

Sample of "Visiting Pemberly"

The front door was opened by yet another footman who, with one of the maids, took their outer travelling garments and carried them away. An older man, the butler, met them in the foyer and with great dignity said, "If you'll kindly come this way, Ladies, Sir, the family are gathered in the South drawing room," and led them across a tiled hall and past a grand staircase to a door which stood partly open.

As they filed in the butler stood by the open door to address the family. "Your guests, Sir, Madam... Miss Austen, Miss Matah, and Mr Author."

A tall man standing by the fireplace bowed, and the three responded. Fitzwilliam Darcy was every bit as imposing in appearance and manner as he had appeared in the novel: tall and handsome and of noble mien. "Miss Austen, Miss Matah, welcome. I hope you are not too fatigued from your journey. Mr Author, thank you for your diligent care of the ladies. I trust you found our county facilities adequate and easy of access. I hope we can find something to amuse you while the ladies are visiting. Do you shoot?"

"Not lately. I was somewhat of a marksman in my army service, but restrict myself to more social entertainment these days."

"Quite. Quite so." Mr Darcy dismissed the topic with a wave of a hand that scattered the grouse and partridge into far distant coverts. "You have not actually met any of the family before, I understand." He proceeded to point everyone out by deferential but slight bows. "My father in law, Mr Bennet; my wife Mrs Darcy –"

That lady looked up and smiled. "Elizabeth, please. Let us be more hospitable than formal."

Mr Darcy leaned back and raised his chin. "Very well. Elizabeth Darcy, then: My mother in law, Mrs Bennet; and my sister, Georgiana Darcy. Please take a seat—Miss Matah, beside me at the fire?" He turned to the butler still standing by the

door. "Perhaps our guests would enjoy a glass of wine, Haggerston – the family also."

Gisel stepped across the room to take the seat offered, while Miss Austen moved closer to the other side of the fire to stretch out a hand. Mrs Bennet, who sat upon that side, though by no means uncomfortably close, edged away as if feeling somewhat crowded.

"Oh, Mr Darcy!" Mrs Bennet exclaimed. "I really cannot consider the slightest drop of wine at such an hour. It will surely go directly to my head. No—I really cannot accept any such refreshment at this time...but of course would not wish my apprehension to spoil such pleasure to anyone else in the company. No. Please do not hesitate from taking refreshment on my account. Mr Bennet, please, assure the guests that my health and headaches should not cause them to forgo their host's hospitality."

Mr Bennet stood to accept a glass from the somewhat disconcerted Haggerston who appeared not to know which way to turn. "Have no fear, Mrs Bennet. I'm sure your son in law's guests will accept your words as uttered in a spirit of concern and comfort. Miss Austen, I see from your expression that you might be pleased to accept a glass. Haggerston..."

Mr Author glanced at that lady, who taking her hand from before the fire, seemed to be suppressing some trouble with her breath behind a handkerchief pressed to her face. Mr Darcy took a glass from Haggerston to hand Miss Austen as the others were quickly served, allowing the butler to leave the room. Elizabeth Darcy leaned forward. "Miss Matah, I hope you do not find our climate too forbidding. It has turned cold these past three days. Before that, my husband and my father were able to enjoy fishing in the lake, it was so warm."

"Oh no. I find it cool but not uncomfortably so. I have travelled a fair bit and been in both hotter and colder climes."

"Really. You are well travelled? Do tell."

Gisel exchanged a glance with Mr Author before answering. "As a young girl I was partly raised by my Greek grandparents at their home in Naphlion. I also spent time with my father recently in ... er... Sweden, and with my mother in London..."

Mrs Bennet gasped. "Then your parents—"

Elizabeth Darcy interceded loudly, "In Greece? Is it possible that you may be conversant with the language of that place?"

"I speak Greek. I can read and write it also."

Mrs Darcy looked up at her husband. "Isn't that a happy circumstance, Mr Darcy?" She returned to looking at Gisel and reached out to take her hand. "My husband has a communication from someone at Athens. Perhaps you could...if it would be no trouble... take a look at it for him. What do you think, Mr Darcy?"

"I would not wish to trouble Miss Matah with such a trifle."

Gisel smiled. "It would be no trouble at all,