

**Miss Bennet:**  
**Christmas at Pemberley**

**JANE SIDES**

LIZZIE

Do you know, Jane; a thought has lingered with me since your arrival: I like Mary. Is it terrible to admit that I didn't know I did?

JANE

I feel ashamed of myself but... neither did I. She is changed, is she not?

LIZZIE

Yes, for the better I think. Or perhaps it is we who have changed. What she said yesterday about feeling... uncomfortable with her arrangement. It actually reminded me of... myself.

JANE

Did it?

LIZZIE

In the way that sometimes I feel that the very fine "Mrs. Darcy" who is mistress of the very fine Pemberley estate is someone altogether different from the woman that stands before you.

JANE

Oh, Lizzie, you are being silly.

LIZZIE

Exactly. And I cannot imagine it is appropriate for Mrs. Darcy to be so.

JANE

You are allowed to be exactly who you are! You make your mark, silly and serious, on this house and this family and on your dear Mr. Darcy, who adores you.

LIZZIE

As do you. How Bingley has grown positively devoted by your side.

JANE

We are rightly matched I think.

LIZZIE

Unlike poor Lydia, who appears more insistent on being more precocious than she was at 15. Is this how she is always in the world, or does she simply become more... *Lydia* when she is with us? What do we do? Is Mary right? Is Lydia's happiness a lie?

JANE

I do so wish it were possible to change her circumstance but there are no real options.

## JANE SIDE 2

ARTHUR. Ah. Well, this engagement was unexpected to all, including myself.

LIZZY. That is a rather unusual circumstance, Mr. de Bourgh. Though I do hope you and Miss de Bourgh are as happy and well suited as Mr. Darcy and I. A house with love and understanding as its foundation can weather any storm, I find. I hope your sittings will be so fortified.

ARTHUR. Yes. Well. So do I.

LIZZY. My best wishes to you, though we shall miss you at future family gatherings.

JANE. I know Mary in particular will miss your conversations.

ARTHUR. *(Standing at this—ready to go—can't stand to hear about Mary.)* Please do excuse me, Mrs. Darcy, Mrs. Bingley.

LIZZY. Mr. de Bourgh.

ARTHUR. I am so sorry to leave so suddenly but there seems to be no option. If you would please tell Miss Bennet... that I will miss our conversations as well and that... I am sorry.

JANE. Mrs. de Bourgh. At least tell her yourself.

*He bows and exits suddenly. It's all too much for him.*

LIZZY. And with that small encouragement you might have very well saved his happiness.

JANE. Everyone needs some kind of encouragement.

### START:

*Jane crosses to Lydia and sits as Lizzy listens.*

JANE. Lydia, I'd wonder if you'd permit me to make a request of you?

LYDIA. What is it? What have I done?

JANE. Nothing, save but to inspire me to ask you to come stay with us when the baby arrives. I would be so grateful for your company and...energy.

LYDIA. Come...live with you?

JANE. I would not ask to take you away from your home in Bath and your dear Wickham if it were not of such great importance, but I—

LYDIA. Mary is entirely wrong about me, you know. We have such happiness, Wickham and I. Such happiness.

JANE. I know you do, of course. But Lizzy will be so busy, and Kitty is in London, and we do not yet know what is to come for Mary. I look to you, dear sister, to help me in this most special time.

LYDIA. Perhaps Wickham could manage my temporary absence. It would be a great struggle for him without me but a sister's duty is foremost. Who are we if we do not help our family in time of need.

JANE. My thought exactly. Thank you, sister.

END

*Jane in a hug. The hug lasts a while. She does not let go.*

*Anne enters. Searching for Arthur. She looks annoyed that she can't find him. Lizzy walks over to Anne with a tray of decorations.*

ANNE. Arthur! Oh my, here I am again. In the tree room.

LIZZY. Miss de Bourgh.

ANNE. Mrs...Darcy.

LIZZY. I did not know your journey was imminent or we should have been more prepared. Please forgive me.

ANNE. If the matter was not so pressing I would not have had the necessity to intrude on your little festivity.

LIZZY. Certainly it is not an intrusion. You are always welcome at Pemberley.

ANNE. How kind. To be welcomed to a place one spent so many hours of one's youth by someone so recently positioned here. I ought to have come earlier to help you get oriented, dear.

LIZZY. Oriented?

ANNE. A sooner intervention might have prevented your more...eccentric style from rooting. Though it is understandable, coming from such inferior conditions as you did.

LIZZY. *(Carefully keeping her composure.)* I am surprised at your offer of help, Miss de Bourgh. I had always thought the residents of Rosings to be rather against my marriage to Mr. Darcy. At the least, I'm certain that was the belief held by Lady Catherine. She did seem unable to contain her opinion on the matter.

ANNE. *(Sharply emotional.)* I would ask you to kindly not speak of my mother. I feel her loss quite deeply.

### JANE SIDE 3

LIZZY. As we decorate on Christmas Eve we shall include this marvelous creature. We'll put a skirt around the base, and deck it in ribbons and jewels.

MARY. What is it going to a ball?

*Darcy thinks this is funny.*

LIZZY. No. We shall get together round it and celebrate Christmas together because this is a Christmas tree.

MARY. And here I did not know trees celebrated.

LIZZY. Well Jane and I shall enjoy the beauty of this tree by ourselves. And the rest of you shall not be invited.

BINGLEY. I do hope I shall merit an invitation. I can think of nothing more pleasant than sitting with two charming ladies and a fir tree.

JANE. Mr. Bingley.

LIZZY. How lovely.

MARY. It is a spruce.

BINGLEY. All the same to me!

DARCY. Come, Bingley! I have recently discovered the location of

### START:

*Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley exit together.*

LIZZY. Mary, you have a brilliant capacity to pour the chill of accuracy on every gesture of goodwill.

MARY. It's obviously not a fir tree, look at the needles. It's a dedicated and uncompromising spruce.

LIZZY. You made your point but missed your tact.

JANE. Now, Lizzy, I appreciate Mary's consummate...correctness.

MARY. Thank you. I know of no other way to approach facts.

LIZZY. Humor, Mary. Levity. Facts are part of life, but life is seasoned with joy and courtesy. And in this regard you have always lived under-spiced.

MARY. I am not "under-spiced."

LIZZY. Salt doesn't count. Now was I mistaken in my impression that Lydia was to travel with you?

JANE. She did not.

MARY. Thank goodness.

JANE. But she'll arrive from Bath on her own tomorrow.

LIZZY. And where will Mr. Wickham be celebrating the holiday? I regret it for Lydia's sake, but Mr. Darcy remains resolute that man will never cross the threshold here at Pemberley after his past behavior, despite the fact that he is now family.

JANE. Mr. Wickham is staying in Bath for the holidays.

MARY. And let us all hope that Lydia leaves her ceaseless whining with her conspicuously absent husband.

JANE. *Mary.*

MARY. Is it not true? Every single letter from her is flooded with such obvious prattle; it could only be hiding the fact that Wickham is her husband in title only and not in heart.

JANE. Mary, that's enough. We're all of us nothing but horrible gossips.

MARY. You do not want facts or gossip. I am at a loss.

LIZZY. Besides, what do you know of heart, Mary? Have your books on botany illuminated the romantic schemes of plants?

MARY. I would rather marry an interesting plant than an idiot man.

JANE. Now, now.

MARY. Not that anyone expects me to marry anyway. An unmarried old maid is the popular presumption, is it not?

LIZZY. Only because you do not want to marry.

MARY. Because I long for a life other than merely being someone's wife and helpmate.

JANE. That is not my experience of marriage.

MARY. You and Lizzy are mistresses of grand estates with husbands of wit and charm. You make marriage and men look easy. I shall never find a husband who understands me, certainly not at Longbourn.

LIZZY. Careful, Mary. Such thoughts may betray you one day.

JANE. I think we can find something more pleasant to discuss than this, don't you agree? Mother and Father will arrive on Christmas Day with Kitty and we shall be a complete set.

LIZZY. A complete set, plus one! Oh Jane, I'm so excited for you. Now tell me everything. How are you feeling? And how is Mr. Bingley readying himself?

JANE. On Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, Mr. Bingley is thrilled with the certainty that it will be a boy. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, he is convinced it is a little girl and couldn't be happier. He can't decide which will bring us more joy, so on Sunday he wishes for twins so he can be doubly happy. It is sweet to watch and nearly makes up for how awfully uncomfortable I am. But you'll know yourself soon enough, dear Lizzy. At least I hope you will.

LIZZY. There is time. Mr. Darcy is somewhat impatient for a family; he is quite enthusiastic in the pursuit. It is amusing, exhausting, and lovely all at the same time. He is just arrogant enough to think he can exercise some kind of control over the process.

MARY. Would you like me to instruct him on the mechanics?

LIZZY. Mary! Absolutely not! Not unless you'd like to embarrass him thoroughly.

MARY. Wouldn't that be fun?

JANE. Some knowledge is better left within the pages of books, Mary. **END**  
again, and what better state is there in the world.

MARY. I have not yet had the privilege of experiencing many other states, so I will refrain from comment.

JANE. Mary, you've been out of sorts the whole journey and you're not picking up on Lydia you're making cryptic comments such as that. What on earth is the matter?

LIZZY. Indeed. I thought you were happy at Longbourn with your books and your pianoforte and your... self.

MARY. For a time I was. I reached the unrestricted access to Father's library and not being scolded for practicing the piano whenever I liked. But I lately struggle to find some use in either piano or books. It's a curious discontent. I cannot place its origin and therefore I cannot solve it.

LIZZY. I don't understand.

MARY. I know I am meant to be the dutiful middle sister, and

everyone expects that I shall care for Mother and Father until they die and Mr. Collins takes possession of Longbourn and I end up in someone's attic.

LIZZY. It's not as bleak as that, is it Mary?

MARY. Isn't it? It is not a life *you* would have chosen. Either of you. JANE. Well, no, but...

MARY. I never chose this life either. I don't recall ever being asked. JANE. Asked what exactly?

MARY. If I longed for something of my own.

JANE. But you have us. We love you.

LIZZY. Yes and Mother and Father, who need you. And... your music and...

JANE. You could always be a governess—

MARY. And teach young sticky things about the glories of a world I'll never see.

LIZZY. I think you're being unnecessarily dour, Mary. We all must make the most of the situation we are in; one cannot know what the future will bring.

MARY. Yes. *(Sighing.)* That would break rather fundamental law of the universe.

LIZZY. Now, come, Jane dear, you must be exhausted. Shall we find your room and rest for the afternoon?

JANE. I would like that very much. I am suddenly so tired from the trip. Mary. I am very glad you're here with us.

LIZZY. As am I.

MARY. Thank you—

LIZZY. *(To Jane as they exit.)* Oh, Jane, I nearly forgot to tell you! Mr. Darcy is receiving a lord to the house for Christmas.

*Lizzy and Jane exit leaving Mary who goes to the piano and starts to play whatever is on the piano as sheet music. Of course it's a love song. She starts to pick out Cooke's "Nobody Coming to Marry Me"...*

MARY.

"Oh, dear what will become of me