Listening To Words Unspoken

by ArwenLune

Summary

Elizabeth and Mr Darcy had to get married before they realised they liked each other, and their marriage did not have a good start. Now they are now each individually trying to make peace by secretly making/giving each other gifts.

Notes

I just hammered this out yesterday and I don't know where it's going or if it'll even go anywhere, but this is the first story that I've flow-written in more than a year and I feel like celebrating. I have a head full of tropes and a yearning for romance.

Also, I have a mishmash of the BBC series and the 2005 movie in my head. It's not super relevant anyway, but I enjoyed Keira Knightly as Lizzie.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Elizabeth

Elizabeth thought with longing to the small, cozy drawing room at Longbourn. To think she had thought the winter evenings on the settee with her sisters and mother stifling! In the face of the chilled silence that had been her world for the past two weeks, ever since the blazing row she’d had with Mr Darcy on their wedding night, she longed for even the inconsequential prattle that used to make her sigh.

The row had been.. she repressed a shudder merely thinking about it. Her new husband had implied that of the two of them, this marriage they'd been forced into benefitted her quite handsomely. As if Elizabeth had needed more proof that he hadn't wanted her, had in fact done anything to avoid the situation until spreading gossip had forced his hand and induced him to do his duty and marry her.

She glanced up from her knitting, noting that Mr. Darcy was presently beginning another letter. In one of their very sparse, very careful exchanges he had informed her that his sister Georgiana would travel to Pemberley a week from today, arriving just before Christmas. Elizabeth wondered what, if anything, he might write to his sister about his marriage to that tolerable-looking country girl he'd been forced to accept as his wife.

Benefitted! In a purely material sense that may be true, but she had never before in her life shed as many tears as she had done over the past month. A sense of grim despair came over her with the thought that these might be the elements her marriage was to be comprised of. Tears and silence. She would be wanting for nothing but affection, conversation, love, and warmth.

At least that last thing she could influence, she thought with something of satisfaction as she bound off the last stitch on her needle. She held up the large, triangular knitted shawl and then wrapped it around her shoulders. It was large enough to cross over in front of her torso and knot the points in the small of her back. Soft lambswool hugged her shoulders, and she nestled back into the big winged chair by the fire. At least here she was warm. Pemberly, well-appointed as it was, was also a place or large rooms and high ceilings, cold air always rolling in off the large windows, and it was shaping up to be an extraordinarily cold winter.

Elizabeth stared into the fire for some time, thoughts unwillingly returning to the fateful afternoon in late november. She'd enjoyed the unseasonably pleasant weather, taking the opportunity for what might be the last long walk she would be able to make until spring. By the time she'd turned toward Longbourn her hems were muddy and, thanks to a slippery descend from a riverbank to cross the stream, mud and leaves covered the back of her long coat, something her mother would certainly have something to say about.

It was in that state Mr Darcy had come across her, and Elizabeth had perhaps been ill tempered with the thought that somebody so proud, somebody who already thought ill of her, happened to cross her path while she looked like this. Rather than nod in greeting and ride on, Mr Darcy had dismounted and insisted on asking if she was well.

After assuring him she was perfectly fine and did not require an escort for the remaining mile back to Longbourn, he had shown a puzzling reluctance to depart, instead insisting on accompanying her in a strange, awkward silence.

She'd been vaguely puzzled but dismissed the event, until the next day rumours had begun to spread that she had been seen returning from a secret rendevouz with Mr Darcy, and that she had looked as if a roll in the leaves had certainly occurred.
Elizabeth breathed out with a soft huff of frustration. Nonsensical and untrue as it had been, once the rumour was in the world it had spread, and things had taken a mutually disagreeable turn toward marriage for the both of them.

She shook herself a little, trying to leave her frustration over the events in the past. If did neither of them good to dwell on them - they needed to learn to cope with the situation they were currently in.

Mr Darcy looked up at the motion, looking at her with a blank expression and unreadable eyes. How she loathed that face. Nay, not the face itself, which was tolerable, even handsome, but the statue-like lack of expression and engagement.

"I believe I will retire for the night, Mr Darcy," Elizabeth said carefully, never quite sure what might bring on his displeasure.

"Very well, Mrs Darcy," he said, standing up to bow at her so very formally. "I bid you a good night."

"And a good night to you also," she said, with a small curtsey before departing. Was this to be the rest of her life? She'd always imagined a marriage in which winter days would be followed by warm winter nights in the arms of her husband.

Elizabeth was grateful that her maid had anticipated her earlier bedtimes and had the fire already lit. When she entered her bedchambers Hattie helped her change into her night shift and brush out and braid her hair. Elizabeth sat in a chair by the fire while the girl filled the bedwarmer with hot coals and began sliding it between the sheets of the bed.

"Is that a new coverlet?" Elizabeth asked, curious despite her low mood. It was a heavy woolen cover with embroidery around the borders, exquisitely fine stitching of a flower motif.

"Yes ma'am," Hattie said, still working the bedwarmer between the sheets. "It belonged to the old Mrs Darcy. A present from her mother, it is said. Mr Darcy asked that your chambers be made as pleasing as possible,"

"Oh. It is very lovely," she said, letting her hand glide along the fine workmanship. She was a little stunned at the thought that her taciturn husband had thought she should have something that had belonged to his mother.

When Hattie finished, Elizabeth got into bed, noting there was a small, neatly folded bath towel on the night stand. She knew her crying had not gone unnoticed by some of the staff, but to be thoughtfully provided with a cloth specifically for drying her tears made her wince.

How did one go about making peace with ones reluctant husband when every word exchanged felt so fraught with tension and disagreement? They hadn't spoken about anything but the most trivial matters since the wedding night. She needed a way to show him she wished there to be easiness between them, and Elizabeth was, for once, utterly lost as to how to break the silence.

She trailed a hand along the fine embroidery of the coverlet. Perhaps she could give her husband a gift?

Of course, what did one gift a man who was want for nothing? He was no squanderer, but if there was something he wished for, he would simply buy it.

Her eyes came to rest on her knitting bag, still in the chair by the fire.
Breakfast the next morning was a quiet affair as usual, but Elizabeth felt a little lighter at the thought that she had a plan. She would knit a pair of slippers from the skein of dark brown lambswool she had bought in the village, and ask the laundress to felt them. Then she could embroider something on them in white silk thread - perhaps a snowflake motif? She would begin knitting directly after breakfast.

Her stitching was finished shortly after dinner on the day after, and Elizabeth sat looking at her handiwork. They were handsome slippers, she thought - the felting as turned out well, the snowflakes were pleasing to the eye. It was some of her better embroidery to be sure.

Mr Darcy was in his study tonight. She'd always planned to offer her gift, but now that it was ready, she could not bring herself to stand up and venture into his domain. It seemed like such a silly thing now, the work of the silly country wife he thought her to be, made for a husband who doubtlessly had better handiwork in his dressing room already. She could not think what she should say on offering him her gift, and she could already imagine the blank look on his face while she tried to figure out how her gift was received.

She quite imagined it would be a mortifying experience. So instead she went to find his valet and bade him to put the slippers at Mr Darcy's bedside for his use. The man merely nodded and promised he would do so, and that was that.

A little anticlimactic, but she would take it over yet another awkward confrontation.

Momentarily at a loss with what to do with herself now, Elizabeth finally went into the direction of the music room. Given Mr Darcy's tendency to appear whenever she played the piano, she'd been forced to conclude he must not be adverse to the sound of it, and some of the most agreeable moments of their short marriage so far they'd spend together in the music room. Now though the room was cold, too cold to play, and she drifted through it, investigating the smaller instruments set out on a sideboard.

After some consideration she picked out a small lapharp - of such size that she wondered if it was perhaps a child's instrument - and brought it with her to the smaller drawing room, which was being heated. She'd eyed the large harp in the music room with something of longing. It would be marvellous to learn to play on such an elegant, delicate instrument, she thought. But she felt too selfconscious to begin a new skill - to do poorly at the instrument - where her husband was bound to hear and compare her unfavourably to ladies he considered accomplished.

His study was far enough removed from the drawing room, and enough doors closed against the draft, that she could sit by the fire with this little instrument and slowly pick out a tune, learning the ways of its strings. It was enjoyable to play only for herself, not perform for other's ears, and the evening passed pleasantly enough, if lonely.

She hardly knew anything about Georgiana and already she was looking forward to the girl's arrival. Going from a house with four sisters and a very present mother to this vast, silent house was... well, an adjustment, to be sure. Hopefully the girl and her governess would bring some life and company.
Darcy

Darcy was on his way to the library when he stilled at the soft sounds of Georgiana's harp. It drifted through the door of the yellow parlor, and for a moment he imagined his sister there, seven years old and delighted with her new instrument. But no, it had to be Elizabeth. He was surprised that she had brought an instrument here, but he supposed that given the weather, he should not be. He was more than prepared to have any room she wished to spend time in heated, but she persisted in mostly using this smaller, easy to heat parlor.

He wasn't sure if it were her country sensibilities or a reaction to his regrettable implication that she should be glad of her improved station as his wife. Either or both had made her determined not to be a spendthrift.

He stood by the door and listened to the simple, sweet melody she slowly plucked out on the little harp. It seemed seeking, full of longing, somehow.

Darcy wondered if he could offer to find her a music teacher without her thinking his motive was anything but wanting to encourage her in something which seemed to give her pleasure. Likely not, but Georgie's presence might help him there. His sister could encourage the interest for the harp and suggest a teacher without risking the implication that Elizabeth needed to make a study of the instrument.

He sighed, and, aware of the looks a nearby footman was trying not to give him, continued on to the library.
"...Madam?"

She startled to attention to find her husband giving her one of those intent looks, and struggled not to blush at being caught deep in thought.

"Pardon me, sir."

"No matter," he dismissed her impoliteness. "I had thought to spend some time in the library tonight. Would you care to join me?"

Elizabeth blinked, trying not to look surprised that he was seeking out her company.

"-yes," she said, just slightly too rushed, "Yes, that sounds.. pleasant."

He gave one of those curt nods that forever left her guessing how he felt upon the matter.

Her husband had apparently thought to ask for a fire to be lit in the library before dinner, because by the time they settled in there, the temperature was tolerable enough. The greater library was as heated as any of these high-ceiling spaces ever were, but the little circle of chairs by the fire was shielded by room screens and positively cozy.

They each selected a book and settled into a winged, high-backed armchair, and spent a surprisingly amiable hour reading in silence, the only sounds coming from the hearth fire and the dogs that had stretched out in front of it.

Elizabeth finished the volume of poetry she'd been reading and put it down, getting to her feet to stretch her back. Mr. Darcy lowered his book to observe her, and rather than wonder if his stony expression suggested approval or disapproval, she seized the moment.

"I should like to learn more about the history of Pemberley and Lambton. Have you a book to recommend me?"

"Oh! Certainly." He laid aside his own book and rose at once, leading her out of the cozy nook by the fire and toward a section of shelving.

"One of my aunts made somewhat of a study of the matter before her marriage, and had her work printed," he explained, indicating a large bound book. "This version includes all her original drawings and maps. She taught me about cartography during the writing of it."

"That sounds very interesting indeed," Elizabeth said, lifting the book from its shelf. "I thank you."

Half an hour later she was beginning to understand where her husband's standards for an accomplished young lady came from. The book was well-written, showing plenty of research, and full of wonderful drawings of the landscape and the house.

She was distracted from it momentarily when one of the dogs got up, stretching and yawning languorously, and sat down in front of her with a slowly wagging tail and a hopeful look. She smiled and beckoned it within range, stroking its silky brown ears. It made a low sound of enjoyment and soon she laid the book on the side table to lavish attention on it with both hands.
After a few minutes the dog slowly let itself slip to the ground, to lay there on its back, paws waving in the air and making enticing rumbly little woo-woo sounds. Elizabeth rubbed its belly with her foot, and the dog lay there in ecstasy.

She was aware that her husband had stopped reading and was watching her, but she still startled a little when he spoke.

"Copper, you are the most shameless creature in all of existence."

The dog just made a warbling moaning sound of happiness, its tongue lolling, and Elizabeth giggled. She glanced at her husband, and he had a peculiar look on his face as he watched her and the dog, something she might almost think.. fond. Perhaps.

He looked away, and she took her book back into her lap, still idly rubbing the dog with her feet. He made a pleasantly warm footrest.

It didn’t take long to realise that showing her the book might be considered a gift from her husband. He was willingly showing her something of himself, because stuck between the pages were drawings and maps he had made as a boy. One of them suggested that treasure had been buried somewhere in the near gardens, and she chuckled, trying to match the drawn map to what little she had seen of the gardens so far. It had snowed almost non-stop since they had arrived at Pemberley, and she was aching to go out of doors.

"Ah yes, the treasure," Mr Darcy remarked with humour underlining his tone. "I wonder if it is still there."

"Did you have very great treasures to hide when you were a boy?"

"I do not recall. All sorts of odd things are treasures to a young boy," he smiled, and she marvelled at how it softened his face.

"This book makes me want to explore the grounds even more," she confessed. "I cannot wait for spring. I weary of being cooped up in of doors."

"Perhaps we could go look for the treasure when it stops snowing," he suggested. "Though we may not actually find it until the snow melts."

She smiled at the idea of it.

"I would like that very much. Mrs Reynolds suggested that it was inappropriate for me to go outside unless I allowed footmen to shovel snow along my route first, and that seemed.." she trailed off.

"Like a lot of work simply for me to take a walk."

"I wonder that you are still so eager to take an out of doors walk in inclement weather. I'm glad that what happened after your last walk has not put you off the practice."

Elizabeth stayed silent for long moments, trying to decipher his tone. It had not sounded disapproving, but..

"Sir, I still do not understand," she began finally, "why you thought it was necessary to escort me when you met me in the forest that day."

He looked up from his book and regarded her for a long, silent moment.
"You seemed to me very distressed, like something had befallen you, and - and I knew Mr Wickham to have an interest in you," he finally said. "I never at the time thought about how being seen with you might cause you trouble also."

She took that in silence, biting down on her first, sharp reply that she had been distressed because of his presence.

"Mr Wickham," she said finally, hoping she sounded calmer than she felt. "What is it about that gentleman that deserves such vicious assumptions from you, sir? After all that you have inflicted on him you would presume--" she struggled for words.

Mr Darcy's eyes were blazing, and she watched him deliberately unclench his hands from the edges of his book. Then he carefully put a bookmark in his place and laid it aside.

"I have," he began, then paused for a couple of slow breaths. "I have in employ three young women who were left ruined and with child by Mr Wickham. I have no doubt at all that there are more such women I have not been made aware of."

Elizabeth looked at him in stunned silence. Then she unfroze and closed her own book, eyes fixed on her husband's face.

"I am ever hesitant about how I should go about exposing him," Mr Darcy continued. "My own demeanor, contrasted with Mr Wickham's happy manners and his willingness to spread the tale of his woes at my hands, would mean, I suspect, I would not easily be believed. Not without exposing someone more close to me than the women in my employ. But let me begin at the start at this tale, so that you may have the full information about Mr Wickham's misfortunes..."

Elizabeth's tea cooled while her husband told her about Mr Wickham. She did not want to believe it at first, but as the tale unfolded she heard more and more things that fit with the man she had met, with somebody who possessed the talent to be seen the way he wanted to be seen. Mr Darcy offered to arrange for her to speak to the kitchen maid who had personally experienced Mr Wickham's manipulative side. Elizabeth had seen her six year old son around the house, and thinking of it, the boy bore a strong resemblance to Mr Wickham.

It was clear he was not eager for her to bring the matter up with Georgiana, but that if it was necessary for her to convince herself, he would not stop her. Elizabeth didn't think it was necessary to make a young girl recount what must have been a profound tragedy. She no longer doubted her husband's version of events.

They sat in silence for a long time.

"Mr Wickham is still in Meryton - my sisters - I must write to my father at once," she finally said, and he looked.. relieved?

"It would be a great relief to me if you did," he said. "The news will bear more weight coming from your hand. I will arrange for a courier tomorrow morning, as soon as your letter is ready."

"Thank you. And I.. I appreciate your concern for me, even if I could not do so at the time," she finally said. "Truly, nothing more had befallen me than a clumsy descent from a muddy river bank."

"Then pray tell me, why were you so distressed?"

"After just days before, you and Miss Bingley had been so willing to consider me an uncultured country miss, my pride was injured at being seen by you in such a state," she said softly.
His eyes searched her face, and he seemed stricken.

"You were... you were distressed by my presence?"

"I had no wish to encourage your low opinion of me."

"Madam - Elizabeth," he said firmly. "I do not have a low opinion of you and indeed never did."

She did not know what to say to that.

"For my part I truly regret that my actions, no matter how well intended at the time, lead to a marriage neither of us chose."

Elizabeth nodded numbly, unsurprised and somehow still devastated at this confirmation of how unwanted the marriage was for him. She hadn't wanted it, and she had already known he had not, but to hear the sentiment renewed... she got to her feet.

"Excuse me," she said, her own voice sounding faraway. "I must go write my father."
Darcy

Chapter Notes

I've messed around with this story a lot before I posted this chapter - all the earlier chapters have changed (some more than others) and a new chapter shoved in. It will probably all make a lot more sense if you take the time to reread from the start.

Darcy watched his wife as she left the library. She seemed.. subdued, more so than he'd come to expect in the past few weeks. Which was already more subduedness than he'd ever wished to see from her.

Though he would never have considered offering for her hand, he had certainly been intrigued by Elizabeth Bennet, as lively and gracious and free of artifice as she had been. He'd initially dismissed her as just another country miss, one with the kind of spectacularly unfortunate family that might scare any suitor away. He had admired her from afar though, observed her. Enjoyed the brightness in her eyes and the sharpness of her mind in what little conversation they'd had.

Then - well, then Wickham. Knowing the man was in the area and wondering if he had a purpose there or if it was coincidence. Dreading what damage he might do here and knowing he could prevent it.. if he were willing to expose his dear sweet sister. It had culminated in his insistence to escort Elizabeth home when it seemed as if something dreadful had befallen her.

He'd known all along that the conversation they'd just had had been necessary, but he had not known how to begin it. That he'd at last been able to convey the truth about Wickham - and be believed - was a great relief.

She now also knew why he had insisted on escorting her that fateful November day, unintentionally causing the budding scandal which had forced their hands into marriage. He hoped understanding of his intentions that day might cause her to think more kindly of him.

Perhaps she already did?

Just the day before he had encountered a pair of felted, embroidered slippers in his bedchambers, and his valet had revealed that Mrs Darcy had asked him to place them in Mr Darcy's chambers.

Darcy had blinked, sure he could not have heard that right. He picked up one of the slippers. It was knit from a dark brown wool, the sole thick and cushy. The snow chrystal shapes that had been embroidered upon them looked crisp and pleasing.

Elizabeth had made these? Elizabeth had made these for him?

He knew her to be both generous and gracious, always ready with a kind word for those she cared about. He also knew he was not among those, at present. Given their chilled silences since the big fight on their wedding night, it was scarcely to be believed that she should give him a gift, let alone one made so carefully with her own hands.

That she should have spent thought on the temperature of his feet astounded him; until then he had supposed that she would not be overmuch dismayed were he to lose a toe or two to exposure.
He needed to thank her, but the manner of thanks still eluded him. He did not think he would be able to hide his surprise at being given a gift, and a thanks that betrayed himself surprised at her generosity would hardly advance his campaign for a peaceful marriage.

When then was he to do? If she did indeed thought kindly of him, it should be encouraged, and in any case a gift should be acknowledged.

The thought of a return gift occurred to him. Something which must have taken her days to make deserved consideration in return, and he could slip in into her rooms as discreetly as she had done. It had the added advantage of requiring no conversation. Since the fight, any discourse with his new wife was still so fraught that avoiding it recommended this course to him.

What then should the gift be?

During their fight she had angrily assured him that his fortune meant little to her, and he suspected buying her a lavish gift - the kind Georgie was at least somewhat accustomed to - would not be received well. He did not want her to think he was attempting to buy her favour. Her gift had been personal, meaningful, and so should his be.

By the time he was ready for bed he'd landed on something he felt a modicum of satisfaction with.

His new wife wrote many letters, being in constant communication with her sister Jane, her friend Miss Lucas, and from what he could tell only a little less frequently with her parents and her aunt in London. He had even remarked upon it unkindly at one point, all but accusing her of using correspondence to avoid him. A mistake, he now readily admitted to himself. He should wish for her to seek him out of her own volition, not for lack of entertainment. Perhaps the gift could be something to signify his new insight?

The various salons contained well-stocked writing desks, as did her bedchamber, but he had seen her carry around a bundle of letters she wished to have with her while she wrote her replies.

He spoke to his valet about the item he wished to procure so he could personalise it. Yes, that would do. Would she understand what he meant to say by it?
Elizabeth

Once in her bedchamber Elizabeth dismissed Hattie after the girl had lit the fire, and only when she was finally alone did the tears trail slowly down her face. She had thought - had hoped - that perhaps they were getting along better.

Speaking to each other more openly had seemed like a positive development, but clearly there was such a thing as too much openness of thought. Since neither had the ability to change the situation, there was no purpose but pain to reiterating how unwanted this marriage was.

When she calmed down she sat down to write a letter to her father, outlining the evidence that Mr Wickham was in no way to be trusted with any young lady (or indeed credit note) and to break off any contact with the man immediately.

The rest of the letter, an update on her own fairings at Pemberley, was brief and breezy, speaking only of activities and news, nothing on her emotional state. She knew her father still felt guilt for having forced her to the altar, and even though it had been clear to anybody that there was no other option, she did not want to burden him with her unhappiness.

In her letter to Jane she felt able to be more open, sharing her confusion about her husband. Her hopes of being able to build an affectionate marriage, and her fears that they would forever be unwilling strangers bound together by fate.

She felt guilty for burdening Jane with these problems while Jane was still so saddened by Mr Bingley's change of heart. Her own hasty marriage with Mr Darcy had delayed the Bingleys' departure by two weeks, but the letter Jane had received from Miss Bingly had dampened her spirits, and Elizabeth knew her sister had forced herself to regard Mr Bingley with polite, if sad, indifference in those last few weeks.

By the time she started on a letter to her mother, which mostly contained details of the preparation for Christmas, she heard the soft voices of her husband and his valet from the adjoining bedchamber. The internal door between their chambers was closed but not soundproof. So far it had not been opened, even though she had watched it very carefully the first few nights.

Then she had realised that the bolt on the door had been newly installed. He must have wanted to make it understood that he would not visit her at night without invitation, and she appreciated the effort to put her at ease.

Finishing up her letters and sanding them, she wondered at which point she would open that door. When the pressure to produce an heir became too much to resist? She hoped that when she opened it, it would not be a purely practical decision. That there might be closeness between them, even though she could not quite imagine how that might come to be.

Reluctant to call Hattie back, she filled her own bedwarmer with hot coals and slide it between the sheets. When the bed was no longer frigid she changed into a night shift, braided her hair with quick motions, and slid in.

It took agonisingly long to get to sleep. Thoughts about Mr Wickham and how soundly she had been mistaken about the man kept playing through her mind. Had it been truly that he was such a manipulator that he had taken her in? Or had she been predisposed to believe him because her pride had been wounded by overhearing Mr Darcy's comment about her to Mr Bingley?
It had been easy to assume the worst about her husband, with his stony expressions and his dismissal of her on their first meeting. Initial dismissal, she supposed. He had not avoided her - even sought her out for a dance at the next ball.

And Lord, such a dance! She’d been determined to find fault with him and still come away blushing at the lingering feeling of his touch and the intensity of his focus on her. She idly wondered what it would be like to dance with him now, if his gaze would hold her captive in the same way. If he would still want to dance with her.

She was still smarting from the reminder that the marriage was so unwanted by him. She had resisted the notion that they must marry even after she had known it was futile, but these last few days... it had felt like things had become easier. Like she might settle into this role, into this life, and perhaps even grow to enjoy it.

Perhaps it was only because he had no wish to be strangers in this marriage, but he had been open with her tonight. He'd shared something of his childhood with her, offered to accompany her on the adventure of following the map he'd drawn as a boy. And he'd been open about Mr Wickham and the pain the man had caused the Darcy family.

The least she could do was return the sentiment and encourage him to know her as more than an acquaintance.
She brought her letters down to the breakfast room the next morning, and handed them to the courier who presented himself. Her husband added his own.

"Merely an entreaty to support your letter," he explained. Elizabeth felt oddly surprised and pleased that such a proud man was willing to let her take the lead on such a matter.

After breakfast he disappeared for a meeting with his steward and Elizabeth met with Mrs Reynolds to discuss the Christmas preparations. It was to stop snowing soon, and Mrs Reynolds assured her that the groundsmen would be able to find a deer for the big meal.

The idea of a whole deer for what would effectively be four people - she and her husband, Georgiana and her Governess - had seemed preposterous until they had laid out the plans for the staff dinner. Then on Christmas day there would be a party for all the Pemberley tenants, with games for the children and mulled wine and sweetmeats and fresh loaves for everybody.

Nothing would go to waste, and Mrs Reynolds seemed appreciative of the way Elizabeth did not consider these matters beneath her notice.

After lunch she sat down to write a letter to Mrs Gardiner and found, to her surprise, a cloth bundle on her writing desk. It turned out to contain a very fine wooden box, beautifully made and just the right size to store letters. Upon its domed lid was inscribed 'Elizabeth Darcy' in what was unmistakably her husband's handwriting.

She felt a slow smile grow on her face, and just sat there for long minutes, cradling the box. There was something about seeing her new name written in his hand that gave her an odd frisson of hope.

She'd been determined to thank her husband for the gift, but dinner was once again so stilted and awkward that she could not find the words. Everything she had thought to say made her feel so wretchedly exposed. It seemed to her that she was imminently readable to him and always had been, while he was still so unknowable to her and always would be.

Then again, he had not thanked her for the slippers, either. He had simply given a gift in return. Or perhaps that had been a coincidence and he had not noticed the slippers?

End Notes

The main thing I've missed about fanfic is sharing it and engaging with the readers, so I would be delighted with any comments :-(
Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!