

*Anne  
de Bourgh's  
Wedding*

It suddenly occurred to me that I was now sitting in a very compromising position: On the floor, of the breakfast room, in stately Matlock Manor, in the arms of a man who was now kissing me as if his life depended upon it, and who, only a few short moments ago was engaged to another. Granted, his intended, Miss Susan Hawthorne had just absconded from the country in the company of Colonel Phillip de Bourgh, my own cousin, headed, we believed, in the general direction of Gretna Green, and I, until only a few moments ago, sat wretched and heartbroken staring at a plate overflowing with food that I had no desire whatsoever to eat.

It also occurred to me that any one of our family members could walk in at any moment seeing me in this very compromising position (on the floor, of the breakfast room, in stately Matlock Manor, in the arms of a man who was now kissing me). However, I needn't have worried because (apparently) Lord Andy was guarding the door, which at that very moment opened.

"Aren't you two finished kissing yet? I can't guard this door forever!" We both pulled apart, embarrassed at being caught in such a compromising position (on the floor of the breakfast room). "Thank heaven," cried Andrew, "from the horrid noises I heard emanating from

this room, I expected to find at least half of Anne's face missing." That did it. Montgomery helped me to my feet and I simultaneously reached down to smooth my gown and reached up to tidy my hair. Andrew walked over to me smiling mischievously. He reached up and wiped at the corner of my mouth with his thumb. "You'll never learn will you, brother? If you kiss a lady and you don't want others to know it, you don't muss the lip rouge."

I shyly looked up at Montgomery, laughing when I saw the state of *his* face. Andrew rolled his eyes when he saw his brother and taking out his handkerchief and grasping him by the chin, began wiping Montgomery's face, removing all traces of the evidence of our previous compromising position (on floor).

"Oh honestly," exclaimed Andrew, "this is you at sixteen all over again, coming out of Hutchinson's shop with blackberry jam all over your face! You're as bad as Little Christopher." Montgomery twisted and squirmed much in the manner of his six-year-old nephew with Andrew scolding him to hold still.

I laughed at the spectacle; I always enjoyed seeing glimpses of Andrew being the protective, loving, elder brother no matter how much they each maintained that they had a mutual dislike for each other.

Pamela peeked around the door, narrowing her eyes at her husband when she saw what he was doing. "Andrew, leave your brother alone and come along; we're all packed for Pemberley."

I ran over and embraced Pamela and said, "Oh, Pamela, in all of the commotion I neglected to congratulate you on your wonderful news. A new baby, how thrilling for you both!"

"Thank you, Anne," she said, clasping my hands. "I hope that one day you and my brother will be blessed in just such a way."

"Pamela, my love," exclaimed Andrew loudly, "If you had seen them as I saw them only moments ago and if I had not interrupted, you might have had your wish granted a lot sooner than you had hoped."

Montgomery pushed Andrew away and I looked away in mortification.

"Well," said Andrew going on, "it was true, was it not? You were right here on the floor for heavens sake, in the breakfast room, of all places. I could barely keep my countenance. You just better be glad that it was I who

found you and not Lady Catherine. I shudder to think what her reaction would be." And then, Andrew being Andrew, shuddered dramatically, to show us how it would be.

Pamela thankfully changed the subject, "Hadn't you two better get a move on? All the carriages are out front and you know how Father is when he's ready to take his leave."

"Um... eh... Pamela," said Montgomery, finally gaining some of his composure after his brother's embarrassing statement, "Be a lamb and make our excuses; tell Father I'll drive Anne over myself in my curriole."

Pamela raised one eyebrow whilst turning her gaze upon me and asked in a rather dramatic fashion, "Do you think that is wise, Anne? I mean, a lady, *all alone*, in an open carriage, with a man who is not even her husband." She then gasped and said, "You do have your reputation to think of."

"Goodness gracious, Pamela," cried Andrew; "she was hardly thinking of her reputation when she was on the floor, kissing my brother, in the breakfast room, of all places. Look, look," continued Andrew, "The breakfast

things haven't even been cleared away for heavens sake. I'll never be able to eat in here again." He then leaned against the sideboard and picked up a scone and bit into it.

"That does it," shouted Montgomery, "Out, the pair of you! I'll not have you both abusing Anne and me for your own pleasure."

Amused at their own cleverness, they both exited the room and left us on our own. A few seconds later Montgomery placed his hands on my shoulders. "Never mind them, let them have their fun at our expense. This has already been a most ridiculous day, and I gather before this day is over we'll have much worst jokes about this situation making the way about the county."

"No, you are mistaken. This is not a ridiculous day; this is the best day of my life, and I would not change a thing."

"Oh, you wouldn't change the part where Georgiana and Patrick burst into the room in hysterics, or the part where your mother and my father were placing bets on the future or the part where Andrew caught us together

on the floor or the part where I nearly married someone else on you own birthday or..."

"No, Montgomery, none of that matters. I had only one view in my mind."

"And what is that?"

I removed myself from his grasp and walked over to the table and lifted up a certain piece of paper and turned around smiling broadly holding it in front of me. A slow smile began to spread over his features, "Oh that! That does help make it the best day of our lives, doesn't it?"

He gently took my hand and led me from the breakfast room. I looked up and we each held each other in sight as we walked in the direction of the staircase. As we slowly started to go up we were aware that our family was all around us, yet we didn't seem to notice them or perhaps they did not notice us as we slowly started to ascend. We only had eyes for each other.

"CASSIE, DID YOU REMEMBER TO PACK MY BLACK DINNER JACKET?"

"I've only been married to you for thirty-five years, Christopher."

"WHILE YOU'RE UP THERE, TELL CATHERINE TO GET A MOVE ON!"

"As loud as you are, I'm sure she heard you herself."

"WHERE THE DEVIL IS PAMELA?"

"Coming, Father!"

"Christopher, my love, will you please stop shouting."

"IT'S NEARLY TEN; WE SHOULD HAVE BEEN HALF WAY TO PEMBERLEY BY NOW!"

"Oh dear, I nearly forgot! Betty... Betty!"

"Yes, my Lady."

"Run and fetch my gloves from my dressing table, please."

"Yes, ma'am."



"Oh dear!"

"CASSIE, WHERE ARE YOU GOING NOW?"

"I forgot to tell Henderson to pack my evening cloak. I won't be a moment."

"WHAT THE DEVIL DO YOU NEED AN EVENING CLOAK FOR, WOMAN!"

"Uncle Christopher?"

"DARCY! SHOULDN'T YOU AND PATRICK BE MAKING TO ROUNDS TO THE WEDDING GUESTS?"

"Patrick and I have only just gotten Elizabeth, Georgiana, and the children off to Pemberley. We were wondering how you would like us to phrase the bad news to the neighbours. Exactly what should we tell them?"

"I'M SURE I DON'T CARE; TELL THEM WHAT YOU LIKE! NO! NO! TELL THEM THE TRUTH, MAN; TELL THEM THAT THAT WRETCHED SUSAN HAWTHORNE TOOK OFF IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT WITH THAT SCOUNDREL COLONEL

PHILLIP DE BOURGH FOR ONLY GOD KNOW WHERE, LEAVING MY SON STANDING ABOUT, LOOKING LIKE A FOOL IN HIS REGIMENTALS!"

"Um... er... perhaps, I'll just say that due to circumstances beyond our control, there will unfortunately be no wedding ceremony today and if they would please be so kind as to join us at Pemberley for dinner this evening as a way for the Fitzwilliam family to make amends."

"DID THEY TEACH YOU THOSE PRETTY WORDS AT *CAM-BRIDGE*?"

"W-What? Look, Uncle, I'll see you at Pemberley."

"YOU'LL NEVER SEE US IF WE DON'T GET A MOVE ON! CASSIE! CASSIE!"

"Coming, Christopher! Oh, honestly!"

"NOW, WHERE IS PAMELA?"

"Here I am, Father."

"Pamela, my darling, pay no attention to your father-in-law and do take your time; remember your condition."

"Yes, Mother Fitzwilliam."

"CATHERINE! CATHERINE! WHERE ARE YOU?"

"Christopher Ian Fitzwilliam, I am Lady Catherine de Bourgh and I will not be yelled at as if I were one of your sons or dogs."

"PAMELA, WHERE IS THAT NO ACCOUNT HUSBAND OF YOURS?"

"La! Here I am! Well, how do I look?"

"You look well, my darling."

"Only well, Mother?"

"WHAT WAS WRONG WITH YOUR OTHER OUTFIT, LORD LAYABOUT?"

"Blue silk, at a dinner party? Really, Father, you and your odd notions."

"WELL, IS THAT EVERYONE?"

Montgomery and I had reached the top of the stairs just as Andrew was going down. Andrew turned and winked at us both and said, "Yes Father, that's everyone."



We were now standing opposite each other, leaning against our respective doors to our respective bedchambers, smiling stupidly at each other. I broke the silence first.

"What are you going to wear?"

"What's wrong with this?"

"Montgomery, my dearest, as much as I love you in your regimentals, I think something a little less severe is in order for two people sneaking off to get married."

"Oh, is that what we're doing, sneaking off?"

"What would you call it?"

"I'd say that we are two people, desperately in love, going off to do what we should have done last year at this time."

"Ah, but you remember, last year at this time we were not engaged."

"And why was that, I wonder? Ah yes, now I remember; *you* broke off your engagement to me."

"I was provoked!"

"Come to think of it, Anne; what are you going to wear?"

"What's wrong with this?"

"Anne, my dearest, as much as I love to see you in almost any colour, when I think back on my wedding day, I don't want to think of my bride wearing black."

"This is hardly black; it's more along the lines of brownish-blackish-green."



Three quarters of an hour later I emerged from my chamber in a beautiful sky blue gown with my hair about my shoulders. In my hands I carried a wide brimmed straw hat with white ribbons and our special license rolled up and safely tucked into my pink-netted purse. Betty, one of my Aunts upper maids, was standing outside my door waiting for me.

"Begging your pardon Miss, but Colonel Fitzwilliam asks if you would most kindly join him in the kitchen."

I looked at her quizzically and asked, "The kitchen; are you sure?"

"Yes, Miss, he was most insistent."

She curtsayed and went off down the corridor. I happened to look across the hall into Montgomery's rooms and saw his redcoat tossed over the back of a chair. Stepping in, I also saw that his sword was carelessly discarded on the floor at the foot of the bed and his black boots rested on top of the coverlet. "Mercy," I exclaimed, peering into his dressing room for signs of his valet. Seeing no one about, I set the boots on the floor, placed his sword back into its holder on the

wall and hung his redcoat up in the wardrobe and set off to find the kitchen.

After ten minutes of wandering the lower hallways to find an exit to the kitchen garden, I crossed the small courtyard that separated the kitchen from the main house and finally found my way to where I was bid. I opened the door quietly and there was Montgomery, standing on a stool looking into a high cabinet, talking to himself.

"Where the devil is everything," he mumbled.

From behind I could see that he wore a freshly pressed white shirt, a blue-green coloured waistcoat, almost the very colour of his eyes and a pair of close-fitting tan breeches tucked into a pair of shiny brown boots. Eventually dragging my eyes away I asked, "What *are* you looking for?"

Montgomery turned around smiling and I let out a small gasp... he wasn't wearing a cravat and the neck of his shirt gaped open. I thought I was going to faint dead away. It suddenly became very warm and I wondered if it was the kitchen or if it was me?

"Anne, why are you looking at me like that," he questioned, chuckling.

"L-Like what?"

"Like you've never seen me before."

"Oh, was I? I-I'm sorry."

"And why are your cheeks so red?"

I quickly made up a story and stammered it out, "Well um... I-I didn't know w-where the kitchen was and I-I was running around in search of it." Montgomery looked at me strangely as if he almost didn't believe me. I rolled my eyes and cried, "It's a very large house!" He raised one eyebrow. "I don't even know where the kitchen is located at Rosings!" He narrowed his eyes and returned to what he was doing. I asked, "You didn't answer my question, what are you looking for?"

"A basket."

I laid my things on a small side table and asked, "Why don't you ask one of the kitchen staff?"



"I gave them all the day off."

"I just saw Betty upstairs, perhaps she knows."

"I gave her the rest of the day off as well; in fact, excepting one of the grooms, I gave all the servants the day off. They are all probably halfway to town by now. We're all alone."

"Oh, really!"

"Yes, really. You and I, my dear, will fend for ourselves."

"What exactly does that mean," I asked in stunned surprise.

"We're going on a picnic."

"Oh really, a picnic? And to think I had my heart set on a wedding, how silly of me!"

"Don't you worry, we'll get married soon enough." Montgomery leapt from the stool and bending over, he resumed his search through the lower cupboards. Somehow, under their own power, my eyes turned in his direction and I stood transfixed as I admired his...

"Anne, will you stop staring at me and make yourself useful!"

"I-I wasn't staring!"

"You're not the only one who can feel the heat from a stare," he said casting a quick backwards glance at me.

Temporarily mortified I asked, "And what do you mean by make myself useful?"

"Well, first of all, you can make us some sandwiches."

The mortification was instantly replaced with bewilderment. "Sand-wich-es?"

"Yes, sandwiches! A bit of meat between two slices of bread."

"I know what a sandwich is!" I casually glanced at the loaf of bread and plate of cold meat that sat on the table but I had no idea what he could possibly want me to do with them. I looked over to him again.

"AH HA! I knew I'd find it!" He produced the picnic basket and set it on the table and quickly began rifling

through the cupboards again to fill the basket with utensils, plates, wine and such. I stood there alternately looking at him and looking at the loaf of bread and cold meat. He stopped what he was doing and stared.

"Anne, do you intend on making the sandwiches or do you wish to look upon my person for the rest of the day?" I blushed and looked away and he had his answer. He cleared his throat, "Come, come, make the sandwiches and perhaps I'll let *you* have the rest of the day off when you are finished."

I was slightly embarrassed to make my admission, but I knew I had no choice. "My love... um... I've never made a sandwich in my life."

He looked at me for a moment and threw back his head and started to laugh. I became annoyed, huffed, and turned to leave and just as I reached the door he caught me about the waist and pulled me back in.

"I'll just have to teach you, won't I?"

He pulled me closer and kissed me. It was rather pleasant and just as I slid my hands up the length of his back; he quickly let me go of me and seized with some

sudden thought, began madly searching through the cupboards again.

I asked him, "What are you looking for now?"

"A knife to cut the bread."

I saw a small knife sitting on the table and picked it up.  
"What about this?"

"That, my dearest, is a vegetable knife, used for slicing things like cucumbers. I love cucumber sandwiches."

"Would you like to have those, too?"

"Oh, yes please; select a cucumber from the vegetable bin." I looked around puzzled and he pointed in the proper direction. I saw potatoes and other various vegetables of various shapes and various colours but, oddly enough, no cucumbers.

"Dearest," I said, "there are no cucumbers here."

Montgomery was still busily searching for a knife for which to slice the bread but stopped as if he didn't believe me, came over and poked around the bin

himself. "You're right. You'll have to go and get one from the kitchen garden." He then cocked his head to one side, smiled saucily and said, "You do know where the kitchen garden is, don't you?"

I stuck my tongue out at him as I strolled out the door. As I walked through several of the rows looking for the cucumbers I could feel someone's eyes on me. It was Montgomery standing by the kitchen door with his hands on his hips, staring at me like I had gone mad. A moment later he walked over to where I was standing and pointed at the base of my feet and bending down he plucked a *zucchini* from the ground. He held it before my eyes triumphantly and said, "See, cucumber!"

I had no intention of telling Mr. Perfect Pants, Montgomery Fitzwilliam, that he oughtn't be so pleased with himself. He turned and marched back into the kitchen and when I joined him he was washing the earth from his "cucumber" and then he started slicing it into the most unbelievably thick slices with his precious little vegetable knife.

I instantly seized upon an idea. "I'll slice the bread," I said, trying to be useful. Montgomery looked up and smiled and returned to his task. I placed the sharpest edge of the knife on top of the bread and began to press

down firmly but the bread only seemed to be getting squished.

Montgomery stopped what he was doing and stared at me for a moment. He then set aside his so called "cucumber" and came up behind me, placing his left hand around my waist and his right hand over my hand. "No, my love," he whispered, "make sawing motions." A second later he started kissing my neck, "Ummmm, you smell nice." I saw what he was about and I pushed him away.

"Go back to your *cucumber*," I said.

He reluctantly released me and sauntered back over to his slicing. I spotted the butter croquet over by the window and innocently said, "Our cook at Rosings always puts butter on our sandwiches. Where do you keep the butter?"

He laid down his knife and started frantically searching through the cupboards again for the hundredth time, pulling out drawers that I knew he looked through just minutes ago. That told me all I wanted to know about Montgomery: he was as useless in the kitchen as

"Never mind," I said sweetly, "I've found it; here it is."

I dug the bread knife into the croquet, which earned me a sideways glance from my fiancé. I then spread the butter on the bread and pushed them over to him as he began to proudly assemble his cucumber sandwiches.

"How many do you want of each," he asked?

I looked at his little zucchini masterpieces, and batted my eyelashes playfully, "Oh, only two cold beef sandwiches for me, please. I don't much care for *cucumber*."

He wrapped two cucumber sandwiches carefully in napkins as I tossed various pieces of fruit into the basket. Montgomery casually looked up and said, "No peaches for me, please, they don't agree with my constitution; I'd prefer nectarines." Never able to tell one from the other, I tossed in what ever my hands touched figuring that we could sort it all out later.

Our lunch packed, I put on my bonnet and started to tie my ribbons. Out of the corner of my eye I could see that my fiancé was now leaning against the dry sink, watching me admiringly. I turned around and

whispered the words "I love you" and he whispered back, "I know."



We made our way back through the house and emerged onto the front. One of the grooms was pulling a familiar looking curricule to the base of the steps. It had bright yellow wheels and a shiny blue coat of paint. I stood there pondering it for a moment, trying to place it. Montgomery was looking down at me smiling. "Do you recognize it, Anne?"

A memory played through my mind. I looked up at Montgomery and smiled. "Is it the same one my father gave you for your seventeenth birthday?"

"The very one."

Soon another memory entered my head and I reached up and touched my cheek, remembering his "thank you" kiss. "Montgomery, that was the first time you kissed me; my first real kiss."

"It was hardly a kiss, it was nothing more than a chaste peck upon the cheek."



"You'll not dissuade me, it will always be my first kiss. I don't believe you still have the same curricule. Did you know that I picked out the colour myself?"

"As you told me that day, several times."

"I was young and excited and next to my father I loved you more than anyone in the whole world."

"Better than pirates?"

"Oh, much better than pirates."

We walked down to the curricule and Montgomery placed our picnic basket next to the carriage blanket on the floor. He then helped me up into my seat and came round the other side, taking the reins from the groom.

"Where shall we go," I asked, barely containing my excitement.

"I was hoping to finally take you to my secret place."

"Not *the* secret place? Not the place I begged and begged you to take me to every time I visited."

"Yes, the very same."

I wanted to cry; I knew he never took anyone there, not Andrew, not even Darcy and I felt so privileged to be let into his special world.

We drove along for an hour or so barely saying a word to each other but looking over every now and then, beaming into each other's eyes, almost reading each other's thoughts, knowing that words were not necessary. Montgomery stopped the curricle in a shady grove of Spanish chestnuts. He got out and helped me down, and picking up the basket and blanket led me through a small wood, which stretched up a hill.

When we reached the top we turned left and we followed a rocky stream with its waters rushing down from a small waterfall a few yards away. He lifted a few branches and I ducked underneath each and taking a few more steps, we entered a lush, grassy spot, totally hidden from the outside world.

There was a pond fed by another set of small waterfalls that created a delightful trickling sound as the water coursed its way over large, mossy rocks. I looked back at

Montgomery who was standing slightly behind me, watching me enjoy his dearest place in the world.

"Do you like it," he asked.

"Do I like it? It's like something out of a dream. I love it! How on earth did you ever find such a wonderful place?" I quickly stepped down to the water, leaning over the little pond seeing several small fish swimming just below the surface. "There are fish in here," I said looking back to Montgomery who stood in the same spot smiling at me. Just on the other side of the water there was a few snow-white ducks paddling happily by. I pointed again, "Ducks!" Montgomery again smiled, this time nodding his head.

"Would you like to know their names?"

"They have names," I asked in wonder.

He moved down to stand close to me and pointing them each out he said, "That fat one is Tibby, and the middle one is Darcy."

"And the one with his head under the water?"

"That's Andy."

I giggled, "Why Andy?"

"Because he preens himself all day long."

Montgomery turned and walked over to the blanket, spread it out and sitting down upon it gestured for me to join him. I don't know what came over me then, I just looked away.

"I promise I won't bite," he said. I smiled a little and took a few steps in the *opposite* direction. "I thought you loved me or was it only my eyes you loved," he pouted adorably. I smiled slightly and looked at the ground. "Let me see, what did that letter say, something about my eyes being the colour of springtime. Is that correct?"

Now I blushed even more. "No," I mumbled softly. "The colour of summer."

"Eh? I'm an old man; I can't hear you very well."

"Monty, stop."

"Now, I know my hearing is going because I think I just heard you call me Monty."

I looked over at him quickly and averted my eyes once again, "Montgomery, don't tease me so, I can't bear it."

"I can't bear to have you so far away from me." I shyly looked over again and he patted the blanket next to him. "Come over here; don't make me walk over there. Oh, wait a minute; I now remember something in that letter about your liking to see me walk. Shall I walk for you ma'am?" I rolled my eyes and took a few tentative steps in his direction. "That's it, that's it. Good, good, one foot in front of the other." I reached the edge of the blanket, still a few feet away from him and dropped to my knees. "Well," he said, "I guess I'll have to settle for that... for now." I looked down at the ground, twisting the ends of ribbons of my bonnet, unable to meet his eye.

"If I had to take a guess, I'd say you were nervous of something? Not of me I hope."

"I don't know, perhaps."

"Whatever the reasons, you can tell me."

"It... it feels kind of strange."

"What feels strange?"

"I don't know. All of a sudden... I don't know why... I feel a little shy of you." I blushed at my foolishness and lowered my eyes to the ground, biting my bottom lip.

He regarded me for a moment and then leaned forward and taking his right hand lifted my chin, his fingers traced down the length of the ribbon, taking up the end of it and pulling at it until my bonnet fell away, then seizing my hand, pulling me gently into his arms. With my back pressed into his chest, I could feel his steady heartbeat, which helped me to relax somewhat and I snuggled into his embrace. His left hand gently moved through my curls and pulling my hair away from my shoulder he lowered his head and tenderly kissed my neck. His fingers worked their way into the back of my head and soon found the bump there from my fall a few days ago. He quickly removed his hand sighed deeply.

"It doesn't hurt anymore," I said.

"No, I was thinking about how close I came to losing you." He held me tighter and said, "When I saw you fall from Benedick's back it was like my life ended."

"I barely remember it. All I remember was the stream, and the dogs barking and the next thing I recall I was staring up into my uncle's face as he was yelling at Darcy to get ahold of something. Why was he quarrelling with Darcy?"

"He wasn't quarrelling with Darcy, so to speak."

"What then?"

"He was yelling at Darcy to get ahold of me."

"Because you were going to shoot Benedick?"

"N-No."

Turning my head slightly, I leaned my head back a little ways and looked up into his face. "I don't understand; what was going on?"

"Anne, please don't ask me."

His eyes filled with pain and he would not look at me. "Tell me," I whispered gently, clasping his hand.

"It's... it's too hard."

"Please tell me, Montgomery."

His lip quivered a bit and I could see that whatever he had to say to me was excruciating for him to get out. I squeezed his fingers even more, waiting patiently for what he had to say.

"I-I was the first to see you fall, so I got to you first."

"Yes, the doctor told me I was unconscious for a few seconds."

"No, it was more than a few seconds."

"Well, how many then?"

"I don't know! It was more like a few minutes, it felt like an eternity."

"Go on."



"I got to you first."

"As you said before."

"I didn't know what to do, I started calling for help."

I smiled, "Thank you."

"No, it's more than that."

"I don't understand. I remember seeing you aiming the gun at Benedick."

"This was before that."

"What happened before that?"

"Father thought I was going to..."

"Yes."

"Father thought I was going to... he knew... he knew!"

"Knew what?"

"That I wasn't in my right mind. You must understand; I was frantic. I didn't see any future ahead for me without you."

A sudden realization began to form. "You don't mean you where going to..."

"I felt no pulse, I thought you were dead; we all thought you were dead! I only thought of it for the briefest of moments. I had to take my anger out on something, and thought why not myself. I knew I didn't want to live without you!"

Montgomery broke free from me and turned away and buried his face into his hands. I touched his shoulder, which he shrugged away from, refusing to be comforted. I stared at him for a moment pondering over what I would say to make him feel better.

"Montgomery, please don't blame yourself. I am so sorry; this is my fault. "

"Not blame myself! How can it be your fault?"

"I can think of several reasons why this it was my fault. Firstly, I was riding Benedick without your permission.

Secondly, you asked me to get down and I flatly refused. Thirdly, I was riding him far too fast; faster than I should have been having only just learned how to ride a few months before. And fourthly, which I should have said firstly, I had no business riding Benedick in the first place because your horse never liked me."

"What do you mean, he never liked you?"

I carefully modulated the tone of my voice, adding a hint of amusement to lighten the tension. "Good gracious he hated me, he was forever trying to bite me or running off whenever he saw me approaching the paddock. And the side saddle, he never did like to see the side saddle coming."

"He was never meant to be a lady's mount."

"Now you tell me." I waited for him to respond. Nothing was forthcoming so I went on, "Almost from the very day Benedick arrived from Devonshire I rode him. Your father missed you terribly and I had to do something to lift his spirits and teaching me to ride your horse gave him so much pleasure. After a while I began to think of him as my horse. I guess I did get a little too possessive." I placed my hand on Montgomery's back

again and this time he didn't pull away. Adding a hint of laughter to my voice I then said, "You never seem to remember that I am Lady Catherine's daughter and we de Bourgh women simply must have our own way." He was still silent so I went on. "Your horse was only one part of my campaign of defiance. Think back to every time you asked me to do something, what did I do in return? I argued with you and disregarded everything you suggested. I bought a house in Town simply because I could and I had to have my way. I only went to live in London on my own because I knew it would annoy you. When you come to think of it, I deserved it when you threw me into the sea."

"I was provoked."

I heard him laugh slightly and I knew I was reaching him in some way so I continued, rubbing his back gently. "You know, I never told you why I came to Devonshire in such a great hurry. It was to get you home as soon as possible."

"Why?"

"Why do you think, you noodle? Because I was afraid that you would meet one of those Devonshire ladies and

forget all about your sickly, arrogant little cousin back in Kent. Come to think of it, I was so busy worrying about those Devonshire beauties that a certain Cheshire lady, whose name we will not mention, slipped right under my nose."

"I was tricked."

"Says you!"

"I was; ask Andrew."

"You expect me to believe that the great, fearless Colonel Fitzwilliam, defender of the faith, Commander of the Queens cavalry, who bravely dons his redcoat everyday to protect this great nation from enemies at home and abroad, was tricked by a badly dressed, snobby little upstart from Middlebury, Cheshire."

"Yes."

"Sad, very sad." He chuckled again, but still would not turn around. "One day, sir, you'll have to tell me all about those other young ladies who tricked you into doing something against your better judgment."

"Does that include present company?"

"I never!"

"When you were eight you wrote to me at Oxford saying that you were being held prisoner by pirates and that if I didn't come rescue you, I'd be sorry."

"You didn't believe there were actual pirates roaming the park, did you?"

"No, but it was a difficult time for me, I was all alone, away from my family, even though Andrew was at Oxford with me, he never paid me much attention. And I was on the verge of failing Latin and a plea from a damsel in distress was just the diversion I needed. I rode all night, on the top of the Bromley post." I laughed. "In the rain." I laughed even louder. "And what was this knight's reward when I got to Rosings Park, a lecture from Aunt Catherine on the evils of neglecting my studies and you refusing to see me because I forgot to bring you a present." I toppled over onto my back, laughing so hard that tears were coming from my eyes and I was barely able to breath.

I know I must have laughed uncontrollably for five minutes together and when I was finally able to stop, I opened my eyes to see that Montgomery was propped up on his elbow, leaning over me, looking down lovingly into my face. He slowly whispered the words "I love you" and I whispered back "I know." Then I reached up and wove my fingers through the hair at the back of his head and slowly pulled him down towards me, every moment thrilling to the sensations of his lips pressed to mine. He pulled away and rolled over onto his back and we both looked up into the blue sky watching the clouds roll by, each lost in our own dreams of the future. Montgomery reached for my hand and brought it up to his lips, kissing it.

"Tell me Anne, I always wanted to know, when did you first realize that you loved me?"

"Oh Montgomery, I have always loved you."

"No, I don't mean that weak, silly kind of cousin love, but that "I'm in love and there is no one ever again for me" kind of love."

"That's easy," I said, propping myself up and narrowing my eyes into slits trying to look menacing. "While I was

watching you turning pages over for Elizabeth Bennet whilst she played the pianoforte. Ugh! I was so humiliated. First Darcy and then you; to watch you both being drawn in like rats to the granary; like moths to a flame. I was so jealous. I love Elizabeth now so very dearly, but I hated watching *you*, of all people, falling in love with her."

"Me, in love with Elizabeth? Never!"

"Just go ahead and admit it; I can handle it. Well, I will try."

"I was never in love with Elizabeth." I rolled my eyes. "Never! I will admit I liked her, she was amusing; she made my visit to Rosings so pleasant and admit it Anne, that was one of your "Darcy" years."

"What do you mean by "Darcy" years?"

"Some years you favoured Darcy and some years you favoured me. Although, come to think of it, those last several years were all "Darcy" years. Just go ahead and admit that you were in love with him; I can handle it. Well, I will try."



"I was never "in love" with Darcy!"

"Says you!" He smiled up at me and said, "You expect me to believe that?"

"It was only some kind of silly girlhood infatuation, set off by my mothers ranting and raving, telling me year after year how much she wanted Darcy as a son-in-law. But the last time you both came to Rosings together, Darcy was so silent and pensive I couldn't stand the sight of him. That, my love, was a "Montgomery" year; it is too bad you missed it because you were so busy turning pages."

"Then why did you never talk to me? I remember I came earlier that same year and you sat on the sofa the entire time, shooting daggers at me with your eyes."

"Because, my love, you would not shut up! You kept talking nonsense, going on and on about nothing, talking about your precious horse and your precious second cavalry! And while we are on the subject, sir, why did you send me all of those insipid letters? And will you please tell me what you we're thinking when you sent me that horrid Valentine poem about your redcoat being red business! Then, to top it all off, you

send me an express the same night asking me for the *hundredth* time about my health! I thought I was going to scream!"

Tired from my outburst, I flopped over on my back, out of breathe. Then Montgomery rolled over onto his stomach and looked down at me and asked, "Are you quite finished?"

"Yes, for now."

"Then I will endeavour to answer all of you questions with five simple words: I was falling in love."

I sat up. "What do you mean by you were falling in love?"

"Just what I said, I was falling in love. You made me uneasy, I never could understand why. I think I rambled on so because if I stopped, I'd have to talk to you seriously and I did not have anything of particular interest to say."

"I never dreamed you loved me then."

"When did you think I fell in love with you?"

"After Darcy and Elizabeth's wedding, when Georgiana sent you my "eyes of summer" letter."

"No, my dear; I was in love with you long before that."

"When?" I asked, barely able to contain myself.

"I do not think I'll tell you!"

Knowing he was teasing me, I decided to tease him back. "I think I can guess, when I danced with Captain Wentworth at the Matlock ball?"

"That's right, Anne, rub the salt in the wounds."

"Montgomery, tell me, please!"

"It was before that."

I smiled mischievously and said, "When I saw you in London the day you introduced me to Captain Wentworth?"

"For that bit of impertinence I'll devise thee brave punishments."

"Come on! Tell me! Tell me! Exactly when?"

"The moment I left Rosings with Darcy and you never come down to say goodbye."

I signed. "Awwwwwww!"

"I thought about you for weeks and weeks after that. I could not go to sleep, I could not concentrate on my duties, and I was of no use to anybody. Darcy, I believe was suffering from his own case of melancholy over Elizabeth Bennet and was of no use himself. What a pair we made. I think all of our friends disowned us for a time. Sometimes we'd sit together hours and hours, looking like two idiots, not saying a word, each stewing in our own misery."

"What you must have gone through. If it's any consolation, I suffered a great deal, too. La! I made a rhyme!"

Montgomery rolled his eyes and sat up. "Hungry," he asked.

"Ravishing!"

He opened the picnic basket and started to remove the contents. He placed a plate in front of each of us and handed me my two cold beef sandwiches. He put a "cucumber" sandwich on his plate and I fought back my laugh with all of my might. I reached down into the basket for a nectarine and placed it on my plate. He dug in the basket and retrieved a bunch of grapes for himself. Removing a fruit knife I began removing the fuzzy skin from the nectarine and slicing into the flesh of my fruit, creating individual little wedges and shared them equally between our plates. I offered him a slice of nectarine from my fingers as he poured out the wine, and I sipped it slowly savouring its coolness on such a warm summer day.

I waited patiently for Montgomery to take a bite from one of his sandwiches, taking an inappropriate amount of delight at the scene to come. He slowly lifted it to his mouth and I sat there biting my lip, waiting for the face of recognition. He was just about to put it to his mouth when he noticed my wicked little stare. He dropped the sandwich back down and I looked at it with regret, barely concealing my disappointment.

"You're doing it again, Anne."

"Doing what?"

"Staring at me."

"I like staring at you, you're so pretty." He cast a wary glance at me and I quickly corrected my mistake, "Handsome, I meant handsome."

"That's better, and might I say, you're mighty handsome yourself."

I was about to say thank you when I noticed he picked up the sandwich again. I wet my lips in anticipation and just as quickly as he lifted it again he dropped it again.

"What is it, Anne?"

"Nothing!"

"I can not eat with you watching me."

"I wasn't watching you."

"Yes, you were!"

"No, I am not!"

"You are; like you're waiting for me to dribble something down my chin."

"I never knew you to be so paranoid."

"I'm not paranoid; I just do not like people looking at me when I'm eating."

"So, I'm *people* now?"

"You're just acting strange."

"Oh, so I'm *strange people*?"

"There you go, twisting my words."

"Look, I'll turn around so you won't think I'm staring." I positioned my body so I could observe him out of the corner of my eye.

"Stop it!"

"What on earth did I do now?"

"You're still looking at me."

"You Fitzwilliam's, what a strange sort you all seem to be."

"And the de Bourgh's are not?"

"A hit, acknowledged."

"You know, Anne, for all our families little faults, you must admit, we do have some wonderful times together."

"Yes, I love them all prodigiously."

"Even Andrew?"

"Especially Andrew! I think he's going to be my favourite cousin from now on."

"Hey, what about me?"

"I think after today, sir, you will be much more to me than a cousin."

He smiled again, and quickly lifted his sandwich and took a bite. I had to place both hands over my mouth to keep from laughing, but strangely enough, his smile



never left his face. The only tell-tell sign of his displeasure was the slow, steady way he was chewing. He eventually sat the sandwich back on his plate and casually reached for his glass of wine. I stared at him for a long moment waiting for him to say something, anything before I lost all composure. I soon got my wish.

"Umm... best zucchini sandwich I've ever tasted."



We ate in companionable silence for the remainder of the picnic, me giving him my other sandwich, we each staring at each other lost in our own little private world. When we finished our meal, he quickly cleared away all of our picnic things. I never had such a delightful day in my life, and for the first time in months I was actually enjoying myself. We lay upon the blanket and I drifted off into peaceful sleep, dreaming of Montgomery as he held me safely in his arms. I started to wake sometime later, as I felt Montgomery placing sweet little kisses all over my face. For some reason I kept wondering when I was going to be awakened from this dream, however, I knew I had never experienced a dream this wonderful. When I finally opened my eyes he was looking at me smilingly. I could never hope for anything better then

this, that was until Montgomery kissed me again and asked, "Shall we go get married?"



Montgomery eased the team back onto the road. The curricle swiftly made its way through the rolling, green countryside while Montgomery pointed out his father's estate workers and he lifted his hand into a friendly wave. Several of these people seemed to stare back at us oddly which Montgomery never seemed to notice. I attributed it to Pamela's last words to us, the odd sight of a woman in an open carriage with a man not her husband, and I thought nothing of it.

We entered a small village that I had never seen before. Montgomery quickly explained to me that it was the village of Lower Winford, one of the four livings in his father's gift. He drew the vehicle in front of the small village church just as the town clock struck two. He asked me to wait a moment while he went inside to prepare the parson. I looked around the town and saw a interesting looking provisions merchant on the opposite side of the street and decided to step in to see what I might purchase as a memento for my special day. That was when I made a startling discovery; my purse was missing! Good heavens, our special license! I hopped out

of the curricule and frantically started lifting the cushions. Finding nothing there, I dragged the picnic basket out into the road and began my anxious search, tossing bits of zucchini sandwich everywhere. I returned to the curricule and lifted every single cushion once again and completely shook out the picnic blanket. Several villagers passed me by giving me odd little stares and were probably thinking I was insane.

Gracious! I thought; what was I going to tell Montgomery? He was going to kill me and leave me on the side of the road to find my own way home! Two dogs gathered about my legs sniffing at the odd bits of sandwich at my feet. As I shooed them away, I heard Montgomery's voice from inside the church. I quickly shoved the basket's contents back into it and I just managed to lift it back into the curricule when he came out.

"Anne, my love we are in high luck, Mr. Boyd has agreed to perform the ceremony for us. He has an appointment in the next village at four o'clock that he must not miss, so we can be married now. Thank God for special licenses!"

I had not the heart to tell him. All I could think was that he was going to kill me and leave me on the side of

the road to find my own way home! He must have seen the horror written all over my face because he stopped smiling and frantically started patting at his chest suddenly realizing he had no coat on.

"GOOD LORD, ANNE, I LEFT THE LICENSE AT HOME!"

For the briefest of moments I was going to let him think it was all his fault, yet there was no way of knowing where my purse was. I gathered up my courage and stammered out my confession.

"I-It was I who l-last had the l-license, my love, my s-sweet... d-dearest. I placed it in my purse for safekeeping."

He looked relieved. "Thank heavens you had the foresight to take care of the matter; we old men and our feeble memories, you know."

He grasped my elbow to gently pull me into the direction of the church. When he felt resistance he looked down at me with wonder. "Do not tell me you're having second thought's."

"Not... exactly."

His smile faded. "Third thoughts, then?" He laughed uneasily.

What little composure I had left instantly crumbled when I started to cry and babble incoherently at the same time...."I had it and then I did not have it and I remember laying it down somewhere but for the life of me I cannot think of where it could be and then this afternoon it slipped my mind completely and I have no idea what became of it and it's all my fault I'm a stupid silly foolish girl and now you will not marry me and I do not blame you if you want to kill me and leave me on the side of the road to find my own way home but I do not know my way back to Matlock."

"Are you telling me that you lost our license?!?!?"

I nodded my head like a miserable child. Like a wild man, Montgomery turned the curricule upside down. Looking under every cushion and rummaging around in the picnic basket, spilling its content on the ground, and finding nothing, he slapped his forehead and slowly slid his hand down over his face letting his fingers come to

rest at the base of his neck. I guiltily repacked the picnic basket daring not look into Montgomery's face.

"Think, Anne, think! Where did you have it last?"

I was whimpering and all I could manage was, "I do not knooooowwww!"

"When did you see it last?"

"I do not knooooowwww!"

"Did you last have it at the duck pond?"

"I do not knooooowwww!"

"What do you mean you do not know?!?"

"Stop yelling at meeeeeeeeeee!"

He pulled me into his arms, contrite. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. There, there. Just think back to this morning, you picked it up from the table in the breakfast room."

"Yes."

"What did you do then?"

"I had it with me when I went upstairs and I put it in my purse for safekeeping."

"Do you remember bringing it down again."

"Yes, when I came into the kitchen."

"And what did you do with it then?"

"I put it down with my bonnet on a table in the kitchen and after that I do not remember; I became distracted."

"And why was that?"

It all came out in an anguished, high-pitched wail.  
"Because I was staring at your bottom."

I was sobbing uncontrollably by now and I was so embarrassed that I buried my face into Montgomery's chest, crying bitterly. Montgomery laughed quietly and patted me on the back.

"There, there, all hope is not lost. Is that the last place you remember seeing it?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Then it must be there." He removed a napkin from the basket. "Here, dry your eyes, I can't have my bride looking as ugly as her groom." He then helped me back up into the carriage. "Let me go and break the news to Mr. Boyd and then we will go home and get our license and find someone else to marry us."



Owing to the distance back to Matlock there was no way we could make it back in time for Mr. Boyd to marry us. Montgomery suggested we go to another church slightly further a field where he also knew the vicar. It would take some doing, but we hoped to be married by four o'clock. As we travelled along neither of us spoke much and I was hoping with all of might that Montgomery wasn't too angry. But I knew something wasn't right with him because developed a case of nervous scratching about the neck.



When the curricle pulled up in view of the manor we spied two horses tied up to the hitching posts out front. Montgomery slowly guided the carriage around to the side of the house and stopped.

"Oh Lord," whispered Montgomery, "It's Darcy." He scratched at his neck nervously.

"What wrong with that?" I whispered back.

"We're supposed to be sneaking off to get married remember?"

"And?"

"Let me just say that Darcy has a certain aversion to elopements. You remain here, I'll go and retrieve our license from the kitchen." He scratched his chin.

He stepped down quietly and as agile as a cat he crept along the edge of the building in the direction of the kitchen garden. Almost as soon as he was gone I heard voices from the other direction; it was Patrick and Darcy speaking.

"How odd, Darcy, there's no one in the stable either."

"Where could everyone be?"

"Did your uncle mention anything about giving the servants the day off."

"I do not recall and even if he did, I am sure he would have left a footman or two on duty. Did you check the back of the house?"

"Yes and look what I found in the kitchen. It looks like Anne's."

"Look Patrick, you go that way and I'll go this way; there must be someone about the grounds."

I heard footsteps on the gravel and panicked. As quietly as I could I got out of the curricle and made a run for the shrubbery. As soon as I hid behind a large bush, I peeked around the side of it as Patrick made his appearance and spotted the curricle. "What the..." He started to inspect it by walking around it. He stopped in front of the team and started to talk to the horses. "Someone seems to have left you two in an odd place. I wonder where you have been? Someone's been driving you pretty hard." He did not say anything more and neither did he move. He stayed that way for what

seemed like an eternity. He then decided to wander off and before I knew it he had disappeared from view. I slowly peered over the top of the hedge and not seeing him I decided to make a dash for the kitchen myself. The hem of my gown must have caught on a branch because the next thing I knew I was tumbling to the ground face first. I somehow managed to roll over and who should be there looking down upon me with his hand on his hips: My cousin, Patrick de Bourgh.

"Anne, darling, why are you lying on the ground?"

"Because I want to." He smirked. "Stop smirking, Patrick and help me to my feet!"

With his assistance I was standing and brushing the leaves and dirt off of myself.

"Now Anne, would you care to tell me why you're hiding in the shrubbery."

"I wasn't hiding in the shrubbery."

"Anne, you were hiding! I saw you as soon as I came around the building. Remember; in future when you're

hiding in the greenery, try to wear something... green.  
Now tell me, what are you up to."

"I'm not *up to* anything."

"Then where is everyone?"

"I should imagine they're all at Pemberley."

"The servant's as well."

"Montgomery gave them the day off. There's a groom about the place somewhere, I saw him earlier. I'm sure he's keeping an eye on things."

"Where's your cousin?"

"Which one, I do have several you know."

"The one who has been kissing you. You should see the state of your lip rouge."

"Are not you supposed to be somewhere making goo-goo eyes at Georgiana?"

"I'll meet her at Pemberley later, I've spent half the day paying calls upon all the neighbours, making apologies for my errant brother's errant behaviour. We only came back to change horses. And speaking of Pemberley, should not you be there as well."

"I-I was on my way but found that I had left something of great importance behind and returned to recover it."

"It wouldn't happen to be a certain special license? Eloping are we?" He dangled my purse up in front of me. I made a lunge for it and he held it above my head.

"Give it me!"

"Not until you tell me how you managed to arrange for a document for your marriage on such short notice."

"Patrick, I'm warning you!"

"Not until you tell!"

I started jumping for it and Patrick was so amused with himself that he started jumping as well. Just then a voice rang out, it was Darcy.

"Patrick! Patrick! Where are you?"

"Coming, Darcy!"

I panicked. "Patrick, what ever you do, please do not let Darcy know what I'm up to."

"Why, pray?"

"Montgomery says Darcy has a certain aversion to elopements."

"And well he might!"

"What does that mean?"

"Just never you mind, wait here."

I went back into the bushes as he went around to the front of the building. I heard my two cousins talking.

"I found one of the grooms," said Darcy. "Everything is well. You were correct Patrick; the servants have been given the day off. Shall we set off for Pemberley?"

"You go on ahead, I want to return home and get out of these muddy clothes. Tell my wife I'll be along as soon as I can."

"Very well, I'll see you soon."

A few moments later I heard a horse gallop off and Patrick reappeared. I emerged from my hiding place.

"If you do not mind, Patrick, may I have my property back, please?"

Patrick's countenance became all seriousness. "Not so fast young lady. As the senior-most member of the De Bourgh family present, I demand an explanation of the nature of these suspicious events. Where is your partner in crime?"

"I'll never tell," I said, folding my arms across my chest.

"Never mind, I have a pretty good idea. He's going to get a piece of my mind!" He set off in the direction of the kitchen and I took off after him, pleading.

"Patrick, don't do this. Montgomery has already had a trying day due to my stupidity. You know we've been

trying to get married for nearly two years now. If you have any understanding in your heart at all, you would not prevent this. I love him and I can't bear to be separated from him any longer. You know my mother; you know she'll take me home to Rosings and make me have at least a six-month engagement. If I do not marry Montgomery today, I'll die, I know I'll just die!"

This was all said with great feeling, which apparently made no impression upon my cousin. He just marched on with a determined face. Upon reaching the kitchen door he paused and looked back at me. I was out of breath and on the verge of tears. Turning back to the door, he pushed it open. There was Montgomery, standing in the middle the room with his back to us breathing heavily looking down at the floor with one hand on his hip and the other scratching the back of his neck. The kitchen was a mess. Every cupboard was open; every drawer was pulled out. He must have searched his heart out and given up.

The very next moment Patrick called out. "Fitzwilliam! Catch!" Montgomery turned to face my cousin at the sound of his name being called and immediately caught my purse in his hands. Patrick smiled and said, "Do not you have a wedding to get to, man?"





With our horses changed, we were soon on the road with Patrick riding along side the curricule until we reached the Cheshire turn off. He stopped, waved, then turned his horse Northwest as we turned in an easterly direction. We drove along for a time but soon we came to the town of Shelburne.

As we entered, many of the villagers that we passed, stopped in the street and stared openly and whispered amongst themselves. Shopmen stepped out of their shops to have a look, even a few children ceased their games to watch us go by. Montgomery did not seem to notice, he just waved in that open, friendly way of his; not noticing that no one waved back. It suddenly burst upon me why we were such a spectacle; these people had yet to hear the latest news regarding Montgomery's martial situation and were probably wondering who the strange woman was, driving in a open carriage with a man who was supposed to be someone else's husband.

I was just about to make a comment when Montgomery spotted the rector tending his garden. When we came to an abrupt halt in front of the parsonage, a cantankerous looking elderly man came up to the gate to have a look at us. My cousin paled slightly and warily stepped

down. I had never seen Montgomery so nervous in his life. Based on his reaction, I stayed where I was sitting and just listened, not a little frightened of the aged cleric.

The elderly man frowned and said, "Colonel Fitzwilliam, you are the last person I expected to see today."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Barnes. I'm glad to see you looking so well."

"Well? I can't say that I'm well; I have a touch of rheumatism. It started acting up last night; the parsonage is a might draughty. Been meaning to speak to your father about it, I think I need a new roof. Then there's the matter of the creaking floorboards, not to mention the rain we've been having which brought on the rheumatism, but I never complain."

"Oh how... trying," was my cousins response.

"Tell me, Colonel, I thought you'd be half way to someplace like Brighton by now on your wedding trip? Not that I know anything about wedding trips. Never did see any benefit to having a wife myself. Can't stand their chatter, but still, I'm surprised to see you."

A few villagers now approached and Montgomery turned slightly to look at them.

"Y-Yes, I am sure you are s-surprised. But, you see, there has been a slight change of plans."

"Was never one for changes myself. I like things to stay the same, never could understand people who changed their minds on a whim. What kind of change in plan?"

One bold young man stepped closer and leaned against the fence and stared into Montgomery's face.

Montgomery taken aback, scratched his ear and said, "I've come to get married."

Mr Barnes thought for a moment, then said, "Mr. Harley is the Hawthorne's parson. I thought he was performing the service."

"As I said before, there's been a slight change of plan. I'd like you to do it?" Montgomery scratched his neck.

"Why me? Why not Mr. Owen? Mr. Owen is your clergyman."

Two of the villagers nodded to each other. Montgomery gave them a sideways glance.

"I know that Mr. Owen is our clergyman, but, you see, Mr. Owen has gone to Peterborough to visit his family."

Reverend Barnes regarded Montgomery for a long moment. "What about Boyd? Boyd's church is a lot closer to Matlock."

"Mr. Boyd had other plans that could not be delayed."

"Did you try Mr. Franklin?"

Montgomery raked his hands through his hair and said, "He's nearly twelve miles away."

Two or three more villagers came over and leaned on the fence to listen to the exchange.

"Who's that there in the carriage?" asked Mr. Barnes, pointing rather rudely with a gnarled finger.

Several pairs of eyes all turned in my direction.

"That is the woman I'm going to marry."

Mr. Barnes's eyes lingered over me and several people started whispering. I sat up a little straighter and looked forward, unnerved by everyone's glare.

"I thought Miss Hawthorne had yellow hair? That does not look like Miss Hawthorne."

"That's because she isn't Miss Hawthorne."

Everyone studied me again. I knew they were because I could see them all out of the corner of my eye. Mr. Barnes soon turned his eyes back to Montgomery and several more villagers sidled over, curious.

"What did you do with Miss Hawthorne?"

"I did not *do* anything with Miss Hawthorne. She went to Scotland."

"Why did she go to Scotland on her wedding day?"

Several of the villagers snickered quietly. This unnerved Montgomery even more and he stammered.

"T-To get m-m-married."

"Why aren't you in Scotland, then?"

"Because I'm getting married in England."

Mr. Barnes thought about it for a minute then asked, "How do you plan on getting married in England with Miss Hawthorne in Scotland."

Several of the villagers now laughed openly. Montgomery started to lose his patience.

"Listen very carefully, I'm not marrying Miss Hawthorne, I'm marrying her."

Montgomery turned and pointed at the vicar and all the villagers turned to have a look at me once again. I wished I could shrivel up and blow away.

"Who's that there then?"

"That is Miss Anne de Bourgh."

Several of the villagers felt the need to chatter loudly. Mr. Barnes pondered on that, sucking his teeth. A moment later he then asked, "Isn't she the one you were to marry a few years ago?"

I hush fell over the crowd as they all waited patiently for Montgomery to answer.

Montgomery scratched his neck yet again and replied, "Yes."

Several of the villagers began talking quite animatedly between themselves and one little boy peered up into the curricule at me while he picked his nose.

Mr Barnes asked, "I thought she broke off her engagement to you?"

Various villagers now nodded in agreement.

"She did," replied my fiancé.

I shooed the dirty little boy away.

"I heard tell you then got yourself engaged to Miss Hawthorne after that."

"I did."

"Why aren't you marrying Miss Hawthorne, then?"

"Because she married someone else."

Some of the villagers now seemed to be collecting on bets.

"When?"

"Today, I think."

"You think?"

Montgomery began to make grand sweeping gestures with his arms, hoping that it would make the aged man understand. "Listen, forget about Miss Hawthorne. Miss Hawthorne is now married and gone."

"Mr. Harley is the Hawthorne's vicar. Did Harley up Cheshire way perform the service?"

"No!"

"Mr. Boyd, then?"

"As I said before, Miss Hawthorne is in Scotland!"

"What doing?"



"Getting married to Mr. De Bourgh."

"I thought he married Miss Darcy a few weeks ago."

Montgomery's patience was at its breaking point.

"No! I'm speaking of Colonel Phillip de Bourgh, Mr. Patrick de Bourgh's elder brother. It was Mr. Patrick de Bourgh that married Miss Darcy."

"Who performed the service?"

"Look, I really do not know!"

"Perhaps it was Mr. Dalton. No, it can't be Dalton; Dalton's the rector at Kympton. Mr. Fowler is the vicar at Pemberley."

"You know, I'm sure you're right. Now can we discuss my marriage? I'd like to get married."

Mr. Barnes became thoughtful once more. "You'll be needing the banns published. That takes three weeks."

"No, no; I have a special license."

"To marry Miss Hawthorne?"

"No, to marry Miss De Bourgh."

He thought another few moments. "How did you manage that?"

Some of the villagers nodded their heads in agreement.

"Listen," said Montgomery with exasperation tingeing his voice, "Can you marry us or not?"

"You ought to know with a special license you can marry anywhere in England."

"I know; that is why I came here."

Reverend Barnes looked at me once more and asked, "Do her folk know you carried her way off over here to get married?"

"As it happens, no."

"Is not her mother Lady Catherine de Bourgh?"

The villagers all gasped simultaneously.

"Yes! So?"

Mr. Barnes turned and walked away. Montgomery called after him, "I say, Mr. Barnes, what is the matter?"

"I'll not perform the service over you two."

"Why ever not!"

"I may be old but I'm not a fool. Good day, Colonel Fitzwilliam."



Speechless, Montgomery marched back to curricule with the look of a man who had just fought the entire French army with his bare hands. The crowd that had gathered parted for him when they saw the look on his face. It was almost as if he was Moses and they were the Red Sea.

He jumped up and set the carriage back in motion. I could tell he was struggling to maintain his composure so I sat quietly by his side for several miles down the road. Halfway back to Matlock after a time of complete

silence, where he did not look or say anything to me once, he stopped the vehicle and got out. He said nothing and did not look at me; he just stood there, a few steps away, scratching at his neck every now and then, staring off into the distance.

This scratching now had started to worry me. Since we journeyed from Matlock it only grew in intensity and he seemed not to be able to control it. I had at first put it down to a severe case of nerves, but this had to be something else.

"Montgomery, my darling, I know you have other more important things on your mind at this moment and far be it from me to distract you while you explore the options of our marriage, however, I feel I must ask, why do you keep scratching so?"

"You'd scratch too if your nerves were as frazzled as mine!"

"Nerves? I never knew you to be afflicted with nerves."

"Until today, I never thought I was afflicted by them either. It's driving me to distraction!"

I opened the picnic basket and removed the water bottle and wet a napkin. "Come here my poor, sweet, darling. Take this, it will make you feel better."

He took the cloth from my hands and ran it over his face. He then took the bottle and leaning backwards poured the entire contents over his face. I watched as the droplets of water trickled bewitchingly down his skin. I must have been lingering a bit too long over his features because the next thing he said was, "Anne, you're doing it again." He then smiled and I opened my arms and held him tightly.

I said, "You'll think of something, I know you will. My father always said you were clever."

"I do not feel very clever."

I released him and brushed back his wet hair. "Do you feel better now?"

"Much." He opened the picnic basket to replace the bottle. However, he stood there and stared down into it for a few moments. He then looked at me strangely, looked back into the basket, and then he looked at me again. "Anne?"

"Yes?"

"Do you have any idea what sort of fruit you packed this morning for our picnic?"

"Yes, of course; grapes and nectarines."

"Do you remember my mentioning that I do not eat peaches?"

"Yes, of course."

"Would you mind telling me what sort of fruit that is there?"

He pointed and I leaned over and looked and said, "That is a nectarine."

"Are you sure?"

"Nectarines have fuzzy skin... or is it the other way round, I could never tell the difference." I laughed.

A dark cloud passed over Montgomery's face. I remembered seeing that face once before and that time it meant that I was about to be thrown into the sea.

"Anne, I can't eat peaches. I could never eat peaches. Peaches make me itch. Those are peaches!"

I bit my bottom lip and nervously looked around for a body of water.

Montgomery stared off into nothingness and saying not a thing, he marched back over to the driver's side, swung himself up into the curricule and set it into motion again. I could tell by the tight way he held the reins in his hands that he was trying to remain calm. I had to know where I stood. I knew (hoped) he still loved me and I also knew (hoped) he would look past this one false step and forgive me.

"Montgomery," I said tentatively.

"Yes."

"Are you all right?"

"No."

"Are you angry?"

"Yes."

"With me?" He paused for what seemed like an eternity.

"No."

I decided to remove the focus from my fruit faux pas back to our wedding debacle. "There is still that Mr. Franklin."

"Yes."

"Can we get there before dark?"

"No."

He was now trying my patience.

"Can you say something other than yes and no?"

"Yes."

"Well, say something else."

"No."

"Are you going to have a sour deposition for the remainder of the day?"



"Yes."

"Stop acting like this!"

"No."

"Fine! Like I care!" I stared off into nothingness.

The horses trotted on for a few more yards then all of the tension that Montgomery had held inside for the whole of the day suddenly poured forth. "This has turned out to be the worse day of my life! It's unbelievable! The only thing to do now is to travel on to Pemberley and get married some other day."

"I do not want to go to Pemberley! I want to go and find this Mr. Franklin!"

"That wasn't a request."

"What!?!?!"

"You heard me, this day has been a complete disaster; I can't take it anymore. We will do as I say!"

"It hasn't been that bad! You're exaggerating!"

"I'm exaggerating? Shall I give you a step-by-step account! First, I get stood up at the altar; not that I minded that part, but, then you lost the licence!"

"You act like I lost the licence on purpose?"

"Hear me out! Secondly, we had to spend precious time searching for the licence, which brought us seven miles out of the way to the silliest village in all of England with the most impossible parson known to man, who decides he won't marry us, not because we don't have the proper papers, no, because he's afraid of your mother! And now, to top it all off, I have only just learned that you have poisoned me!"

"Poisoned you!?!?!"

"Yes, poisoned me! It seems awfully peculiar that you knew the difference between a cucumber and a zucchini; yet, you can't tell the difference between a peach and a nectarine!"

"You ate them, obviously you can't tell the difference either!"

"So, now it all my fault? I hardly think so!"

"I knew it, I knew it! I was waiting for this! I was waiting for you to place the blame on me for everything. It was an honest mistake. I never said I was perfect. But I forgot that all you Fitzwilliam men require perfection."

"I have never required you to be perfect, Anne. All I demand in a wife is a little common sense."

"Ah ha! The Fitzwilliam trait finally rears its ugly head. I was wondering when I would finally see it in you!"

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"I'll tell you! Your father is demanding, Andrew is demanding, even Little Christopher has not been spared the Fitzwilliam code of conduct!"

"Stop this Anne; stop this foolishness before you say something that you regret."

"And Montgomery demands that I follow his orders. In case you have not noticed, sir, I am not one of your red-coated flunkies!"

"That does it; I'm taking you to Pemberley. You need to cool off!"

"And I told you that I'm not ready to go to Pemberley! I want to go to Mr. Franklin!"

"I am not driving all the way out there on some wild goose chase to find him gone or to have him refuse to marry us. We will get married another time."

"Montgomery Fitzwilliam, you are marrying me today or else!"

"Or else what?"

I chose my words carefully. "Or I will return to Kent and you will never see me again. Am I rightly understood?"

"What is that, some kind of threat?"

"Take it however you want. You heard me, you will marry me today or you will *never* marry me at all."

"Take it back, Anne."

"I will not!"

He looked me straight in the eye and said slowly and calmly, "Then I will not marry you at all."

Fuming, we each looked at the other for a moment. I never expected to hear those words come out of his mouth and it was making my blood boil. I was hurt, angry, and cross and at that moment the only thing I wanted to see was the back of Montgomery Fitzwilliam's head.

"Stop! I want to get out!"

"That can be arranged!"

Montgomery pulled in the reins and stopped the curricle. He did not look at me and also made no moves to help me down. As soon as my feet touched the ground, the curricle sped off at break-neck speed. I watched the dust thinking surely he would turn around at any moment. I watched and waited. And waited. And watched. And watched some more. And waited some more.

It suddenly occurred to me that I was in a very complicated position; I was indeed left on the side of the road to find my own way home and I really did not know my way back to Matlock.



I started to walk and in no time I was hot and fatigued and in my light slippers my feet ached terribly. At the crossroad there was a broken log under the shade of a tree. I sat down, thankful for somewhere to rest. I sat there for a few minutes and then all of the anguish and hurt that I was feeling started to pour out. I cried like a baby, cursing myself for unleashing my temper once again. Perhaps it was all for the best, perhaps Montgomery and I should never have taken our relationship beyond the bounds of cousins or common acquaintances. I wished I had Georgiana or Pamela there to talk to me, to comfort me, to tell me that everything was all right. But now my head ached, and I couldn't think rationally anymore. I brought my knees up to my chest and laid my head down and closed my eyes.

A good while later I heard a carriage approaching; thinking (hoping) it was Montgomery coming to rescue me. I quickly wiped away my tears and sat up straighter but instantly saw that it was coming from another direction. As soon as I heard someone cry out to me in a voice that I did not recognize, my heart sank.

"Hullo, there." I looked up and saw a smart looking chaise and four approaching. The thought of highwaymen momentarily flashed through my mind.

However, I recollected that highwaymen rarely travelled in such style, especially such elegant carriages with crests upon the door. The carriage stopped. All I could do was sit up and try to look respectable, the entire time thinking that respectable women did not sit on the sides of roads.

A man stuck his head out and asked, "Do you need any assistance?"

"No, I don't think so."

"You look as if you could use some help. Where are you headed to down this road?"

"Matlock, I think."

"You think," he asked, chuckling lightly.

"I would be much obliged, sir, if you would kindly point me in the right direction."

"I am a stranger in these parts myself, but I was told that if I stayed on this road it would take me into the town of Matlock."

A young lady then stuck her head out, "Oh, please say you will join us, we have plenty of room."

"You are most kind, but I do not wish to be an encumbrance."

The man said, "It would be no trouble at all, we would love the company. Forgive me, but perhaps I should introduce myself first. My name is Bertram, Mr. Edmund Bertram. Also, allow me to introduce my wife, Mrs. Francis Bertram. Fanny, this is..." He looked at me beseechingly.

"I am Miss Anne de Bourgh."

"It is a great pleasure to meet you, Miss de Bourgh. And now that we are all friends, may I ask how you came to be here, alone on this road?"

"If you don't mind, I'd prefer not to answer. But I can assure you it is nothing scandalous."

He studied me for a moment and then said, "As you wish."



Mrs. Bertram then said, "Could we drop you somewhere? Do allow us to drop you somewhere. I would hate to think of you sitting out here all alone, especially since it grows dark soon and it also looks like rain."

Mrs. Bertram then smiled at me so sweetly that I hated to refuse and to tell the truth, I was hot and tired and could only think of sitting down in such a comfortable carriage. So, the next thing I knew I was travelling with them.

"Where would you like to go Miss De Bourgh? We are travelling as far as the town of Matlock ourselves," said Mr. Bertram.

"How fortunate for me, I am going to Matlock Manor, if you would be so kind as to drop me there."

"This is good news. My particular friend Mr. Owen has graciously permitted my wife and myself to use his home while he is away visiting his family. I believe his house is just outside the grounds of the manor. You see, Miss de Bourgh," he paused looking into his wife's eyes, "we are on our wedding trip."

Newlyweds! This is always my luck. However, I smiled and started the polite conversation that newlyweds always seemed to expect, no matter how much I hated the topic. "Oh, newlyweds, how... interesting. How long have you been married?"

"But three days," replied the over-beaming Mrs. Bertram that drew an even more beatific beam from her husband.

"Three days; three whole days; how... charming for you." I wanted out, now.

"Yes, three days," said Mrs. Bertram dreamily, looking up into her husband's face as if he were the only man in the world. When she saw me staring, she instantly blushed and looked away.

"And when my friend Mr. Owen was at our wedding, and learned that we were touring the peaks, he kindly offered us the use of his home; you see, we are on our wedding trip."

Another trait with newlyweds, they tend to repeat themselves.

"How... charming."

"Tell me, Miss De Bourgh," asked Mrs. Bertram, "Is the rest of Derbyshire as lovely as they all say? I have never travelled so far north."

"I cannot really say; I am not from Derbyshire and I have never travelled about much myself. However, from what I have seen through carriage windows, it seems pretty enough."

She then asked, "How long have you been in this part of the country?"

"Too long," I mumbled under my breath which earned me a quizzical stare from the *newlyweds*. Then I quickly added, "Derbyshire holds very little pleasure for me, I'm from Kent you see and I am eager to return home."

"From Kent, you say," cried Mr. Bertram excitedly, "The garden of England!"

I thought to myself, why do people always say that, that particular expression was highly overused in my opinion. However, I smiled and nodded politely.

Much to my relief we soon entered the environs of Matlock Manor. I indicated the turn we should take and Mr. Bertram informed his coachman. I nervously started fidgeting with the stings of my purse, twisting and knotting it, taking it apart and knotting it again with trembling fingers. I looked up, seeing that the Bertram's were now watching me intensely and I set it to the side only to start fidgeting with the ribbons from my bonnet. When I had frayed the ends, I placed my hands demurely on my lap and smiled at the Bertram's until the carriage came to a complete stop at the front of the manor.

I looked out of the window. There was Montgomery standing on the steps with a look on his face that can only be described as crossness. I must have paled because Mrs. Bertram then asked, "Oh, you poor thing, do you need to lie down?"

I shook my head, but Mrs. Bertram seemed unconvinced. One of the Matlock footmen came to open the door and Mr. Bertram stepped out to assist me down. I was just about to thank him and hurry into the house when Montgomery approached, still with a look of annoyance on his face. He studied Mr. Bertram up and down then putting on that gentleman-like smile of his he said, "Sir, allow me to thank you for seeing my

*wayward* cousin home. Sometimes she is such a handful. I hope she did not cause you too much trouble."

"No, not at all! It was a great pleasure to be of service to such a charming young lady."

I thought I heard Montgomery say, "Humph!"

"Allow me to introduce myself, I am Colonel Montgomery Fitzwilliam."

"Delighted sir, I am Mr. Edmond Bertram," and turning to the carriage and helping his wife down he said, "Colonel Fitzwilliam, this is my wife, Mrs. Francis Bertram. Fanny, this is Colonel Fitzwilliam." Mrs Bertram held out her hand and Montgomery bowed over it, gallantly.

"Delighted, ma'am," said Montgomery, being as polite as possible. I wondered what the Bertram's would think of him if they had heard the terrible things he said to me over an hour ago. "Please, step into my home and take your ease; it is the least I could do for your having gone out of your way to bring my *errant* cousin home."

I would not look at him but I recognized the tone: that Fitzwilliam tone; the one they all used when they thought they were so superior.

"No indeed, sir, it was not out of our way at all. My wife and I are staying at Mr. Owens's house just outside your gate. He has graciously permitted us to use it while we tour this part of the country; you see, we are on our wedding trip."

I looked up into Montgomery face to see his reaction. His left eye twitched involuntarily.

My cousin said, "Since we are neighbours, I would not dream of sending you on your way without some refreshment; do say you will come in to take your ease."

Mr. Bertram looked to his wife for her approbation and she again smiled sweetly. As we all stepped in I saw that some of the servants were again on duty. The footman took my bonnet and the hats and coats of the guests. Out of the corner of my eye I could see that Montgomery was now freshly dressed, this time outfitted in entirety, including a stiffly starched cravat tied tightly about his neck.

When we were all sitting in the drawing room, Mrs. Bertram was the first to speak. "How very elegant your home is, Colonel Fitzwilliam."

"I thank you, but I must tell you this is my father's home; he is away for the evening along with the rest of my family. They are attending a family celebration."

"Oh, I do hope we are not keeping you and your cousin from partaking in the festivities."

"No indeed, my cousin and I have nothing to celebrate."

I shifted uncomfortably in my chair as the Bertram's shared a quick glance between each other.

Mr. Bertram spoke next, "I was admiring this portrait of the two little boys. What interesting little characters they must be."

"My brother and myself as children."

Mrs. Bertram asked, "Oh, you have a brother? How many brothers and sisters do you have all together, Colonel?"

"Only one elder brother, no sisters though. I do have a lovely sister-in-law by the name of Lady Pamela. When she returns tomorrow you must come and meet her."

"I would enjoy that very much."

"Yes," continued Montgomery, pontificating, "my brother has been *most* fortunate in the selection of his wife. Unfortunately, I have not been so lucky. I guess I'm just not the *marrying* type."

I mumbled under my breath, "You can say that again."

Again the Bertram's exchanged a glance but ventured to say nothing. Fortunately, the tea things were brought in and placed before me; I now had something to occupy myself with. I politely asked the Bertram's how they took their tea and then I handed it to them. I poured out my own and sat far back in my seat. Montgomery stared at me for a long moment. "Cousin Anne," he asked, his vice full of sarcasm, "Are you forgetting something?"

I brought my hand up in exaggerated surprise, "Oh dear me, I completely forgot!" I leaned forward to the tea tray again and lifted a plate in the direction of the Bertram's, "Shortbread?"



The Bertram's both declined and I sat the plate down and Montgomery got up and poured his own tea. A long moment of silence followed until Mrs. Bertram spoke. "How very lovely the country is here about. I was wondering since this is our first time in this part of England, what would you suggest we see first, Colonel Fitzwilliam?"

"I believe I shall defer that to my cousin, Anne. She had a good opportunity to take in the countryside this afternoon while on her walk." He turned to me, "Anne, you spent a good deal of time out of doors today, perhaps you would like to give the Bertram's your own opinion."

"The Bertram's must excuse me; I do not have an opinion that would be of use to them."

"Oh really, I was certain you were always one with a ready opinion... for everything!"

"My dear Mrs. Bertram," I said quickly, "your tea is getting cold, do let me refill it for you."

"That will not be necess..."

"Then do let me press you to take a shortbread; my aunt's cook does make a delightful shortbread."

Mrs. Bertram looked at me then to her husband then back to me and quickly took the shortbread. Mr. Bertram, eager to introduce some sort of civil conversation said, "Ah, Colonel Fitzwilliam, I have been sitting here this entire time wondering if we have ever met. I can't quite place you, but I am certain I have seen you before."

"Do you get to London much, sir? I am usually to be found there with my regiment."

"No, I don't go to London much, in fact I have not been there in over a year. Surely you have been to Northamptonshire? That is where I reside with my wife."

"I have travelled throughout England extensively, but I must admit that I have never spent much time in Northamptonshire."

"It will bother me until I remember. Did you perchance go to Eton?"

"Harrow, actually."

"And after that?"

"Oxford."

"That must be it then. I went to Oxford myself; Trinity."

"I went to Queen's. What a small world."

"Did you hear that, Fanny? This is excellent news indeed. We must get together during our stay and talk over the old place."

"Unfortunately, I will not remain in the country. I return to my regiment later tonight." Here I looked up; I did not know this. "However, before I go, I will make sure that I leave a letter for my father and brother, both Oxford men as well. You can count on their instant friendship and your having attended Oxford will predispose my father to liking you. And Mrs. Bertram, I can assure you that my mother and sister-in-law will be most happy to make your acquaintance as well."

Mrs. Bertram looked at me, "I hope to see you, too, Miss de Bourgh."

Before I could speak, Montgomery spoke. "I recollect something that my cousin said earlier, something about packing her bags and returning to Kent and never showing her face in Derbyshire again."

I quickly added, "My cousin is a bit delusional today, you must excuse him."

"When can I expect your departure, then?"

"If I didn't know any better, *Colonel Fitz-william*, I'd say that you were trying to get rid of me."

"Don't be silly, *Cousin Anne*, I'm not trying to get rid of you; I find myself already well rid of you."

"Then surely you forget, *Colonel Fitz-william*, I do have my own carriage, my own horses, my own servants, and I am quite capable of coming and going as I please, when I please. I don't know why you can't seem remember that I am an independent woman; a *very* independent woman."

"I can assure you, *Cousin Anne*, that I recognize your independence. I hope that your *independence* keeps you warm at night."

"I say, Fanny, will you look at the time," cried Mr. Bertram, suddenly leaping to his feet, "I do believe my wife and I must take our leave."

"Leaving so soon?" asked my cousin, "Do permit me to see you out."

I stood, smiled and curtseyed. The Bertram's seemed as if they could not get out fast enough. While my cousin saw them to the door, I rushed up the stairs and turning into the corridor, raced to the far end of the hall and entered my room, slamming the door. I paced for a few moments then pulled the bell for the maid and Betty was knocking upon my door in no time. She had the look of sheer terror on her face when she saw my own face.

"Heavens! What ever is the matter, Miss?"

"Betty, I need you to help me pack. I am leaving Matlock this instant."

"If you don't mind my asking, where will you go at such an hour? It will be dark soon! Surely Master Mont..."

"Please do not mention his odious name in my presence. I am leaving tonight and I do not care where I go as long as it is away from here! Get me my travelling clothes!"

I sat on the bed with a thud, staring into nothingness, listening to the rain that just then began to fall. I could hear someone's pounding feet coming up the hall and I instantly knew who it was. A moment later, I could hear Montgomery across the hall opening and closing drawers and shuffling things about. Obviously, Betty could hear it too because her fingers trembled as she took my things out of the wardrobe. A moment later I heard his door slam shut and then the sound of the pounding of his boots back down the hall.

Was he leaving? Was he leaving this moment? I got up and paced some more. I noticed that Betty had my boots and was waiting to help me put them on so I stepped out of my slippers. However, my curiosity got the better of me and I walked to the window and stared out. There was Montgomery below, standing in the rain as one of the grooms brought him his horse. I could see Benedick's misty breath swirling about his nostril's as he was being lead up the sweep from the stables. By now my cousin was soaked to the skin, his long black cloak was hanging stiffly about his ankles, yet, he stood

there perfectly still, letting himself become drenched to the skin.

I thought to myself: Fine! Stand there like an idiot! Like I care! Stand there and let yourself get all wet. You'll probably catch a chill then where will you be? See if I come running to your rescue.

My memories instantly flew back to last Christmas when just such a similar scene played out before my eyes when he came to my London house. I remembered he did get wet and Margaret said he soon after developed a putrid infection. Not that I really cared or anything that the same thing would happen again; he was a grown man who was perfectly capable of looking after himself.

And now that I thought about it, so what if my father planned all this time for me to marry Montgomery. I'm quite capable of picking out my own husband. It was true that my father never liked to see Montgomery made unhappy and it especially pained my father to know that I was the cause of it.

What would my father think of me now? With his own written words he made his wishes perfectly known this

morning, he had always intended Montgomery for me; never Andrew, never Darcy. It was always Montgomery who held his favour, it was Montgomery he entrusted his most cherished possessions to, it was Montgomery who he asked to look after me, it was Montgomery who he placed all of his faith in and I always placed my faith in my father.

My father never erred in his judgment; he always knew best, knew what was right. I wished my father could be here now, to guide me, to tell me what to do. I sat back down on the bed and buried my face in my hands and cried to him for help. "Oh Papa, what have I done? Please help me?"

His voice rang out to me as true and clear as if he was in the room, "Anne, what are you doing, my girl? Go after him."

Betty knelt at my feet to assist me with my boots. I slowly lifted my head. She looked up at me in wonder.

"Betty, did you hear that?"

"Hear what, Miss?"



"I could have sworn I just heard my father's voice."

"Did you now? And what did he have to say?"

"He said, 'go after him'."

"You was always a good girl where your father was concerned; you never disobeyed him. Seems to me that now is not the time to start disobeying him."

I brought my hands to my cheeks and whispered, "Montgomery."

Betty stood and put her hands on her hips, "He can't hear ya with the door closed."

I ran to the door flinging it open, shouting, "Montgomery!" Down the hall I ran with Betty calling after me.

"Your boots, Miss! Your boots, Miss Anne!"

"What care I for boots when Montgomery is getting away?" I flew down the stairs taking no notice of the stares from the servants. "The door, the door!" I yelled

to Reynolds, the awaiting footman, "Open the blasted door!"

The footman grasped the knob and opened the door just as I raced to it and he deftly stood aside as I sailed past him and out onto the front steps. I looked around frantically; no one was there. I only saw the back of the groom as he stepped into the carriage house. Montgomery was gone; he'd left me and I was all alone.

"Montgomery!" I called out through the rain. "Montgomery!" I yelled even louder. Regardless of my lack of footwear I hitched up my skirts and ran down the drive as fast as I could. "Montgomery!"

The stones on the path did not matter, the stinging of the rain did not matter, the wetness of my clothes did not matter; the only thing that mattered was that I had to catch him before he made it through the gate and out to the open road.

"Montgomery!"

The mist parted and there he was, up ahead, setting atop Benedick, cantering up the drive. I shouted again

as loud as I could, but the rain began to pour forcefully, drowning out all surrounding sound.

"Montgomery! Stop!"

He was now approaching the gate and in a few moments he would be riding past the parsonage and out into the road. I called out again, but it all seemed to be in vain, "Montgomery! Stop! MONTGOMERY!" My voice by now was on the edge of sheer panic, "MONTGOMERY!" The gate was now only a few yards away from him. I ran even faster but it was to no avail because in the very next moment he was out of it and away.

"Montgomery!" I sobbed violently when I reached the stone columns that announced the entrance to Matlock's Park. Montgomery by now had passed the parsonage and looked as if he was urging Benedick into full gallop. He was getting away and I had lost all hope; I had nothing left to live for. Taking a few steps forward, I collapsed into a heap in front of the parsonage house, falling face first into the water and mud, wailing uncontrollably. I was now out of my mind with grief and seized with a sudden thought I called out one last time, "BENEDICK!"

What the human ear could not hear the animal's ear heard with ease. I lay there on the ground, covered in mud watching Montgomery's horse come to a complete stop against his master's will. A second later, Benedick turned his head around to have a look at me. I could not hear Montgomery well enough to make out his words to the horse, but I could tell he was giving Benedick a piece of his mind. Benedick paid not one bit of attention; he simply stared at me lying there in the mud. I could see Montgomery dismount and bend down to inspect the horse's shoe, but the sight of Benedick looking off into the distance made him also turn his head and follow the animal's line of vision.

"ANNE? OH MY GOD, ANNE!"

I struggled to my feet. However, before I could take one step in his direction, he was there, pulling me into his arms, kissing me with all of his might. Kissing my cheeks, my nose, my ears, my forehead, my neck, my hands; any bit of exposed skin. I just stood there clutching him and crying like a baby, apologizing profusely and telling him that I loved him.

"I'm sorry. I do love you. Don't leave me. I love you. I was being a silly little girl. I would have died if you left me. I love you!"

"Hush! Don't say a word. I love you, too. It was all my fault, Anne. I am sorry, so sorry. I shouldn't have said what I said. Forgive me. Please say that you forgive me. Do you forgive me? I love you."

"No, you have to forgive me! Please forgive me. Promise that you'll never leave me. You were right, I was wrong. Everything that went wrong today was my fault. Forgive me. I love you."

"No, I wasn't right. I'm always wrong. I love you. Forgive me. I was acting foolishly. I love you. Say you love me. Do you still love me? I'll never treat you that way again. I love you. I'll never leave you, ever. I love you."

More kissing, clutching and apologizing followed; his hands roaming through my hair and down my back, me too insensible to care. We must have stood kissing like that for several minutes, each lost in our own little world. I stopped, suddenly feeling someone's eyes upon me. Then Montgomery also stopped what he was doing when he realized that someone's eyes were upon him as well. We both turned at the same time to look at the front of the parsonage.

There in the doorway stood Mr. and Mrs Edmund Bertram staring at us, agog, with their mouths hanging wide open in disbelief. They were probably wondering why two such obviously insane people were standing in front of their door, in a totally compromising position, on a public road no less, in front of stately Matlock manor, kissing like a pair of wild beasts. We stood there looking at them as they looked at us.

Montgomery straightened up first, tugging at his cravat. Then reaching over he tried to wipe away some of the mud from my face as I tried to wipe away some of the mud from the front of my gown and tidy my hair in the process. We were all a little too embarrassed to say anything; Montgomery and me because for the second time today we had been caught in a compromising position, and the Bertram's were too embarrassed to speak because they were probably wondering if all people in Derbyshire were as demented as us.

Montgomery, ever the gentleman, always eager to put others at ease was the first to speak, "Hello, Mrs. Bertram, Mr. Bertram. Nasty bit of weather we're having, what?" They continued to gape as we all stood there looking at each other as the rain unrelentingly poured. Montgomery offered a hasty explanation, "Y-You were probably wondering about this little scene

that was being played out in front of your door; believe me I can explain, you see... we're engaged."

"No, no... y-you need n-not explain," stammered Mrs Bertram, "We... w-well my husband and I... we were just wondering... that is to say... we have just got the tea on and..." She couldn't finish; she was just too shocked for words.

There was no way Montgomery and I could endure another moment longer in their presence and it was obvious that the Bertram's were trying to be polite to hide their discomfiture.

I somehow managed to speak. "W-We can't keep you any longer. Come along, c-cousin, let us not keep the Bertram's standing about in the rain. Let us take our leave and return to Matlock."

Montgomery retrieved Benedick and walked back in my direction, avoiding looking in the direction of the Bertrams. He was just about to take my arm and lead me away when Mr. Bertram stepped into our path.

"I'm afraid I cannot allow that, Colonel Fitzwilliam."

"Pardon?"

"I can't allow you to take this young woman back to your father's house after what I just witnessed. You yourself informed my wife and me that your family was away. Miss de Bourgh obviously needs a chaperon and in the circumstances I believe Miss de Bourgh would be better off if she remained with us for the evening. Having her go back into that house goes against everything I stand for in my professional capacity."

"Professional capacity?" asked Montgomery blinking back the rain.

"Yes, in my professional capacity... as a clergyman."

I looked at Montgomery and Montgomery looked at me.

Before Mr. Bertram could say another word, Montgomery and I took off running for the manor, leaving Benedick where he stood. We ran down the drive. We splashed through the rain and jumped over puddles and made it to the house, ignoring all the odd stares from the servants. Owing to Montgomery's slippery boots, I made it to the top of the stairs before he could. I sped down the corridor like madwoman and flew



into the blue room. My trunk was sitting at the foot of my bed half-packed and I lunged into it, pulling and tossing all of my clothes to the floor.

Montgomery came in next and took in the whole of the scene. Immediately realizing that I had again misplaced "it", he ran to the wardrobe and flung the doors open, pulling what little clothes that remained there out into the floor.

"Where! Is! It! Anne? Where! Is! It?"

"I don't know!" I screamed, charging into the direction of the trunks, pulling off each lid and casting them aside.

"Anne, you were the last one with it!"

"I know, I know!"

"Find it!"

"I'm looking!"

Montgomery ran into the dressing room, pulling everything off of the shelves in his mad hunt for it as

well. He came out seconds later to find me under the bed with my legs sticking out. He pulled at my feet, pulling me from under the bed only to dive under the bed himself.

"Ack! It must be downstairs with my hat."

I ran out the door leaving Montgomery to get himself out from under the bed. Down the hall I darted, yelling for the servants to get out of my way, and yelling for Montgomery. "COME ON!" Down the stairs once more, slipping on the Italian marble, leaving a muddy streak across the floor on my way to the coat closet, pushing the footman out of the way with strength that I never knew I possessed, diving into said closet, pulling out hats and coats that didn't even belong to me, seeing nothing there, racing in the direction of the drawing room, seeing Montgomery flying down the stairs with his hair wild, him slipping on the Italian marble in the muddy streak that I just made, on his way to the coat closet, me yelling to him that I had already searched it, him sliding across the marble again and following me into the drawing room.

I frantically scanned the room looking for any signs of it, only to leap upon the sofa pulling the cushions away. Montgomery, seeing what I was doing, started pulling at

all the chairs in the room, looking under the cushions for it too. I couldn't find it. Where could it be? I collapsed on one side of the room and Montgomery collapsed on the other. We sat there staring at each other panting for air.

The footman entered eyeballing the scene but keeping his voice steady, as if he was used to the Fitzwilliam's acting like raving lunatics everyday. "There is a Mr. Bertram for you, sir."

Mr. Bertram did not wait for the servant; he just entered hurriedly, still wearing his rained soaked greatcoat as he looked about the room.

"Colonel Fitzwilliam, I was quite serious when I said..."

"Oh never mind that, Bertram! When you were here an hour ago, did you happen to see a lady's pink...pink...?" Montgomery was now gesturing with his hands unable to find the words because he was out of breath.

"Do you mean this? It was left behind in my carriage." Mr. Bertram pulled my purse from his coat pocket and the special license somehow dropped out of it and onto the floor. Montgomery and I both saw the document fall

at the same time and on our hands and knees we each scurried for it simultaneously. However, Mr. Bertram was too quick for us. He bent down and picked up the paper and unrolled it. He brought it up to his eyes obscuring his face from view as he read over the words. When he lowered his arm again we each stared up into his face waiting for him to say something, anything. He brought out his pocket watch and said, "My wife and I will have the pleasure of seeing you both at the parsonage in one hour." And he turned on his heel and was gone, taking the document with him.



Betty helped me remove all traces of mud from my person and help me into my light pink gown. There was a soft knock and Betty peaked around the door and soon returned with a stunning bouquet of pink roses.

"Compliments of Colonel Fitzwilliam, Miss."

I breathed in the heady scent and stared down into them was Betty styled my hair. When she was finished she helped me on with my evening wrap and walked with me down the stairs. Below stood all the Matlock servants lined up on either sides of the staircase, smiling up at me; this made me smile in return. When I

reached the bottom, Reynolds, the footman that I had knocked about earlier offered me his hand. I looked around for my fiancé.

"The Colonel asks most kindly for you to allow me to escort you to the church. He will meet you there."

I smiled and nodded eagerly and we went outside and down the steps. Miracles of miracles! The rain had ceased and the full moon shone down, brilliantly illuminating the damp pebble walk. An open phaeton with a perfectly matched pair of white stallions awaited me below. As we rode off, two groomsmen, running ahead, carried torches to light our way all the more. I turned and looked behind the carriage and the servants were now following along behind us, waving lanterns, and white handkerchiefs and they were singing.

*Down by some crystal spring,  
where the nightingales sing,  
most pleasant it is in season,  
to hear the groves ring.*

*Down by the riverside,  
aye a colonel we espied,  
entreating of his true love for to be his bride.*

*Dear Anne says he,  
will you marry me,  
all in your soft bowers, a crown it shall be.*

*I shall give you no pain,  
I will you maintain,  
my ship she's a loaded, just coming from Spain.*

I had no idea how Montgomery had organized all this in one hour. I was just amazed as I sat there grinning from ear to ear, listening to the song, and happily thinking of what was yet to come.

Mrs. Bertram greeted me in front of the parsonage and walked behind us, down a path that led into the church. My escort and I entered the chapel and Mrs. Bertram quickly ushered me into a small alcove and relieved me of my wrap and gloves, kissed me lightly upon the cheek and walked away.

By now, all the Matlock servants were assembling in the pews. No organist was available, but I heard someone playing the music on a fiddle.

It was now my moment to step out and when I did, there was Montgomery standing proudly next to Mr. Bertram at the front of the church, resplendent in his dress uniform, with his hat tucked under his arm and his sword resting at his side. I slowly walked as if on air on Mr. Reynolds arm, thinking that there was no better sight in the world than a handsome man, dazzling in scarlet.

When I reached the alter Montgomery looked down upon me with so much love in his eyes that I thought I would cry.

"Dearly beloved," began Mr Bertram, "we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding;"

Here Mr. Bertram paused and raised an eyebrow in Montgomery's direction. He continued, "But reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.

"First, it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name. Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body. Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity. Into which holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined..."



We were now married.

Hurrah!

Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery Ian Fitzwilliam



or rather:

Colonel and Mrs. Montgomery Ian Fitzwilliam

Mr. Montgomery and Mrs. Anne Fitzwilliam

Montgomery and Anne Fitzwilliam

Anne and Montgomery Fitzwilliam

Anne and Montgomery

We dined in the summer dining room by candlelight and when we were finished the cook brought out a small wedding cake deliriously delicious with currants, fruit and nuts, covered in white icing. Montgomery smiled mischievously at me, walked over to the side of the room where his sword rested across a chair, and drawing it down skilfully, made two perfectly cut slices much to the delight of myself and the assembled servants who applauded loudly. When we had fed each other the cake and received another round of applause, Montgomery seized me by the hand and led me to the ballroom.

"Why are we here?"

"Because, Anne, my love, you have never danced with me."

The same fiddler now struck up a rousing tune, which I instantly recognized as one of the few country-dances that I knew. Montgomery led me into the middle of the floor and bowed as I curtsied. He then held out both hands, which I took and he twirled me about the floor.

The servants stood all around us clapping merrily to the melody and moments later they all joined in. We danced for at least an hour; however, my husband soon grasped my hand and led me out the ballroom door.

I smiled and said playfully, "I was having fun, Mr. Fitzwilliam, and I don't believe I was quite finished."

"I believe, Mrs. Fitzwilliam, that you are."

"Why Mr. Fitzwilliam, that sounds suspiciously like a demand."

"No indeed, Mrs. Fitzwilliam, nothing more than a simple request."

I smiled saucily and was just about to return when I saw Betty from the inside of the ballroom, close the door. A moment later I heard a distinct locking sound.

"It would seem, Mrs. Fitzwilliam, that we have been locked out!"

"Yes, but by whose desire, Mr. Fitzwilliam; the servants or yours?"

I suddenly realized the double meaning of my words, but with one look at my husbands face, I was told all I wanted to know.



**Colonel Fitzwilliam's Journal Excerpt  
by Colonel Montgomery Fitzwilliam**

*...thou art sad...Get thee a wife, get thee a wife!*

Excerpt from *Much Ado About Nothing* - by William Shakespeare



**August 20. 4:23 a.m.** Hurrah! The bachelor years are over! For eight hours and twenty-three minutes I have been a married man. Feel fabulous, rather like Lord Nelson after battle of Trafalgar, though obviously not dead. Ooh. Anne just moved. Wonder if she will wake up and want to talk.

**4:27 a.m.** Anne has still not woken up. Wonder if she is hungry. Perhaps I should pop downstairs and wake the servants and have them prepare her breakfast.

**4:31 a.m.** Wonder what time the servants usually get up?

**4:33 a.m.** Perhaps I should prepare her breakfast myself and bring it up to bed? Hmm? Have never actually prepared a proper breakfast before with eggs and sausages. I'm sure it will be easy.

**4:37 a.m.** Wonder where the servants keep eggs and sausages?

**4:38 a.m.** And scones?

**4:42 a.m.** Mmmm! Anne just rolled over. Looks very lovely in the morning with hair in face and covers pushed off.

**4:43 a.m.** Must not wake her up. Will just move a bit of... Ahhhh!

**4:44 a.m.** Was Anne sitting bolt straight up in bed, yelling at me to find something useful to do.

**5:48 a.m.** Mission accomplished.



**Anne Fitzwilliam's Epilogue  
by Mrs. Anne Fitzwilliam**

"WAKE UP UNCLE MONTY, WAKE UP!"

"Christopher, what the... what time is it... what are you doing in here... when did you get back?"

"I WANT TO HEAR A STORY! I WANT TO HEAR THE ONE ABOUT THE LIONS AND TIGERS!"

"Ssshh! Christopher, I've told you that story a thousand times."

"GET UP, GET UP, OH PLEASE GET UP!"

"Ssshh! Why are you doing this to me? Why don't you ever do this to your father?"

"HE'S THE ONE THAT SENT ME IN HERE!"

"Ssshh! I should have known; some brother he is! Tell you what, Little Chris, why don't you go, have something to eat, ride your pony, play with your toys, then find several other interesting little things to do and then come back and I'll tell you all about the lions and tigers."

"BUT I WANT TO HEAR IT NOW!"

"Oh Lord!"

"UNCLE MONTY...?"

"Hmmm?"

"DOES SHE KNOW THE STORY?"

"Sssh! I have no idea."

"CAN I WAKE HER UP TO FIND OUT?"

"Sssh! No, out of the question!"

"THEN... *MAY* I WAKE HER UP?"

"Absolutely not! Now Sssh! Go quietly before we both wake her."

"I'm already awake! How can anyone get any sleep in a house full of Fitzwilliam's! You have to be the noisiest family I know!"

"Takes one, to know one, *Mrs.* Fitzwilliam!"

"Oh my, I have put my foot in it now, husband!"

*Hurrah! My husband!*

"It's not the first time, wife!"

"Well, I nev...!"

"The Fitzwilliam men have a little tradition that I'm sure you are not aware of, seeing how this is your first day and all."

"And may I ask, seeing how this is my first day and all and seeing how I now have the *misfortune* to be one of you!"

"The men of the family insist on being kissed every morning when they wake up. That's the tradition!"

"Oh *that* kind of tradition! Sort of like pride, vanity, blockheadedness, gloominess, especially when you don't get your way. Ruffianism, engaging yourselves to highly *ridiculous* ladies, uh... uh... there's more; sulkiness, pigheadedness, *dropping* ladies into the sea..."

"Peace! I will stop your mouth!"

"EWWWWW! I CAN'T WATCH! I'M LEAVING!"

"But, Little Christopher; I thought you always said you wanted to be just like your Uncle Monty!"

"NOT ANYMORE, AUNT ANNE! NOT ANYMORE!"



We both watched as Little Christopher ran out the door. Then my husband... *Hurrah! My husband!*... turned to me with a mischievous little grin.

"I'm still waiting," he said.

I pretended that I didn't know what he meant, "*Waiting...* what for?"

"I'll give you what for!"

I playfully pushed my husband away (*Hurrah! My husband!*) and said, "We have a million and one other things to think of before kissing. Like..." I paused and made a face. "Like which one of us is going to tell *my mother* that we ran off to the parson's house in the middle of the night to be married."

"I leave that to you my love. I have the task of telling my mother *and* father!"

"Something tells me I'm getting the short end of the stick!" I then wrapped my arms around my husband's neck (*Hurrah! My husband!*) and said, "Why don't we just sneak off and take a honeymoon to somewhere like Devonshire? I simply adored Devonshire! Perhaps you

will again take me in your arms and show me how to catch a fish."

"Oh! That reminds me," said my husband, *Hurrah!* "Fletcher has told me that he and Miss Margaret plan to marry next month at Michaelmas and we're both invited. After that they will settle in town. They were lucky enough to find a reasonably priced house in London, if there is such a thing. I believe he called it a steal. I wonder if it is anywhere near our house in Chelsea?"

*Oh no!*

I grimaced.

I closed my eyes.

And I slowly said...

"Montgomery... my love... my sweet... my dearest... about the house..."



The servant opened the door to the dining room and Montgomery and I stood there for a moment listening to the loud conversation going on around the table...

"No Christopher, Anne will most likely want to be married in Hunsford church where all her friends can see her. Do come to reason, my love."

"AND I SAY SHE SHOULD MARRY HERE IN DERBYSHIRE IN MATLOCK'S CHAPEL. I'VE WAITED LONG ENOUGH!"

"Who said that my noble daughter would marry your wretched son anyway? And even then if I do allow it, my noble daughter will be married in Canterbury Cathedral by the Archbishop himself, after a six-month engagement. That is my final resolve!"

"Aunt Catherine, that's going a bit overboard is it not. Perhaps..." Andrew paused, looking in our direction, smirking, "Perhaps my tedious brother and Anne have *other* plans." He brought his handkerchief up to suppress a snicker.

Pamela then thought to add her two pence worth. "Don't you think that Anne and Monty should be here to make

their own decisions; but then again, there is something about a winter wedding that I find ever so romantic!"

Montgomery looked at me and I looked at him as he said, "Hmm, a winter wedding? That would have been nice."

Everyone stopped what he or she were doing and turned to look at us.

"Good afternoon, everyone!" I said brightly.

"Good afternoon, my dear family," said my husband. *(Hurrah!)*

I walked around to the sideboard to prepare my plate. After all, we agreed that he would do the telling. I looked over my shoulder and listened on in humour as Montgomery struggled to get a word in edgewise.

"Um... Mother... Father... "

"Monty, dearest, you and Anne missed a splendid party. Though, with the rain last night, the roads were hardly passable and I'm glad you decided to stay home. I insisted that your father call for the carriages first thing

this morning. I didn't want to risk staying at Pemberley another day. Did you two find something to amuse yourself with last night?"

Andrew gagged on his coffee, which made me quickly turn to face the sideboard, which instantly drew Pamela's eyes upon me. I knew they were upon me because I could feel the heat of them on my back. Little Christopher then said, "They were together in Uncle..." I spun around and looked at my nephew just in time to see Pamela cover his mouth with her hand.

With my sister-in-law's hand firmly over her son's mouth, Little Christopher sat there squirming in his seat and thrashing about. However, Aunt Cassandra was pouring milk in her tea; Mother was rearranging the silver and Uncle Christopher shook out the paper and they didn't seem to notice. I gave Montgomery a significant look, trying to get him to tell the story that now had to be told as quickly as possible.

"Um... Mother... Father... "

"OH SON, WE WERE JUST DISCUSSING THE WEDDING PLANS. I WAS TELLING EVERYONE THAT WE COULD HAVE THE BANNES PUBLISHED

TODAY AND YOU TWO CAN SAY YOUR 'I DO'S' BY MICHAELMAS!"

"Father, I..."

"And I was telling your father that brides get married in their own parish, not in the grooms."

"Mother, I..."

"I told you both that my noble daughter would be married at Canterbury after a six-month engagement. But first there is the settlement to determine. Christopher, how much do you plan on settling on your son?"

"NOW CATHY, YOU KNOW PERFECTLY WELL THAT I ALWAYS PLANNED TO SETTLE TEN THOUSAND POUNDS ON THE BOY. I ALSO PLAN TO PURCHASE HIM THAT HOUSE HE WANTED IN... OH, WHERE IS IT, BOY?"

"Chelsea, Father."

"Chelsea!" cried my mother in horror; "No daughter of the noble house of de Bourgh is going to live in Chelsea!"

Montgomery looked at my mother and said, "Have no fear, Mother. Anne and I no longer have a home in Chelsea to call our own anyway, it has been let. I was thinking about finding us a place somewhere near Kensington."

My mother glared at him. "Have you lost your mind, Colonel Fitzwilliam? You just called me Mother! I am your Aunt Catherine, boy!"

"Not anymore, *Mother*."

A hush fell over the room as I heaved a sigh of relief and turned to continue preparing my plate. For some reason I was ravenous. Hmm? Where are those scones? Oh, there they are! Big, fat, blueberry ones, my favourite!

*The End*