The Merry Wife of Pemberley

by cscorpia

Summary

A month after their wedding, Fitzwilliam and Elizabeth Darcy travel on to Pemberley and begin their married life.
A black coach drawn by four horses was clattering up the road that led to Pemberley. One of the occupants, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy, had every hope of showing his new wife her home in all of its glory. Unfortunately, it was raining.

“Fitzwilliam, why are you scowling?” Mrs. Elizabeth Darcy asked, “You will frighten whatever maids happen to see you.”

“It is raining,” Mr. Darcy responded, “I had wanted you to see Pemberley in more flattering weather than this.”

“You forget, my dear, that I have already seen Pemberley.”

“Not as it’s mistress though. Your first view as my wife will be tinged by mud.”

“Hopefully my petticoats will forgive me,” Elizabeth said teasingly. At this, Mr. Darcy smiled, remembering her morning walk to Netherfield Park many months ago. Elizabeth continued, “What should I expect from my first introduction to Pemberley as its new mistress?”

“All manner of respect and kindness, I should hope. Since we are arriving so close to dinner, I would imagine Mrs. Reynolds will not have us greet the entirety of the staff until tomorrow, or perhaps even a few days. I would not be surprised if Mrs. Black forwarded some of your menu preferences in London to Mrs. Reynolds, so I would expect a meal of some of your favorites. They were expecting us this morning,” Mr. Darcy said with a sigh, still clearly put out by the rain. Over their first month of marriage, Elizabeth had learned that he greatly disliked any changes to his plans, particularly last-minute and uncontrollable ones.

Finally, the carriage rounded the final bend and drew to a halt in front Pemberley. Elizabeth looked at the grand front door and smiled. “I am so very glad that there is not a grand staircase to the front door, for otherwise we should get quite wet!”

“Indeed, my dear Elizabeth,” Mr. Darcy said as the carriage door was opened. As quickly he could, he stepped out of the coach, handed Elizabeth down, and entered the grand house.

The entrance hall of Pemberley was not overly grand, but gave way to a beautiful, high-ceilinged saloon. Though she had seen it before, Elizabeth could not help but stare.

“Mrs. Darcy?” Mr. Darcy said softly. Regaining her attention, he said more loudly, “Hello, Mrs. Reynolds!”

“Welcome home, Mr. Darcy, Mrs. Darcy,” the housekeeper said. She had been standing just inside the archway that led to the saloon, unnoticed until a gangly footman had taken their coats. “I hope your journey was enjoyable.”

“It was, thank you,” Elizabeth said, never one to lose the power of speech for long.

“Will you be wanting dinner soon, ma’am?” Mrs. Reynolds asked. Elizabeth looked around for a clock. It was about half past four.

“Yes please, in about an hour,” she responded.

“Very well. Would you like me to show you to your room or…”
Here Mr. Darcy interrupted. “I can show her, Mrs. Reynolds, thank you. Please alert Mrs. Darcy’s maid that she will be ready for her in about a quarter hour and tell Williams where I have gone.”

“I shall, Mr. Darcy.” With that, Mrs. Reynolds left them. Elizabeth looked around the entrance hall again, noting the almost invisible footman that waited by the door, before taking her husband’s arm as he led her through the saloon and up the grand staircase. Upon reaching the top, he led her down the left hand side of the corridor and through a simple door that opened onto a long hallway.

“This is the family wing. I hope to later take you on a full tour of the house, and I imagine Mrs. Reynolds will as well. But for now, this must suffice. This is Georgiana’s room here,” he said, motioning to the third door in the hallway, “And the master and mistress chambers are further down.” They arrived outside a white door. Mr. Darcy kissed her cheek softly, “I should get changed for dinner. This is your room.”

Elizabeth opened the door, watching as her husband walked down the hall just a little bit further and open his own door.

Her room had soft yellow walls and a light grey carpet. Large windows opened onto a view of the south gardens and the woods farther out. There was a large four-poster bed with yellow curtains and a yellow bedspread. Next to one window, there was an upholstered chair and a small table. To the right of the door that opened onto the hallway, there was another door, which presumably opened into Mr. Darcy’s chamber.

Elizabeth heard a knock and called out, “Enter,” expecting a lady’s maid. During the month they spent in London following their marriage at Longbourn, Elizabeth had been assisted by an attentive house maid, since it did not make sense to hire a lady’s maid in London when they would soon be traveling on to Pemberley. Mr. Darcy had written to his steward, instructing him to ask that Mrs. Reynolds hire a probationary lady’s maid to begin work when he and Mrs. Darcy arrived at Pemberley.

Mrs. Reynolds entered the room, “I’m sorry, Mrs. Darcy, but the lady’s maid I retained for you, Miss Greenfield, was discovered to have run off with the middle son of the local blacksmith. We haven’t had time to engage another.”

Elizabeth sighed quietly. She hadn’t wanted to admit it, but having a lady’s maid – even just a temporarily promoted house maid – had been most convenient in London. She was looking forward to meeting her trained lady’s maid at Pemberley, if only for the time it saved in dressing. “Very well. We can begin inquiring again in the morning. Is there anyone available now?”

“Yes ma’am. Annie Hadaway is our head housemaid. May I call her in?”

“Please do.”

Mrs. Reynolds stepped out into the hall and a slight girl a few years older than Elizabeth entered. “Good evening, Mrs. Darcy,” she said.

“Good evening. Annie, is it?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“And you are the head housemaid?”

“Yes ma’am, for at least a few more months.”

“Only a few months?”
“I’m engaged, ma’am, to a clerk in Derby. I’ll be living there after the wedding.”

“Oh, my congratulations.”

“Thank you ma’am. What do you wish to wear?”

Annie commenced helping Elizabeth to dress in a light blue evening dress with a lace overlay. She had finished pinning up Elizabeth’s hair just as a knock came from the interior door.

“Come in,” Elizabeth called out, nodding to Annie as she curtseyed and left. Mr. Darcy opened the door and walked over to where she was sitting in front of her mirror.

“You look lovely,” he said, offering her his arm.

“Thank you, Fitzwilliam,” she responded. Together they exited the room and walked back down the family hall and onto the corridor above the saloon. The dining room was across the saloon from the entrance hall.

The table, though probably shrunk to its smallest size and dwarfed by the room at large, was plenty big enough for Mr. and Mrs. Darcy. Just two places were set and a single footman waited by a serving table. The butler stood inside the door.

“Ah, Abrams!” Mr. Darcy said, “This is my wife, Mrs. Elizabeth Darcy. Elizabeth, this is Pemberley’s butler, Abrams. His father was the butler in my father’s time, and Abrams took over for him about five years ago.”

“It is lovely to meet you, Abrams,” Elizabeth said, “Pemberley is beautiful.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Darcy,” Abrams said.

Dinner passed with idle conversation and excellent food. Having been married a month, the Darcys were somewhat acquainted with one another and their habits. After dinner, Mr. Darcy suggested that they withdraw to the drawing room, remarking that a mere evening could not be sufficient for Mrs. Darcy to truly appreciate the library. Elizabeth laughed and allowed herself to be led to the drawing room, smiling softly as Mr. Darcy firmly shut the door behind them.

“Hello, Mrs. Darcy,” he said, touching her elbow slightly, “I heard that your lady’s maid has run off?”

“Yes she has!” Elizabeth exclaimed, “And to think, she hadn’t even met me yet. Yes, she ran off with a blacksmith’s son. Mrs. Reynolds left me in the capable hands of the head housemaid. It seems that I must wait a bit longer before experiencing the wonders of a true lady’s maid so elegantly advanced by Miss Bingley.” Darcy frowned slightly at this. Elizabeth, seeing this, said, “Do not worry. For years my sisters and I were helped by a single maid. It must be positively luxurious for Mary and Kitty now, let alone for me to have the attentive assistance of a very capable housemaid. Truly, I do not mind it.”

“Still,” Mr. Darcy said, “I will ask Mosier to put an advertisement at Derby. Hopefully someone will be found soon.”

“I agree, my dear,” Elizabeth said, sitting down on the cream sofa and looking around. The drawing room had orange-red walls, a patterned cream ceiling, and a beautiful white fireplace with black detailing. Though it was late May, a fire was crackling merrily in the grate, and the candles in the chandelier cast a soft glow over the room. Mr. Darcy smiled and said, “I’ll return shortly.” He left the room and Elizabeth waited, mildly puzzled as to what caused him to leave.
True to his word, he returned shortly, carrying a well-worn volume in his hands. “Do you like Shakespeare?” he asked.

“Certainly,” Elizabeth replied.

“Then may I read to you? I have brought his play, The Merry Wives of Windsor.” Elizabeth nodded, and Mr. Darcy began to read, “Sir Hugh, persuade me not; I will make a Starchamber matter of it: if he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, esquire…”

Elizabeth reclined against the back of the couch and closed her eyes, listening to her husband read the dialogue between Shallow, Slender, and Sir Hugh Evans. Before long, the scene had ended with Slender’s defiant exclamation, “I'll rather be unmannerly than troublesome. You do yourself wrong, indeed, la!”

“Do I resemble Mistress Anne Page to you, Fitzwilliam?” Elizabeth asked teasingly.

Mr. Darcy started slightly before remembering it was his witty wife asking and responded tenderly, “No, though you also have brown hair, Slender would not have said that Mistress Anne spoke ‘small like a woman’ if he had met you.”

Elizabeth smiled and took his hand. “Perhaps it is good, then, that you do not consider ‘Seven hundred pounds and possibilities’ to be the most desirable trait in a wife.”

“Perhaps it is,” he responded lightly. Elizabeth yawned. “Is it time for you to retire, my love?”

“I believe so, but Fitzwilliam, I shall need your assistance.”

“My assistance?” Mr. Darcy said with feigned neutrality.

“Yes!” responded Elizabeth, laughing, “For I cannot remember where my rooms are!”

Mr. Darcy laughed and, standing, helped her to her feet. Husband and wife left the drawing room arm in arm and Mr. Darcy again left Mrs. Darcy at the door outside of her bedroom.

Annie was already in the room. She assisted Elizabeth out of the evening dress and into her nightgown and dressing room. Elizabeth washed her face and hands with water and sat as Annie took down her hair.

“How would you like your hair for the night, Mrs. Darcy?”

“Down please,” a deeper voice than Mrs. Darcy’s said. Mr. Darcy had silently opened the door between their rooms and was standing just inside the doorway. Annie started and stared at Mr. Darcy.

“Goodnight, Annie,” Elizabeth said with a smile. The blushing maid collected the evening gown and left the room, wishing her hasty goodnight. Elizabeth then turned to her husband. “I told you you would scare the maids, Fitzwilliam.”

“I am sorry, my dear. Is that the housemaid attending you?” he replied.

“Yes,” she said, “Her name is Annie. She’ll only be here a few more months though, as she is engaged to a clerk in Derby.”

Mr. Darcy had crossed the room to take her hands. Now he kissed her softly. “Are you tired from the journey, Elizabeth?” he asked solicitously.
“Not too tired,” Elizabeth replied, giving a gentle squeeze to his hands. They continued like this for some moments, holding hands and occasionally kissing. Finally, Elizabeth said, “You know, Mr. Darcy, I have not yet seen your rooms at Pemberley.” With this, Mr. Darcy lifted her into his arms and carried her into the other room, shutting the door soundly behind him.
Pemberley, Derbyshire, England

Elizabeth Darcy awoke and rolled over to find that her husband was conspicuously missing from the other side of the bed. She sat up.

The master’s chambers at Pemberley were much larger than those in London. The walls were dark blue. In many ways, his rooms were the mirror image of hers. The interior door between their two rooms was to the left of the door that opened out onto the hallway. Against the wall on the far side from the interior door was a large four poster bed, where she now sat, with a deep red canopy and bed coverings. Like in her room, the windows looked out over the south garden and beyond into the woods. From his room, she could see the long green pasture that lined part of the drive up to Pemberley.

Finally deciding that her husband was well and truly up (while wondering how he had managed to get dressed without her noticing – or his valet, Williams, seeing her), she got out of bed and slipped back into her dressing gown. Once back in the mistress’s rooms, she rang the bell pull and sat down at her dresser. Not ten minutes later, Annie arrived and helped her into a short-sleeved lavender gown with an embroidered bodice and hem.

Upon entering the dining room, she received an affectionate smile from her husband. “Good morning, Fitzwilliam,” she said.

“Good morning, Elizabeth,” he responded, “Did you sleep well?”

“I did. I must have been more tired from the journey than I realized. And you?” Mr. Darcy responded that he too had slept well and the ate in comfortable silence for awhile.

“What are your plans for the day?” Elizabeth asked.

“I had hoped to take you on a full tour of the house, but I also have some estate business to take care of that will likely last past luncheon. I believe Mrs. Reynolds also wanted to review some things with you. I would not expect any callers today, since it was so rainy yesterday and we only just arrived.”

“When will Georgiana be joining us?”

“Do you tire of my company so quickly,” her husband asked lightly. Seeing her look, he said, “She is still staying with Lord and Lady Matlock in London. From what I recall, Mrs. Annesley should rejoin them within the week. There, I think the whole party will travel north until they reach Pemberley, at which point Lord and Lady Matlock will stay for a few days before traveling on to their estate. So she will rejoin us in about two weeks, I would estimate.”

“Will it just be Lord and Lady Matlock, Georgiana, and Mrs. Annesley?” Elizabeth inquired.

“No, I would imagine that Lady Edith and Lady Helen will also be traveling with them. Edward will not be coming, as he will be with his regiment.”

“And Viscount Dursley?” Elizabeth asked. Viscount Dursley was the eldest son of Lord and Lady Matlock and heir to his father’s title as Earl of Matlock. He and his wife, the Viscountess Dursley, had been married four years prior and had two young children named Richard and Eleanor.

“To the best of my knowledge, they are still at the Dursley estate in Gloucestershire and will remain
there at least until Michaelmas, if not longer.”

By now they had finished their breakfast. Mr. Darcy stood. “Would you like me to show you to your sitting room? Mrs. Reynolds can attend you there.”

“How will she…” Elizabeth began, before remembering that Abrams, the butler, was in the dining room. He nodded at her politely. Of course he would tell Mrs. Reynolds that she was waiting in her sitting room. She took Mr. Darcy’s arm.

Once back in the middle of the saloon, facing the entrance hall, Mr. Darcy stopped. “I thought it would be helpful for you to orient yourself,” he explained. “Directly in front of you is the entrance hall. To the right is the staircase – sometimes called the grand staircase – that leads to the second and third floors. To the right is the library and the gallery. Behind us is the dining room, where we just came, and one of the drawing rooms, where we were after dinner last night. There are more rooms on this floor, and in the whole house, but hopefully this will help you find your way around to start.”

Elizabeth smiled. “Are you worried you’ll lose me?” she asked.

“My mother used to tell us a story about the first time she came to Pemberley. She and my father met in town and married from the Matlock estate, so she never saw Pemberley until three months after her wedding, even though Branburry Place is not far from here. The first afternoon after she arrived, she had been taken to one of the drawing rooms, the one that is now called the cream drawing room, and could not find her way back!” Mr. Darcy laughed, “You would not be the first Darcy bride to be lost in Pemberley.”

“Well then, Fitzwilliam, perhaps you ought to lead me to my sitting room!” Elizabeth said laughingly. Mr. Darcy happily obliged, showing her through yet another drawing room and down a hallway.

“My study is just further down the hall, past the turn. It’s not easy to get lost in this wing of the house.” Mr. Darcy kissed her on the cheek lightly. “I hope estate business does not take me too long, so I can take you on a proper tour of Pemberley.”

Elizabeth agreed. Once he had left, she took a deep breath, mentally scolded herself for being nervous for a simple meeting with the housekeeper, and opened the door. The sitting room was empty.

Elizabeth stepped inside and shut the door quietly. Again, she was impressed by the elegant decoration. The walls were a muted brown and much of the upholstery was done in a very pretty shade of rose. It was a feminine room, without being overpowering. A picture of the Virgin Mary holding the Infant Christ hung above the white fireplace.

“Come in, please,” Elizabeth called out upon hearing a knock.

“Good morning, Mrs. Darcy,” Mrs. Reynolds said, “I trust your first night in your new home was to your liking?”

Elizabeth blushed slightly but replied, “It was Mrs. Reynolds, thank you. Good morning to you as well.” There was a slightly awkward pause before Elizabeth spoke again, “What needs my attention today, Mrs. Reynolds?”

“I have brought the menus for the rest of the week and next week for your approval, ma’am. Our cook, Mrs. Carter, received the letter from Mrs. Black in London with the recipes of some of your favorites. I also have some accounts for your approval and I thought that we could walk through the
first floor of the house so I can make notes of anything that can be changed right away.”

Elizabeth gave her assent and she and Mrs. Reynolds set the menus for the following week. Elizabeth noted that there was no central list of the various dishes that could be prepared and requested that Mrs. Reynolds and Mrs. Carter make a list of dishes organized by category to make meal planning easier. Once both accounts and menus had been finished, they commenced a tour of the house.

The nearest room, Mr. Darcy’s study, was passed over as he was working and Elizabeth would not be making any decorating changes there anyways. From Mrs. Reynolds, Elizabeth learned that the drawing room she and Mr. Darcy passed through to reach her sitting room was aptly named the green drawing room. There were two other drawing rooms; the crimson drawing room next to the dining room and the cream drawing room on the south wing next to the chapel.

“The chapel hasn’t been used for years, ma’am, not since old Mr. Darcy’s aunt was married there. Old Mr. Darcy had no sisters and so no one was married out of it in the last generation. It’s a true altar, ma’am, but we keep it mostly shut up,” Mrs. Reynolds told Elizabeth when she asked about the chapel. By luncheon time, Mrs. Reynolds and Elizabeth had only managed to inspect Elizabeth’s sitting room, the green drawing room, the entrance hall, the saloon, and the dining room.

“I almost find myself in need of a nap, Fitzwilliam!” Elizabeth exclaimed at luncheon. Mr. Darcy only smiled.

“I hope Mrs. Reynolds isn’t working you too hard, my dear,” he said, “After all, we are still technically on our honeymoon.”

Elizabeth smiled and squeezed his hand. “I thought perhaps on Monday I could call on the parson and his wife. I’m sure he knows much about the neighborhood, particularly our tenants and anyone in need of charitable assistance.”

“That sounds like a wonderful idea, Elizabeth,” Mr. Darcy said, “And we will see him at church on Sunday, provided the rain stops at some point.” He looked outside, “At least the rain lightens every few hours or so.”

“It is a blessing. I do miss my walks, London was just a little too crowded for them to be truly refreshing.”

“Once the ground has dried, my dear wife, you may take the longest walk of your life.”

Matlock House, Mayfair, London, England

The Countess of Matlock, Lady Helen Fitzwilliam, dabbed daintily at the corners of her mouth with a napkin. “How long will you remain in London, Edward?” she asked her second son, Colonel Edward Fitzwilliam.

“I do not know, mother. It depends on my commander. The papers are reporting that Napoleon has taken Milan,” her son said.

“Perhaps it will be a wedding present for his new bride,” Lady Edith said, her eyes sparkling mischievously.

“Really, Edith,” her mother replied, just barely rolling her eyes. Of her two daughters, Lady Edith was the one who was most apt to take newspapers from her father’s study when he finished them. It was not a habit that he discouraged.
“It is the widow Josephine de Beauharnis. Her first husband was guillotined by Robespierre…”

“Really, Edward!” here Lady Matlock interrupted, “Such things are not suitable for the ears of gently bred ladies. Particularly unmarried ones!”

“And she was imprisoned as well,” the colonel whispered to Lady Edith. At this, Lady Matlock just rolled her eyes.

The ladies stood and moved into Lady Matlock’s sitting room. Colonel Fitzwilliam went off in search of a quiet place to pen a letter to Darcy, informing him that Mr. and Mrs. Wickham were gaining a reputation in Newcastle for overspending and frivolity.

In the sitting room, Lady Matlock and Lady Edith were responding to correspondence, Lady Helen was reading a novel, and Georgiana was diligently working through the French book she and Mrs. Annesley agreed that she should read while in London.

“What is that you’re reading, Helen?” Lady Matlock asked, looking up from her correspondence.

“Madame d’Arblay’s new novel. It’s called Camilla,” Lady Helen responded. She was the youngest of the Earl and Countess of Matlock’s four children and the second girl. Though halfway in age between her elder sister, Lady Edith, and her cousin, Georgiana, she was not particularly close with either of them. Her father’s firm hand and mother’s sharp eye kept her from being as silly as Lydia Wickham, but she much preferred novels and shopping to French or embroidery. Unlike Lydia and Mrs. Bennet, the Countess of Matlock was duly attentive and loving to all of her children, she did not lavish praise on them or overlook their silliness. Thus Lady Helen, who was certainly superior to Lady Edith in looks if not in mind, comported herself well in public, was not overly vain, and could generally be expected to provide pleasing dinner conversation.

“Madame d’Arblay?” Lady Matlock asked, “I don’t recognize the name, has she written other novels?”

“Miss Frances Burney, mother. She was married two years ago to a French man. He was a general under the Marquis du Lafayette and he is a Catholic,” Lady Helen responded.

“Yes, Miss Burney. I remember the name. Goodness, I hope they are not in France right now.”

“Because of the guillotinings, mother?” Lady Edith asked.

“Edith, really! Reading the papers is all well and good if your lord father permits it, but I’d thank you to keep political discussions in his study,” Lady Matlock rebuked. Lady Edith returned to her correspondence and Georgiana looked up.

“Does Madame d’Arblay have any novels in French?” she asked.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Lady Helen said carelessly, “I’m not even sure if she speaks French. General d’Arblay is an émigré.”

A footman opened the door. “A gentleman caller for you, Lady Matlock,” he said.

“Who?” Lady Matlock asked. It was not unusual for young gentleman to call on her or her husband, generally with the intention of furthering their acquaintance with Lady Edith or Lady Helen. Few were aware that Georgiana was staying at Matlock House, as she was not yet out.

“A Captain Henry Paulet,” the footman replied. At this, Lady Edith blushed slightly and Lady Helen moved from the armchair closest to Lady Edith over to the corner near Georgiana.
“Very well, you may show him in,” Lady Matlock said. A few minutes later, Captain Henry Paulet was announced.

“Good afternoon, milady,” he said, giving a slight bow to each of the ladies in turn. Both Lady Helen and Georgiana were reading their respective books with a studied air of disinterest.

“Good afternoon, Captain. May I introduce my niece, Miss Georgiana Darcy? She is staying with us for a few weeks while her brother travels on to their estate in Derbyshire with his new bride.” Lady Matlock said, abandoning her letter. Captain Paulet crossed the room and sat down in the chair recently abandoned by Lady Helen.

“Good afternoon, Miss Darcy,” Captain Paulet said, giving Georgiana another small bow, “Please congratulate your brother for me on his marriage.”

“I will, thank you,” Georgiana said very quietly.

“How is your family, Captain?” Lady Matlock inquired.

“They are well, Lady Matlock, thank you. My lord father and my lady mother are in residence at Hackwood House. My elder brother, Lord Wiltshire has recently returned to the military and is with the militia in North Hampshire. My sister, Lady Clanricarde, is with her husband in Ireland.”

“How is Lady Clanricarde enjoying Ireland?” Lady Edith asked.

“She likes it well enough,” Captain Paulet said, eager to speak to the object of his intentions, “In her letters she tells us that County Galway, where her husband is governor, is quite beautiful. How is your family?”

“We are all well. My brother, Lord Dursley, and his family are at their estate in Dursley. My brother, the colonel, is staying here with us while we are all in London,” Lady Edith replied.

“Are you long in London?”

“Another week, I believe. We will be traveling on to my cousin’s estate in Derbyshire,” Lady Edith said.

“Where are you staying while you are in London?” Lady Helen asked. She had been quietly watching the interaction between her eldest daughter and Captain Paulet. Lady Edith was not yet twenty-two and if she remembered correctly, Captain Paulet was twenty-nine. Twenty-one was by no means an old maid, but if Lady Edith could be married soon, it would be a blessing.

“At Winchester House, ma’am. My lady mother keeps it open almost year round, as Lord Wiltshire and I are often in London, though rarely at the same time.”

“Would you like to dine with us? We are having a family dinner on Sunday and you would be quite welcome.”

“I would be most amenable to that, Lady Matlock,” he replied with a quick glance at Lady Edith.

Lady Matlock, satisfied that the pair could carry on conversing on their own, returned to her correspondence. After Captain Paulet had taken his leave, she rose and went to her husband in his study.

Unlike at Pemberley, at Matlock House the master’s study was on the far side of the house from Lady Matlock’s sitting room. Lady Matlock found her husband sitting at his desk reviewing accounts
from their estate in Matlock.

“Richard?” she said upon opening the study door. Her husband looked up.

“Yes, Helen?” he said.

“Captain Paulet just came to call. I’ve invited him to dine with us on Sunday.”

“Captain Paulet?”

“The Marquess of Winchester’s second son. He seems interested in Edith.”

“In Edith? Good. She’s far too insightful to remain unmarried for long.”

“Yes, very insightful. She insists on discussing guillotining at breakfast.”

“Does she now?” the earl laughed, “Good girl.” His wife gave him a gentle smile. “Oh Helen, do not worry. I would never give consent to a man who I did not think would appreciate Edith’s mind.” He stood up from his desk and walked over to take his wife’s hands.

“I do not worry, Richard. I only hope Captain Paulet is ready for a bride who knows about his naval exploits!”

At this the earl chuckled again and kissed his wife soundly.
“Fitzwilliam, do you think we’re neglecting the neighbors?” Elizabeth asked while Annie fastened the pearl shell necklace Mr. Darcy had given her as a wedding present around her neck. They were dining alone again.

“No, my dear, I do not. We’re going into the village tomorrow for Sunday services and we may greet them all there. Did you not mention visiting the parson tomorrow?” he replied.

“Yes,” she said, nodding to Annie as she bobbed a curtsy and left. Elizabeth turned in her chair slightly to face him better. “I thought he might be able to tell me something about the villagers and the tenants.”

“Elizabeth, I can tell you about the tenants if you wish.”

She smiled up at him. “Not just what they grow or how long they’ve held the lease,” she said, “I want to know about their families, as much as is proper. Who is expecting, who is sick, who might appreciate a basket of food. And I would like to make the acquaintance of his wife.”

Mr. Darcy offered her his arm so that they might go down to the dining room. “I do not believe I have met Mrs. Radcliffe more than briefly on Sundays when I have been at Pemberley. Mr. Radcliffe, as you know, is not a very old parson.”

“Yes, I recall you mentioning something to that effect,” Elizabeth said, thinking back to the living that Wickham had rejected and then demanded.

“So on Monday you shall call on the parsonage. I hardly think anyone can fault you for visiting them first and reserving most of the morning to do so. And you couldn’t have visited before, for you will just be introduced to most of the neighbors on Sunday.” Mr. Darcy smiled at her.

“Or perhaps my dear husband simply wanted me for himself,” Elizabeth replied.

“Perhaps he did.” Mr. Darcy stopped on the stair and glanced around quickly. There were no footmen or maids in sight, so he kissed her. “Can you reproach me that?” he asked when the kiss had finished.

“No,” said Elizabeth, with just a hint of pink around her cheeks that was mirrored in Mr. Darcy’s face.

Dinner was, as usual, quite excellent. Elizabeth still wondered at the quiet that underlay a meal between only two people, as opposed to seven. There was no talk of lace or bonnets or dancing. She reflected that Longbourn must be much quieter now, with only Mary and Kitty at home.

“Will you tell me about our neighbors?” Elizabeth asked Mr. Darcy when they had retired to the drawing room.

“There are not many near us. The Matlock estate is about nine miles to the south. The River Wye, which is the closest river to us, meets the River Derwent at the village Rowsley, which is between Pemberley and Branburry Place. Chatsworth House, the seat of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, is about two miles west of here, closer to Bakewell. The current Duke of Devonshire is William Cavendish, married to the Duchess of Devonshire, whose Christian name is, I believe,
Georgiana, and is the daughter of the Earl Spencer, who died about thirteen years ago. They have three children, Lady Georgiana, Lady Harriet, and Lord Hartington, though I cannot remember their ages. We do not often see them.”

“Did not the Duchess of Devonshire have an affair?” Elizabeth inquired. Mr. Darcy blushed slightly.

“Yes, a child was born about four years ago. The Duchess had an affair with a member of Parliament, Charles Grey. The Duke and Duchess nearly divorced. The Duke, I believe, also has several illegitimate children. A Lady Elizabeth Foster lives with them. I believe she is separated from her husband.” After this, they were silent for a moment, until Mr. Darcy added, “I prefer to keep Georgiana out of their company, though I cannot slight a Duke.”

“Are there other neighbors?”

“Yes. Sir Edmund and Lady Susan Abbott live at Riveredge Manor about three miles from here. I cannot remember how many children they have or their ages. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Bourke have the lease at Roxbury near Bakewell and have, I believe, five children. There is also Haddon Hall, also near Bakewell, owned by the Duke of Rutland, though the family does not live there.”

“Do you often meet with them?”

“Not very,” Mr. Darcy replied, “Though I imagine that will change now that Pemberley has a proper mistress. In my mother’s day, Pemberley was the social center of our little corner of Derbyshire, often surpassing even Chatsworth House and Haddon Hall.”

Elizabeth gave a very small sigh. At Longbourn she was not much for visiting. For her mother, it was a time to bemoan or brag about her daughters’ current selection of suitors. Lady Lucas was not particularly fascinating and her Aunt Phillips was as silly as Mrs. Bennet. She did not know what to expect of Pemberley’s neighbors.

“Will we be giving any balls?” Elizabeth asked.

Mr. Darcy put down the book he had just picked up. “I believe that is up to the lady of the house,” he said.

Elizabeth did not smile. “Do you want to give any balls?”

“Not particularly, though I know we must give at least one over the course of the year here at Pemberley, and probably one in London once Georgiana is out.”

“Will she come out this season?” Elizabeth asked.

“I do not know. I was planning on speaking to my Aunt Matlock when she arrived. I will take her advice as well as that of Mrs. Annesley under consideration.”

“And Georgiana’s feelings?”

“If she wishes to come out this season and my aunt and Mrs. Annesley advise against it, I shall delay her. If she does not wish to come out then I will most likely let her wait. I doubt Edward will have a strong opinion one way or another. But you know, my dear, we will have to go to London for at least some of the Season, as much as I detest it,” Mr. Darcy said.

“I know we must,” Elizabeth said, “And hopefully Jane and Bingley will be in town as well.”

“I imagine so!” Mr. Darcy said, laughingly, “With yet another chaperone in Mrs. Bingley, I highly
doubt Miss Bingley will want to miss all the additional opportunities for visiting and being visited. She may drive even your sweet sister and brother-in-law to distraction!”

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