and rabbits missed. "Ah! Your mother goes. She is a very good natured lady, is she not?"

Bettina looked unconvinced but answered, "Oh, she's well enough. Mama does have a fine temper of her own. It is the more remarkable, as Papa has not always been as gentle to her as he might."

"Infamous! I cannot hold with men who don't treat their ladies well. If I had him here

I would tell him so.”

“Would you?”

“Yes, that I would; I always say what I think. I am a blunt straightforward fellow enough, Miss Wickham, and not able to make fine speeches. My brother is the man for that—he is just fit to be a clergyman, but I assure you I am born to something else.”

“I am very glad you are not to be a clergyman, Mr. Fitzwilliam.”

“Are you indeed? You care about what happens to me, then, do you?”

“That would not be a proper sentiment for a young unmarried woman to express, would it?”

“No. I had forgot your modesty, which is perfectly tremendous. But there, that is my cursed bluntness again. My father tried to teach me more elegant manners, and I spent two terms at Oxford, you know; but it hasn’t answered, has it? I am what I am, Miss Bettina, and I make no apology.”

“No, no, I am sure you can have nothing to apologize for,” she said with a simper.

“You like me the way I am, then? I am glad of it. Oh, you smile! Tell me the meaning of that smile, can I cajole you, Miss Bettina? Or do you think I am being very foolish, and making love to you, and all that?”

“Making love is not always foolish.”

Elizabeth could not hear their conversation as she sat on the other side of the fire, but she perfectly caught its tenor, and she rose and invited the other ladies to retire

upstairs and dress for dinner.

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The ensuing days were painful ones for Mrs. Darcy and something not much less for Cloe and Jane.

The ladies were confined to the house by a storm of snow and sleet.

Theirs was not a congenial party, and Mrs. Wickham’s manners were a constant source of irritation.

Comfortable, nay luxurious as a house party at Pemberley must be, even in inclement weather, Mrs. Wickham could never sit still to enjoy the beauty and elegance of her surroundings but must always be in agitation over something.

She fretted about her girls’ toilettes for the ball—feared they could not be completed in time, owing to the snow, which made shopping excursions to Derby, or even Lambton, out of the question; she worried that the guests would never reach Pemberley at all and that there would be an insufficient number of gentlemen to dance and flirt with her daughters.

The ball was by no means her only concern, for whenever she left off talking about it, her alternate occupation was trying to persuade her sister that she, Mrs. Wickham, should be included in the party that would be going to London for the season, after Christmas.

Her wheedling, however, did no good, for Elizabeth never would consent and immediately changed the topic whenever Lydia approached it.

“Oh! Here it is, the twentieth of December, and so much still to be done. I wonder

you are not concerned, Sister. I am afraid no one will come and that there will be nothing for them to eat if they do."

"Then we will have nothing to worry about," said Elizabeth, only half attending.

"Why, to be sure, Jane has all her clothes from London and will look a picture opening the ball, I know, but, dear Sister, only think a moment about my girls. Sure they will disgrace this house, dressed in any old thing. What gown do you wear, Betty, my love?"

"I have told you before, Mama. My aunt has given us both white tarlatans. I do wish I had fresh slippers, however. Those cannot be got now, I dare say."

"Oh, I wish they could, for your sake, my dearest. Never mind, you could not afford real silk shoes anyhow, with dancing slippers only good for one time. At any rate, you'll be handsomer than any one else, so I'm sure no one will notice your slippers aren't made of silk.

And Cloe will look well enough, I dare say. "

"Tell us if you require any thing, my dear cousin," said Jane, gently. "It is a pity that we cannot get to town, but I have more finery than I ever use, and you must borrow any thing that takes your fancy; it is lucky that we are both of a size."

"Very true. How convenient that is," said Lydia jealously. "I only wish Betty could wear your things, too—only she is so tall. It is unlucky, as far as the clothes are concerned; but of course her height is the most elegant one there can be."

"Thank you," Cloe told her cousin, from her heart. "I am very much obliged to you. But I believe my toilette will be complete, thanks to Aunt Darcy's kindness."

“Not mine, however,” Miss Wickham observed. “It is a shame I have no ornaments and will have to dress my hair plain.”

“My dear, surely you can contrive something pretty, like a turban or some feathers in your headdress? Mrs. Darcy’s maid will assist you, I am sure. Else it will be a sad coming out for you.”

“The girls will have all the assistance they require,” said Mrs. Darcy calmly.

Lydia subsided but only for a moment. “But will they have partners enough—that’s the question. Can anybody arrive in this weather? Oh! I am sure my heart will break if the ball has to be cancelled because of it.”

“I do not expect that in the least, my dear Lydia,” said Mrs. Darcy patiently.

“The roads hereabouts are all good, and the neighbouring families that have been invited will have no difficulty in making the journey. And I am sure our guests from farther away will travel safely. The Pilchards—the Venables—the Fieldings—the Collinses—Lady Catherine—they all have excellent carriages, and the storm is really nothing out of the ordinary way.”

“I hope you are right. Oh, and are you engaged, as yet, for any dances, my love?”

“How could I be, Mama,” said Bettina in some annoyance, “when the guests have not arrived yet?”

“I am sure your cousin is engaged. To a lord I make no doubt. Is it not so, my dear?”

“Why, yes, Aunt; there is Lord Frederick; he is an old family connection, my Aunt Lady Neville’s brother.

We are very fond of him," replied Jane patiently, "and he has promised that he will dance with me when I come out. He is to ride over for the ball, and he is so obliging that I know I can speak for his dancing with my cousins, too."

"Well, we must be sure that he does. That is right. Plenty of high bred gentlemen for my girls! Is this Lord Frederick young? What is his estate?"

"He is five or six and twenty, ma'am, but I have no doubt that he is very well off. He has a very good estate just across the border, in Cheshire."

"Oh! Then he is a lucky man. But my girls will not poach upon you, Miss Jane, I have not brought them up to that. No girl of mine will steal your beau."

"He is not my beau, ma'am," said Jane indignantly, "only a very old family friend, as I have said. I have known him all my life. He has often been here when my Aunt Georgiana and her family are visiting."

"Oh—then he is fair game," said Lydia. "Do you hear that, my girls? Well, I can see that I must be on hand as a chaperone to make sure that all turns out right. Do not you think I ought?"

Mrs. Darcy did not gainsay it, for as Lydia was the girls' mother and was actually in the house, there would be no keeping her from the ballroom on the night, and it was useless to try.

She could not conceive of much pleasure from her guests' knowing of this family connection, but she imagined to herself that the crushing of her pride on such a point would no doubt be a good lesson and keep her from over-conceit.

"Now that I no longer dance, I shall watch the young ladies with great pleasure, and when we are at London, it will be quite as good as being presented myself," Lydia

announced.

“Not so hasty, Mama. I did not comprehend that you were to go to London with us,” said Bettina.

“What! Of course I must and shall be there. Such unsteady young folk need us older ones about. Your mother must be on hand. And I can have a place in that great coach, as easy as not.”

“Excuse me, madam,” said Mrs. Darcy, since the subject was broached, “but I do not think there will be room. Our carriage party has been arranged beforehand, you know, and cannot now be changed. If you go to London, it must be at your own expense.”

Lydia could have said a great deal and would have, earlier in her life, but her years of unhappiness with Mr. Wickham, in dealing with creditors and landlords, had taught her some caution, and she knew that whatever she did, she must not offend her rich sister.

So she subsided for the moment, not daring to say more.

Two days before Christmas, warmer weather prevailed; the sun shone; the light casing of ice and snow melted; starlings and finches sang in the sunny brown fields, and very muddy coaches came rolling and jouncing cheerfully along the Pemberley road.

Among the earliest of the arrivals was Henry Darcy, come from being ordained with other young men in his situation, at York, and ready to preach his first sermon at Lambton Church, by gracious consent of Dr. Clarke, who was grateful to escape having to address such a large and distinguished gathering twice on Christmas Day.

The family party greeted Henry warmly and attended church with a pride that perhaps

some might have thought improper in such a place, but it was impossible for the Darcys not to smile upon their son, as his words rang out, clear and sensible.

The morning after his ordeal, he walked out with his sister and Cloe, to talk it all over.

“So kind as my mother and father always are!” he exclaimed. “I was uneasy before I ascended to the pulpit, you may be sure, but when I saw them sitting there, looking so certain that I would do well, I was helped over the hard bits. But I am glad it is over.”

“Nonsense, Henry, there could not have been any hard bits. You are a natural born preacher. Everyone said so. Ever so much finer than poor old Uncle Clarke, who puts one to sleep when he preaches about flowers, and the unfolding of the soul; I have heard him so often that I fall into a doze when he says the word ‘plant.’ But your sermon was something else.”

“Thank you, Jane; but I hope there is not too much of the orator about me. That implies insincerity. Do not you think so, Miss Cloe?”

“No, indeed. And I am sure Jane did not mean to imply such a thing. She only meant that you spoke very eloquently, as you certainly did. You are sure to be a popular preacher.”

“That would be a misfortune, according to my ideas of usefulness—but I daresay I do have something of the noisy trumpet in my nature.”

“Henry wants a compliment, Cloe,” said Jane. “You had better oblige him by paying it.”

“I thought I had,” said Cloe, with a smile. “You should be quite gratified by your own performance. The object of your words is to make the congregation think about being

good, and in that, I am sure you succeeded."

"Kindly said—and kindly meant I am sure. But I think what my sister is hinting is that I may become too fond of the sound of my own voice. However, if yesterday is any example, that is not likely to happen; I was uncomfortable enough when it came to the point, and when I saw so many faces turned up to me, I felt all my unworthiness and my great responsibility and wondered that it should be such a lazy fellow as myself, telling people their duty."

"But preaching is your duty."

"It is a part of it, certainly, but not all. In my father's young days, a clergyman might be content to do no more than to read a sermon aloud on Sunday and divide his services amongst several parishes, taking the livings of them all, but that will not do now.

A clergyman today cannot be a mere fine gentlemen.

There is more thought given to these matters nowadays, or at any rate, more talking about them.

Evangelism is much discussed in the great centers of learning.

But here I am giving you a veritable Collins-sermon.

I told you of my propensities. Perhaps I should take as my text, 'earnestness is best out of sight.'"

"What you say is very true," said Cloe, "but at Pemberley, there can be little work to do—so liberal as your father and mother have been. The model cottages are fine, and I have never seen anybody that looks very poor, hereabouts. I am sure it will be the

same at Manygrove."

"Yes; I could almost wish for a wider sphere. Pleasant parishes like Manygrove do not need my services to the same degree as the poor mining towns. The changes going on in the world, since the Reform Act, have thrown so many people out of work and distressed so many in the north, in regions much closer to this than you may be aware, that I almost do not think it right to be comfortable only five miles from Pemberley, as I shall be. Perhaps I shall look up some work in the coal fields."

"I envy your undertaking," said Cloe earnestly, "I only wish I could do as much." Before she had spoken the words, she blushed to think how they could be construed and wished she could recall them.

"I am sure you can never help doing good, any more than a parson, or a parson's wife," said Henry, with an arch half-smile.

Cloe felt her heart beating, but she said calmly, "As I am to be a governess, I do not expect I will be in a position to do much for the poor—only for spoilt children, I imagine."

"Why, you never know where your mission lies," he said lightly, "either of you two young ladies. Perhaps you will even marry a clergyman—such as myself."

He stopped walking, put his stick in the ground, and looked earnestly at Cloe. She blushed deeply and turned away.

"That won't be my fate," said Jane gaily. "If Aunt Kitty is an example, I cannot admire the lot of a clergyman's wife!"

"I think we may depend on your not turning out much like poor Aunt Kitty, whatever your station," said Henry with a laugh and turned the subject.

“Look, how the holly grows so thickly on this path: wonderful shiny green leaves, and the reddest of berries. Shall we gather some, for decorations? My mother will be pleased. Here is my penknife.”

They industriously fell to work, and the talk became desultory. At length, they looked up to discern a carriage at the top of the ridge, approaching Pemberley.

“There. Now my mother’s apprehension, and my father’s, will be answered. If I mistake not, that is Lady Catherine’s coach, with the Collinses,” said Henry, pulling down a branch.

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Lady Catherine de Bourgh, somewhat impeded by rheumatics, walked with magisterial gravity into the drawing room, attended with deference by Mr. and Mrs. Collins. Mrs. Darcy rose to receive her and was imitated by Mrs. Clarke and Mrs. Wickham, as the usual civilities were exchanged.

Her Ladyship did not bestow much attention on Elizabeth, whom she cordially detested for the lowness of her connections, and she looked past Elizabeth's sisters, quite as if they were not there.

Instead, she seated herself, with great attention to all the details of her own comfort, then stared at Bettina some time and at last inquired who she was.

"It is my niece, Miss Wickham," Elizabeth replied with brevity.

"Niece? Oh, I see. The product of that infamous union between your sister and that scandalous scoundrel—the steward's son. So much to be deplored, I have always said!"

"Madam, perhaps you will wish to moderate your remarks, as you see Mrs. Wickham before you."

"Oh, is it? But I have never held that an evil is any less an evil by being hid. I said that this marriage was disgraceful five and twenty years ago. It is still so today; and I call it extraordinary that you, Mrs. Darcy, can have such people to stay at Pemberley and expect someone of my rank and dignity in life, as well as my age and infirmity, to endure the shock of such an introduction. Am I not right, Mr. Collins?"

“Indeed, Mrs. Darcy,” said Mr. Collins pompously, “I wonder at it myself. That is exactly what I told my dear Charlotte when I found out who was likely to be here. You never do right by countenancing wrong, you know, and so I would say, were I rector of Pemberley. Clarke is altogether too lax. That book of his—the Flowers of Derbyshire —is all very well; but he ought to be attending to the morals of his parishioners. Gardens are fine things, but it is very ridiculous to think about them in the winter, in my opinion. By the by, where is your son Henry? Now that he is ordained, it is really his duty to teach you, his honoured parents, how to behave toward these unworthy relations. They ought never to be noticed by you. I am sure Henry feels with me on this matter. I wish I could have heard his first sermon, but of course I had my own duty to attend to. That is what I will tell him—never to neglect his sermon. Depend upon it, young Mr. Henry needs advice from a clergyman of greater years and experience than himself, and I shall be most happy to serve. I am sure Dr. Clarke has done little toward instructing him—and I am sorry for it. Where is the young gentleman? Not from home, I trust. That would be unfilial, at this season.”

“He is in this house,” said Mrs. Darcy, “or will be when he comes in from the park. When he does, Mr. Collins, it will not be time to teach him his obligations, if you please, for this is to be a party of pleasure.”

“All the more reason,” said Mr. Collins impressively, “why I must take it upon myself to teach Mr. Henry his duty. He is come unto scenes of temptation, with all this gaiety, and it would do well for his brother and sister to hear my words too, and your nieces must be in especial need, brought up as they have been. Everyone starting out in life can benefit from my advice. Many a twig has fallen from the tree for want of a proper word of caution.”

“You will have your opportunity, Mr. Collins, to lecture all the trees in the park, while you are here, if you wish it, but I hope you will wait until after the ball. All the young people are at home. Henry and Jane are out walking with Cloe, I believe, and I

heard Fitzwilliam ride up a little while ago, so you will see him soon."

"There are two of these girls, then?" said Lady Catherine.

"Unfortunate. I hope, Mrs. Darcy, that your sister does not design these girls for your sons. Such a calamity could only result in the ruin of the entire house. Unequal marriages never answer, or misalliances either," and she looked pointedly at Elizabeth.

Lydia lost her head. "Misalliances!" she ejaculated. "I like that! Where there is a fine family of children, you cannot think there is anything wrong with the marriage, and Mrs. Darcy has three good ones, and I have a great many more. Not poor, puny little only children that don't survive!"

This was a hit at Lady Catherine herself, whose only daughter, Anne, had died, while still a young woman, the victim of excessively copious doses of calomel, prescribed by her Ladyship herself.

Lady Catherine's broad face turned red, but before she could answer, Lydia raged on, "My daughter Betty is as beautiful as any girl in the kingdom, and as good, and I should not wonder if she was on the point of becoming engaged to Mr. Fitz, if she should wish it!"

Lady Catherine opened her mouth to reply, and Bettina paled, but neither spoke, for at that moment Mr. Darcy and Fitzwilliam walked into the room. They made their bows in form, while Lady Catherine took breath and began her attack on them both.

"Do you hear, Darcy! What this infamous creature has had the temerity to say, and in your own house!"

"Evidently not," he replied coldly, "as I have only just walked in. And I must

observe, that this to me, by way of a greeting, Aunt Catherine, is quite extraordinary. But you are referring to a lady—?”

“A lady! Not quite that, I think! This person you so unwisely insist upon harbouring—” she indicated Lydia—“has made her plans for your son and means to marry him to her daughter, I tell you.”

“She will be clever if she can achieve that, Aunt. But you need not be afraid. Fitzwilliam has no thought of marriage at the present, have you, my son?”

Fitzwilliam uttered something unintelligible.

“And if he had, I am not sure that consulting you, Lady Catherine, as to its propriety would be needful. In such cases, a man is only obliged to obtain the consent of his own parents.”

“I must take exception, sir,” said Mr. Collins.

“Lady Catherine is the senior member of your immediate family, and as such, it is understandable, nay praiseworthy, that she should show concern for all the affairs of the junior branches. You cannot wonder that she takes a tender interest in the family reputation. And if marriage, a proper marriage, is in question, then I feel I must have something to say about it, for the sacraments fall under a clergyman’s care, and I have long been by way of being man of God to this family, if not in name, then in deed.

When a man, a young man, of considerable means, like Mr. Fitzwilliam, can support a wife, he ought to do it, I say, and so I should advise all such young men.

But again, he must of course consult all his different relations’ wishes in the matter.

When I myself married, it was quite another thing.

I had no one to consult, my honoured father was dead, and I am sure he could not have objected to the amiable lady I then nominated as my wife, but had he been alive, you may be sure every one of his wishes would have guided my own. ”

“I am highly displeased and affronted, Darcy,” said Lady Catherine, “and I do not mind telling you that, if it were not so late in the day, I should turn the coach about and return at once into Kent. But as it is I had much better remain for the ball, however distasteful the duty is to me. I have no pleasure at being at Pemberley, when things are thus disordered.”

“Perhaps Lady Catherine will like to go to her room to rest,” said Mrs. Collins solicitously, “I know I should.”

“Indeed, dear Charlotte, the very thing,” said Mrs. Darcy gratefully.

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Cloe dressed herself carefully for her first ball with some difficulty, as Bettina and the maids had taken up a position in front of the looking-glass, and she could scarcely see around or through them.

In the absence of jewels to display, Bettina was evolving a complicated hair arrangement in which her plaits were sculpted and twined about with a feather headdress lent her by Mrs. Darcy.

The sisters' gowns were both white, but when they at last stood together before the mirror, the maids revolving about them, pulling out their skirts so the material lay smoothly, Cloe felt that no one would take notice of her, when Bettina was by.

Yet she was in remarkably good looks: her white skin shone in the firelight, her light hair was arranged smoothly in bands over the ears, with some small gold flowers taken from the hot-house; and she had the satisfaction of a pair of white-and-gold enamel bracelets lent her by Jane, though a ribbon around her neck was her only other ornamentation.

She appeared a picture of simplicity; yet using similar materials, Bettina had drawn a very different picture indeed.

More statuesque in form, she commanded the eye with her height, bearing, and colouring, more brilliant than her sister's.

Her dark hair was impressive in its ornamentation, and she waved a feathery fan that Fitzwilliam had bestowed upon her, though she laughingly declined to own where it came from.

On the landing the sisters were met by Jane, who advanced, all elegance, her own silk gown more costly than her cousins', with diamond solitaires twinkling in her ears and a headpiece of silk roses.

"Oh! Jane, how lovely you look!" cried Cloe.

"You are the ones who are lovely, and I shall be proud to present my cousins," she replied, kissing them, and they swept downstairs, the two younger girls arm in arm, Bettina pacing behind them, towering over their heads in stately fashion.

The house party was collected in the ballroom already, and carriages were arriving from all the great houses of the neighbourhood.

In spite of Lydia's fear that the weather might keep people away, the guests numbered scarcely less than three score.

The Pemberley ballroom was fully equal to such a gathering, and it looked its most beautiful, with hundreds of wax-candles sparkling in the great crystal chandeliers, the polished floor gleaming in readiness for the dance, and the holly decorations hanging in festoons from the walls, making a most festive Christmas appearance.

Mr. Darcy beamed fondly at his daughter and took her arm as the procession went in.

"It is fairyland," said Cloe, enchanted, to Henry, as he took her arm and they fell into step behind Fitzwilliam and Bettina.

"It is pretty, is it not? I am glad you are pleased; that is what my father so kindly intended. And I like seeing you in such good looks: I am sure I may safely say as much, for you are not one of the young ladies that affects anger upon being complimented."

“To be sure not. I am too happy. Do you know, if I am to be a governess, my recollections of a night like this will be pleasant to me, and I shall be fortunate to have them.”

“Yes—” he said thoughtfully, “but I hope that does not mean you consider your fate as settled. You might marry, you know. People sometimes do.”

“But I am not an heiress,” she replied with a smile, “so it is wisest for me to plan for the day my ordinary life begins again.”

“Cloe, it is not my place to wonder—but is being a governess exactly the lot you should choose for yourself? Or would you choose to be useful in another sphere, say as wife to a useful man?”

“Of course I would rather be that,” she said, casting down her eyes, “anybody would; but I cannot expect such good fortune.”

He said no more, recollecting where he was, but he took her hand as the fiddlers began to strike up for the first dance.

Jane stood by the side of Lord Frederick, the family connection, who was handsome and charming beyond what any family had a right to expect.

With gallant punctiliousness, he had early claimed his right to the first two dances.

“For you have kept me waiting longer than any other partner,” he told her.

“I have been waiting for you to grow up.”

Jane’s cheeks, always pink, went a little pinker. “And are you pleased with the result?” she asked archly.

“No one could be more so,” he returned with admiring sincerity, and they began to dance together, in perfect time.

The older people watched from a row of gilt chairs, with varying expressions of criticism, elation, or spite. The Darcys, beaming on their daughter, looked, and were, some of the most happy and content beings in the room.

“Our Jane is everything she should be,” said Darcy, “you are to be congratulated, Elizabeth, on such a beautiful young woman; she does you credit.”

“There is very little of my merit in her beauty; she resembles me less than she does her Aunt Jane, for which I am thankful, for Jane was always the beauty of the family. Our sons, too—are they not a handsome pair?”

“If looks were virtues, we might be perfectly satisfied with all our children,” was the reply.

But the Darcys could not indulge themselves in parental compliments of longer duration. Lady Catherine leaned over Elizabeth to speak to her nephew.

“Darcy! I must beg that this disgraceful scene be stopped. Cannot these musicians play something other than a valse? It is not proper. Country dances, or minuets, were the mode in my youth. But these valses—with such close embraces, and such swift movement, will cause the dancers to become dangerously feverish, and to swoon, with the very worst consequences that can possibly be.”

“Lady Catherine is quite right,” Mr. Collins agreed, with energy.

“It is the very thing to inflame the passions and to occasion brain fever. I do not like to speak of such things before ladies, but when I see young cousins dancing together in such a fashion, it is my duty, as a clergymen, to remonstrate.”

“Yes, indeed, Mr. Collins, Fitzwilliam and that girl have had four dances together: four, and there is no end to it. People are starting to talk. Something must be done.”

Elizabeth had little desire to do anything to please Lady Catherine, but this was a rare instance of their thinking in concert, for to her discomfiture, as she examined her feelings, she found that they were not very dissimilar from her Ladyship’s.

“Miss Partridge is not dancing,” she said.

“I am very concerned to see it. Let me find Fitzwilliam, and ask him to dance with her.”

But a survey of the ballroom failed to disclose her older son or Miss Wickham, though everyone had seen them only moments before, and Elizabeth finally laid her gloved hand on Cloe’s arm as her partner returned her to the chaperones.

“Have you seen your sister, my dear? I want Fitzwilliam, and last time I saw them they were dancing together.”

“Yes, they were, ma’am. But they cannot be dancing any longer—the first set of dances is over, and I have changed partners, so I suppose Bettina is in a similar situation.”

“No doubt I will see them when the dancers take the floor again,” said Mrs. Darcy.

Henry came over to her. “You want Fitzwilliam, Mama? Perhaps he is in the card-room or the supper-room. And some of the dancers may have stepped into the garden. Shall I look there?”

“Surely no one can be outside at this hour,” objected Mr. Collins. “There is actually ice on the ground, and in thin dancing-clothes it would be most incautious.”

“But some of the gentlemen go outside to smoke.”

“Good heavens! But Fitzwilliam does not smoke.”

“He does; I have seen him do so at the races.”

“Races! Mr. Henry, surely you, a clergyman, never attend race meetings.”

“I have been to one or two in my life; I am very fond of horses, you know, Cousin Collins, though of course I do not bet. But this is not much to the purpose, when my mother is thinking about Fitzwilliam.”

The music began for a schottische, and Elizabeth returned to her seat in despair. Nowhere in the flouncing dancers could she discern her son or his cousin, and as they were two such striking figures, their not being in the room was certain.

In fact, the young couple had stepped out through the garden door to breathe the chilling air, for Bettina scorned fears for her health, and there Fitzwilliam, fired by her bounding spirit, her beauty, and her open pursuit of himself, proposed to her, quite contrary to his father’s commands, and was accepted instantly, indeed almost before he could speak the words.

They returned to the heated ballroom, an engaged couple; and the happy man, who had taken a sufficient number of cups of wine punch to loosen any feeling of restraint, ebulliently stepped up to his father and spoke the tremendous news, conveniently overlooking what would be Mr. Darcy’s likeliest reaction.

“Father, I have proposed to Miss Wickham, and I am glad to say she has accepted me. I know this is not precisely in accordance with your best wishes for my future, but I am sure, when you see how happy we are, you will approve.”

“Great God, Fitzwilliam! That is more than I know! But how can you conceive that this is the place for a discussion of such things? Consider, almost everyone we know in the world is present in this room, and probably ten or twenty of them are listening at this moment. Let us end this. You will come to my study in the morning, if you please, sir, and we will talk then. But I must say, such an application at this time, and in this place, is highly displeasing to me.”

Fitzwilliam tried to say something, but Mr. Darcy continued, “Enough has been said, sir,” and turned away.

Fitzwilliam returned to Bettina. “Well, he was a little taken by surprise, certainly he was surprised, but I think all will be well in the morning,” he told his bride elect, who smiled and simpered and tried to blush.

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Mrs. Darcy saw her husband turn away from their son, and she walked through the dancers, nodding and smiling here and there as she went, until she reached her husband's side and took his arm.

"I see you have found Fitzwilliam. Was all well? I think he had better dance with Miss Partridge, or perhaps Miss Elwood, next."

"My dear, I must speak to you privately for a moment, if you please. Come into the supper room."

They adjourned there, in the hope that the guests would think they were attending to last-minute arrangements for the repast. It was fortunate that the room was empty, except for half a score or so of servants.

These were busy enough laying out the six couple of roast fowl, the twenty pheasants, the baron of beef, the venison pies, gooseberry pies, and plum pudding, and they had no time or inclination to pay the least attention to their master's private conversation with his wife.

"Mrs. Darcy, it is inconsiderate of me to trouble you with this matter tonight, and in the midst of a ball, but you must know it without delay."

"Oh, what is the matter?" she cried.

"Fitzwilliam has proposed to Miss Wickham."

Elizabeth sank into one of the gilt dinner-chairs. "Oh, no! You told me that he

promised, so faithfully!”

“I hardly believe Fitzwilliam knows what it is to promise something faithfully. I am very much disappointed in him. But she will be his wife, unless we can do something about it, and that quickly,” said Mr. Darcy.

“What, what can we do? He is of age; he has proposed, and if the match is broken off, he will be guilty of breach of promise, will he not?” asked Elizabeth.

“Would not that be better than his having such a wife? And perhaps some influence can be brought to bear to prevent such an eventuality. Unfortunately, his obtaining my permission is only a moral, not a legal, obligation. I can hardly justify disinheriting him, because we do not approve of his wife.”

“The scheming creature! This is all her fault. Fitzwilliam never was tempted to behave in such a way before. Oh, what a mistake to have Lydia’s daughters here—how I repent it! She must leave at once,” said Elizabeth emphatically.

“Not, I hope you mean, while the ball is going on.”

“No; certainly not. But in the morning, we must make arrangements for the carriage to take her straight back to Newcastle and Lydia with her. We can say that urgent business called them. Oh, to be rid of them both, would be untold bliss,” Elizabeth said with a sigh.

“And it must be understood that there is no engagement. I will talk to him in the morning—but I have little hope of prevailing, after this. Fitzwilliam is his own master and unfortunately has little more sense when he has had nothing to drink, than when he has.”

“Is this the result of intoxication, then?”

“Who can say? It is immaterial now. The wonder is how we ever came to have such a son, Elizabeth. You, the cleverest woman I know, and I hope I am not deficient, but Fitzwilliam is so intolerably stupid that I can hardly fathom it.”

“Do not say such things in anger, my love. He is able enough; it must be that, as our first child, we spoilt him—first born, first fed you know—and thence comes this lack in him, of consideration, of feeling. But to think of such consequences as this! It is what nobody does think of, when they let their little child have all that it wishes.”

“I do not think it is any of your doing, Elizabeth. Do not blame yourself. Neither of us treated him any differently than we did his brother and sister, and in the event, it is useless to repine.”

“Of course it is, but you know, Darcy,” said Elizabeth thoughtfully, “I think there was different treatment. You doted on Jane; I doted on Henry; and our great, lubberly boy, the least lovable of the three, grew up rough and uncared for.”

“I hope not. And we may be able to do something with him yet. He has not a bad heart, and perhaps there is no real harm in the girl.”

“That, I fear, is too much to hope. Where Fitzwilliam is weak, Miss Wickham is positively pushing, and she was too much for him, in this instance,” said Elizabeth.

“I tremble if it is so,” said Mr. Darcy, “but you have seen more of her than I have. There is no hope, of course, of her parents’ withholding their consent.”

“My dear! You ought not to indulge in pleasantries at such a time. You know it to be impossible. But Cloe! Dreadful. I had forgotten. She is perfectly guiltless; must she be sent off, too?” asked Elizabeth.

“If one sister goes, I should think both must.”

“Oh, dear, does not mischief come in by the pound and go away by the ounce? Henry will be sorry. He has grown so fond of Cloe; and so has Jane, of course,” Elizabeth lamented.

“My dear wife, I trust you are not implying that both our sons have fallen in love with their cousins. That really would be too much,” said Darcy.

“It is too much; but I fear it is so. I have never seen Henry so attentive to a young woman, and Cloe is all she should be, all that I could want in a daughter. Oh! If only this had not happened, we might countenance one cousin-marriage.”

“I don’t think I could. But this is faulty reasoning, Elizabeth. Why should one match of that sort disgust you, and another, exactly like, not be seen in the same light?”

“That is very true,” she said slowly, “and yet there is a difference. Fitzwilliam’s behaviour stamps his match as a disobedient, disobliging one, formed in error, and to be repented of.

My dislike is based on a matter of character.

Cloe is a very different kind of young woman from her sister, who is vulgar, presuming, untamed, like Lydia.

There is nothing in Cloe’s character to make a marriage with her objectionable; barring the degree of affinity, I think Henry could not find a better partner.

And oh! That the first, disgraceful match, should prevent the other from ever becoming a reality!

But Henry would not marry where his brother had already brought such distress upon the family.

Mr. Darcy, shall we send one sister away, or both, or neither?

It is a dreadful dilemma, to be sure, and I don’t in the least know what to do. ”

“We will consider it tomorrow. We have guests to attend to now, Elizabeth, and must be no longer absent.”

“Yes, we have been gone too long. Heavens, what suspicions must Lady Catherine have formed, by this time? That this should happen directly before the eyes of nearly every connection we have in the world! We could not make a more public spectacle, if we had studied for years. I could not have believed it. Well: we must put the best face on it, but I don’t know whether they must be sent packing in the morning, or not. ”

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Elizabeth did not spend many hours in her bed, as the last of the dancers did not tire until five, and then she could not sleep but took counsel of her pillow.

In her agitated, anxious, troubled mind, there arose thoughts of her two sons, who heretofore had shown no inclination for matrimony but were now both deep in the business.

In neither case could she see much prospect of happiness.

She could not decide whether she was more distressed by Fitzwilliam's declared suit or Henry's undeclared one: she did not like her elder son's choice, but in propriety and eligibility it was no worse than that of the younger—better indeed, in one way, for Fitzwilliam could well afford to take a portionless wife, as he was heir of Pemberley.

So she reasoned, but her heart could not follow her thoughts.

She liked and approved of her niece Cloe, a well-principled, modest young woman, eager to improve herself, willing to work in a humble, indeed distasteful profession, rather than contract obligations to any one else.

Cloe was the daughter she wanted, and she was sure Henry cared for her; yet she did not know how far she wished that his suit might prosper.

He had not spoken, and he would not, in honour, aware as he was that there were serious considerations against the match.

Perhaps his father would consent, but it would cause him pain, and Henry would not seek to press his point until the time was right.

And now, if his brother's hasty and imprudent marriage went forth, the time never would be right for Henry: he must consider that his own hopes were at an end, for he would not put his parents through double distress, bringing disgrace and ridicule upon the house.

Convinced as she was that Henry's attachment was sincere—though, in his tender disinclination to distress her, he had never breathed a word of it—Elizabeth was equally certain that Fitzwilliam's love was the fruit of idleness.

It was no new thing for a man of easy temperament and with plenty of leisure to be attracted by a powerfully determined young woman, bent only upon securing him.

She doubted that he had a suspicion of his Bettina's real nature, that she was, as Elizabeth thought, a veritable combination of her parents' worst traits: noisy and vulgar like Lydia, and devious and unprincipled like Mr. Wickham.

Of Miss Wickham's heart, Elizabeth thought very little, though she tried to believe that there might be no real harm in the girl and that her forward and ill-bred manners might be all that made a match with her worse than one with her sister.

Contrary to the usual ways of mothers, it was impossible for Mrs. Darcy to believe that the young woman was really in love with her son.

Where was the attraction? He was no more than ordinarily well-looking; he was not clever and had few of the qualities of conversation and sympathy that a woman would find beguiling, who had not a marked passion for fox-hunting.

But he was heir to Pemberley, a prize for any girl to seek, and Bettina was not the

first girl in the world to try to marry for money.

Mrs. Darcy was not even sure it was fair to condemn her, considering who she was and what she came from.

What future was there for a young woman who did not marry?

If she went out to work, any hope of social and material betterment was irretrievably lost. Women who were forced to such circumstances must be respected, but were far more to be pitied, for the inevitable toil, degradation, and hopelessness involved in their condition.

A married woman might be considered her husband's property, according to law, but in return, her husband was obliged to care for her, and there could be no doubt that every woman of small means would best be advised to marry and marry as well as possible.

Bettina must do what she could for herself, and she had little enough to recommend her—a handsome appearance, high animal spirits, and a healthy regard for her own interest, and that was all.

She had no fortune, and the highest worldly boast she possessed was her tenuous connection with Pemberley.

Her father could give her nothing, and she had not a clever mother to help her arrange matters.

Elizabeth had felt the lack of the same when she was single and had not grown too old to remember how she had envied girls whose mothers could teach them, help them, and allow them to remain modestly apart from delicate matrimonial manoeuvring.

But Elizabeth and her sisters had been far better off than poor Bettina.

Their father had been able to maintain them, after all; even if they had not married, they would hardly have starved.

The Wickhams, however, were a lamentably numerous family, and apart from their abundance of children, they had nothing.

When she thought of this, Elizabeth could almost find it in her heart to retract her hard feelings about Fitzwilliam's engagement and pity her niece.

But there was another side to the question—Mr. Darcy's side.

The pride of the Darcys was undoubted; and although his marriage had softened him much, Darcy could not rejoice in the prospect of this insolvent, indecorous young woman for his daughter.

That she should succeed Elizabeth herself as chatelaine of Pemberley, assume the headship of the Darcy family, and be lady of all the surrounding countryside was a painful prospect.

Was it improper, unjust pride that gave weight to such considerations?

No, decidedly not: for the marriage of Mr. Darcy's heir affected more people than only the young man himself.

Perhaps it was unfair to suppose that Bettina would not be a model of charity, a careful custodian of Pemberley, a fitting steward of the Darcy fortune, but Elizabeth felt the conviction that she was far more likely to be on the side of extravagance, a propensity for gadding about, and a London life.

Contemplating the dilemma in sober sadness, Elizabeth resolved that the engagement, if not totally broken off, must be discouraged.

At the very least, the young people must be made to wait for as long as possible, to see if their affection would be as short lived as it was ill-judged.

It would never do for Miss Wickham to remain at Pemberley and be treated by the family as a daughter-in-law elect.

She must go at once, and Elizabeth contemplated an opening by way of Lydia, to tell her that as they were to leave for London so soon, the house party must be broken up: Mrs. Wickham and her daughter would return to Newcastle, at Mrs. Darcy's own expense.

As for Cloe, Jane would want to claim her companion, but if Miss Wickham could not be got rid of without her sister, then Cloe must go, too.

Mrs. Darcy rose with her mind made up and sat in the breakfast room, toying with her bread and coffee, and appearing, to her husband and guests, more silent and out of spirits than they had hardly ever seen her.

"Are you well, my dear Elizabeth?" asked Mrs. Collins anxiously. "You have not overtired yourself, sitting up late? I am sure you ought not to have come down so early this morning, after a ball."

"I am perfectly well, thank you, Charlotte," said Elizabeth, rousing herself. "I cannot sleep late. It is more pain to do nothing than something."

"I am the same way precisely," said Mr. Collins, "and it is an excellent thing, too. A country clergyman cannot have the late hours that his city brother may be allowed to indulge himself with. There is too much to be done. The farm to attend to—petitions

from one’s neighbours—an infinite amount of business.

I hope you will remember that, Mr. Henry, and not think you can lie in a bed of ease, now you are a clergyman. ”

“I never thought so, indeed, Mr. Collins,” replied Henry.

“That he never has,” said Jane indignantly. “Henry is always up ever so early, and he walks out and does a great deal of writing before breakfast. And Lord Frederick is the same. Are you not, Lord Frederick? Were you not in the garden hours ago?”

“You know I was,” he answered with a smile. “You were kind enough to show me all your favourite plants. I know of nothing more enjoyable than taking a lesson in botany from such a knowledgeable young lady as yourself.”

Jane blushed and turned to Mr. Collins. “No, we are all early risers here. It is only Fitzwilliam, you see, who is the lie-abed. Look now: it is near ten o’clock, and where is he? He is not downstairs yet.”

“Is it ten?” said Elizabeth, surprised. “Fancy, and it is a maxim with him that the sleepy fox has seldom feathered breakfasts. I have heard him say it a hundred times.”

“He ought to be here,” said Mr. Darcy, in some displeasure. “I have a particular wish to talk to him this morning, and he knows it. Sykes—will you send a housemaid to call Mr. Fitzwilliam? He must have gone back to sleep. I cannot comprehend it on such a morning.”

“Oh, Mr. Darcy,” said the manservant, “Mr. Fitzwilliam is not in his chamber at all; when the housemaid went to call him this morning, he was already gone.”

“Gone? What—has he taken his horse out?”

“I couldn’t say, sir. Shall I make inquiries?”

“Fitzwilliam and his early rides,” said Jane, “at least I was unjust in calling him a lie-abed, and on the morning after a ball, too. This is excessive energy, to be sure. And he does not like to miss his breakfast, as a general thing.”

“But he is not the only one missing breakfast,” added Lydia. “Oh! No! There is Lady Catherine and Betty.”

“I hardly think they are together as you have bracketed them, ma’am,” observed Jane, with a smile.

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“No, Lady Catherine ordered breakfast to be brought to her own room today,” said Mrs. Clarke, who always knew such things, through her habitual close questioning of the servants.

“Cook was quite put out, but she would have it so; she says she always does it, the morning after a household is distracted by a ball. I took especial care that all was arranged properly, you may depend upon it. I was glad to spare my sister from such worry. And I believe Lady Catherine found the eggs very fresh.”

“But Betty?” wondered Lydia, looking about vaguely. “Where is she?”

There was a pause, as Mrs. Darcy caught her husband’s eye in alarm, and they both turned to look at Cloe, whose confusion and distress were evident.

“I was asleep when Bettina came to bed,” she faltered, “and I have not seen her this morning. Sometimes after she has been at a ball, or an assembly-dance, at home, she does not sleep at all. I thought she must have gone out for an early walk.”

“Gone out with Fitzwilliam,” said Elizabeth with energy, pushing back her chair.

“Hush, my dear! Calm yourself. They have only gone riding and surely will be back directly,” protested Mr. Darcy.

“I should not have thought that a man and a maid riding about the countryside could be countenanced in a Christian household,” said Mr. Collins gravely, “and I am sorry for it. I fear, Mr. Darcy, you are remiss in your duty. Young ladies under your protection ought to be properly chaperoned, and how Miss Wickham can so forget

herself, I cannot imagine. There has been grievous mismanagement here, depend upon it, and when they come in, I had better have a word with both the young people."

Mr. Darcy had it on his tongue to angrily retort, when Sykes reappeared.

"Sir—the stable man tells me that Mr. Fitzwilliam took out the town chaise and his matched hunters before first light this morning. He told Thomas he was taking the London road and expected to be in town by tomorrow nightfall, and, sir, he had the young lady with him."

There was a dreadful silence, and Mr. Darcy broke it by trying to question the servant farther, but there was no more information to be elicited. It was certain that Fitzwilliam and Bettina were gone and that they were now beyond the power of the fastest horses to retrieve them.

"But there is the train, Mr. Darcy," said Lydia with unexpected presence of mind, "which my daughters took only the other day; sure you could go to town on that. The main line can be got at Manchester, and from there it goes to London in a whirl. You could get there ahead of them and make them marry, could you not?"

This speech, considering Mrs. Wickham's own past history, was dreadful to Elizabeth, who gave her husband one wild, despairing look.

"This too much recalls scenes of the past," he said grimly, "which I prefer not to revive. Indeed, I do not believe that I ought to go. Fitzwilliam is of age, and he has, it seems, taken his own way. No doubt, we will hear from him soon."

"But my Betty! My darling child!" exclaimed Lydia, her hand on her heart.

"She accompanied him of her own volition, in full accordance, I have no doubt, with

your teaching, and whether or not she will become his wife, I have no power to foresee."

There was now a disturbance at the other end of the table, as Cloe grew suddenly very pale and laid her head down upon her arms, as if she might faint.

Everything was done that is usually done in such cases; Jane fetched water, the suffering lady was fanned, and her wrists chafed.

When she was able to stand, Jane, Lydia, and Mrs. Clarke escorted her to her room, to lay her up in lavender, while the others of the Pemberley house party consulted as to what was best to be done.

Mr. and Mrs. Collins withdrew to the drawing-room, to enjoy a thorough contemplation of its ornaments and the family morals, while Lord Frederick, thinking his presence more likely to be burdensome than helpful, made arrangements for an early departure, though considerately assuring Henry that he should return at a moment's notice, if he could be of any use.

Henry joined his parents, who had withdrawn to his mother's room.

"Father, excuse me for presuming to remonstrate with you," said he diffidently, "but I wish you had not said such a thing before that poor girl—that her mother's teachings should have such a result as that. It is an insult to her. No wonder she felt it."

Mr. Darcy was concerned. "I am very sorry, Henry. I would not have done so for the world. I was not thinking; I was provoked, as you certainly can comprehend. Yes, poor girl! You are right. I shall say something to her when she comes downstairs again."

"But can you get no word of them?" asked Elizabeth anxiously.

“They will not hide themselves,” said Darcy. “I cannot believe Fitzwilliam so entirely dead to decency as that. We will have letters as soon as possible, I have every hope.”

Elizabeth passed her hand over her face. “It is so like Lydia—as if that dreadful time has come again. I can hardly credit it.”

Her husband looked at her soberly. “Console yourself, Elizabeth,” he said.

“Probably, Fitzwilliam means nothing so very reprehensible, after all. He knows we disapprove of his choice of wife; he marries privately. Much to be deplored, but there may be nothing left to do but to welcome our new daughter and to try to see the match in the best light.”

“Do you think it will be a match?”

“You know as much as I do.”

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Letters did not reach Pemberley for nearly a week, and when they did arrive, they were not of a sort calculated to bring much comfort. This was Fitzwilliam's:

"I am very sorry, my dear father, for any distress and alarm I have caused you and my mother, but my extreme passion and love for Miss Wickham is such that I must have her.

Therefore I calculated that removing to London was the only way to achieve this aim.

Be assured, that my respect for you would never allow me to marry where you did not approve, and I know your reasons for withholding your permission are good, she being my cousin and of inferior blood.

It can be no harm to take her into my protection, however, as she has no respected name to lose, and I shall care for her and give her as comfortable a home as she will rejoice in having.

Many of the best drawing-rooms in London will be open to us, married or not, as attitudes on such points differ in some circles than at home in the country, and I daresay my Bettina will be satisfied in the distinguished society in which she finds herself.

Heaven knows I can pronounce myself a happy man.

I shall come up to the country when the weather moderates, to see about the hounds.

In the meantime, Thomas knows about their diet, and perhaps Henry will not dislike

giving them some exercise.

I hope I know enough not to insult my mother by bringing my mistress to Pemberley, so you may all be easy on that score.

Hoping you will call on us, however, while you are in town, I remain,

Yours, he is that to me, because—you will smile when you hear—he has agreed to give me five hundred a year, a fine apartment in Half Moon Street, where all the fashionable world is to be met with forever, and my own carriage and some jewels his mother has given him, thinking, as it was, for her future daughter–in–law, which it won't be my fault if I am not.

In the meantime, I have no cause to repent and think it no matter if I am not presented at Court, just now, for there are plenty of fine people who will not be too proud to meet me, and I daresay I shall make my courtesy, some time or other.

And while my Fitz loves me I care for no one else but him and him alone.

I hope you will not cast me off yourself, but remember that my situation is really no different from that of a wife, in all respects, which I may yet be one day, and that no matter what befalls, I shall always be,

Your attached sister,

Bettina"

Cloe, bitterly ashamed as she was of having such a sister, who could not only act as Bettina had done but express herself in such a way, longed to show the letter to no one, but to burn it; however, she felt she owed it to her mother to do otherwise.

Lydia had rendered the feelings of the rest of the house party still more miserable all the week by loudly bewailing her daughter's fate to anybody that would listen.

Lady Catherine would take no notice of her; Mr. Collins lectured her every time she came near; but Cloe felt that, however lamentable her mother's behaviour on the occasion, she ought to know what had befallen her favourite daughter, and how far she was culpable for the result of her teachings.

For these reasons, in the course of a morning when Lydia was keeping to her dressing-room, calling herself too weak and fretful to go downstairs, Cloe placed the letter into her mother's hands.

Lydia, reclining on the sofa, still in her dressing gown though it was past eleven, seized the letter and read it hastily.

"Five hundred a year! Well, that is something like. It will do for her pin money—but I wonder if she is not to pay for her lodgings and carriage out of that? That would be quite a different thing, and I wonder what Mr. Fitz means by it. She must consult a lawyer and have articles and a proper settlement drawn up, that is what. I will write and tell her so this minute. And her clothes—she went with little but what she was standing up in. He will have to buy her everything, all new."

Cloe was accustomed to her mother's violent views and unwise partizanship of Bettina, but this blindness to a daughter's infamy shocked her.

"Mama! You do not consider—you do not realize what this means. Unless they can be made to marry, Bettina is lost—lost to us forever. You will have lost a daughter, I a sister."

"Oh, no, surely not. There is no call for that. Only because they did not stand up before a minister for ten minutes. How can such a thing signify? I came very near not

standing up with your father, and what difference has it made, may I ask? I am very sure Fitzwilliam will keep to her only and she to him, and she is our very own selfsame Betty, with five hundred a year besides. She has done very well. I shall certainly not cast her off but will visit her in London, and I vow I will find her in mighty fine circumstances."

"But, Mama, do you not see that what she has done is a dreadful sin? It is against all the teachings of society, against custom, and against religion. Surely you know that if you countenance this immorality and visit Bettina, no one will ever receive you again."

"Well, and no one receives me any way, my dear," said Lydia comfortably. "I am too old, and too ugly, and too poor; and I don't go into society."

"But no one will receive Betty, either. She will be an outcast all her days. No respectable woman will ever speak to her. Her children will be illegitimate."

"Now, Cloe, don't take on in such a way. Don't you think, when young Fitz sees his pretty firstborn, he won't make an honest woman of Betty and take his high-and-mighty parents by storm? Oh, yes, we will see her at Pemberley yet, that we will."

"I scarcely dare to hope you are right, Mama," said Cloe soberly, "for I believe it to be impossible. The woman whom Fitzwilliam has taken into this disgraceful sort of keeping can never hope to have her situation regularized or have the presumption to aspire to a respectable position here. I believe such things very seldom happen and can see no hope for Bettina at all. And consider, Mama, what will become of her should Fitzwilliam ever tire of her? She will have to seek the protection of another gentleman—she will be a forgotten creature."

"Upon my word, you know a great deal!—a young lady like you should not know the existence of such things. I am sure I did not, when I was your age. But that is what

the world is coming to," said Lydia, with indignation. "I should think you would be a great deal too nice to talk of them."

Cloe, not for the first time in her life, felt all the uselessness of remonstrating with her mother and almost the impertinence of her trying to do so; but there was no one else who might more properly perform this office and prevent Mrs. Wickham from behaving in a way that would, if anything could, worsen the family's disgrace.

A childlike mother is a terrible burden for a daughter, and Cloe was more than ever sensible of it as she attempted to speak firmly and rationally, though her own feelings were agitated.

"I only want to ensure that you comprehend the seriousness of the situation, Mama, else I should certainly think it too dreadful to mention at all. But you must remember that it does concern me: for what Bettina has done must serve to absolutely invalidate all her sisters' chances of ever marrying respectably.

And I am sure of one more thing: that our presence at Pemberley must be inflicting the utmost pain on dear Mr. and Mrs. Darcy, and I will be the cause of this no longer.

Now that we know Bettina's fate and that there is nothing to be done for her, no purpose can be served by our remaining at Pemberley to make our hosts miserable.

Therefore I propose our removing home to Newcastle at once. "

"Leave Pemberley! Have you gone distracted? I have hardly been here a fortnight and have no idea of leaving these three months. It is very right my sister should do her share in helping us, and living so comfortable here is what I can appreciate, if you cannot."

"But my father—have you no wish to go home to him and the children, to console

them for what my sister has done?”

“Pish, my dear, they won’t care about it.

Wickham can shift for himself, he always does; he has the boys to fetch spirits for him, and he cares nothing for my company, I can assure you, for he is out with his friends six out of seven nights in the week, as you know very well.

What should I want him for, or he want me?

Only he might go to town and make Fitz marry Betty, but I know he never will. ”

“No, you are right there. But still, Mama, I am convinced that we are not welcome at Pemberley, and if you do not take steps for our departure, it will be my duty to arrange the matter.”

“You shall do no such thing. The impertinence! Until my Sister Darcy tells me to be gone, here I shall remain, and your duty is to me, your mother, not her. I require you to stay here, so say not another word on the matter. Besides, I have not lost hope that Mr. Henry may be induced to speak to you.”

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“That he never will do, now, if ever he once thought of it,” said Cloe quietly, rising to go back to her room, “and if he so forgot himself, it would be my duty to refuse him. And I think that is quite enough upon that subject. Now, Mama, I will not disobey you; but if you will not permit me to arrange for us to return home, then perhaps you will not object if I should seek a situation of my own.”

“What, never a situation like Betty’s? But you are so violent against such things.”

“No, Mama, how could you think that? You must know that what suits Betty would not be likely to suit me. Have not we been entirely dissimilar in our taste and in our characters, since we were children?—No, I thought of answering an advertisement—of becoming a governess.”

“What, you? But you know nothing, no Italian and music and that. It is a great pity you don’t, to be sure, for such an accomplished young lady might attract the gentlemen.

However, I should hardly like to see a daughter of mine in service, unless perhaps in a Duchess’s household.

That might do, but you have not the qualifications, and otherwise, the thing itself is horrid.

Such a disgrace, I never could hold up my head again or go home to face your father.

Yes, Cloe, I think I should die of shame, if you became a governess. ”

“I hope you would not,” said Cloe soberly, “for it is the only alternative I see open to me. I have been taking lessons of my cousin Jane’s masters, you know, and I am not so ignorant as I was when I first came.

I believe that I am fit to instruct in English, in the use of the globes, and in mathematics, for which I always had a liking; the principles of drawing have been opened to me, my French is improved, and I can dance.

It is not much, to be sure, but I might perhaps teach some very young ladies or be a nursery-governess, if nothing better offers.

You would not really object, Mama? I should earn a little money, enough to keep myself, and there would be that much less for you to worry about.

I might, in time, even be able to send something to you and my father.

Perhaps one day I could succeed well enough to open my own little school. ”

“You! A school! Well, that is fine talking, for a girl not eighteen. You should try to get Mr. Henry to marry you, that is what. A clever girl, like Bettina, would make fast work of his prudishness and scruples, and all that. But there, I have done. You have got this romantic teaching nonsense into your head. It is as great a disgrace as anything I ever heard, and I should think your father will not have anything to do with you ever again, much less your great Pemberley relations, but I am not one to oppose my girls. If you want to throw yourself away and take a dreadful place for housemaid’s wages—for I do not expect you would make more than twenty pounds a year, while there is Betty who has got five hundred—well, then, it is no more than you deserve. ”

Taking this conversation, all in all, as approval, Cloe felt authorized to dispose of herself as she wished, though she remained in some doubt as to whether her mother

could ever be persuaded to quit Pemberley.

She had introduced the suggestion, however, to her mother's querulous mind, and a little more thought brought her to the sense that she owed duties to her aunt and uncle as well as to her mother.

As she was under their roof and meant to open a correspondence seeking a position, while still at Pemberley, and before removing to Newcastle, she lost no time seeking a tête-à-tête with Mrs. Darcy and succeeded as that lady was taking her morning turn about the shrubbery.

It was a bleak January day that made farther walking out undesirable; but there was little snow on the ground, and the first signs of snowdrops were to be seen here and there, despite the cold.

Mrs. Darcy, wrapped in her long fur pelisse, looked pensive as she paced, and Cloe hesitated to disturb her.

But Mrs. Darcy looked up and smiled a good morning.

After exchanging greetings, Cloe began, with resolve, "There is something I wished to say to you, ma'am. I am only sorry to interrupt your walk."

"Not at all; I am glad of the company," said Mrs. Darcy. "There are some in the house to whom I should not like to give up the pleasures of a solitary walk, but you are not in that number. I hope you are not the bringer of bad tidings. They are all we have had lately, it seems."

"No, I do not have it in my power to distress you in that way at the moment, and I hope I never shall. Indeed, my dear Aunt, I hope you will allow me to tell you, how truly sensible I am of your great kindness in retaining me as your guest, after what

my sister has done."

"Say no more about it, Cloe. My son is not blameless in the matter; the fault was on both sides; and your presence at any rate is a pleasure and a comfort to me."

"I have been only too aware," said Cloe, with diffidence, "that at such an unhappy time you must prefer to be as nearly alone with Mr. Darcy as possible and must wish that some of the Christmas guests did not remain at Pemberley quite so long into the new year."

"I mention no names," said Elizabeth, "but to be frank, you speak nothing but the truth. However, let me say again, this does not apply to you, my dear niece, and indeed Mr. Darcy and I both wish very much that you will remain with us and accompany us to town when we go—though the trip must be delayed, and the season will be no occasion for great pleasure, as we once had the right to expect. But I know that Jane will depend on your company, on your being in London with us."

"But, dear Aunt, that is exactly what I believe I ought not to do," replied Cloe. "You see, I must do something for myself, and this is the very best time to begin. Should you be very sorry, Aunt, to have a niece that is a governess?"

"Sorry? Indeed I should. Ashamed, no—I honour you for your resolution, but I am sorry that you think yourself forced to it. Your prospects are not so bad as such a determination implies."

Both were silent for a moment, neither wanting, in all delicacy, to approach near Henry's name.

"If you will forgive me, ma'am, I think they are bad, for I have no fortune, and few respectable young men will incline to marry a woman with such a sister.

And as I have no expectations, I ought to make plans to dispose of myself.

My mother will return to Newcastle, I am sure, when you set out for London, but I do not wish to accompany her.

Home has little attraction for me, and I know better than to think myself necessary to my parents: I have respect but have never thought with them, and I believe my presence is only an irritation.

With so many brothers and sisters, the best help I can render them is to provide for myself, and if I am to have a life of governess-ship, I should wish it to commence at soon as may be.

May I, therefore, with your permission, answer advertisements?

Here you see are two that are in the papers we have received by the London mail.

A gentleman in Surrey—another in Hertfordshire.

I shall write to them both without delay, if I may, and see what sort of reply I receive.

Will not it be the best course? I will do nothing without your advice. ”

Mrs. Darcy looked at her in dismay. “But my dear—this is sudden indeed. I have not a word to say against the prospect, but is it truly necessary, and so soon? We hoped to take you and Jane to London—not for a complete season, the circumstances being what they are, but we do not believe the pleasures of some young people ought to be broken up because of the indiscretions of others. We should like to bring you out, show you a little of the world, before you begin upon such serious labours.”

More than ever, Cloe felt all the worth of her good heart.

“Your kindness,” said she gratefully, “could not be more sincerely felt, but it is impossible to accept. A governess had better not set up for a London fine young lady, and I have no wish to be on the catch for a husband—” she looked down—“none at all. I think it will be best for me to go.”

Elizabeth regarded her keenly for a moment. “If you think so, I will not question your judgment,” she said gently. “What are your wishes? Do you want to make your intentions known, or shall I say nothing?”

“Oh, say nothing, say nothing,” said Cloe quickly. “There may be no answer to these letters after all, and I should dislike being the object of much discussion.”

“It will be as you wish, my dear,” said Mrs. Darcy, and they turned into the main sweep, and back to the house, for the wind was become piercingly cold.

If Cloe wanted to keep her intentions to herself, however, she was out of luck in having Mrs. Wickham for her mother; for Lydia could no more keep such news quiet than she could fly, even considering, as she did, that Cloe’s going out as governess was more disgraceful than her eldest daughter Bettina’s elopement.

At dinner, therefore, she enlivened the meal, at which the entire company was assembled, dull and out of sorts, from the hostess’s uncharacteristic depression, the host’s abstraction, the unusual quietness of the young people, and the inability of the rest to ever say anything of much sense under any conditions at all.

“What do you say, Sister,” cried Lydia, leaning across Mrs. Clarke, “to my Cloe’s going out as governess?

She means to do it, indeed. She has told me this very day that she means to write to two gentlemen about it, a Mr. Barnett and a Mr. Smart, I believe, but I don’t think it will answer, for neither one is a Duke. ”

“I had known of this already,” said Mrs. Darcy quietly, “and as Cloe has made up her mind, I think we ought to oblige her and not discuss the subject.”

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“A governess!” said Lady Catherine, paying no heed, “in this family! Well, that is unfortunate! I cannot contemn the connection more strongly. Still, if it is to be, then surely the girl need not disgrace herself further by answering public advertisements and going off to anybody who asks her. You may be aware that I have always been extremely fortunate in getting young persons placed in desirable situations, and I insist, Miss Wickham, that you put yourself into my hands and make absolutely no move at all until I have been able to make proper inquiries for you.”

Mr. Collins had been fidgeting throughout this speech, preparing to say something, and now he broke in eagerly.

“Forgive me, Lady Catherine, if I commend the kindness and condescension which have always characterized so great a lady as yourself. Who would have thought that a young lady, bent on going out to service for the first time, might immediately attract to herself the goodwill of such a distinguished patroness? You are more fortunate, Miss Cloe Wickham, than you know, more fortunate than any other young lady in the kingdom in your situation has ever been, I believe, in having Lady Catherine de Bourgh take an interest in you. I am qualified, I think, to bestow your thanks where they are due—and also to say that Lady Catherine’s kind offices, which distinguish you so particularly, will not, happily, in this instance, be needed; for by a remarkable coincidence it happens that my wife and I were only talking this matter over the other day, and we have determined that we are in need of a governess ourselves, at our house in Kent.

Our two youngest girls are growing of an age to require such a person; the nursery girl we have does not suit, not having sufficient acquirements for the post; and indeed we had intended to speak to Lady Catherine on this score upon our return to Kent,

had we not, Charlotte, my dear? ”

“It is all very true,” said Mrs. Collins calmly, “but you put Miss Cloe Wickham on the spot. I should be most happy to have her as governess to Catherine and Maria, but she must know it is not a very high position, little more than nursery governess. The girls are only six and eight. Our elder children have been grown up so many years that their governess departed long ago, and the youngest ones do not yet require anything very difficult in the way of accomplishments. Someone kind, and firm, and sensible, who can teach them some writing and French, is all I condition for. Miss Cloe would suit admirably, I think, but she may, with justice, choose a more distinguished situation. She should be allowed to consider it all on her own. We must not importune her.”

“Certainly not, my dear, certainly not; that was never what I was going to do, though if a girl must be a governess she can hardly do better than to remain in her own family—and as I am heir at law to her grandfather, it really is her own family. When the living falls at Longbourn, we shall actually be living in what was her grandfather’s house.

Nothing could be more suitable; and therefore I urge Miss Wickham to close with the offer immediately.

Twenty pounds a year, I think, will be sufficient, there is no call for anything more—with, of course, full eating privileges, which are of incalculable value.

We shall be very glad to allow her to take her all meals with us, even dinner, as she is quite a relation; her position in society will be unaltered, and there is no reason for anyone to think that she will be in a servant’s place.

I am sure we shall have Lady Catherine’s entire approval of a plan so highly estimable. ”

“Indeed, Mr. Collins, you are too kind,” said Cloe, “but I hardly know what to say on the occasion; I hope you will allow me to consider, some little time.”

“Exactly, Miss Wickham, I am glad to see that you hesitate, very glad upon the whole,” put in Lady Catherine, “for I cannot so readily ascertain that you are precisely the right kind of young person to bring up little Catherine and Maria. Do you have a knowledge of Latin? Is your stitchery perfect? If you please, Mr. Collins, I should like to examine the young lady thoroughly, before any offer is made and any irreversible step taken. Nothing can be done in a hurry.”

In truth, Lady Catherine did not like any plan being made which had not been initiated by herself and was angry that it had not occurred to her to think of Cloe for the Collins household.

“Oh, no, Lady Catherine, we should never be hasty in so important a matter,” put in Mr. Collins in an agitated, rushed fashion. “We should never take any step you thought rash or ill-considered. Yes, Miss Wickham, the matter certainly must be further examined and studied.”

Cloe was beginning to say that she had no objection, when Lady Catherine interrupted. “I do not say it is ill-considered. Only that I should wish to know more of the young lady before any decision so momentous can be taken.”

“You have all been staying under the same roof with her for a month,” cried Mrs. Darcy.

“How much more do you need to know? But let us discuss the matter no more at the dinner table. Miss Cloe Wickham is surely qualified to be your governess, Charlotte, as you are perfectly aware, and she ought to have the position if she wishes it, though I dislike her leaving us.”

“My dear, it is a point in which Miss Wickham must make up her own mind,” said Mr. Darcy gently. “And nothing need be settled tonight.”

Henry and Jane had listened with alarm to the discussion; it was the first they had heard of Cloe’s intentions, for talk of her possibly becoming a governess someday had seemed far removed indeed, and Jane, at any rate, had thought little of the future insofar as it pertained to anything beyond her own introduction to the delights of London.

Henry, sitting next to Cloe, said in a low voice, “I did not know you planned to take this step so soon.”

“Yes; I must.”

“And my party—you are to go to London with us,” said Jane anxiously.

“I wish it were in my power. I am afraid it is not.”

“You must not urge her, Jane; she knows what is best,” said Mrs. Darcy. “Mr. Darcy, was the shooting good today? I do not think I have heard you say so.”

“Not bad, my dear; Henry and I got several fine rabbits and could have got more,” he said.

The talk of sport, much livelier when Fitzwilliam was present, faltered after another desultory remark or two, and then Charlotte, with thoughtful concern for her friend Elizabeth’s feelings, started talking of the Collinses’ plans for returning into Kent and the muddiness of the roads, which brought about an animated discussion of the conditions of roads and cart ruts in general, and the dirtiness of the season, a subject of interest to everyone.

Henry was shocked and grieved by Cloe's decision.

Although he was perfectly convinced that Fitzwilliam's elopement with Bettina precluded his right to address her sister, he could not immediately do away with his feelings for her; and though prevented from speaking and bound up in his own distress, he understood after the briefest consideration of the matter that he could not see the woman he loved go into servitude as a nursery-governess in Mr. Collins' house, without some interference.

Accordingly, the next morning, as Cloe set forth early, intending a walk to get herself away from Pemberley as well as to put her two letters into the Lambton post, Henry overtook her on the country road, which was, in truth, considerably dirty.

"I have been hoping to see you this morning," he said. "You are not going to town in this weather?"

"Indeed I am; why not? It does not rain; and as for the mud, I have my pattens on, you see, and my wonderful machine, the umbrella, and am therefore all fitted for the country. Besides, I have letters to take to town, and the walk will agree with me, body and mind."

"Those letters! That is why I want to speak to you, if you will allow me."

"I wish you would not, Cousin. It can only cause pain. I have thought over this matter, as you must be aware, and it is certain that I must take this course; and as Mr. Collins' offer may not be tendered again and may be the most suitable situation open to me, I think it prudent to make inquiries in other quarters. "

"Suitable! No, that I should think not," said Henry. "But I can say nothing against your logic—only one thing, and that is, you would not have to go into such servitude, if you were to marry me."

Henry had hardly been aware himself, that his remarks had been tending toward this conclusion, but having said so much, he felt only relief and gladness that he had done so, and he waited for Cloe's answer, looking at her very earnestly.

"Certainly, I would not," said Cloe, taking a breath, after recovering from her surprise, "but there is no use in talking of such a thing, for I could not marry you even if you asked me. I could not go against the very well-known wishes of my aunt and uncle."

"They have never once said that I must not make proposals to you," said Henry seriously, "and in fact, I know very well that they love you and would accept you as their daughter. Besides, I am of age; I have a competence to enable me to marry, but you know all that. What you may not be aware of is that I care for you with all my heart and can think of nothing that would make me happier than to have you as my wife. And, though it is hardly fit to speak of this in the next breath, I must do so, because I know what your objections will be: and that is, I do not think that we should allow the wickedness of my brother and your sister to ruin our lives and our happiness, as well as their own."

Cloe could hardly speak, from a mixture of joy and anxiety, which showed itself upon her face, despite her best efforts to compose herself.

"Mr. Henry Darcy," said she, after a moment's struggle, "I cannot thank you—thanks are impossible. It pains me, you cannot conceive how much, to have to say that I cannot accept your proposal, but I must not. Even if your parents could be persuaded to agree to your wishes, it would surely be against their own, and I cannot bring your family into ridicule, after all they have done for me and mine. My mother is living on their bounty at this moment—I am dependent myself—it would be in every degree indelicate and wrong. I am very sorry, but you are young and will soon forget me, and it is my duty to do the same, painful though it is."

“It is painful—you do admit that?”

She acknowledged it with an inclination of her head, and he took her hand and held it.

“I cannot give you up, my Cloe—I cannot. Please allow me to think, that if things were different—”

She withdrew her hand. “But they are not different, and I cannot see that they ever can change. My sister’s situation will become only more disgraceful—my obligations to your family greater. We must consider this subject closed, and forever. Excuse me, sir, I think I had better go on, alone.”

But he would not suffer her to do so, and they walked to town together, though saying very little.

The few farmers and village people who saw them, if they considered the matter at all, would have thought the two cousins quiet and decorous enough in their demeanour, but Cloe’s heart was in a tumultuous state.

Her exquisite happiness, at being beloved, was combined with inexpressible grief; and the result was that, between joy and wretchedness, she hardly knew how she felt or what she did.

After this meeting, Henry would not importune her again, and in a very few days the offer from the Collinses was repeated, with firmness, and accepted with the same.

No answer came from the posted letters that could interfere with Cloe’s resolution of engaging herself to the Collinses, and in a few days more, not later than the first week in February, Mr. and Mrs. Collins and Lady Catherine departed for Kent in the great lady’s carriage, and with them was the Collinses’ new governess.

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There are times when familiar pleasures become wearisome, though it is always a surprise to good-natured people to find that it can ever be so.

It was with a heavy heart that Mrs. Darcy began her annual preparations for the winter migration to London, the opening of the beautiful house in Portland Square, and the commencement of another social season.

The spectacle of her fellow beings in the drawing-rooms, salons, and ballrooms of the fashionable world was ordinarily meat and drink to her; she delighted in the political conversation of the day, the raillery, the quizzing, the nonsense, the gossip, and the follies, but this winter she almost dreaded the peregrination, especially leaving the peacefulness of Pemberley.

“My father used to say,” she told her husband, “that we live to make sport for our neighbours and to laugh at them in our turn, but I confess that this year, at least, I feel that we would be the laughed-at ones, and I have no taste for it.”

Mr. Darcy was writing in his account book, but he looked up and met his wife’s half-laughing, half-troubled eyes.

“Dearest Elizabeth,” he said affectionately, “we need not go to town, you know.

Only say the word, and we will not. Because we have been delighting the fashionable world with the appearance of their country visitors every winter for a quarter of a century, it does not follow that we must do it forever.

“I have always made but a poor figure in a drawing-room myself. However, many

things may go on in London, without us. The great hostesses will be forced to find other people to invite them; the poor old King may sicken and perhaps die, and we will miss the spectacle of a new young Queen; and then Jane in her eighteenth year will not come out as she ought. But it will not matter to the world, or, what is much more to the purpose, to me. I shall be perfectly happy in the country. There are improvements to the house that can very well be done in this quiet season, and there is another consideration. You may perhaps not like to leave Henry alone in Derbyshire in his first winter's curacy. But it is for you to decide."

"Oh," cried Elizabeth, "you are no help at all, leaving it to me, as the excellent husband I have taught you to be. A good wife, you know, makes a good husband. But I am torn a thousand ways. I confess that even with all the delights of London to which you so feelingly allude, I could take no pleasure in them while we are where reports of Fitzwilliam's behaviour will reach us daily, and there are innumerable kind friends to be very sure that they do and to cunningly savour our reaction.

I know how it will be. The young couple will have been seen at the opera—or Lady So-and-So will receive them—or we will have only just missed them riding in Hyde Park.

Fitzwilliam will visit us alone and talk about her!

—and that will be painful. No, I cannot like it, and even if I could harden myself and recollect that he is not laughed at who laughs at himself first, it is hardly decent to be in such a position.

I used to think I wished to attract the attention of the fashionable world, to be the center of all eyes, but now that I am in a position to achieve such glory, I see that it is not what I want at all or what I could endure. "

"I agree with you perfectly," said her husband, "about London; it is as your favourite,

Cowper, says, ‘God made the country, and man made the town.’ But what about my little Jane? I do not like that she should miss her gaiety, her presentation at Court.”

“I think,” said Elizabeth, considering, “that to introduce a young lady into society in such circumstances is hardly fair. People will be talking about her brother forever; and there could be nothing worse for a girl in her first season than to be so constantly canvassed on such a subject. Perhaps she might have faced it out, with Cloe by her; having a friend, a cousin, would take away the awkwardness—but as it is, perhaps we had better not venture.”

“You might take her to Bath for a time.”

“I—not we? You, who are alive to all the multifarious pleasures of Bath in midwinter? That is chopped logic.”

“Yes—you know I hate Bath of all places. A centre for trifling individuals, on the watch to meet others of their kind. But a trip there might be gay enough for Jane. And if we bring her to London next winter, she will not be nineteen; that is full young enough.”

Elizabeth smiled in relief. “You are always right; it is a rule with me to think so at any rate. I only hope Jane will not be disappointed.”

Whether she was disappointed or not at the loss of her London season, Jane submitted so quietly that her parents suspected that she was talked into bearing the circumstance with philosophy by her brother.

No more than a week later, she was able to be tolerably cheerful, appearing before her mother and aunts with letters in her hand.

Mrs. Darcy was in the sitting room she generally favoured in the mornings, for it

faced east and caught the faint gleams of winter sun.

The colours in this room were pale, light chintzes with berry patterns, and an elegant full-length painting of Lady Neville, beautiful in billowing grey satin, matched the clouds outside the long windows.

Mrs. Clarke and Mrs. Wickham were working while Mrs. Darcy read to them from the latest number of “Pickwick,” of which it is doubtful they heard much, though her spirited style did full justice to it.

“There you are, my dear. I have started ‘Pickwick’ but do not believe I am much beyond the place where we left off last time. Shall I go back a little? Your aunts will not mind.”

“Oh dear, no. I could listen to dear Walter Scott forever,” said Lydia with a great gape, laying down her stitchery.

“It is Dickens, Boz, you know,” said Mrs. Clarke tartly.

“Oh yes, to be sure; he is so coarse. I declare I can hardly work.”

“You can hardly work at any time,” retorted Mrs. Clarke. “That hem is wrong side out on that child’s pinny, and why you think the poor mites need such frippery in winter I do not know.”

“Excuse me, Mama, but if you and Mr. Dickens will wait a little, I have letters,” said Jane. “One from Cloe, and one from Aunt Georgiana.”

“From Lady Neville! What can she want?” exclaimed Lydia.

“I should think you would be more interested in your own daughter,” said Mrs.

Clarke sharply. “If I had any children, I am sure I would always ask after them first. Well, and what does Lady Neville say, my dear?”

Looking at her daughter’s pretty, flushed face, Elizabeth said gently, “Is Cloe well? Do the Collinses suit her?”

“It is hard to tell, Mama,” Jane confessed, handing over the letter.

“You see she writes cheerfully, says that the Collinses have made her as comfortable as possible, considering the smallness of their house. Mrs. Collins is very kind, the little girls are well-behaved, and they do not see Lady Catherine above twice a week. But it must be a very confined life.”

Elizabeth read the letter thoughtfully and passed it to Lydia.

“Yes—I see she does not complain, but it must be hard to be in a small house with Mr. Collins through a whole winter. A man who believes that a pin saved a day is a groat in a year, to direct all one’s activities and teachings!

No pleasure parties, no trips, no visitors, very few books …

Yet we must remember that she is not in want, and we can depend upon Charlotte to see that she is not positively ill-treated.

We might wish her situation otherwise—she deserves better—but it is not a very hard case. ”

Lydia finished reading. “What do you mean, she deserves better? She seems vastly contented, upon my word. Only hear what she says. ‘This house is so small that I must share a room with the two little girls, but they are sweet and docile, and we are quite comfortable together. Happily, there is some freedom in a country rectory of

this sort, for it is really a farmhouse; there are delightful walks round about, and Lady Catherine is far from objecting to my using the paths at Rosings on my half-day off, though in this cold weather it is not enticing.’”

Lydia looked up. “I have never seen Rosings, but you have, Lizzy; is not it a beautiful place? Are the garden walks she speaks of not very fine?”

Jane was surprised to see a colour rise to her mother’s quietly pale face, under her lace cap, making her look quite young.

“It is very grand indeed, of a style more elaborate in its ornamentation than Pemberley,” she said.

“It was at Rosings—I used to meet your father in the walk there,” she murmured, turning to Jane.

“Ah! The place holds memories for you. How lucky Cloe is to be there,” said Lydia.

“Who is to inherit Rosings?” asked Mrs. Clarke. “Since the death of Lady Catherine’s daughter, I always thought that Mr. Darcy must be the next heir, himself. Is it not so?”

“What a fine thing if it was,” said Lydia. “Why then—when Fitzwilliam inherits Pemberley, his younger brother would have Rosings. And with Mr. Henry established there—what amazing luck for his wife! Oh, I always said it was lucky that Cloe is established so near. I am quite in raptures.”

“There is no necessity for that, ma’am,” said Mrs. Darcy, “for Mr. Darcy does not inherit Rosings. It is not entailed, and Lady Catherine has the right to dispose of it as she pleases.”

“She is getting on, indeed,” said Mrs. Clarke thoughtfully, “though to be sure she is very stout. I have always observed that such people do frequently live forever, but even she must go, sooner or later.”

“But it is no concern to us if she does, Sister,” put in Mrs. Darcy hastily, “for I know quite well that she means to leave Rosings to her other nephew, Lord Osmington.”

“Has he not enough fine places of his own, I vow,” said Lydia crossly. “Why should he inherit Rosings?”

“Why indeed? You must know, that the Earl of Osmington was elder brother to Lady Catherine and to Lady Anne Darcy—Mr. Darcy’s mother,” explained Elizabeth patiently.

“He died many years ago, but he had two sons, the present Earl and General Fitzwilliam, who is in India. No doubt Rosings is intended for the General, and he will retire to his seat in due course.”

“An old bachelor like that,” fumed Lydia. “Well! Mr. Henry may get it in the end, after all, when he dies.”

“You are welcome to speculate,” said Elizabeth coldly, turning to Jane. “Well, Jane: do you like to tell us what Georgiana says?”

“Yes, do let us hear Lady Neville’s letter, my dear,” said Mrs. Clarke.

Jane, who had shrunk into her seat, dismayed at the talk of Rosings and Henry, brightened and gave the letter an important little flourish.

“It is an invitation, Mama. A bid to visit dearest Aunt Georgiana, that is all! She calls herself quite well now and says she could do with a bit of company and would like

me to amuse her and play with the children—and only think, they are all going to Buxton! She thinks the waters will be good for her and baby, and the opera is there; we should have such a good time! May I go, Mama? At Buxton, you know, I should not be very far away, if you should want me."

"Why, yes; the very thing, if your father thinks so."

Lydia was struck by her niece's good fortune.

"Well, you are in high luck indeed, to go to a gay place like that! People never took me to such places when I was young, I can assure you, but that is what comes of being Miss Darcy of Pemberley. Well, and what becomes of your London season then, Miss? You ought to be seen by the world. Lizzy, surely you don't mean to let that fine house languish for want of use, all winter long? "

"We do not go to town this year," said Mrs. Darcy firmly, "and we may expect Pemberley to be a dull place indeed, with your children and mine scattered and dispersed. I daresay you will like to go somewhere gayer yourself—perhaps Newcastle."

"Sure Jane will need a chaperone to Buxton? And who fitter than her aunt?"

"You are very kind to make the offer, but we will send her maid with her, of course; and then Georgiana will take care of her."

"For shame, Lydia, cannot you tell that it is time for you to be off?" burst out Mrs. Clarke heatedly. "I am sure you are not wanted here, and you ought to go and look after your other children so they don't turn out like your precious Betty."

"As it happens," said Lydia loftily, "I had already decided to go back to my dear Wickham and little ones; only I don't know what may have befallen him, for he has

sent me nothing in all these weeks to enable me to travel even so far as Manchester, never mind Newcastle; so I do not even know how I can return home. ”

She smiled fetchingly; and although Mrs. Darcy could not return the smile, she replied calmly, “Of course we will pay your fare, Lydia, as you know perfectly well. Here is ten pounds,” she withdrew a bill from her reticule, “I hope that will do. Our coach will take you as far as Derby. Will nine o’clock tomorrow morning suit you? I will tell Thomas.”

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Joyful relief was felt by nearly all in the household when the coach carrying Mrs. Wickham rattled away down the sweep, and quiet descended upon Pemberley.

There was some bustle, indeed, in the ensuing days, with the preparations and then the departure of Jane for Buxton.

Mr. Darcy thereafter spent half his time in overseeing repairs to the house and the rest reading or walking and talking with his wife, occupations for which he never felt he had enough leisure.

Elizabeth, though she might have wished for a more congenial female companion than Mrs. Clarke, still rejoiced in the absence of Mrs. Wickham.

She knew herself fortunate in being always satisfied in her husband’s company and confidence, and frequently her days were enlivened by Henry’s riding over from his parsonage to tell her of his difficulties and experiences and, perhaps, his wishes and hopes.

One very muddy afternoon early in March, a horseman was seen galloping along the ridge from the direction of Lambton, and crossing the stone bridge toward Pemberley, and Elizabeth went so far as to step into the garden.

Mr. Darcy, who had been in his library, joined her, book still in hand.

“That is not Henry; it is from the wrong direction, and he is riding too fast,” she said.

“It looks like Fitzwilliam,” said Darcy, with a keen look. “Yes, it is—I am certain of

it.”

“Fitzwilliam! And alone!” The parents stared at each other and said no more as the sound of rapid hooves came closer and Fitzwilliam, with the same jaunty wave as he used after a day out hunting, thundered past and turned into the stable.

“Yes, my dear Father and Mother,” he said after making his perfunctory bow in the drawing room, “I have come to stay, with your permission, if you will forgive me for giving you no notice. I was happy enough to get out of London and would not go back there for love or money, I can tell you! A horrid hole; no sport but talk, talk, talking, which I never cared for. Standing up on one’s hind legs in a drawing room—that is all.

And nothing is as it was, for Bettina has left me, though to say the truth it is for the best.”

“Left you—has she!” Elizabeth cried in horror.

“Yes, yes. Did I not write? Did not she? Oh, confound it, I cannot think how that did not happen. No: we did not agree, that’s the long and the short of it, and I am happy to be no longer encumbered.

But enough of that. I have invited some friends here.

They will arrive tomorrow. You will not mind, Papa, if we shoot a few birds?

If the coveys are down, we can ride and jump fences in pursuit of a few foxes—either way, I am agreeable; it’s all one.

And we can have comfortable dinners, and so I told them—Pemberley is enough of an inducement to travel a hundred miles, and everyone knows it.

You won’t mind these fellows: it is Lord Farley, to be sure, and my friend Vickers, and then Moles.

He’s a wonder, knows everything there is to know about the horse trade. ”

“Your mother has particularly been enjoying the quiet of the season at Pemberley,” said Mr. Darcy austerely, “and we had not figured to ourselves filling the house with a set of fast sporting men.”

“Oh hang! There’s nothing in that. They won’t trouble you, be out in the field all day, and Farley’s a lord, I tell you, and even Vickers is an Honourable and in the stud-book and all that.

Can’t vouch for Moles, but he’s a quiet fellow enough.

But it’s as you like, yes, perhaps it will be better if they put up at the Fox and Dog at Lambton.

Don’t want them bothering you, Mama. I will tell them when they get here. ”

“But Bettina,” pursued Elizabeth, “you really must sit down, Fitzwilliam, and stop pacing in your boots and telling us about your friends: I must know about Bettina.”

Fitzwilliam looked restless and disinclined to speak.

“You must tell us what has happened to the young lady, Fitzwilliam,” said Darcy, “your cousin.”

“Bless me, so she is! I had forgot.”

Elizabeth lifted up her eyes expressively, and waited.

“She is well,” he said uneasily, “at least she was when I left her.”

“So you left her,” said his father sternly, “I hope not in want. Is she provided for? Do you return to her?”

“No, hang it, I’m damned if I go back to the creature. She’s led me a pretty dance, and I’m not the man to stand for it.”

“Your language has coarsened, Fitzwilliam, in your new mode of life,” said Darcy austerely. “I beg you will remember your mother is present.”

“And Fitzwilliam, even if you have quarrelled, you must not forget your responsibility,” said Elizabeth earnestly. “You have taken Miss Wickham from a respectable home—you cannot leave her to shift for herself. And excuse me, but is there any, any prospect of a child?”

Fitzwilliam turned red. “I know you think me devoid of all feeling, and principle, and all that,” he said sullenly, “and my behaviour I know has not shown me off. But I hope I am not as bad as that. I never said I would marry Bettina; she knew that. You did not like it. That was enough, and I was not inclined to the married state. In short, I never thought seriously of such things, but I assure you it never was my intention to ruin her.”

“Ruin her!” said his father, angrily. “Well, you have done that pretty thoroughly, upon my word, whatever your intentions. Can you deny it, sir?”

Fitzwilliam looked uneasily from his father to his mother. “I, I do not—that is, I was not—oh, it is hard to say.”

Elizabeth astutely regarded her son. “Would it be better,” she inquired compassionately, “if I withdrew? It may be easier for you to speak of such things to

your father, alone."

He looked at her gratefully, and she nodded kindly and withdrew. "I will be in my sitting room. I only condition, Mr. Darcy, that you come and tell me what I am to know of Bettina as soon as may be."

The gentlemen were not closeted long; the story was soon told and soon heard, and by noises going on downstairs, Elizabeth collected that Fitzwilliam had left the house and gone to the stables. Her husband was presently in the room with her.

"I do believe I have got it all out of him, my dear, and a pretty story it is," he said in a tone of emphatic disgust. His face was flushed darker than usual, and Elizabeth looked up at him, alarmed.

"Oh! Do not keep me in suspense. Is Fitzwilliam very much to blame? What has become of that poor girl?"

"Poor girl!" exclaimed Darcy. "She is not to be pitied."

"What do you mean? The gentleman, in such cases, does not suffer as the lady does. His reputation is not spoilt—his prospects not ruined forever. You know very well, Mr. Darcy, that be a woman ever so charitable, and kind, and selfless, as true and as clever as possible, a fall from virtue means, in the eyes of the world, that she is ranked no better than the lowest—how shall I say it?—Winchester goose."

He held up a hand in protest. "Yes—I know all that. And Fitzwilliam does not pretend not to bear culpability. It is too much to hope that he will do a foolish thing only once in his life—but I do not believe he is as much at fault as might be. Elizabeth, how shall I say it? He was not her first seducer."

Elizabeth rose from her seat in indignation.

“Oh! He does not scruple to lay the blame on her frailty alone! When she is helpless, her life spoilt beyond redemption. I could not have believed it. How could he behave so abominably? Not her first seducer, indeed! Why, there never was a whisper of ill repute attaching to poor Bettina’s name before this disgraceful episode. ”

“Can we be quite sure?” asked Darcy. “What do we really know of her life in Newcastle? And her character—were you always perfectly satisfied with that?”

“I admit I did not like the girl,” said Elizabeth slowly.

“I thought her manners vulgar and impertinent, which was not surprising, considering the disadvantages of her home—the wonder was that Cloe should be so superior. But in all this, no one ever breathed that Bettina was not virtuous. How can he say so!”

“Hear me out. He fully accepts blame in being the means by which her unchastity was exposed to the world, which is bad enough. But while her character is now publicly known, its nature was not called into existence through Fitzwilliam’s actions.

She was only clever in concealing her former intrigues, for she certainly had them. ”

“If she was unchaste, he was a fool,” said Elizabeth, with emphasis, “and we have only his word about her!”

“Only listen. I will not tell you proof, but he found her not inexperienced, and she was so eager for the adventure herself—being very sure he would eventually marry her—that she spurred him on to the London journey. There could be no concealment, and so they set up housekeeping.”

“I have not patience to hear of their arrangements. But come: how does this serve to put either of the young people in a reasonable light? They are both to blame, as far as

I can see."

"So far, yes. But as they lived together, he found her extravagant, imprudent, anything but a peaceable companion. She nagged and blamed him continually for not marrying her, but to his credit, though he very soon tired of her and was no longer in love, he had no thought of abandoning her."

"How very kind of him! It is very well Fitzwilliam has gone out riding, for it will be many hours before I can bring myself to look him in the face again, my own son though he is."

"Elizabeth, you are too harsh. You still have not heard all his recitative, if such a thing may be so called."

"Then tell me."

"The details, you know, are not fit, but, Elizabeth, he suspected she had lovers, and then one afternoon he did find her with another gentleman. Her vices are really undoubted, and depend upon it, Fitzwilliam has returned home a wiser, humbler man, for all his bluff manner."

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Elizabeth was not convinced. “If she has other lovers,” she said firmly, “it is because of what he has made her. The immoral life she led with him has lowered her. Whatever her prior experiences, her reputation was intact until Fitzwilliam meddled with it, and who can judge a woman in such a situation, exposed to public censure as she has been? Heaven forbid me from doing it! No, no, I can only pity her; and I do not know how I will countenance him and his sporting friends, here at Pemberley in future.”

“I know,” said Mr. Darcy in a pained manner, “it is very ill-done in him, to bring friends at such a time. In justice, we cannot say which of the young people is more in fault but must treat them equally, whatever the world thinks. It is a pity that their sin is so widely known. It will be a perpetual disgrace. Nothing can be done to wipe it off.”

“Where is she now?”

“I speak of it with reluctance. With her newest lover. You will have to know who it is,” he said.

“Must I? Surely there can be no occasion for my knowing his name. There can hardly be more shock and grief in the matter. It is not Henry at any rate.”

“Almost as bad,” he replied. “It is our nephew, Bingley’s boy. You know he is in London.”

Elizabeth could scarcely credit what she was hearing. “Jeremy! Good God! How can that be? I am bewildered,” said she, putting her hands to her face. “Poor Sister Jane,

and Bingley! It may be good to have company in trouble—but not them. Their only son, too! Oh, how could it happen?”

“It happened because he was there. Being the cousin of both Bettina and Fitzwilliam, he mixed with them and was a frequent visitor of the ménage.”

“I see,” said Elizabeth slowly.

“So, when matters fell out between the young couple, Jeremy took the part of the lady, in a spirit of misguided gallantry. Now he is fully sunk in the business.”

“Do not think,” said Elizabeth, “that your own gallantry is unnoticed and unappreciated by me, in not fixing the blame entirely upon my niece, for seducing her two cousins. Indeed, that is the only satisfaction I have, since I cannot even relieve my feelings by ascribing the entire system by which Bingley and Jane have indulged and spoilt their boy, as resulting in his bad behaviour—for our own far more enlightened and sensible system has only brought about the same end.”

“You must not be distressed,” said Darcy, coming over to her and looking into her eyes earnestly.

“Parents do what they must and what they can; there are so many forces acting in the world that it is not fair to predict results as if people grew to a pattern. Why Henry should be of a superior morality to Fitzwilliam, and as it seems, to his cousin Jeremy also, we cannot guess, but if we do not ascribe it to the winds of chance, we may conclude that it may have something to do with Fitzwilliam’s being our first son and consequently somewhat more indulged than Henry, as Jeremy certainly was.

It may be so, or it may be the disposition of nature.

We shall never know, and we can only rest in the knowledge that we have tried to do

our best—you have, certainly, Elizabeth.

We brought them into the world, nourished them, taught them, but their adult actions must be their own.

Now, I beg you, torment yourself no more upon this subject. You have not done wrong."

"You are always so rational," cried Elizabeth warmly, "but in all this, my comfort must not be the first object. There is that wretched girl, and what is to become of her I do not know. Fitzwilliam seems to have got himself away, but what of my poor nephew? Is he to live in continuance of this shocking crime? Surely, indulgent as the Bingleys are, they will never tolerate such a thing."

"I suppose Bingley must go to town and take his son away," said Darcy with a sigh, "and he may like me to go with him. It is a thing I would particularly wish to avoid. I shall, however, go if asked; Jeremy will in all probability be more tractable than our son."

"Yes, I am sure he will do what his father wishes in the end. But Bettina,—there should be some woman with her. My sister or myself—or her own mother—Nothing seems precisely right, or proper, and the question is worrisome. I cannot remonstrate with Bettina, she would never listen, still less to Jane, and Lydia would be worse than nobody. She would only congratulate her, I do believe."

"Suppose, Elizabeth, I write to Bingley by this day's post and tell him what we have learned.

We can go to town together, and if you would have no objection, we can try to persuade the girl to return here with us, until we can find a suitable situation—a cottage perhaps—I do not know—but her father can by no means support her in an

independent situation, and we have some responsibility in the matter since it was Fitzwilliam's imprudent flight with her that brought it all about.

We can make the offer to her and entreat her to take it.

If she does not, there will be no more we can do. "

"You are very right, and I should be praising you for ever, if only there were not the alloy that you are Fitzwilliam's father," said Elizabeth.

Feeling somewhat cheered, as we always do when we see our course plainly before us, Mr. and Mrs. Darcy repaired to the drawing-room and ordered tea.

It had been drunk, and the letter to Bingley comfortably talked over and even written, when the Darcys and Mrs. Clarke began to notice the emptiness of the tea urn, the darkening of the sky outside the window, and the lateness of the hour—and to wonder why Fitzwilliam did not come in.

"It is late—he cannot be riding at this hour," said Elizabeth, somewhat anxiously, "but I have not heard his horse."

"Do not be concerned," said Darcy, "Fitzwilliam knows what he is about when it comes to horses, if nothing else; and if Exigency has thrown a shoe or anything of that sort, depend on it Fitzwilliam will come trudging home before long, if he does not dine in whatever cottage is nearest. It is not a wet night; and a three-quarter moon will be up presently."

"I cannot be so tranquil as you are," said Elizabeth, "for the world. He does ride so fast—I know his skill, but every horseman does take a fall, and Fitzwilliam may be unguarded because he is in an anxious state. I wish I had not spoken so severely to him."

“You did not, at all, my dear,” said Darcy.

“Shall I make inquiries—perhaps some of the men may be sent out to search,” suggested Mrs. Clarke. “My sister is concerned; shall not I just send to inquire of Thomas?”

Mr. Darcy was just beginning to say that it was not necessary, when the footman who had brought the tea opened the door rapidly, and that same Thomas precipitated himself into the room, his face white, his hair and coat disarrayed.

The gentleman and ladies had only half-risen, when the servant burst out, in an agitated manner, “Sir—please excuse me for coming in so hurried, but it is Mr. Fitzwilliam—his horse has thrown him, sir, and been lamed—a workman, going home through the fields, found him.”

“Where is he now?” said Mr. Darcy, in a calm, businesslike tone, as Mrs. Clarke fell back in a flutter and Elizabeth stood silently by his side.

“In the ha-ha, sir—by the park gate. That’s where he fell; the horse tripped and went over into the ditch. In the ha-ha.”

“Call some of the men, get a lantern, and Mrs. Clarke—no, Thomas, you run and get some of the housemaids to ready some linen and a litter. We will go there at once. Elizabeth: you are not hysterical—you are calm, thank God—Will you have some brandy?”

“No, but perhaps we had better have some for Kitty,” as she supported her sister to the couch, “she is not fainting, but you are light-headed, are you not, my dear?”

“Yes—yes—but I will be all right, never mind me—my nephew—”

“Yes, Thomas, only one moment, tell me: is he badly hurt? What is to be done?”

“Nothing, ma’am, and sir, I am afraid the linen and things aren’t likely to do him much good. He was quite insensible when Cotler found him; and it looks like his neck’s broke.”

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For some time, the life of Fitzwilliam hung so gravely in the balance that the doctors despaired of him, and the Darcys' anxiety was extreme.

Faced with the possible loss of his son, Mr. Darcy regretted his good nature, his love of the country, and what he was willing to think would have grown into better principles than had yet been evident.

Elizabeth, as was only natural, shed tears for her firstborn, for the merry child he had once been, and she was sorry they had not parted without some affectionate words.

But neither she nor her husband were so blinded by their anguish that they could forget Fitzwilliam's faults, a weak head that seemed to have precluded the acquisition of the moral sense they had so carefully tried to instil.

They acknowledged that his failings, if not corrected, were likely to bring unhappiness upon him and his family, again and again, probably, but in spite of all Dr. Clarke could say about branches being cut down, and Mrs. Clarke's philosophizing about Bettina's wickedness receiving its reward, Mr. and Mrs. Darcy did not leave off wishing and longing for their son's recovery with all their hearts.

It was not in Elizabeth's nature to lament excessively, out of proportion for the cause, or to involve others in her misery, and she found, at length, that with so many to support her, she might maintain a tolerable composure and calm.

Jane, her sister, and Bingley were at Pemberley very soon after receiving the news.

Swanfield was but half a day's ride away, and Jane, though placid in general and

even more so in middle age than she had been in youth, was strong in her feelings and deeply anxious to be with her sister.

Being the mother of only one son herself, and that a doted-upon one, and having lost another child, a little girl, many years before, Jane felt great sorrow at what she imagined her sister's feelings to be.

Added to this was her concern over the tidings about Jeremy that had only reached Swanfield the day before the sadder news; it was, then, no wonder Mrs. Bingley's servants could not work fast enough to pack her things for the journey.

Charles Bingley, always rapid in action and concerned for his friend and his sister-in-law, was ready to depart even before his wife, and their Christmas party was effectively broken up.

The Gardiners, a pleasant elderly couple much beloved by both the Bingleys and the Darcys, after tendering all possible offers of help, saw what was really wanted and considerately took themselves home, but Bingley's sister, Mrs. Babcock, had a spirit of activity and interference that would not let her long remain absent from the scene of a tragedy.

To her, the news brought mixed feelings, in which shock over a tragic mishap to so young a man and one connected with herself, however distantly, was mingled with a curious sort of pleasure.

This sprung from her lively jealousy of Elizabeth, which originated in her old desire to have Elizabeth's husband for her own.

These feelings she had suppressed but never entirely overcome, not seeing the justice of making such an effort.

As a young woman, elegant, well-born, and well-educated, Miss Bingley, as she then was, had been convinced that nothing but the appearance of the upstart interloper Elizabeth could have prevented the match between her and Darcy.

Her disappointment was severe and did nothing to render a sharp temper any softer.

It was long before a man as eligible as Mr. Darcy had placed himself in her way again, in fact none ever had; her temper had faded with her beauty, and she was further aggravated by making her home with Bingley and his wife in full and vexatious view of their warm married happiness.

Her sister, Mrs. Hurst, had died of dropsy, and Mr. Hurst of apoplexy; and the sinking of these relations made Miss Bingley feel still more acutely aware of the passing of time.

Where there was trouble, as now was at Pemberley, the Babcocks could not but be there; the hospitality of the house might be uppermost in their minds, but perhaps there was also the possibility, however slight, that if the young man died, he might leave some legacy to old family connections, and then there would be funeral meats.

Added to much scope for needless bustle and interference, there were also the poor Darcys to comfort, and an opportunity to work themselves into their favour, despite all Mrs. Babcock's spiteful feelings.

"What a shock for poor Mrs. Darcy!" she exclaimed. "She will be prostrated, I am sure. Her whole house of cards, quite fallen down."

Mrs. Bingley had not cried over the news of her nephew's accident, but she was very pale, and her lips were held tightly pressed together as she rapidly went over her husband's linens, with her own hands, for the journey.

She looked up in horror. “What do you mean, Caroline—there is something more? What have you heard?”

“Oh, nothing, to be sure, Sister. I could not, you know; there has only been the one messenger. I only meant—so proud has Mrs. Darcy always been, with her house and her fine friends and her airs—to find her son no better than he should be and now perhaps killed into the bargain is very, very sad.”

“Caroline!” exclaimed Mr. Bingley hastily, “do not say such horrible things. Fitzwilliam may not be so badly hurt, after all, and as for his behaviour—please to remember, that our own son has not acted in any way his superior. We must not waste time in such reflections anyway but be off at once.”

“That is right, Charles, and I am quite ready. Your things are in this case, and mine are going downstairs directly,” Mrs. Bingley said firmly. “We must go to Elizabeth and to Darcy as soon as ever we can. So Caroline, goodbye, and we will send you word when we know for ourselves.”

“It won’t be necessary, Jane; you don’t think I would let you go on such a dreadful mission, in such perturbation of mind, without the help and support of those nearest to you? Robert and I are coming, of course.”

Bingley, however displeased, would not gainsay his sister, and Mrs. Bingley, as was her wont, gave her credit for better feelings than she really had, so no argument was made. Bingley’s only stipulation was that Mr. and Mrs. Babcock should be ready in time.

“The carriage is to come around in half an hour—we have not an instant to lose,” was all he said.

“I quite understand. What if the poor sufferer has already departed? Think of his

bereaved parents, tormented by their knowledge that their pride has had such results! They will need me to arrange the funeral, I know. I have experience, with the poor Hursts, that will be invaluable. I know just how such things ought to be done. Fitzwilliam's own horse must walk backwards in the procession—but I forgot; I suppose it has been killed. "

"Don't speak of it, I pray," said Mrs. Bingley, shuddering.

"Yes, for God's sake, Caroline. Only hurry."

"One hour, Bingley, that is all I beg, and positively no more; it won't take that for Robert to choose his waistcoats and I my gowns," she cried, running away.

For a wonder, she and her husband were actually waiting in the hall when the carriage was brought before the door; in truth, there was no force in the world, not being hurried nor her husband's being preoccupied with his wardrobe, that would prevent Mrs. Babcock from seeing the spectacle she figured to herself and which she had longed to witness for the last five and twenty years: that of Mrs. Darcy, humbled and miserable.

Mrs. Babcock found herself disappointed in her expectations.

On reaching Pemberley, the visitors were not greeted by a weeping Mrs. Darcy, falling into their arms with her back hair down.

The lady was sitting with her son, and it was left for others of the party to give the newcomers a kind welcome.

Darcy was really glad to see the Bingleys and quietly gave them an account of Fitzwilliam's condition.

Mrs. Babcock scarcely listened, so busy was she observing the changes in the best Pemberley drawing-room.

“Only think! That is the ormolu clock that Darcy brought back from his tour of the Continent,” she exclaimed. “How old-fashioned it appears now. Yet I remember when you first showed it to me, Darcy,” she said sentimentally.

Darcy did not attend, being turned away, and she, displeased, vented her ill feelings by observations upon the furniture.

“I declare—this room is not at all improved. It has a positively provincial air, beside what one sees in London, in the best circles. The satin upon that sofa—it appears not to have been replenished this ten years. That kind of pale yellow looks worse than anything, dirty. You would think that Mrs. Darcy would have noticed, but of course that cannot be expected now.”

Her brother looked at her expressively. “My dear Sister—I wish you would not speak of such things—while the son of the house lies so ill.”

“Oh, certainly!” she said, and subsided to sit in an ill-natured silence.

Fitzwilliam continued in a most perilous state.

He still lived, but he did not seem able to move, although there was no injury to any part of the body but his neck.

It was very singular, but the medical men assured the Darcys that the paralysis, which seemed profound, might lift at any moment.

Such cases were not unheard-of, though the longer the passage of time, the less likely would be a complete recovery, and the chance of the young man’s dying at any

moment was by far the greater likelihood.

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All that money could do was done. Mrs. Darcy sat with the sufferer for some hours each day, little good though it did, for Fitzwilliam continued perfectly insensible.

After these piteous sittings, it was blessed relief to Elizabeth's feelings to seek her own room and rest in her sister's tender solicitude as a luxury that could not be enough appreciated.

Only then could she endure other company, and she descended to her own drawing-room with some reluctance, knowing what guests were waiting and no doubt tormenting her own family. The Babcocks accosted her at once.

"I hope, Mrs. Darcy, that you will have your mourning as fine as possible and not leave it off for at least six months," Mr. Babcock addressed her earnestly.

"Black lace is thought very handsome, with the newer styles—the fuller skirts, and the wider sleeves, you know, so becoming to a lady no longer quite young. As for jewels—only jet is admissible. You will not be able to wear the Darcy diamonds now."

"Of what are you thinking, my love? Diamonds can always be worn; it is not as if they are coloured jewels," cried his wife.

"But poor Eliza is thinking of something besides her own dress. She is thinking of poor Fitzwilliam. To be sure it is dreadful, that poor young man dying so young. I can hardly bear it."

Mrs. Bingley was distressed. "Please, dear Caroline, how can you talk as if

Fitzwilliam had already left us? It is very unfeeling. Consider my poor sister—consider how you would feel, in like case, and say no more," she implored.

"I can hardly imagine what my sentiments would be on the occasion," said Mrs. Babcock with asperity, "as I am not a mother. But it is always best to face the inevitable—no use pretending—and everybody knows poor Fitzwilliam is as good as dead."

Mrs. Bingley looked inexpressibly pained and pressed her sister's hand.

"It is no matter, Jane," said Elizabeth. "I must grow hardened to the pain, for it is very true that my poor son may not live, and there are comforts all around me—in your kindness and Mr. Bingley's. Indeed there is much to be thankful for."

"I should say so," pursued Mrs. Babcock. "I understand—that is, I have been told—that the young man is in no pain, and it is very lucky that he can feel nothing, for otherwise he would be in awful agony. That must be a relief to your feelings. That his neck was snapped so instantly."

"Caroline! I beg of you!" cried Mr. Bingley. "We should endeavour to console Elizabeth, not dwell upon the dreadfulness of what has happened."

"Oh quite so; very true; we should think not of the accident but of the future, and there is much to contemplate there with pleasure, I am glad to say. Mr. Henry will be heir to Pemberley, and a worthier one there could not be. More prudent than your brother," she nodded approvingly at Henry, "and therefore a better landlord and householder. I am sure the people round about must be glad at how things look likely to fall out."

"Mrs. Babcock," interposed Henry hastily, after a half-look at his mother, "the tenants and everyone here feel for the family's anxiety; we have had visitor after

visitor, people from the cottages and all around, who have known Fitzwilliam all his life, and if you think they do not feel our pain and are not offering their prayers for his life, you are quite mistaken.

Besides, I feel it," he said in a voice that was not quite firm, "my brother's situation, you know; and I must beg you will not refer to it again. "

"Quite so, my love, you put your foot into the thing; you ought to say no more," advised Babcock.

"Sure there are more cheerful topics. Your nephew Jeremy—and where is Jeremy? Gone to town and taken up with the very young woman who has given us all this trouble. Now that is a sort of behaving that could break a mother's heart, but I must say I do admire him for showing some spirit. "

"To think," said his wife, "of our dear Jeremy, being taken in by that woman! Excuse me, I believe she is some relation of yours, but otherwise I should say she must be a very low down, ill-bred sort of person," she finished, turning to Mrs. Darcy.

"She is my niece," said Elizabeth coolly. "I have not much to say in her defence, to be sure, only that a girl in such an unfortunate situation deserves to be spoken of with compassion."

"Ah, that is very well, very well," said Mrs. Babcock, "but what is to be done, may I ask? While Jeremy, who has never had a thought in his head all his life but what is pure and blameless, is being hourly corrupted, I really have no patience to think of it."

"Something is being done, my dear Caroline," said Bingley, his irritation rising, "Darcy and I go to town tomorrow."

“Excuse me, Uncle,” said Henry, “but I wonder if it might not be better arranged. My father has much to attend to here, and I am sure would be only too grateful if you would remain with him and my mother. I should like to propose myself for the mission. Why should I not go and spare you the journey? I will talk to the young couple and bring them back here, if it is to be done.”

“That is a consideration,” said his father. “I believe it is well thought of. To own the truth, I should prefer to remain here—and it can only trouble you, Bingley, to see Jeremy in such a situation.”

“Of course it would,” cried Bingley, “but if my son has been a rascal, I suppose it should fall upon me to remonstrate with him. And why should we expose Henry, a young man, to such a thing?”

Darcy had no fears for his son. “You cannot think Henry would be influenced in the smallest by witnessing such a sin,” he said, “he is a clergyman and prepared to deal with such things, I believe. And I would trust him anywhere.”

“Certainly; I did not mean to suggest anything else. Well, if you are satisfied, then it is Elizabeth who has the best right to decide, I conclude.”

“If Henry would go,” and her eyes appealed to him.

Mrs. Bingley indicated that she, too, would be glad to have her husband spared the journey, and Mrs. Darcy was relieved that both the Bingleys would remain.

“And you must not worry about Jeremy more than can be helped, Sister. Henry will take care of him,” said Mrs. Darcy.

“I really believe he will. Only, Lizzy, I am forgetting your unhappiness and suspense, in my own selfish concern—if only I could say something that could at all relieve

you.”

“You cannot help it, Jane, and your being here is inexpressible pleasure, whatever may happen.”

It was decided that Henry would stay with the Gardiners, who had longed to be of use, while in town; this arrangement brought satisfaction to the minds of all, and so it was settled.

A comfortable dinner of spring lamb and early peas was ate, and the evening that followed was a peaceable one.

After the unvarying nightly report from Fitzwilliam’s room—that he was still lying, an insensible block, but evidently not suffering—the party tacitly, and with some guilty feelings, agreed not to mention the topic any more or to think of it as far as was possible.

It is not to be doubted that Elizabeth’s quiet thoughts stole upstairs to her son now and then, but the others were glad to think of him no more.

Mr. Darcy played at chess with his son, while the others sat placidly and wondered aloud how many days Henry was likely to be gone and who should be invited to sermonize in his place at Manygrove.

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Henry went to London on Monday, observing that he had often heard Cousin Collins say that Saturday is the working day, and Monday the holiday of preachers, but it was not necessary for him to arrange for a substitute to replace him on the Sunday at Manygrove Church, for he was back again no later than Friday, accompanied by his cousin Jeremy but without Bettina Wickham.

Both sets of parents, the Darcys and the Bingleys, no less than the rest of the party, waited eagerly to hear the prodigal's story, and happy was it for Henry's sense of propriety that he did not have to speak, such was his disgust of the subject and so delighted was his cousin to have an interested audience.

Jeremy Bingley was at this time only one and twenty, a fair-haired, altogether well-looking young man, of a taller and more graceful figure than his cousin, much improved by a fine suit he had purchased in town and a French cravat which was the envy of Mr. Babcock.

"I say, you really are quite all the mode, Jeremy," he exclaimed with animation and envy, quite lifted out of his usual languor.

"You are proof of exactly what every young gentleman needs, in addition of course to a tour on the Continent—a season or two of fashionable life in London. Only look at the difference the bon ton has made upon young Mr. Bingley! Your trowsers, sir—who was your tailor? There is not a seam to be seen; all is so smoothly fitted, it is perfection."

"Mr. Perley of Bond Street," said Jeremy, seeming off-handed but really very pleased. "It is the very latest thing—brown breeches—and my cravat, I am glad you

like my cravat."

"For God's sake, Jeremy," said his father angrily, "what is all this talk of your clothes? Who cares about them at such a time? You will have every one thinking you are a puppy. You did not used to mind what you wore in this way. I hope London has not ruined you utterly and made you too nice. But perhaps the less said about it the better, considering how you have been living."

"Please, Jeremy," said his mother earnestly, "you must tell us about poor Bettina. Why did you not bring her? Surely she would wish to quit such a dreadful life?"

"Oh, I never would have come home had I thought there would be such a rout about it," said Jeremy pettishly.

"Her life isn't dreadful at all, if you want to know.

You are all so absolutely buried in the country here that you cannot conceive that Bettina Wickham is a very queen of the fashionable world.

Her beauty, her spirits—an endless number of most eligible people, great swells too, were jealous of me, I would have you know. "

"Nephew, you talk like a fool," said Mr. Darcy heavily. "I hardly thought that anything could hurt Mrs. Darcy and myself more, after what has happened to poor Fitzwilliam, but your absurd and wicked talk has done the business. To the loss of him must be added my loss of esteem for you."

"Well, I hardly know why," faltered Jeremy, slightly shamefaced. "Of course I am sorry about Fitzwilliam, Uncle, and I hope he is likely to improve; but begging your pardon, I have done no more than any man of fashion would—than Fitzwilliam did himself for that matter. Bettina is quite the rage."

“Then she is lost,” said Mrs. Bingley sadly, “my poor sister’s child.”

“No, no, Mama; indeed, she is not. It only shows how country folks know nothing about the world.”

“We know something about morality, at any rate,” said Henry sturdily, “and a woman who behaves so, though she is my cousin, is an unfortunate who will never be admitted to polite society again. We all know that: how can you dare deny it?”

“Well, but I do. Why, the beautiful creature is far more welcome in the highest circles than you are yourself, Cousin, and there is no excuse for your not knowing that, for you have actually seen her. How improved she is by her exposure to great people! Her air, her walk—why, Lord Astley and Tom Spencer himself are wild after her—and as for ladies, the most aristocratic of them won’t turn their backs on Betty, for where she is, is where everything gay is going on, and she is welcome into salons that would make you raise your eyebrows if I told you the names of the hostesses. ”

“Can it truly be so?” asked Mrs. Bingley, wonderingly. “Heaven forbid this should be the reward of such vice!”

“Vice such as hers is seldom given that name in the fashionable world; Jeremy is right enough about that,” said Henry, “and Bettina does look very well—blooming, indeed. Perhaps she will enjoy her present éclat, but what can you say, Jeremy, about her future and, what is more, her immortal soul?”

“Think about your own immortal soul,” suggested Jeremy, “since you are a clergyman. She can mind her own, you may be very sure. Bettina intends to make her name upon the stage, you must know, and with her talent and beauty and all that, her future will assuredly be a brilliant one.”

The thought of their niece’s becoming an actress filled all the family elders with

consternation, and all sensible discourse ceased, with the Babcocks leading the speculation as to what theatres the lady would play at and making delighted predictions of her certain downfall.

Henry said no more, but he sought a private audience with his mother in the course of the next morning, as he felt that she was the person to whom he could most comfortably unburden his mind on this subject.

The other ladies had gone to make some purchases in the village, and Mrs. Darcy was glad to plead nursing duties connected with Fitzwilliam to stay behind, though in truth, with his many attendants, he scarcely required her actual care.

To be alone with her second son, however, was a pleasure and a relief to her, so like-minded and congenial a pair as they always were, and she listened to Henry's revelations with a lively interest.

His visit to London was his theme, and he opened it by saying to Elizabeth, "I have not told you all. I did not think it fit to be a subject of general conversation. It could only be painful to my Uncle and Aunt Bingley, and there are others here who would be only too ready to spread such stories abroad."

Elizabeth indicated that she understood him and begged only that she might not be required to keep any confidence back from his father.

"Not at all," said Henry, "I should wish him to know. And then he can tell as much of the story to Mr. Bingley as he deems right—I would rather not have to decide."

Elizabeth admired her son's delicacy and circumspection and urged him to proceed. He did not hesitate.

"When I arrived in town, I soon found Jeremy and Bettina in lodgings, the same as

Fitzwilliam took, I believe: a handsome apartment in Half Moon Street. They were certainly very comfortable, and as I have said, Bettina looked well. I have never seen her so handsome, nor so well-dressed—though I believe that the elegant wardrobe she now possesses was presented by Jeremy, not my brother."

"I am sure of it," said Elizabeth dryly. "Fitzwilliam probably bought her a horse."

"He did. How did you know?—A fine mare, a sweet mannered grey creature, that she rides every afternoon side-saddle in the Park in a most handsome grey habit, surrounded by gallants. It is said that the Duchess of Kent herself nods at her."

"That cannot be, surely. I understood that Princess Victoria's mama was a model of rectitude," said Mrs. Darcy, vastly entertained in spite of herself.

"Perhaps she does not know who Bettina is. That is the likeliest explanation. Well, the first time I visited the establishment, I saw the couple together, and I thought their boldness hardly to be exceeded. They greeted me with excessive delight, as if their cousin were paying a wedding call upon a contented young pair. I was disconcerted the more when I saw that they showed no symptoms of anxiety about my poor brother; indeed, they had not even curtailed their engagements on that account. They made but one token inquiry about his condition—trusted he did not suffer, and that when he went, they hoped I would not grieve unduly, but be pleased with my new inheritance, a way of talking that was quickly dropped, as you may imagine it received no encouragement on my side. I was convinced that they had no proper feeling at all. They invited me to dinner, but I was embarrassed and declined, pleading a prior engagement with my Uncle Gardiner, but I did arrange to walk out with Jeremy."

"And did you?"

"Yes, if you can call it walking, when it was a mere sauntering from tailor to glove

maker to the shop where a blasted walking-stick was being fashioned for him of Madagascar wood. Excuse my language, Mother. But at length I got him to listen and tried to bring him to a sense of his disgraceful station. He has always admired Fitzwilliam, you know, and thought what was good enough for him would do very well for Jeremy: he had a singular sense of pride at stealing away Fitzwilliam's prize, as he thought, and thus feeling himself the better man. "

"That is extraordinary," said Mrs. Darcy thoughtfully. "How could he feel that, when Fitzwilliam's refusal to marry her brought about their breach—did it not?"

"Yes. Her temper evidently is passionate, and Fitzwilliam could not long bear it. She wanted him to marry her, but she dallied with other young 'bloods' as Jeremy calls them—it was only 'the mode,'—what all the world does. I can hardly blame Fitzwilliam; his indignation was very just."

"Well, go on. Do not be afraid of offending me, Henry. I want to hear everything. Even if I may later devote myself to trying to forget it, I would rather know."

"My dear Mother, I hardly know what particulars are fit for me to relate; yet what you wish cannot be wrong—if only it does not distress you."

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“It never can distress me to know the truth of what people do, in their folly and vanity. I used to laugh at them when young, and to say the truth, it is still my secret belief that an ounce of mirth is worth a pound of sorrow. But even when I cannot laugh, the intelligence is almost too interesting. Therefore, proceed.”

Henry related what Jeremy had told him of his visits to Bettina, of Fitzwilliam’s jealousy of all the other gentlemen who paid her attentions, and Jeremy’s pride when Bettina indicated that she might be persuaded to look upon this cousin as a more desirable lover than the other.

Jeremy’s self-love was piqued; he could not be detached from her at such a critical time; and Fitzwilliam, seeing it, was disgusted with the lady.

He did not choose to blame his cousin Jeremy, thinking his susceptibility to temptation only natural, but he had resolved the critical situation by taking himself away.

The lady was distressed and showed it prettily, the more so when the papers were full of the “grievous accident befallen the heir to the great estate of Pemberley in Derbyshire, a riding mishap that has rendered him unconscious, from which swoon he has not yet awakened; and it is feared he will not long survive.”

Bettina protested that she did not know what would become of her without her protector, and Jeremy stepped in, full of importance and pride masked as gallantry, and promised that she should not want for anything while he lived.

As his allowance was substantially less than that of the heir of Pemberley, hers must

be proportionately reduced to not more than one hundred fifty pounds per annum, but she swore that it was an immense sum, vastly enough, and they had been eternally happy together for rather more than a week, when Henry arrived and found them in the midst of a pleasant domestic dispute about who would pay her hat bill.

Jeremy was not quite past being worked upon by reason; and when it was represented to him that by cutting a figure as a man about town with a mistress, he was distressing his parents dreadfully, there was a flicker of compunction, and when Henry assured him that Mr. Bingley could be counted upon to reduce his allowance in consequence of this behaviour—a reduction that would be singularly inconvenient as Jeremy had begun to realize the expensiveness of Bettina's wants, frivolities, and debts—the flicker fanned to a stronger expression of comprehension.

A very little more talk, reminding him of the greater wealth of his rivals and the more than likelihood of Bettina's accepting one of them, did its work, and by the time Henry had listened to a rambling account of their daily bickering, of her unreasonableness and continued demands for more money, Jeremy had been brought to as tractable a state as Henry could wish, and he agreed to accompany him on his return to the north.

He was not so lost a soul as to be entirely contemptuous of the unfailing kindness of such tender and indulgent parents as the Bingleys, and he was almost desirous of a reconciliation with them.

His only scruple was that he should leave poor Bettina broken-hearted, but Henry knew better and comforted him with promises to see to her.

To bring Bettina to reform and reason was, Henry knew, likely to be a far harder task, and one probably out of his power to achieve, but once Jeremy was safely away from her and established at the Gardiners', preparatory to the journey home, Henry visited in Half Moon Street and made the attempt.

He was presented with a scene daunting enough to discourage even a very determined young man certain of what was right, for Miss Wickham, in her ringlets, and bare shoulders, and drooping leg-of-mutton sleeves, and lace mitts, was a fan-fluttering coquette in full flourishing sail, entertaining a roomful of dashing young eligibles and not looking as though she cared for Jeremy's defection in the least. She showed tolerable interest in Henry, however, marking him with attentions that infuriated her other cavaliers, and when they departed, she begged Henry to remain with her alone, to talk over family business.

"I did not, you may imagine, suspect her meaning at first," Henry told his mother, "for I considered her Jeremy's property, so to speak, and only thought this a chance to make her listen to some grave subjects."

"And did you succeed?"

"You shall hear. I spoke to her as a clergyman and as one of the family, but to little purpose. She lifted up her shoulders and turned away, and I could see there was no use talking to her of her immortal soul and hope of Heaven, because they were no concern of hers. I judged, therefore, that practical matters might influence her more, and I spoke to her of the future that she could expect, if she continued in such a course."

"And did this have no effect?"

"It had an effect but quite different from what I hoped. At the suggestion that a woman who chose to be a mistress to a succession of men, rather than a wife to one, would end pitiably, she replied that we all come to bad ends, and there was no reason why she should be poor, as she might be if she had remained in her so-called proper sphere. That lovers gave her gifts, and rich and noble lovers could be counted on to give her the largest ones, and a shrewd woman might put enough aside to keep her, when her stock in trade, her beauty, had diminished."

“Really,” cried Elizabeth, disdainfully, “it is a case of the cow’s not knowing what her tail is worth, until she has lost it. Did you not tell her what we all know—how profligacy and want always dissipate what little savings such creatures ever can accrue?”

“Of course I did, but she was different, she claimed, so sought after that she knew she should do very well, and in any event she did not mean to be at the mercy of any man’s whim for long, for she should earn her living upon the stage.”

“Worse and worse! Has she actually acted?”

“Yes, indeed she has, and in a manner most unhappily calculated to bring forward attention to her person. It is not Shakespeare that has attracted my cousin; no, her first appearance, as I understand, was in the pantomime, ‘Harlequin and Old Gammer Gurton,’ at the Drury-Lane, in which I am sorry to say, she wore the breeches.”

“You don’t mean it!”

“But to some purpose. The number of men that have been attracted by this exposure of her handsome figure has been astonishing. But this was by no means her only display.”

“Well, what else?”

“You have heard of the accident to Madame Louise Irvine at the Covent-Garden Theatre, January last?”

“No;—stay. There was something of it in the newspapers.”

“Yes, well, you must know, it was in the pantomime, ‘Harlequin and Georgy Barnwell’—very popular piece—has a flying omnibus balloon, and a rook pie

containing a Jim Crow, and Heaven knows what; it is said to be like nothing ever seen on this Earth, and I well believe it. Well, Miss Irvine ascended a tight rope and was seized with an attack of giddiness twenty feet up, and—do you remember the incident now?"

"Yes; the poor creature broke her limbs, did she not?"

"Only an arm, but she was fortunate to survive, and you must know who went on as the Columbine dancer in her place."

"Good God! No—Impossible!"

"Yes, it was Bettina; of course she could not do all Madame Louise's tricks, but she did climb the rope and down again, and her admirers were in extacies. They are talking of it still."

"Has the girl gone mad, then?—is she trying to destroy herself? It seems the only explanation."

"Do not distress yourself on her behalf; the pantomime is closed. No; her latest triumph has been in a novelty piece at the Adelphi—the 'Arab Leap'—it is all about one Osman who bears off a child and fires a pistol on the stage, and another Arab does a summersault across a moat. Bettina is said to look very well as an Arab lady, but she does no dangerous movements."

"I collect," said Mrs. Darcy dryly, "that my niece is not to rival Ellen Tree or Miss Kemble and that she is more likely to break her neck in reality than to succeed as a tragedy queen. Ought not someone to remonstrate, before she is killed outright?"

"It would be of no use. I saw myself that there was no discouraging her when everything was so roseate, according to her way of looking at things. Only when I

spoke of her position in society, did she show any anger."

Elizabeth was surprised. "Did she? I wonder why. I should not think she would care very much about society, when she flouts its rules so thoroughly and takes irrevocable steps to alienate herself from all decent company."

"I will tell you what she said. 'Mr. Henry,' said she, 'let us make no mistake. I know what you are talking about because I have led a virtuous life, until lately—how lately, is none of your business—but you, for your part, cannot understand me, because you know nothing of my experiences.' I said I hoped Heaven would preserve me from ever having any so wicked, but she laughed and went on, 'You must understand, if you can, that I have learned a very great deal since I adopted my new profession, and I am in a position to tell you things that would surprise you. I admit that when I came away with Fitz, my motives were light enough: only to have a good time, and to make him marry me if I could. When he went away, I had to think hard about my situation—and so I have.'

"'If you thought about it,' I said, 'I wonder that you continued it.'

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“She replied, ‘In the first place, you must see that I had not much choice. You cannot go back again and be a chaste and virtuous lady once you have left off. You would have me come back amongst your people, who would then coldly cast me out again, or, since they call themselves charitable folks, they would see me shut up in a cottage somewhere for the rest of my life, with no society, no pleasures, no prospects. For diversion, I might be allowed to take in sewing or keep sheep. You may be sure I would be kept away from all decent gentlemen, lest I pollute their pure homes, and there would be no hope of my ever again enjoying the free and open companionship of any one of the sex. But your family is merciful, and I have no doubt I should be given a small pension, to enable me to live in this poor and retired way—like a prisoner in a solitary cell, to think over my sins and rue them for the rest of my days. This, I suppose, is the sort of thing you had in mind?’

“I told her that no one wanted to make prisoner of her, and if she truly repented, there was every chance she might always hope to make a respectable marriage, in time, but she said that in such circumstances she knew very well that no one in the country would have her but some cow keeper or other—no gentleman would take a penitent in a cottage. I could not deny that it was so, and she concluded, ‘I think we will agree that what I have described is no life at all, to be scorned and reviled by all the good folk around me. But consider: in town, I possess a degree of acceptance. Not, perhaps, as much as a great lady would, but my position is not altogether disagreeable. People enjoy my society—people who like a good time and are not glum and Church-ridden—and I decidedly prefer a city life to that of an anchorite.’ That was her answer, and I must admit I did not know what to say.”

“What could you say?” asked Elizabeth, all curiosity.

“I tried to talk about right and wrong, but there is where she grew vehement. Why was it wrong, she asserted, to be a man’s mistress?

It was only nature, and what was nature, made by God, could not be indecent.

Dogs didn’t worry about marriage, nor people in ancient societies; in Turkey, she believed, a woman’s duty was to have as many children as possible, married or not.

She knew a gentleman who had been to Turkey, and it was so.

“And that if we are Christians, she did not think it Christian to treat some folks like inferior beings. ‘The mere fact of being married by a preacher,’ said Bettina, ‘cannot determine if one is a virtuous, innocent woman; some properly wed in the sight of God are miserably wicked, and some who would be called—never mind what—have many virtues. Committing fornication does not make you bad, and chastity does not make you good.’ She might be good or bad, depending, but it had nothing to do with her lovers.”

“That is amazing,” said Elizabeth presently.

“Who would have thought that Bettina, so idle, so frivolous, would have thought so much on that subject—or any subject? It is as strange as the idea of her becoming a rope-dancer. Her reasoning is wrong, it is perverted in support of a false truth, and yet somehow it almost makes you respect her. I am not sure why. Oh! What a pity she did not learn to think before bringing about so much misery. For I cannot be at all sanguine about her future, whatever she says.”

“No. And I fancy she has been meeting with some of the unpleasant side of her role in life, for she did mention the awkwardness of mixing in with other ladies. Gentlemen were never discourteous, she said, but she would receive invitations and cards from ladies in society, who believed her to be a wife, and then she would have

to refuse the invitation or be exposed to the humiliation of confessing what she was, which is hard for anyone. ‘I would not,’ said she, ‘intrude upon any immaculate creature or besmirch any lady who was pure by reason of being a virgin or a wife, but to be shunned, as I am, is unfair and undeserved, when I can behave as properly as any other lady.’”

“I wonder she thinks that,” said Elizabeth. “She could never behave with the least propriety before. Perhaps she has improved in her manners, since living in the great world.”

“You would not say that, if you saw her; she is just what she always was. Well, I saw no reason for the continuance of such a fruitless conversation. I could not bring her to God, nor to a sense of right, nor anything; rather, she was winning me to a sense of sympathy with unfortunate creatures like herself, reviled as they are. Compassion for all should be my aim, but as achieving it was not my mission on this particular occasion, I was not sorry to bring the interview to an end. When I prepared to withdraw, it was then that she made her proposal—one which I would as soon forget, but as I am telling you everything, my dear Mother, as extraordinary as it may seem, I shall not omit it.”

“You don’t mean that your cousin tried to—” Elizabeth broke off.

“She told me that I was much handsomer than either my brother or my cousin Jeremy (I was not so vain as to believe her) and she knew that, with her new wisdom and sense about the world, she could make me happy—much happier than her untaught sister, the little governess. She did not scruple to mention that.”

“Oh! I would not have believed it. And she is not fit even to say Cloe’s name,” said Elizabeth indignantly.

“In short, it was plain to me that she saw me in the light of the soon-to-be new heir of

Pemberley and, as such, considered me worth her attentions, but I would not remain to be sported with, and so I departed, much to my sorrow, for I would very much like to have done better with her and made some impression. I told her to call upon us when she was in trouble or any need, and," (with a sigh) "I have no doubt that she will."

"Yes. It is an interesting portrait that you paint—we can see that no one becomes thoroughly bad at once; it happens by degrees. You have done your duty, Henry. I do not think anyone could have won her over," said his mother decidedly.

"I am glad you brought Jeremy back, and I am most of all glad that your sister and Cloe are not at home to hear and suffer all this."

"Yes, there is Cloe," said Henry, with heightened colour, striving to be calm. "I would not for worlds have her know what her sister has become, or if she must know, then not the extent of it. Mother, how is she? Have you at all heard?"

Elizabeth explained the contents of her latest letter but could say nothing encouraging, either of Cloe's situation or of Henry's prospects.

The openness which had characterized the conversation between mother and son now abruptly came to an end, with an unwonted strain descending, neither knew from whence, and after a moment, with a polite bow, Henry withdrew from her sitting room and went downstairs to make preparations to return to his parish church at Manygrove.

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Misfortunes, it is said, come in threes, and Mrs. Darcy had no wish for a third, when a second broke upon her in an express message from Mrs. Smith in Hertfordshire—Elizabeth's sister Mary.

Their father, Mr. Bennet of Longbourn House, was dying.

Past seventy, of feeble health in recent years, too frail to stir from home, he had lived a retired life since the loss of his wife ten years before, indulging in almost no society but shutting himself up with his books, waited on only by the dutiful Mrs. Smith, herself a widow.

Both Mrs. Darcy and Mrs. Bingley had made the journey south as frequently as the claims of their own families would allow, to be certain of Mr. Bennet's comfort and to cheer his spirits; and he had continued tolerably the same, until one night after retiring, he was taken with a seizure in the head, from which he was not expected to recover.

It was fortunate that the Bingleys were actually at Pemberley, so that the families might confer as to what was to be done.

Elizabeth felt herself torn between her concern about remaining near Fitzwilliam, and her exceeding desire to see her dear father one last time; and after much deliberation it was decided that Mr. Darcy should accompany his wife to Longbourn, leaving Fitzwilliam in Henry's charge, thus freeing the elder Darcys to pay their respects and to assist Mrs. Smith.

The Bingleys, with Jeremy and the Babcocks, were to return to Swanfield.

So large a party at Longbourn was not what Mr. Bennet could want, even when in the best of health, and to find such surrounding his deathbed would alarm him extremely.

It was not felt necessary or grateful to Elizabeth's feelings, which were all on the side of privacy, to attempt to travel by train, and Mr. Darcy's excellent coach and fast animals brought him and his wife to Longbourn with such expeditiousness that they reached its gates in the afternoon of the second day from setting out from Pemberley, only spending one night at an inn, at Oxford.

They were not too late; Mr. Bennet was awake and aware, and inexpressibly relieved to see his favourite child.

"I am glad you are here, my Lizzy," he said, "it was all that was wanting." Unable to speak, she pressed his hand, and he continued, "I confess I have been in terror of joining your mother, and hence I have kept off the eventuality as far as was possible, but I think I have reached some sort of peace and can accept anything now. You are happy, Lizzy, yourself?"

"Oh, yes," she managed to say, thankful that he had never been told about Fitzwilliam. "You know I am, Papa; Mr. Darcy is the best husband I could ever have wanted, and I have been so very fortunate—" She could not finish.

"That is right," he said, pleased, "better than Wickham. Well, Lizzy, I shall sleep a little now, I think."

Elizabeth sat with him and did all that she could for his comfort, and a little more than a week from her arrival, with only a few more opportunities for conversation, he died peacefully, in his sleep.

Elizabeth, and Darcy, and Mary, sat solemnly in their grief and awe, but they were not left to relish this period of quiet and privacy for long, for almost as soon as was

possible, after the news' being received and digested by the Collinses, did the entire family descend upon Longbourn, with admirable promptness in taking up their new residence.

"Please do not think, my dear Cousin Elizabeth," said Mr. Collins formally, establishing himself firmly upon the fire-mat and leaning on the mantelpiece with a proprietary air, "that I seek to turn you out untimely. Indeed I am aware that there is no turning out about it, as Longbourn has not been your home for many, many years. There is no one here, indeed, that I displace, but my Cousin Mary, and I am sure that we will find room for her somewhere, as long as she should care to stay, within reason, so long as she knows that she is not mistress in the house any more."

Mr. Collins' four youngest children, two schoolboys on holiday and the two little girls who were in Cloe's charge, were already established in the nursery rooms that had once belonged to Elizabeth and her sisters, and Mrs. Collins was engaged in trying to find rooms for all her multifarious relations who cared to stay, to feast on the sight of their own Charlotte in her inheritance.

The Darcys scarcely knew where they were to sleep themselves and had already had quiet thoughts of repairing to an inn, until their horses, servants, and belongings could be made ready for the trip home.

Mary, much oppressed by her father's death, had cried so much that her countenance was much affected; but she heard Mr. Collins' remarks with indignation and put down her pocket-handkerchief long enough to say, "Indeed, Mr. Collins, I would never think of staying: I have been mistress of this house—it contains many memories of my dear parents, memories which, you know, are to be respected, as things of that sort should be, and I passed the whole of my marriage with Mr. Smith here."

"Indeed," said Mr. Collins formally, with a small bow, "far be it from me to ever

denigrate such sacred memories. They are as safe with me, the new master of Longbourn, as they could be with any one else, and I assure you, I shall never step into my library without thinking of your lamented father, and of Mr. Smith, though I never had the honour of meeting that gentleman."

"That is kind," said Mary, somewhat mollified.

"But I assure you that I am very well aware what your rights are, according to the entail, and I would not deprive you of them for an instant. Indeed, it would pain me to stay here, for it is your domicile and not mine, and I do not wish to inconvenience you for even a moment but shall depart at once."

"Why, where shall you go?" he asked, rather in surprise.

"I assure you, we have no wish to dispossess you untimely, so near a relation as you are, and so good a neighbour to my wife's family for many years, a recommendation that I will never overlook, you may be very sure.

You cannot be thanked enough, in my opinion.

Shall you make your home at Pemberley now? "

Exasperated as well as diverted as she was by Mr. Collins, for bringing the matter to the point, Elizabeth thought it might as well be settled now as at any other time, and since she and Mr. Darcy had already had sufficient leisure to consider the matter, she joined him in a very gracious and prompt invitation to Mary to make her home with them, where she would have the further comfort and advantage of being with her sister Kitty.

Mrs. Smith was not averse, for upon her few visits to Pemberley she had never yet got to the bottom of Mr. Darcy's very fine collection of books, and she looked

brighter at once.

“It will be strange to live in the county of Derbyshire, after living in Hampshire all my life,” she observed.

“I hope I shall like it. It is above the fifty-third number in latitude I believe and consequently has somewhat less light in the winter, than our more southerly regions. The air around Pemberley is healthy, I know, and I must own that the change will be to my liking. Change, I believe, is an important part of life. If we do not change at times, we cannot expect to grow wiser, and in a new county I expect there will be much to learn and to observe.”

“You must have a good rest after your labours,” put in Elizabeth kindly, “no duties; just enough for happiness—that is, if you want solid activity, there are Mr. Darcy’s books that have not been arranged this long time.

Books are all over the house, I confess; he is always ordering more, and no one ever puts them back in their right places. We need a grand re-arrangement.”

“I would not have believed such a thing,” said Mary, shocked.

“Any disorder in books is what always should be prevented. But your fine collection of natural history—the botanical books—I hope those are not out of place? And your music books, I suppose Jane has had them out, to play the pieces, and not returned them.”

“No; you need not be afraid. I do not think any one has disturbed those since your last visit, and Jane does not play very much. But you will enjoy yourself putting all to rights, will you not, Mary? And I confess, now that our dear father is no more, it will be pleasant to have three of us sisters together.”

“And Jane will be near at hand. Only Lydia will not be with us. How far is Newcastle from Derbyshire, sister? More than one hundred twenty miles I believe. We shall have to look it up. Mr. Darcy has an excellent atlas, I recollect. Will you have Lydia for a visit? She must want a change more than I do. So many children as she has—I confess it makes me thankful I have not any. My excellent husband, being only an attorney’s clerk, could not have afforded them, and with children, I should not have had time to read very much.

Children, I believe, are a grave responsibility.

To have a human soul to form, with such consequences if not properly directed, is so serious an undertaking that I do not understand how anybody can attempt it.

Children must look up to their parents, but the parents must be above reproach themselves.

It is sad that Mr. Wickham is so deplorable a man.

Shall you have any of their children to stay, Sister? ”

“Not, perhaps, immediately,” said Elizabeth, recollecting with what difficulty Lydia had been got rid of, and what had been the results of the last visit of some of this selfsame sister’s children.

Here Cloe entered with her two little charges, followed by Mrs. Collins and that lady’s mother, old Lady Lucas, carrying materials for the cutting-out of dresses for the little girls.

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Mrs. Darcy smiled at her niece. “Here is one who will always be welcome at Pemberley,” she said good naturedly. “Cloe, my dear, you must come to us and have a holiday soon.”

Cloe looked up brightly, from trying to quiet the children, whose noisy request to be at a game of cat’s-cradle, instead of stitching their samplers, was beginning to make itself distracting.

Cloe was as glad to see Mrs. Darcy again as Mrs. Darcy could wish her; but apart from offering her formal greetings and condolences, she had not much opportunity to speak to her aunt.

Her post with the Collins family was no sinecure, and she was kept running all day long with different errands for the family.

Charlotte was a kind mistress, but the mother of half-a-dozen children, even though only four of these were still at home, had too much to do not to depend heavily upon her governess, especially in a household where there were few servants.

More importantly, Mr. Collins was a continual interferer, always contradicting his wife’s orders, interrupting his daughters’ lessons, and lecturing Cloe on her own deportment and morals—advice meekly taken outwardly but often made tolerable only by a vigorous call upon her own patience.

“Does that please you, Cloe? Would you like to come to Pemberley, when we remove from here? Charlotte, I do not mean to threaten you with the temporary loss of your governess, but there are many fine young women in the neighbourhood who might

act substitute, and I am sure your sisters could put you in the way of such a one."

"Oh certainly," said Charlotte easily, "it would be very little difficulty; nursery-governesses are to be had; so Cloe, if you should like to go, do not consider yourself bound or be concerned about us in the least."

"Yes, indeed," put in Mr. Collins, "we should be sorry to lose you, Miss Wickham, when you have just got Maria and Catherine in order—I say, there, little Daughter, do put down Miss Wickham's thread, it is not at all the thing to play with—and her scissors—do tell them, Miss Wickham, to be on their guard.

One must take great care. Samplers are dangerous things.

No, to say the truth, I would be tempted, if Miss Wickham leaves us, to employ a young person with a knowledge of figures.

Miss Wickham's arithmetic is very faulty, and I am afraid she will transmit this fault to the girls.

I observed it when I asked her to calculate the hectares in the back pasture—which she could not.

Then I noticed that she had not spent as many hours reading sermons to the children as I should have thought proper on a Sunday, in a clergyman's house; no, they always walk out, instead.

Not that I consider exercise as something irreverent—far from it—the body is our temple, you know, it is our temple, and I do not intend any criticism, my dear.

You are an obedient young person, I am sure, and we are very well-pleased with you.

If you are to leave, however, it would be best for you to do so before the beginning of the next quarter, to make all neat, and as that is two weeks away, you can give that time as notice and be quite ready to go away with Mrs. Darcy when she goes. ”

Elizabeth could see Cloe turn pale even by candlelight and was sorry she had ever started the subject, particularly as a matter of such general discussion.

“I do not—I had no intention of going to Pemberley,” said Cloe, looking at her earnestly.

“Please do not think that I am asking to go there. Indeed, there are reasons—I think I had better not. Mrs. Collins, I should like to continue my duties, if you are not dissatisfied with me,” she added modestly.

“Very well, my dear,” said Charlotte indifferently, “there—oh! I knew that would happen,” as the child put her hand down upon the scissors, cutting her finger slightly, and setting up a fearful howling.

“Catherine, my love, how troublesome you are. Why do you not take them both upstairs, Miss Wickham; it is full time.”

Cloe took the little girls one by each hand and bore them upstairs, and the subject, along with most of the noise in the room, was dispelled.

Mr. and Mrs. Darcy were not sorry to leave Longbourn.

Mr. Collins was as proud as a dog with two tails, Elizabeth privately observed to her husband; and the noise, and the bustle, of the Collins family, their children, their servants, and the presence of so many of Mrs. Collins’ relations, were a continual irritation to Elizabeth’s spirits, so that even Charlotte’s kindness was little alleviation.

It was uncomfortable, too, to see poor Cloe as a governess, kept with the children, with so few resources for her own recreation or amusement, and Mrs. Darcy did regret leaving without her.

In Mrs. Smith's grave joy at her removal to Pemberley, there was some compensation, however, but on the whole it was in an uncharacteristically depressed state of mind that Elizabeth finally took leave of what had been her father's home for the last time.

Saddened as she was, she had no expectation of any sources of happiness that might remain to her, and she was surprised, upon her return to Pemberley, to be met in the portico itself by both Henry and Jane, eager to tell her some rapturous news.

"Fitzwilliam is awake, Mama! He has spoken! Oh! You must see for yourself," cried Jane.

"Is it…" Elizabeth asked, bewildered, looking at Henry, "can this be true?"

"Indeed, he is in a great state of amendment. Come."

And before Elizabeth could divest herself of her travelling clothes, her son and her daughter led her upstairs to see the miracle.

Yes, Fitzwilliam had come to himself, and although still unable to move his limbs, he could speak. He said his mother's name, and she fell upon his bosom as any mother in the kingdom would.

When she had wiped her tears, it was time to laugh, and for Henry to tell how all had awaited the first words with great suspense and how Fitzwilliam had crossly demanded some pale ale, in a most beautifully natural tone.

“Did he? Did you, Fitzwilliam?”

“That I did,” he assented, with a weak smile.

“I declare he shall have some now—it won’t harm the lad,” said Mr. Darcy.

“It’s all right, Mother,” Fitzwilliam answered her worried look. Then turning his head slowly to gaze at his father, he added, “And you must believe me, sir—how sensible I am of your concern for me, after all the trouble I have caused.”

“Don’t speak of it, my dear boy, don’t speak of it,” said Mr. Darcy quickly, while Elizabeth leaned against her husband in relief and satisfaction.

From this moment, thankfulness was felt throughout the whole house of Pemberley, for the change might be looked upon as the restoration of Fitzwilliam.

Though still immobile, pinioned to his bed, he was recognizably himself and talked with his father and his mother with fullest affection and gratitude.

They did not sit by him long, so as not to tire him; but his improvement was so great that Elizabeth dared to entertain hope of still further advances, though the doctors conscientiously discouraged such thoughts.

Nothing, however, could now dim her spirits, which positively brimmed over in her wholehearted joy, and, with the feeling of a burden removed, she was able to turn her attention to the rapturous exclamations and embraces of her two other children.

Jane had returned to Pemberley from her visit to Georgiana, and she was full of a great happiness, which she hardly had patience to wait to communicate to her mother. The hour or two that Elizabeth had been in the house had seemed to Jane like an eternity.

“Mother, he wants to marry me!” was Jane’s joyful whisper, the moment Elizabeth was in her own room and at last in the act of taking off her bonnet. “May he come to ask my father? He is at Buxton but will ride over tomorrow. I thought you could not disapprove.”

Elizabeth certainly could not, as she knew perfectly well that “he” was Lord Frederick Neville.

In addition to being a thoroughly eligible and worthy young man, with a pretty estate of his own in Cheshire, he was the younger brother of Georgiana’s husband.

The Darcys had known the young man all his life, and they had not forgotten to wish for the union almost before its arrangement could even seem possible.

Jane had always been very fond of Lord Frederick, who had visited Pemberley frequently, and their affection had grown up with her own growth, so that it wanted only Jane’s partiality and respect to ripen into a stronger affection, and her recent visit to her aunt’s house, where she had the advantage of seeing him every day, seemed to have done the business in the most natural way.

He was, in addition to everything else, on the friendliest terms with Henry, and Jane seemed in a very fair way for happiness.

She looked lovelier than ever, her shining hair arranged in a simple coronet at the crown of her head, and her delicate features set off by the grandeur and dignity of her flowing grey silk gown, in the latest fashion, with large, sloping sleeves, a narrow waist, and full, trailing skirts held out by crinoline.

“Engaged, and so soon? Not even a London season?” said Elizabeth, between laughter and tears, kissing her daughter tenderly.

“You are sparing us a great deal of trouble and expense, dear Jane. I shall not have to sit in fifty London ballrooms as a superannuated matron and chaperon; and I could not be happier. Are you quite sure you do not feel cheated?”

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“Oh, no! I am not so silly as to require a season, I hope I have more serious thoughts in my head than that,” said Jane, “and besides, you know Frederick—” she pronounced his name shyly—“says we shall certainly take a house in town, so we shall see all that is going on. And perhaps we can go to Buxton in the summer, dear Buxton, where it all happened.” She picked up her skirts and danced around the room.

“It was the loveliest thing imaginable—there were private balls, and the opera, and I so enjoyed staying at Aunt Georgiana’s house, the new baby is a love, and oh, Mama, I never knew Frederick so well before.

He is all I could ever want in a man. I never suspected he was so very fond of me.

I am so glad his hair is dark; I should not like a light man at all; and it is so nice that Henry likes him so much.

Everything is so perfect, if only you think that Papa will not mind. ”

“He will miss his daughter, of course, but you are not going very far away,” said her mother fondly, “and he will be happy to see you in such hands.”

“Oh! If Fitzwilliam were all well, and if Henry could only be as happy as I am! Then I should have nothing in the world to wish for. Mama, I am sorry you were not successful in bringing Cloe with you. He is excessively disappointed.”

“He loves her then? You think so, do you?”

“Indeed he does. I have been observing him narrowly. He blushes and starts when her name is mentioned, quite lover-like, you know. And besides, he has told me.”

“What has he told you? That is—do not repeat it, if it violates a confidence between you—but I confess I should like to know.”

“Oh, there’s no harm. He told me all about it, and he should not dislike your knowing. That he loves her, and told her so long ago, but she would bury herself in Kent, and now Hertfordshire, all to avoid him. It is so sad, poor boy.”

“We did invite her,” said Mrs. Darcy, concerned, “but she would not come. I am sure she likes him, though I do not know how far it would be right to manoeuvre to bring them together. It is safest to leave it as it is, perhaps. I do not like to meddle.”

“Oh, Mama, I hope never to grow older if I am to become so careful and prudent as that. You would think you had never been in love. Henry is unhappy without her, I tell you—and she is such a charming and deserving young woman, I should so like to have her for my sister. It is dreadful for her to be a governess. What is your hesitation? Why did not she come here?”

“Why, indeed,” said her mother with a sigh. “Well: you must invite her to your wedding.”

“May I?” asked Jane, smiling. “My wedding! When will it be? Perhaps in May or June? That is not too soon.”

“My love, we are getting ahead of ourselves. It is not right to speak of such things until your father has approved it all. You had better go to him at once, and mind, it is not an engagement until he says so. Frederick is in Buxton, is he? And he comes tomorrow?”

“Yes; you will be quite settled in by then, I know, and Papa at leisure.”

Lord Frederick did arrive before noon the following day, and by the time the family sat down to dinner, he had gained the blessings of both parents.

Mr. and Mrs. Darcy smiled upon their daughter, who never stopped chattering; Henry could not congratulate his friend enough.

To crown all, he was taken upstairs to stand by Fitzwilliam’s bedside and receive the invalid’s hearty congratulations, while the aunts watched the performance with great critical interest.

“Now, Frederick—you had better take care of my sister, or I shall have to get up and see to you,” Fitzwilliam feebly quizzed his brother in law elect.

“That will hardly be necessary, old boy. Jane has informed me that she can take care of herself, and she is such a nineteenth-century young lady, there will be nothing for me to do.”

“Excuse me, but I do not know how modern she is,” said Aunt Mary earnestly.

“I have never yet succeeded in making her read The Last Days of Pompeii , and I wish she would—it is true it is only a novel but so instructional. She will not be a well-read wife, I fear, Lord Frederick, though I have tried to make her so.”

“I am sure you have had more success than you credit yourself with, Mrs. Smith,” said Lord Frederick, in a mood to be amiable to all the world.

“In my view she has read quite enough, but as for housekeeping, she knows next to nothing,” sniffed Mrs. Clarke. “You know it is true, Lizzy—painting and singing are all very well, but has she ever opened a receipt book? Will she be able to manage her

household? I very much doubt it."

"Why, I have been watching Mama all my life, Aunt," said Jane serenely. "Watching is the best teaching."

Before going to bed that happy night, Jane did not omit to write of her joy to Cloe, carefully wording a most urgent invitation to come to the wedding; but by return of post came the reply, full of earnest wishes for Jane's happiness, but with a firm and decided refusal of the invitation.

She could not leave her duties, would not if she could, did not wish to be indebted to the Darcys for transportation, and thought it wisest not to come to Pemberley—but Jane would understand.

Jane did understand, and she told her lover, "We will have to devise another way to get Cloe here. I will think of one; you may trust me for that. I want Henry to be as happy as I am."

"You are happy, then?" he asked her, as they passed under a flowering apple-tree in Mr. Darcy's garden—her answer fully occupied them for a considerable time.

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Lady Catherine de Bourgh found herself unprecedentedly lonely at Rosings, in the absence of the large Collins family to dominate and condescend to daily.

Mr. Collins' replacement at Hunsford parsonage was his own oldest son, newly in orders, a quiet and self-sufficient young man who shyly kept to himself, yet was prickly and independent enough, in her Ladyship's view, not to be patronized or bullied into matrimony.

He proved a poor substitute for the wider field of the many things that were wrong with the Collins household that required Lady Catherine to set right.

Before the spring was far advanced, therefore, she sallied out to visit Longbourn, to see Mr. and Mrs. Collins in their new home and to tell them how best to manage.

"This wilderness has grown up considerably since I last visited here," she commented to Charlotte, "I remember, and do you sit upstairs with the girls all day, or what room do you take for your own?"

"I take Mr. Bennet's library that used to be. Mr. Collins thinks it gloomy, and he prefers the downstairs parlour that opens into the garden. The governess gives the girls their lessons upstairs. There are bedrooms enough, even for our family, now the boys are at school."

"Yes. The Bennets had five children, and you have only four at home, so you are comfortable enough. And with the little boys gone, the house is really empty. But the governess, you say—you still have Miss Wickham, I think?"

“Yes; she does nicely with Maria and Catherine, and has been teaching them all about the geography of Europe.”

“Of Europe! Has she, indeed! But what can that little thing know of such matters? I observed her closely at Hunsford, and I did not consider her equal to her task then. I must tell you, frankly, that I am surprised that you have continued her in your household so long. I beg you will have her called down, Mrs. Collins. I should wish to examine her.”

Charlotte did not like this, but she did not dare to oppose Lady Catherine, knowing her oldest son’s comfort depended greatly upon not offending her; and so Cloe was summoned. If she was too much harassed, Charlotte reasoned, she could always be reassured privately afterward.

“So! Miss Wickham, I mean to examine you for your post, and I must tell you at the outset that I think you very young-looking. You are eighteen?”

“Yes, ma’am; just.”

“I cannot think such a young governess at all justified. I never had one under thirty for my own dear daughter; and all the many I have recommended to friends were all older than you. Why do you consider that you are qualified at such an age, when others are not?”

“Excuse me, ma’am, I don’t know that I am, but I have been teaching Catherine and Maria these two months, and if Mrs. Collins were not pleased, I think she would not keep me.”

“So you suggest that I apply to her, for information concerning you? That is rather impertinent. You must know that I have done so already, and she has given me a tolerably good report. Mrs. Collins, however, is too yielding, not strict enough in her

standards, very soft tempered. I have often observed it, and that is why I must concern myself about her daughters' education.

I believe I am acquainted with the degree of learning which you possess.

Fit to be a nursery-governess perhaps, but where will you be when your charges grow older and begin to require real instruction?

Can you pretend to be qualified to teach girls of older years? "

"Not, perhaps, at present, but I assure you I am endeavouring to improve myself. I read daily, do some French work, and Mrs. Collins has given me leave to practice upon the piano."

"Hum! that is well—but I will come to the point, Miss Wickham. While you may pass as an indifferent sort of teacher at present—likely not to do very much harm to the girls' understanding, at any rate—there is one subject in which you cannot instruct and in which you are answerable to a higher power than even myself. "

"And what is that, ma'am?" said Cloe impatiently.

"I mark your tone, young woman, I do, and it does not speak well for you. It is a mark against you, at a time when I am adding them up, and it may even be the deciding one. You know very well that I speak of religion, of morality, of giving these children high religious principles, and I have formed the conclusion that for this awe-full and important office, you are by no means qualified."

"How have you discerned such a thing in me?" asked Cloe, distressed.

"I am sure I have omitted nothing in the children's religious instruction.

I should not be likely to, in the home of a clergyman, you know.

Mr. Collins sermonizes the girls very constantly, and their mother reads the Bible with them and often instructs me to fulfil this office, when she cannot. ”

“Silence! Do you think that I am not aware of all that? Naturally, in this house, the girls’ religious education can hardly be wanting, but I am referring to their instruction by a person of inadmissible morality herself.”

“I?” asked Cloe. “But, what can have I done?”

“It is not what you have done; it is what you are. You sit there quietly, presenting the appearance of an innocent young miss, and it is all the more insidious. How can anyone pretend to be virtuous, coming from a family such as yours?”

Cloe now fully understood whither Lady Catherine’s remarks were tending. “I was placed in this house by your own relations, my aunt and uncle, the Darcys of Pemberley,” she stated slowly, with resentment, “and Mr. Collins, a clergyman, perfectly approved of this measure.”

“You do not know any such thing. You are not aware of the many, many heart-wringing discussions I had with your employers, aye, late into the night, upon the subject. We all knew very well who and what your parents are. Your father was a ne’er-do-well—nay, a seducer—long before he was lost to drink, and he is lost, that much is well-known. ”

“Whatever his failings,” said Cloe, angrily, “he is my father and has never been unkind to me; you have no right to speak of him.”

“I have every right to speak of the drunkard son of Mr. Darcy’s late steward, Miss.

I abhor strong language; but the words are the only ones to perfectly describe him.

It is you who dare not contradict me. We all know that indulgence like his runs in families, and while I am willing to concede that you are personally abstemious, there is another kind of laxity that you are still more prone to fall into: witness the moral conduct of your own mother, a violent, headstrong woman, who lived with your father before they were married. ”

“Lady Catherine,” said Cloe, rising to her feet though the room seemed to sway around her, “that was a quarter of a century ago. My mother has paid for her indiscretion (for indiscretion was all that it was) a thousand times over. She has had a hard life, with many children, in much want and with many hardships, but through it all she has been a virtuous wife, and I am proud that I am able to spare half my salary to her. If you do not forbear to mention my parents again, I must leave the room.”

“You may rest easy, my girl. I shall not mention them again, though I must say in passing that their station in life hardly qualifies you as a lady, and a half-lady is no fit governess for a gentleman’s family. But I have done with that. The person whom I must mention is your sister.”

“Bettina? How can this concern her?” said Cloe, scornfully.

“I will tell you. You may have been kept—quite properly—from a full knowledge of her conduct, but it has not been possible to conceal it from me. In passing through London, you must know, I saw billboards—common public billboards—actually advertising the appearance of your sister, Miss Wickham, as an actress upon the Haymarket stage. What do you think of that?”

“I should consider it quite out of the scope of this conversation, which I firmly believe ought to be concluded.”

“Nonsense! I made inquiries, for I have heard, that however disgraceful an actress’ life may seem to us—to me, at any rate, as I cannot expect it to strike someone like yourself so—there are some of that class that do not lead completely unvirtuous lives.

I would never wish to condemn anyone unfairly.

It is not in my nature. I have often served, in my own county, as a kind of informal magistrate, and I assure you I have always given a hearing to all the facts, as is consistent with British justice.

I am quite a proverb for fairness. But, as an unlettered young lady, you probably know little about such matters. ”

Not knowing how to retort to this, Cloe sat still, meditating a hasty rush upstairs, to take refuge from Lady Catherine, but concluded that it was not worth it.

She would only distress Mrs. Collins, who had been kind to her, and in any case it was far from improbable that Lady Catherine would pursue her even into the far recesses of her room.

There was no hope of peace, so she submitted to hear her out, trying to remember that she was an elderly lady, and deserving of compassion and respect on that score, if no other.

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“Well! I made inquiries, you may be sure. I am not unacquainted with the fashionable world, you may know, though my adventures in it were many, many years ago, when I was Lady Catherine Fitzwilliam. Society was quite different then. No young lady was given over to the care of a governess not of the very highest character.” She paused impressively to let this sink in.

“I was a very handsome young lady, much more handsome than my younger sister, Lady Anne Darcy—that is, she was pretty in a delicate sort of way, but she suffered ill health, poor thing, and she died sadly young, you may have heard, only a dozen years after her marriage, leaving her children, Darcy and Georgiana, quite motherless. I have been a second mother to them, however, and they are quite devoted to me, as is entirely proper. Indeed, I was instrumental in forming their characters and think they do me honour on the whole.—Such a pair has seldom been seen—and Georgiana, at least, is nobly married.”

She was quiet a moment, thinking, and Cloe did nothing to encourage her to speak again.

She resumed, however, “I always think that appearance is best which announces robust health; my own poor daughter Anne would have been beautiful if she had only been healthy. But high breeding always makes for a most aristocratic appearance. My brother, the Earl of Osmington, married a very handsome, high bred woman; and their two sons, the present Earl and General Fitzwilliam, are the finest men in England in both appearance and character. That is—Fitzwilliam is in India, of course. He will inherit my property when I go. He is unmarried; I have often wished differently, but I have done with planning young people’s marriages: they are an ungrateful set.

Well, and what was I saying? My mind does wander at times, these days, which is only natural to my age; my memory, however, is wonderful, as remarkable as it ever was, but I do fall into musings, which is not strange, considering all that I have to think about, and serious matters, too.

Oh: yes, the fashionable world—and good breeding tells—you have quite a delicate appearance, and I hope will not pass any dreadful consumptive complaint on to the Collins children, poor little dears. ”

“I am not at all ill, madam,” said Cloe, controlling herself.

“Well, well, and why should you be, living in the abode of comfort, in fine places such as Pemberley, and Hunsford, and now Longbourn? Such houses! I really think no other young woman in your situation can ever have had such opportunities. It would surprise me if you did not improve in such places as these. But, oh! yes—company—I have high connections in London, you know. There is old Lady Scarborough, and some of poor Queen Adelaide’s ladies—well, never mind their names, it would hardly be fit for me to speak of people in high life to you, the governess—but I asked a few well-chosen questions about this actress, not telling anyone she was in any manner a connection of my own, however distant.

Not that anyone would have believed such a thing of me, my character speaks for itself; but I found out the whole story. ”

“Did you, ma’am?” Cloe felt she was to hear it; it could not be avoided, and she could not decide only whether curiosity or dread most informed her feelings upon the occasion.

“Oh, yes. Your sister is, as I feared, an actress of the very worst character. Off the stage, she is quite as wicked as upon it, for she is kept in great style, in a most scandalous fashion: by some gentleman or other, I do not pretend to know whom. I

must not elaborate on such matters to you—it is not proper to say such things to a young unmarried woman. The differences between the married and the unmarried must be preserved; remember that. It is a mark of excellent taste. Are you quite well, Miss Wickham? You look pale. You are not going to faint?"

"I am not, but I should like some water," and she managed to ring for a servant, for her shaking hand would not let her deal with the pitcher, and she would not ask Lady Catherine. She did, however, gather courage to ask the question weighing upon her.

"Lady Catherine—I do not wish to know details, believe me, but can you only tell me, as a matter of humanity, is my sister well? She cannot write to me, you know—so I have heard nothing."

"No. It would be wrong if she did, and if ever she does write, you should tear up her letter, unread. She certainly ought to be dead to you and to all your dear family. But I daresay it will not be wrong for me to tell you that she seems to be prospering finely in her wickedness—such things sometimes do happen in this world—though it is a wonder that God allows one of that sort to flourish and be healthy and prosperous. But as I say, no particulars. Remember, Miss Wickham, that her being well now means nothing. She will be punished, as surely as anyone is punished, hereafter; she will be ill and persecuted and die in a low state, I am certain. I would not have her immortal soul, for the world." Lady Catherine paused to complacently regard their respective fates at the seat of Judgement.

"Lady Catherine, you must understand that what you have told me has been very shocking to me—and that I wish to retire."

"Oh! Yes, I daresay. Quite so. Well, I have done with you: quite done. Now, surely, you understand why you will never do as governess to the Collinses, and if you try to take a like position anywhere else, I will think it my duty to write and tell your new employers of your antecedents. I do not do this to be cruel, but so that you understand

there is not the least use in trying to pass yourself off with any degree of credit, anywhere. I wish you no ill; you have evidently comported yourself as properly as you can, given your disadvantages; but you can see that you must no longer remain in this house, the sister of such a person as that."

"She is not to instruct the Collins girls, ma'am," said Cloe wearily, "but there is little use in arguing with you on the subject, and any continuance of it will only bring me pain."

"You will, however, leave at once, as I have demanded?"

"I do not know; I must beg to retire. I can only say that I will think over the things you have told me," said poor Cloe, feeling herself perilously close to childish tears and not wanting to show them before Lady Catherine.

She went upstairs, leaving that noblewoman standing her ground in the sitting-room, well-pleased with her good morning's work and confident of having rid the Collinses of a succubus and an unworthy governess.

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It was not left, after this conversation, for Mrs. Collins to say much to reassure or to comfort Cloe. She nervously asked the girl if Lady Catherine had seemed pleased with her, and Cloe replied that she “believed so, except for her family and in particular her sister.”

“Oh! I was afraid that would come up,” said Charlotte, frowning.

“How unfortunate. I have the utmost respect for Lady Catherine—she is a very good woman, and we owe her a great deal, I believe—but, she did not actually say she wished you to leave, did she? It would be very awkward if she did, though you must believe, Miss Wickham, that we think you a very good girl and we do not at all wish to lose you.”

“Perhaps it will be best if you talk the matter over with her; I hardly know what was said or what was intended on that point,” said Cloe. “Indeed, my head is reverberating from it all, as if I were sitting next the organ in church: she does talk so loud.”

“Poor girl! Yes, Lady Catherine has been growing deaf of late, and she always had a fine declamatory tone. Well—suppose you lie down and use some of my lavender water. My youngest sister and I can take the little girls into the garden; and if you remain upstairs for a bit, you will probably not encounter Lady Catherine again before she leaves—which will be wisest.”

Cloe certainly thought that it was, and she took Mrs. Collins’ excellent advice and was soon laid down upon the bed, but sleep did not come, and she found herself revolving in her mind what she ought to do.

To stay at Longbourn did not seem possible; she felt her place in the house was a matter of indifference at best to nearly every person in it; and if that was the natural consequence of being a governess, she might, at least, be better compensated in another position.

Mr. Collins was a close man, as evidenced in many ways, not least of all in the smallness of her own salary, and his wife was too good a manager and wise a partner to counteract his lifelong habits of penury and thrift.

Cloe felt that she was fond of the little girls and had engaged their affections, but she was convinced that they would do equally well with any governess of ordinary good nature, and surely the Collinses were too conscientious as parents to engage any other kind.

The only advantage that Cloe could see in her present position was that she was not amongst strangers, for the Collinses were connections, if distant ones.

There must be some security in this, though when she considered Lady Catherine's discourse, she did not feel very certain on that point.

She was not ill-treated by her employers; and by having accepted the position, she might be considered obliged to remain as long as she was needed; yet she could not feel that this obligation lay heavy upon her.

Therefore, if she could think of some other way to maintain herself, pleasanter and more productive of a competence, she should take it.

She recoiled from advertising again: it was so cold-blooded a way of doing, and to go to the house of strangers took more courage than she felt she presently possessed, especially as her situation was not absolutely desperate.

She knew she should be thankful that it was not, but when she thought of Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine, a rebellious spirit arose.

How far it should be indulged and given rein she did not know, and feeling uncertainty of what was right, and desiring the possibility of improving her station, and not wishing to seem ungrateful, she sat perplexed.

Though in general being self-sufficient and thinking for herself, as the circumstances of her family life in Newcastle had taught her to do, Cloe felt herself wishing for someone who could advise her—a prudent person, with more experience of the world than herself but partial to her and understanding her situation.

She thought of one, but the thought must be put away as one not to be indulged.

She loved Henry Darcy and knew she loved him, but she had no right to do so.

She could not forget him by simply ordering herself to do it, and the idea darted into her mind, unbidden,—how delightful it would be to talk all over with him!

Reminding herself that this was impossible, her next thought was of Henry’s mother, and here she felt herself on better ground.

Mrs. Darcy was her aunt; she had been unfailingly kind and sound in her judgement, and Cloe could not doubt that she sincerely wished for her happiness.

She felt she could consult her aunt, and to take such a step would even be prudent, for, in her position, Mrs. Darcy must be acquainted with many families and might know of a situation for Cloe that would be all she could desire.

With the first sensation of hopefulness since Lady Catherine had started speaking to her, Cloe wrote a letter, feeling all the awkwardness of framing her request, for it

occurred to her, as she was writing, that it might be construed as an application for being invited to Pemberley or putting herself in Henry's way.

Therefore, she endeavoured to do away with any such implications, and what with her constraint and her anxiety, the resulting letter was short.

Mrs. Darcy's feelings, on reading it, were as warm or warmer than even Cloe could desire. She walked into her husband's library, her face in a glow, to set it before him, but only Mary was there, arranging a pile of volumes.

"Have you seen Mr. Darcy?"

"Why, yes: he was in here, but he would not remain. I hope I have not made him feel uncomfortable in his own room. But I happened to ask him if he minded if I put out all the works of Hannah More here, on this little table in the alcove, where everyone may consult them: her wisdom ought to be imbibed every day, you know, and really with Jane in the house, the Essays for Young Ladies ought always to be at hand. It would be far better than having the tables covered with Dickens, and Scott, and Miss Edgeworth. It is not good for young people to read too many novels; they will meet with too much excitement, and I am almost sure Mr. Darcy agreed with me, though he did not say so. Do not you think he did?"

"I don't suppose he would mind which books you put out, but where, where did he go?" asked Elizabeth impatiently.

"Who—Oh! Mr. Darcy. I believe he is writing in the parlour."

A little checked, Elizabeth ran thither and found Mr. Darcy just blotting his letter. He looked up and smiled.

"There you are, my dear. I have just finished writing to my sister. I hope she will join

our family party for the wedding, if she can leave the children; she will hardly want to bring them all. Well: what have you there?"

"It is a letter from Cloe. Look here."

She showed him the letter, which was to this effect:

"My Dear Aunt,

I hope you may excuse my forwardness in writing in hopes of obtaining your kind advice upon a particular subject, namely, my position at Longbourn.

Please do not think that I am unhappy in my situation with Mr. and Mrs. Collins.

They are always extremely kind, and I am well-treated; and my health is excellent. But Lady Catherine has intimated to me…

("'Intimated!' Mr. Darcy, that is good!" exclaimed Elizabeth.)

…that she is not satisfied with the respectability of my relations—in especial, my sister; and although Mrs. Collins assures me that the circumstance of Bettina's profession is no impediment to her, I am persuaded that Mr. Collins feels differently.

He will not absolutely dismiss me, but I can see that he agrees with Lady Catherine at heart.

Therefore, while I have been extremely obliged to you for helping me to obtain so eligible a situation, I believe that I ought to look for another—if one can be found where my unfortunate family's reputation is not regarded as a hindrance.

I would wish to do nothing, however, without consulting you and Mr. Darcy, who

have shown me such tender consideration and interest in my well-doing.

I know, Aunt Darcy, how ready you are to invite me to Pemberley, but I believe it will be right for me to remain at my post until actually presented with another, and I am sure you will agree with my judgement on this point.

I would be only too grateful if you would favour me with what advice occurs to you; with your knowledge of the world, superior to mine, and of what is a proper course for a young person like myself to take, I should feel great trust and confidence in whatever you might recommend to me.

My hope is that a position in a family of your acquaintance that I am qualified to fill may become known to you.

I know I need not apologize for the liberty; your kindness has taught me that.

I hope that Mr. Darcy and all your family are well; and I remain, we must be careful how we advise her. I should like to get her to Pemberley—after living in Mr. Collins' home, it must be what would be best for her."

"Undoubtedly; but you see she does not want that. Very properly, she seeks employment. It seems to me, Elizabeth—that is, I am no governess-hiring agent—but sometimes these things do not want so much thinking-out as that; in short, something has just occurred to me. Why should she not go to Georgiana? There she would be comfortable. My sister certainly wants help with the children, and she would treat Cloe as an attached friend."

"She would so truly be one of the family," cried Elizabeth, her eyes sparkling.

"Oh! Mr. Darcy, what a happy thought. But it is what I should have expected from you. What a clear thinking brain you have, and what a delight that it has been at my

disposal these five and twenty years—never have I had better cause to hug myself and you," suiting action to word.

Mr. Darcy suffered her caress with very good grace; for, though he was formal in public, he showed his wife great fondness when they were alone.

"No use complimenting me over such a very trifling matter. I have not yet closed my letter to Georgiana; shall I put that in?"

"Certainly. There can be no doubt of her compliance with our demands, so good tempered and obliging as she always is, though I suppose I must not write to Cloe until the offer has actually been made."

"No, but you may be easy. Georgiana is a very ready and forward correspondent, and you will hear very soon."

It was not three days before the Darcys had Lady Neville's reply and they were glad to know her as anxious to please and willing to be of use, as she had always shown herself.

All was soon settled. Cloe would be engaged to help with the Neville children; she would live only a day's drive from Pemberley and only a few miles from her friend Jane, who was excited at the prospect of seeing Cloe again, for Mrs. Darcy would take no refusal.

Cloe was to make a stay at Pemberley for two or three months for a thorough rest before taking up her new duties, which would by no means be as arduous as those in the Collins home.

It was all as perfect as good will could make a plan, but even so, Cloe might have hesitated in consenting, had Mrs. Darcy not taken care to mention that Henry had by

now taken up full residence at the rectory at Manygrove and was too busy in his new parish to come to Pemberley very often.

Cloe would be at Pemberley for Jane's wedding, however, which prospect filled both Jane and her mother with satisfaction, and Cloe admitted to herself that there was great pleasure at not only being so welcomed and loved in the family, as a most important addition to the wedding party, but also in anticipating that she would see Jane's husband and watch her happiness.

It was, in truth, all very delightful to think of, and in Cloe's parting with Mr. and Mrs. Collins she was so light of heart and gay in spirits that she had a hard time pretending a proper reluctance at bidding them farewell.

She could not regret leaving their house, and tiresome as was the long journey by rail and by carriage, she felt very few of the jostles, minded not the people staring at her in the rail-carriage, and could even smile at the fat lady in the coach, with so many parcels, crammed in like herrings in a barrel, who insisted on putting some upon her, Cloe's, feet.

She felt that she was going home, and she had to keep reminding herself that she had no right to think of Pemberley so.

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The next few weeks were very happy ones for Cloe, as they were for everyone else at Pemberley.

The beauty of this particular spring seemed unprecedented, and the inmates of the house, walking in twos or threes over vast carpets of bluebells in the Pemberley woods or past the tossing daffodils that fringed the trout-stream, seemed to find every reason to be out of doors nearly all day long.

Fitzwilliam had been promoted to being pushed in a wheeled chair, and on the very finest days, when there was no danger of a shower, he was wheeled out under the trees, where he could sit and watch the sport of the others and join in their chat.

Though an engaged couple, Lord Frederick and Jane were very far from requiring to be exclusive in their own company. They made entertaining and enlivening poor Fitzwilliam their special occupation.

“Are you turned around in the right direction, Brother?” Jane asked solicitously. “I see the horses are moving off. Shall we move your chair, so you can continue looking at them?”

He had been peaceably watching the horses grazing in the paddock for half an hour.

“Oh, no, I’ve had enough. Might as well go upstairs. Fine piece of horseflesh that Deliberation’s going to be; Exigency was his sire, you know. Pity they had to shoot him.”

“He was in no state—” began Lord Frederick uncomfortably.

“Oh, Fitzwilliam, after doing you such an injury, I wonder you can be so forgiving.”

“Wasn’t the animal’s fault, Janie; mine.

I’d been drinking you know, and you take your chance, when you ride in such a state.

Even the best horseman does. No, no, I got what I deserved; that is what.

No matter. As long as I can go to the races—do you think I may be well enough to be taken in a chair to Newmarket, perhaps next season?

The doctor won’t hear of it, damn the fellow, but I think I may, whatever he says. It’s my neck that’s bust, not his.”

“It is not for me to say, but I hope you will be well enough. Perhaps there may be a race meeting nearer home.”

“Yes; if I can’t ride, I can still watch races. But now I think a nap’s the thing. Call Simmons, will you—no, no, Frederick, don’t take me up, you want to be walking with Jane.”

Whenever Fitzwilliam was comfortably occupied in the house, the young couple rambled idly together, out of doors.

They delighted in Cloe’s joining them on boating-parties and, in long walks with the dogs in the blossoming park, catching sight of tiny blue-and-white butterflies, and brown rabbits, and all the other manifestations of nature in its most springlike state.

Within this Arcadia, little attention could possibly be given to events in the rest of the world, but there was one piece of general news which penetrated even to the lovers and their friends at Pemberley, and that was the death of the King, in the month of

June.

After some solemn things had been said about the death of the good old man, the topic on everyone's lips was the new eighteen-year-old Queen, and there was a general wonder about how anybody so young and female would conduct herself in such an awe-full position.

They had not to wonder long, for there soon arrived a visitor who was well able to inform them on these points.

This was Jeremy Bingley, who had been spending some time in town, rather against his parents' wishes, who feared another opening of the Bettina question.

Jeremy, however, when he was together with the other young people in the park, spoke more confidentially than he would have done with the elders present.

"I am going home to be a good boy now and thought I would take Pemberley in my way," he drawled.

"One is always sure of being well-fed and well-housed here—excellent dinners, beautiful country—Swanfield cannot hold a candle to it. My father certainly has not the way of doing things Mr. Darcy has, but then, he has not half the income. Less, now, I am sorry to say, with what I have managed to get through."

"Jeremy! For shame!" cried Jane, dropping the handles of Fitzwilliam's chair, which she and her lover had been pushing, four-handed. "How can you talk so of my aunt and uncle—and they so kind to you? I hope you have not been gaming. That would be so very shocking."

"Oh, no, no; not at all; not lately, that is. Not since the last little trouble—five hundred pounds, it must be confessed, I lost in a single bet on the turf with—but

there, hang it, I am very sorry, I did not mean to speak of it to distress you, old boy."

"That is all right," said Fitzwilliam. "It was my fault. I know I led you astray, in the bad old days, and I am sorry for it now. See where all my foolishness has got me—instead of me leading you, now you must push me."

"Oh, surely, now, you mustn't blame yourself. That is not fair. You meant no harm, we all know, and I hope you'll soon be back on your feet again."

"Not likely. Not I. No, it's the push-chair for me, for life; I am reconciled to it. The doctors say I won't move anything below my middle again, not on this Earth. I fancy they are right. At least, I can speak, and eat, and drink, and I tell you, Cousin, I have had time aplenty to think."

"That you have," said Jeremy uncomfortably.

Fitzwilliam went on, "Yes; and I see things more seriously now, I can assure you. I had my failings; I was thoughtless and heedless enough, and did many bad things."

He dropped his big head on his chest, almost the only movement he could make, and looked the very picture of sadness, a big, immobile child.

No one could think of anything to say for a moment, and Jeremy finally advanced, "I was the worse fool than you, Cousin; it was not all your fault. Don't think any more of it, pray. "

"Yes, dear Brother, do try to be cheerful. See how lovely it is in the park, and how nice it is we are all together, all of us who love you," Jane tried to console him.

"True, true," cried Frederick and tactfully tried to turn the subject. "Jeremy, won't you tell us how things are going on in town? That will entertain Fitzwilliam better

and the rest of us too, I'll be bound. Is everyone talking about her new Majesty?"

"Yes, I should like to hear about her," said Cloe, with a grateful look at Lord Frederick. "Only think, she is exactly the age of Jane and me. I cannot imagine being a Queen, can you, Jane?"

"Oh, no! It must be quite frightening to have to discuss matters of state and dull, too, to have to sit in council with old men and ambassadors every day. But still it is a grand thing—to be Queen of England. Did you see her yourself, Jeremy?"

"To be sure I did," he answered. "Once in the Park, riding, and another time at a levee—my friend, Sir Humphrey Horeland, got me into that, and it was a dreadful crush, but I saw her just the same. With difficulty, it is true, for she is so small. I had to crane my neck over the crush—like this—"

He demonstrated, and they laughed.

"But is she so very small?" cried Jane, "smaller than I am, or rather, smaller than Cloe, for Cloe is the littler?"

"Oh, yes, Cloe is quite a giantess beside her: I do not think the little Queen can be four foot eleven. Perhaps not four foot ten . And she is plump and not pretty, with a sort of German face, a hooked little nose, and teeth that stick out."

"Oh! Jeremy! How horrid, how disrespectful!" cried the girls. "You are making it up," added Jane.

"Indeed, I am not, but I do not mean to say she is positively ugly, for she has a very pretty skin, and smooth light hair—rather your colour, Cloe—and a most remarkable air. Everyone says they have never seen anything like it. Though she is so tiny, she has the most perfect carriage and, tout ensemble, a real look of Majesty. I wish you

could see her. But you will go to Court when you are married and be presented as a married woman, will you not, Jane?"

"Yes, I think I shall," said Jane positively.

Jeremy went on, "But there, I have forgot—I hope you don't mind my mentioning it, Fitzwilliam, and don't take it wrongly, but the fact is I have a message to you, Miss Cloe, from your sister."

There was a frozen silence. Cloe must feel that any mention of Bettina was a gross breach of propriety, and when it was done by Jeremy, Bettina's lover, and before Fitzwilliam, her former lover, it became so dreadful that no one knew how to look. Jane found her voice first.

"Jeremy, surely you do not mean to talk to Cloe about her family here and now, in company? And I am certain it is too much for Fitzwilliam. He must be wanting his tea. Shall we wheel you back, Brother?"

"Rather have something stronger than tea, yes," Fitzwilliam agreed.

The young couple wheeled the invalid off, and Cloe looked after them ruefully.

"That is like Jane—she is all consideration and takes such care of her poor brother. Well, Cousin; I will hear what my sister has to say to me. Please, if you can, tell me with dispatch, and then we will end this subject."

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“I am glad that you are not absurdly prudish, for a young lady,” Jeremy said.

“After all, these are modern times, and Bettina is a good-humoured enough girl, and I’d have married her myself if she were not an actress, and if my father were not so opposed, and if she had any money.

But I have seen her again, and there is no use of talking to me of indelicacy, for you cannot miss her if you are in London.

She is always in something or other at the Covent Garden, you know—not a theatre with the very best reputation, the audience are ruffians, and they say a lady in a decent gown will have it spoilt if she goes into a box there—but that may be merely lies, put about in the newspapers by the other theatres.

Nothing is more likely. Well, Bettina plays there, now, not only in mere pantomime but in farce and melodrama, too: I saw her myself: she was a village girl and sang a song in ‘William Tell,’ not badly at all, upon my word.

She must be quite well paid, need not be at any fellow’s mercy if she does not like it. ”

Cloe looked down. “Well, and what is the message?”

“Only that she is happy and hopes you will come to see her on the stage if ever you come to town. Her lodgings are in Drury Lane, and it would be no harm to your reputation to visit her there; or she would be pleased to have a letter from you at any time. She has heard from your father and mother and even sent them some money.

There. Was that so very bad?”

“I am glad to hear that she is well,” said Cloe resolutely, “but I am sorry she has not yet come to a sense of the wrongness of her own conduct. I will—I will send her a kind note. Now, let us return to the house and join the others.”

They turned, and without further conversation they walked back past a field of purple fox-gloves, and they passed into the walled garden, full of roses in bloom, where Dr. Clarke was most happily occupied. He hailed the young people with animation.

“How d’ye, Miss Cloe; how d’ye, Mr. Jeremy?

Have you ever seen such roses as these?—I should not boast, but they are approaching perfection, especially these white ones, a new strain, which I shall call ‘Queen Victoria,’ to be sure.

And did you notice the borders along the walk—Hayes has not done badly with them, under my direction, I think—wild-flowers, campion, lavender, celandine.

I prefer a wild border to dry formalities —something more of wildness—do not you agree with me, my dear? ”

“Oh, yes, Uncle Clarke,” said Cloe, trying to bring her attention to what he was saying, “the roses—may I take a few back to poor Fitzwilliam? I think he would like it.”

“Well—I do not like to disappoint—by all means, you may—but if you can wait, I would advise it. Three days, Miss Cloe, only three more days, and they will be perfection: then, perhaps you will take a selection. And I have some that I am cultivating specially for his mother, too, as a great surprise. The Elizabeth rose, which—but I must betray no secrets.”

“That will be lovely,” agreed Cloe, absently.

“There is nothing like a rose, is there?” he said, growing confidential. “It was a rose first taught me to love my Maker, more than forty years ago, and I always shall, until gathered in by the great Gardener.” He bowed his head respectfully.

“Very fine flowers, Uncle,” said Jeremy, with a nod, and they moved on. As they drew near the house, Jeremy spoke again. “Nice old fellow … By the by, where is my cousin Henry? I thought you would have married him by now, Cloe; that is what.”

“How can you say such things, Jeremy?” she said, with a reproachful look.

“Well, I am sure he was sweet on you; can’t blame him; you’re quite as pretty as Bettina.

She is well enough for an actress, but you are of a fresher—modester—sort that I should think would suit him capitally.

I don’t doubt but you’d make quite a sensation yourself in London, and I can’t think what Henry is about.

I am sorry if I have said the wrong thing,” he said hastily, catching sight of her face, “bless me, but that is the way I always do.”

They had gained the house, and Cloe lost no time in running upstairs. Lord Frederick, coming down from Fitzwilliam’s chamber, felt rather than saw her fly past, her face averted, and his Lordship stepped forward and waylaid Jeremy.

“What on Earth have you been saying to the girl, old chap?”

“Only about Henry,” said Jeremy, abashed.

“Look here,” suggested Lord Frederick, after a moment’s reflection, “perhaps we ought to do some fishing, this afternoon, and get ourselves out of the way, what do you say?”

Jane repeated what she knew of the conversation to her mother, with indignation, and Elizabeth was quite as outraged as her daughter, though from a mother’s perspective.

“It can’t be proper for Jeremy to talk to Cloe about her sister in London, now, can it, Mama?—considering what Bettina is. I don’t know how he can be so thoughtless.”

“The shame of Jeremy’s behaviour, for his mother—so good and as sweet as she is. I am sorry he has learnt nothing from his late experiences—certainly not discretion,” she said.

“He needs a sensible wife,” said Jane, in a matronly fashion that was amusing to behold, given her youthful face. “But I would not wish such a fate for any nice girl. I know he is my cousin, but I think he is quite despicable.”

“He needs to be chained up for a few years, that is all,” said Elizabeth with a sigh. “He is such a very silly young man; but then, he is only one and twenty. Perhaps, when Henry comes, he can do him some good. Being with Henry would be the very best thing for Jeremy.”

“I hope when Henry comes,” said Jane vehemently, “Jeremy will be long gone.”

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Henry did come, and after his cousin had ridden back to Swanfield, repentantly upon the whole, for the sight of Cloe's sadness and shame had worked upon him so far.

The entire party would know themselves glad to exchange Jeremy for Henry; and the young man very speedily found Jane and Cloe in the walled garden, picking roses, for Mr. Clarke had at last given them permission to cut the full-blown blossoms.

"This is a pretty sight," he said, walking in by the garden gate. His eyes met Cloe's at once, but she lowered hers and said nothing. Jane ran over to him and grasped his hands.

"Henry! Here you are! Can you stay? Are things all right in your parish? Has my mother seen you yet—shall I tell her you are here? She and the aunts are in the library with Fitzwilliam, Aunt Mary has found some interesting racing volumes she wished to show him for a treat, and the other gentlemen are out riding," she finished, in one breath.

"Why, Jane, you talk so fast. Yes, everything is well at Manygrove. I have been marrying and burying parishioners at not much of a rate—in fact, there have been no marriages or deaths, though I have had two Christenings. It is very hot, however, and I thought a few days at Pemberley, watching the sight of my sister with her intended, would refresh me. Do not take me for an idle parson," he said, taking care not to look at Cloe again until he thought she could bear it.

"No, Jane, you need not go to my mother yet—sit and rest, do."

But Jane was up and running, and she called over her shoulder as she flew, "Mama

has not seen you; she will want to know."

Cloe was therefore abruptly left alone with Henry, in a situation of awkwardness which seemed to her almost unbearable.

She could absolutely think of nothing to say and turned a pink rose around in her fingers, sure that it matched the colour of her face and glad to use her bonnet as a screen.

Henry advanced a little, and said hesitantly, "I have not seen you in this long time, Cloe—not since you went away and became a governess. I am sure you did it all very well, but I wish you would have stayed here."

She forced herself to speak, though she still could not meet his eyes. "I could not, you know, and it was not so very bad after all. The Collinses were kind, and I saw a part of the country that I had never seen before. Kent was quite beautiful." Her voice trailed off.

"Is it very painful for you, to see me here?" he asked quickly. "I shall remove myself if my presence is distasteful to you; I would not distress you, for the world."

"Oh, no! Not at all," she managed to say. "I am leaving myself, you know—I have stayed such a long while already, and your family has been so kind. I go to Lady Neville, soon, and I am fortunate to have such a prospect. Not a girl in a hundred, I am sure, could."

Henry moved close enough now to be face to face with her. "Cloe," he said, "I must say it, impossible though it seems. You must not. Please do not accept another position—I want you to remain here."

She looked up in astonishment. "Mr. Henry—Mr. Darcy—Cousin, you know I cannot

do any such thing. I must go, and that soon. I do not wish to remain dependent and a burden here or anywhere else—I must be independent."

"Not if you were my wife," he said, earnestly. "Would you indeed prefer independence to that? Cloe, I have always wished you to marry me, and I cannot stop wishing it, now that I have seen you again. I think I could make you happy, and I know you would make me so."

She tormented the rose petals in her hand and looked at the ground. "You know very well that can never, never, be."

"Of course it can. Who is to say not? My father and my mother will welcome you with delight. Jane will be so truly your sister—you will be at home at Pemberley."

"Oh, don't tempt me, don't tempt me. It sounds too beautiful to be true—and it is," she cried.

"You do care for me, then? The prospect does tempt you?" A joyous smile stole over his features.

"That is what I want to be assured of. Say nothing, if it is so—and I will know how to be happy. Cloe, I stayed away because I thought you wished it, but I could do so no longer: you are the wife I want and will have."

She found she could not reply, and after a moment he took her arm gently.

"Let us go into the house," he said, "and see my mother. You must think it over, and you will see, in a rational light, that there can be no objections. But I will importune you no more at present. Your own good sense will do a better job than I can."

Mrs. Darcy and Jane saw them walking through the gardens, slowly, arm in arm, and

they were rejoiced, but when the young couple entered the parlour, Henry said nothing, and Cloe took a seat near Fitzwilliam.

She occupied herself in offering him the different roses, one by one, so that he might enjoy the scent of each, and he sniffed very dutifully to please her, kindly refraining from entirely spoiling her happiness and usefulness by telling her that he had never had any sense of smell worth mentioning.

Henry talked quite successfully about parish matters for the next hour, though hardly aware of what he said, and when his father came in, he followed him upstairs and presented his case to him, with warmth and anxiety, while Mr. Darcy pulled off his riding-boots.

The agitated Henry further scrupled to explain the full truth: that Cloe had not yet accepted him.

“As far as I am concerned,” said Mr. Darcy, “you may marry the girl, if it pleases you, and if you can make her have you. Her family may be a drawback, but as I married into it myself with remarkable success, I can only call it a prescription for happiness, and if her parents have been a burden to me this five and twenty years, I shall be quite glad to pass them on to you. I fancy it is the sister that it is at the bottom of the girl’s reservations, but as my late father-in-law Mr. Bennet used to say, no one ought to mind being connected with a little absurdity.

And I say, if folly were grief, every house would weep. ”

“It is more than absurdity and folly, indeed,” said Henry soberly, “but Cloe is not to be held responsible for her sister’s character, and if you do not object, sir—”

“Far from it. By your marrying Cloe, we would have an actress in the family no more than is already the case, and we are not so foolish as to think it is a reflection on poor

Cloe’s virtue, any more than on our own.

Well, go down, go down, Henry; continue your wooing, and be so good as to let me finish getting dressed.

She will make a very good parson’s wife, and I shall give you the fields between Pemberley and Manygrove when you are married, so you will start life on no less than two thousand a year, and when I am gone, you two will look after your brother, and help him run the place.

With your influence, Pemberley will be much properer than it ever could be in my lifetime, I have no doubt.

You will never allow any actresses hereabouts.

Times change, and we must change with them. ”

“Thank you, Father,” said Henry with all his heart, “your kindness is such as I cannot express—” But Mr. Darcy waved him away and rang the bell for his manservant to bring up the shaving-water.

Henry courted Cloe very determinedly, and every day, as Fitzwilliam sat under a sun-umbrella, watching his beloved horses, the two young couples walked a little distance into the Park.

They liked to see how the crops were ripening, and to look at the fish in the stew-pond, and to watch the donkeys pulling the heavy stone rollers over the smooth green lawn, scattered with daisies and buttercups, and to see the view from the old stone bridge.

Much as they all liked each other, it was remarkable how the foursome generally split

into two pair.

Mrs. Darcy tactfully stayed back, on these occasions, watching over Fitzwilliam, hoping to make him feel less left out, but her tender consideration may have been thrown away, for as long as he could be wheeled out to see the horses and have the racing-stud read to him daily, and be fed sufficient beef and porter in judicious sips and bites, Fitzwilliam was not unhappy.

He did not care if he never formed part of a couple with a young woman again, since one of the species had led him into so many difficulties.

Jane, however, was anxious about the match between her friend and her brother.

“I do hope Henry will persuade her,” she said to her future husband, for the fifth or sixth time that day.

“I made her listen to some solemn talk on the subject last night and told her I should never forgive her if she did not take him.”

“You have been telling her that very constantly, all week long,” observed Lord Frederick. “I should think she is tired of hearing it. You might safely leave it to herself, I am sure.”

“Do you really think so?”

“Certainly. Hanging and wedding are the two things that go by destiny, do they not? So there is not the least doubt in the world.”

Nor was there. When Henry and Cloe joined the others, during one of these walks—it hardly matters which one, as they were all very much alike—there were two engaged couples instead of one; and Jane claimed the affectionate embrace of a sister, while

Lord Frederick shook Henry’s hand with warmth and pleasure, so that the four young people made a joyous cluster in the midst of a poppy-field.

Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy walked out and joined them, and they heard the long wished-for news and embraced their new daughter-to-be with heartfelt delight.

Mrs. Darcy drew her a little apart and told her, with smiles and embraces, “I was sure you would give in. So persuasive as our Henry is, so full of courtesy and full of craft, with his tongue his best weapon—how could you long resist his arguments?”

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“Indeed I could not!” said Cloe, laughing a little in her embarrassment.

“He has made me so very happy. There is nobody like him—so clever, and so kind—I am the happiest creature in the world.” She was unable to find anything better than the most threadbare words, but her face was expressing her feelings.

“If only I can be sure that I will not disgrace you. I fear what people will say about Henry marrying his cousin, with no money, and such connections—the more so, because it is all true.”

“That must never be mentioned between us again, my dear. I daresay we may receive a vituperative letter on the subject from Lady Catherine, but we are used to that, on our own account, and can endure it. I was a poor girl when I came to Pemberley, you know, and I flatter myself it has done Mr. Darcy no harm, only good. Love is not found in a market; I want to see my son happy. And your relations—why, please to remember, they are mine, too. My only regret is that we cannot give Georgiana an excellent governess, but her loss, by our acquisition of a delightful daughter, seems a fair bargain. Oh, yes, Darcy and I are vastly contented—and a contented mind, you know, must be a continual feast.”

September was the month fixed upon for the two weddings; the Darcys did not wish to part with their daughter before she had quite turned eighteen, but even with this delay, Lord and Lady Frederick’s marriage was the first celebrated of the two, for Henry wished to execute some additional building at Manygrove before bringing his bride home, and the young Nevilles were established at their seat in Cheshire quite three weeks before Henry and Cloe drove off from Pemberley Church, all smiles.

Wickham and Lydia were invited to Pemberley on the occasion, with all their children, and if Wickham took more of an interest in Mr. Darcy's excellent wine than in his daughter's happiness, he kept quiet, at any rate, and left any offensiveness of manner to his wife.

Her loud and urgent exclamations of pride in her daughter, and her wish of being very often at Manygrove, in the near vicinity of Pemberley, were directed with many a hopeful look at her sister Elizabeth, who did not acknowledge these hints.

Christmas was celebrated with great festivity at Pemberley, with a dance that served as the occasion upon which Jeremy Bingley first noticed that he was becoming infatuated with the young woman who would, before long, become his wife.

She was a connection of the Nevilles and a girl of character, strong-minded enough, despite her youth, to require that he become less trifling, and he did become tolerably domestic, a source of pleasure and pride to his parents, rather than a trial.

He was no very solid character, but he was very fond of his wife, and being so much in company with his new family, superior people as they were, and making frequent visits to his cousins, who neither gambled nor gadded about, did much to steady him.

The Darcys had another source of joy in the return from India of Mr. Darcy's favourite cousin, General Fitzwilliam, which happened that winter; he came home with a bride of his own, the handsome and sprightly widow of a fellow-officer.

They lived chiefly in London and made many visits to all their welcoming relations, in Derbyshire, and in Cheshire, and in Kent.

They were contented to be back in England, and neither of them being young, and both good-natured, they could wait with perfect patience and philosophy for the day when Rosings should fall to them, never wishing for it to occur one moment earlier than was natural.

There was one occasion on which the Pemberley family indulged in some gadding about, for soon after the cousins' marriages, the Darcys accompanied the two young couples to London, and there they enjoyed the social season as fully as Jane could ever have desired.

Fitzwilliam was not a part of the party on this occasion; having achieved his wishes of being taken by carriage and chair to attend the Newmarket races, to his fullest satisfaction, he was content to stay quietly at home with the Clarkes and travel no more.

Without a care on her mind, therefore, Mrs. Darcy presented the two young married ladies at Court, in their bridal dresses, with myrtle and white roses in their hair, and if they whispered to one another about Queen Victoria's smallness and plainness, no one heard them.

Jane had such a sweet smile from the girl who was so close to her in age that she concluded that she was quite good-natured and not proud at all, for a Queen.

"I hope she will find someone to marry, and be as happy as we are," she earnestly told Cloe.

They did not see Bettina, either at the theatre or in the dashing drawing-rooms and sporting salons to which she was admitted, and if one or two ill-natured people asked if it was true that the actress was a relation, Mrs. Darcy replied in the affirmative with a distant blandness that soothed her uncomfortable niece.

Bettina was successful and prosperous; there was no winning her from her wicked ways, and Cloe only wished that she might not have as painful a decline as she felt she must eventually suffer.

For herself, she rejoiced in every happiness, in her marriage to a man whose mind was so fully in concert with her own, that she hoped that they would be as happy a

couple as her aunt and her husband had always been and still were, even in the modern Victorian age that was opening upon Pemberley.

THE END