

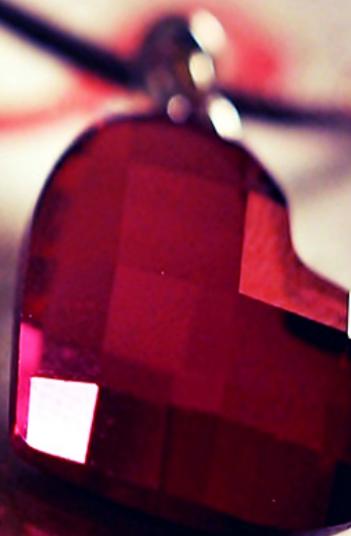
THE SCENES

JANE AUSTEN
NEVER WROTE



FIRST ANNIVERSARIES

Love



THE SCENES

JANE AUSTEN

NEVER WROTE:

FIRST ANNIVERSARIES

by

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The Scenes Jane Austen Never Wrote: First Anniversaries

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DEDICATION

For our devoted readers.

Authors' Note

We hope you enjoy this brief collection of Anniversary Scenes from your favorite Jane Austen couples. These were written by Jan Austen Variation authors to celebrate the first anniversary of Jane Austen Variation.

Please share this book with your friends and invite them to visit us at AustenVariations.com

Maria Grace

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Jane and Mr. Bingley

By Shannon Winslow

“Heatheridge is exactly right for us,” declared Mr. Bingley, eager to share the news with Georgiana upon their return. “Not nearly so grand as Pemberley, of course, but I declare it presents a very stately and dignified appearance. I believe even my sisters would be satisfied!”

“More importantly,” added Darcy, “the place seems sound from a business point of view. And the steward appears to have a good head on his shoulders. I believe you can rely on him to steer the course, Charles, at least until you learn to manage things yourself.”

“There is the sweetest little music room, Georgiana,” said Elizabeth, “and the grounds are lovely. The original owners flooded an old, retired slate pit – one within sight of the house – to form a lake. So instead of being a blight on the landscape, it becomes rather an embellishment.”

“What did you think,” Georgiana asked Jane, who looked as if she could hardly contain herself. “Did you like the place as well?”

“Oh, yes!” Jane enthused with eyes shining. “I wish you had seen it.”

“And you shall before long, if we have our way!” added Mr. Bingley. “Jane and I have already settled it between ourselves to lay claim to Heatheridge as soon as may be. In fact, I have an appointment with the solicitor tomorrow.”

“It is simply delightful,” Jane went on. “I can think of no other word that suits the place so well. I knew almost from the first minute that it was to be our home. I could picture us there – our family – now and years into the future. It is exactly right.”

The Bingleys’ purchase of Heatheridge went through

without a hitch, and plans for their relocation commenced immediately. To avoid the strain of travel, Jane, who was in a family way, was to stay at Pemberley whilst Mr. Bingley returned to Netherfield to make all the arrangements. The night prior to his departure was set aside for celebration – of the Bingleys’ new home but also to commemorate their shared wedding anniversary with the Darcys. Georgiana joined them, all partaking in a delectable late supper and a particularly fine wine selected to accompany it.

During a brief pause in the conversation, Georgiana proposed a toast. “To the happy couples,” she said, raising her glass. “May every blessing of marriage be yours now and in the years to come. May you in turn be a blessing to your children and to many others, as indeed you all are to me.”

Mr. Darcy thanked his sister and they all drank to her fine sentiment. Elizabeth was especially touched. She knew making such a speech, even amongst friends, had not been easy for the shy Georgiana. Indeed, the girl did look uncomfortable afterward, perhaps suddenly feeling herself the odd one out, and she shortly excused herself. The other four presently retired to the drawing room.

“What a night this is,” exclaimed Bingley as they settled themselves two by two, “and what a year! Can you believe all that has happened in twelve short months? It seems more like an age ago that we four stood up in church together. So much has changed since.” Here he looked intently at his wife. “I was such a foolish young man when we met. What could have ever persuaded you to fall in love with me?”

Jane blushed and dropped her eyes.

Darcy then spoke to break the brief silence. “You and I are both very fortunate, I think, Charles, that our wives were generous enough to look past our early errors.”

“You men are *far* too eager at claiming all the blame

for yourselves!” Elizabeth protested with mock indignation. “It is most ungenerous of you. I know for a fact that I made my share of errors, and yet I would much prefer not to be reminded of them. Let us think of the past only as it gives us pleasure.”

Smiling, Mr. Darcy squeezed his wife’s hand. “A very wise philosophy, my dear. Very wise indeed.”

After the Bingleys had gone up to bed, Darcy and Elizabeth lingered, side by side, in front of the fire, each lost in their own thoughts.

“Bingley was quite right about one thing,” Elizabeth at last mused aloud.

“Hmm? What is that?”

“How distant I feel from my former life. I begin to remember my years at Longbourn more as if someone else lived them... almost like it is a story I read in a book. Being here with you, Darcy – that is all that seems real and true to me now.”

Pulling her closer, he kissed the top of her head. “This is where we belong – together, at Pemberley.” They fell silent again, staring into the dancing flames a while longer. “Well, shall we go up?” Darcy asked at length. Not waiting for a reply, he stood, swept Elizabeth into his arms, and turned to carry her upstairs.

“Why, Mr. Darcy!” she cried in surprise. “What will the servants say?”

“Nothing at all, I should imagine. I have given them the night off in honor of our anniversary. So they have discreetly disappeared and left us to ourselves.”

“You always manage everything so capably, my dear.”

“Even you?” he asked, elevating one eyebrow.

“Especially me,” Elizabeth said, allowing herself to be taken off to bed in her husband’s very capable arms.

Lydia and Wickham

By Monica Fairview

Mrs. Bennet was busy making herself a new cap when Hill appeared in the doorway.

“Mrs. Wickham is here, madam,” said Hill.

Mrs. Bennet uttered a loud cry, jumped to her feet and ran to the front door. Clutching her handkerchief to her bosom, she hurried towards the carriage just as Lydia was stepping out.

“Oh!” said Mrs. Bennet. “What a surprise! You should have written to tell me you were coming!” She put out her arms and Lydia launched herself into them. After a tight squeeze she set her daughter before her at arm’s length and examined her. “Let me look at you! To see you again so soon after your delivery! Where is little Charles? I cannot wait to see him.”

Mrs. Bennet looked towards the carriage expectantly.

“La, mama, you surely did not expect me to bring Charles on such a lengthy journey, though it breaks my heart to part with the little poppet. I have left him with the wet-nurse. If only you could have seen him! He has become so very handsome! I am sure he is the handsomest boy in Newcastle, but then of course with such good-looking parents, it is only to be expected. Wickham thinks he favors him, but I can assure you, he has my eyes and eyes are the most important thing, are they not, mama? Well, apart from other things, of course.”

“You get your eyes from me, my dear, and I can tell you, I had a few admirers in my day. But let us not linger. Let us go inside and you can give me all the latest news. But make haste, because we must call on Mrs. Philips to let her know you are here. She will be so jealous! Her daughters hardly ever visit

her. How long are you staying? Sit down. Let me ring for refreshments. Mr. Bennet is out but he will be delighted you have come and I believe Mary has gone to consult with the curate about some church matter. I cannot believe you are here again. It has been so quiet lately. Your father disappears into the library for hours at a time, Kitty is always off visiting one of her sisters, and Mary is so very dull.”

Lydia gave a little giggle. “Nothing has changed, then. You should go and stay with Lizzy, mama. If I could, that is what *I* would do. But Mr. Darcy does not like dear Wickham, so I can never stay very long. I cannot bear to be parted from my dear husband. You know, today is the first anniversary of our wedding.”

Mrs. Bennet beamed. “Is it indeed? I remember that day as if it was yesterday. Such joy! Such jubilation! You cannot conceive how pleased I was for you. The only stain on my happiness was that I was not able to be with you when you chose your wedding clothes. But why did you not come with Wickham? If Wickham were here, I would have had a dinner party with dancing afterwards.”

Lydia sighed. “As to that, I am sure it does not matter if Wickham is here or not. Wickham is growing quite tiresome. He does not like dancing half as much as he used to. Every time we go to a ball, he disappears into the card room and I scarcely see him all evening. You must set up a few entertainments, mama, for I am dying to dance.”

The door opened and Hill appeared with tea and cake. “I see Cook is still making the same old Portugal Cake. I must ask her for a recipe. Dear Wickham has a sweet tooth.” She took a big bit and sighed contentedly. “Oh, it is good to be home.”

Mrs. Bennet bit into a piece of cake. “Yes, yes, I grant you that Cook makes a good cake, but why did Wickham not

come with you? Then you would have been saved the effort of copying the recipe and we may have had a dance. Meryton may not be as big as Newcastle, but we know how to entertain ourselves. You should not have left Wickham behind.”

“La, I did not leave him behind,” said Lydia. “Wickham is always somewhere or the other, he is never still. He has so many friends and they are always inviting him to house parties.” She pouted. “I used to accompany him, but all they did all day was hunt and play cards, so I stopped.”

“So where is he now?” Mrs. Bennet was determined to satisfy her curiosity.

“Wickham is in Town,” said Lydia, pouring herself another cup of tea. “He said he was going up to London to prepare a surprise for me for our anniversary. He was supposed to send for me, but the letter must have gone astray because I did not receive anything. The post is becoming more unreliable by the day. I plan to surprise him by going up myself. La, I shall have such a laugh when I see his face! He will be so happy to see me!”

“And so he will,” said Mrs. Bennet, smiling indulgently, “However, there is no hurry, I am sure, now that you are here. We will do very well together. You must give him time to miss you.”

Lydia considered her mother’s words. “I do believe you are right, mama. He has only been gone a month, and you know how things are in Town. There are so many distractions. Besides, he has had to look for lodgings, which is very difficult because we have limited resources. I have asked Lizzy repeatedly to approach Mr. Darcy for funds, but she only sends me small amounts which are scarcely more than pocket-money. I must admit, I am not very impressed with her Mr. Darcy after all. He is very miserly. Actually, I feel quite sorry for Lizzy. I am certain she has to beg for every penny. My Wickham is

very generous when he has the money. Why, the other day he gave me his whole quarter's officer's pay. 'Take it,' he said, 'or I will spend it on cards.' Can you imagine anyone more generous? However, one of the servants must have stolen it because the next day when I looked in the drawer where I had hidden it, it was gone. I am sure I have no idea what we will live on, so I wrote to Lizzy, but she did not reply. I suspect she is too afraid to ask Mr. Darcy."

Mrs. Bennet looked around her to make sure she would not be overheard then leaned closer to her daughter. The two heads almost touched.

"You need not say anything further, for I declare I am quite terrified of Mr. Darcy myself," she said, patting Lydia's hand, her voice descending into a loud whisper. "I say this to you in confidence because I would not want to offend Lizzy, but I do not believe she chose wisely. I have never liked the man. He puts on such airs and struts about as if he owned the world. I cannot feel comfortable around him. I prefer your Wickham by far. Now there is someone who is a sight for sore eyes, especially when he is in uniform. *He* does not fancy himself something important. And *such* charming manners. As for Mr. Darcy..."

Charlotte and Mr. Collins

By Leslie Diamond

9 January 1813

“Charlotte!” called Mr. Collins, slamming the front door and panting as his feet could be heard trotting down the entry.

Startled from her occupation by the commotion, Charlotte Collins’ eyes widened as she peered at the clock on the mantle. One o’clock! He had only left to call on Lady Catherine at half twelve. Why was he home so soon?

“Charlotte!” He hastened into the room and stopped a few paces from where she sat at her escritoire. “There you are!”

She tucked Lizzy’s letter within a Radcliffe novel, and placed a hand to her lower back as she made to awkwardly lift her body, heavy with child, from her chair. “I just finished my note to Maria.” She set her fingers on a letter that rested upon the dark oak of the escritoire. “I intend to walk into Hunsford to post it before I call upon Mrs. Hervey.”

A pleased expression overtook his countenance as he nodded. “You have indeed proven yourself the active, useful sort of gentlewoman Lady Catherine requested I take as my bride. As I told my dear Cousin Elizabeth when she visited last spring, ‘You and I have but one mind and one way of thinking. We seem to have been designed for each other.’”

Charlotte opened her mouth to speak, but before she could utter a word, he began again.

“Of course, cousin’s aspirations should not have been as high as she wed. Lady Catherine...”

“Speaking of Lady Catherine,” interrupted Charlotte, before he prattled on. “You have returned early from Rosings

today. Was Lady Catherine displeased with something?"

He started and began to shake his head with fervour. "Oh no! Her ladyship has been most gracious and bestowed great condescension by instructing me to spend the day with you." He grasped her hands and held them in his sweaty palms. "She was only displeased that we were apart on our first wedding anniversary."

Oh no! No! No! No! Charlotte cocked her head a bit and stared. "She what?" she asked faintly. "But what about Mrs. Hervey?"

He took on a solemn mien and nodded. "I had heard she was grave—very grave indeed, but I am certain she will be fine until the morrow."

"But, that will not do. Her daughter sent a servant this morning to ensure you would come by today."

Mr. Collins bobbed his head. "Do not fret so. I will call and condole with the poor woman's family."

As she disguised a sigh, she waddled towards the door, picked up his walking stick, and held it out for him. "Perhaps you should go now, and then I will call upon her on the morrow."

Just maybe she could finish Lizzy's letter before she walked into town!

Mr. Collins took the proffered walking stick and returned it to the corner beside the front door. "You do me credit, my dear, but I intend to visit Mrs. Hervey in the morning."

He could not truly mean to follow her around, could he? With a smile to herself, she gestured toward the window. "I suppose you have some work in your garden? Or you could check on your bees."

Her husband tugged her back to the parlour, retrieved her spencer and bonnet, and helped her to don them. "You

mentioned posting a letter to your sister, so I will be happy to escort you into town.” His voice lowered as he muttered to himself, “Yes, Lady Catherine will be very pleased.”

Charlotte rolled her eyes, and then batted his hands away when he began to fasten the buttons for her.

“Forgive me. I only meant to be of aid.”

If only his eyes would look up to hers as she spoke, but they remained on her décolletage until it was covered. He offered her his arm, and once he fetched his hat and walking stick, led her down the road towards town, prattling on about Lady Catherine, Anne deBourgh, and Rosings with barely a pause for breath.

After they posted the missive to Maria, Mr. Collins took her to the booksellers where he selected and purchased a copy of Fordyce’s sermons.

“Mr. Collins, you own that volume, do you not?” she asked.

“Indeed, I do. Your memory is as astute as always, my dear.”

When the proprietor handed him the wrapped parcel, he held it out to her. “I thought you would like a copy of your very own. That way, you might consult his great work without the worry of borrowing mine.”

“Thank you.” Charlotte attempted not to display her distaste for the gift. After all, she might not be romantic, but Fordyce?

He led her from the store, and she pointed in the direction of Briarworth. “I should still like to call on Mrs. Hervey.”

“But my dear Charlotte, as much as it grieves me to consider the plight of poor Mrs. Hervey, I was specifically told by Lady Catherine to attend no one but you for the entire day! She will be seriously displeased! Charlotte!”

She set off walking and did not stop at his calls, so her husband followed, his protests not ending until they reached the front gardens of the Hervey estate where she admonished him to be quiet lest the Hervey's hear him; however, once the housekeeper answered the door, he was all simpering flattery and proclaimed how the great Lady Catherine insisted he condole with them upon that very day.

Charlotte had a reprieve from his attentions while he spoke with Mr. Hervey, Mrs. Hervey's children, and finally Mrs. Hervey. Their call kept them at Briarworth for close to an hour before they took their leave.

Mr. Collins did not reprimand his wife for her insistence upon the call as they walked home, but expounded on about how pleased his noble patroness would be. "We were together, which was part of her benevolent instruction. She can find no fault in our call! Indeed, our attentiveness to one of our flock should be most appreciated.

Under the guise of following a bird in flight, Charlotte turned her head so she could roll her eyes. They were not far from the parsonage. She ached to sit and rest; her ankles could not take much more.

No peace could be found, even upon their return home. Once she refreshed herself, she took a seat on the sofa her Radcliffe novel in hand with every intention of finishing Lizzy's letter, but Mr. Collins entered soon after desirous to read to her from her anniversary gift.

With a start, she awoke as the light from the windows was beginning to dim. A glance to her husband revealed he was still seated beside her, a shocked expression upon his face.

"Please forgive me," she blurted, wiping the drool from her chin. "I had not intended to fall asleep. The walk into town must have been more tiring than I expected."

A simpering smile overtook his features as he gave a

nod. "I am certain the exertion of carrying our child is to blame. Do not fear, my dear Charlotte. I am by no means upset by your ill-timed nap. I will have to ensure you retire early."

He placed the book on the side table, stood, and offered her his hand. "Cook has sent word that our dinner is served. We should partake of it before it becomes cold."

Dinner was a quiet affair—on her part anyway. Mr. Collins prattled on as was his wont for the entirety of the meal, only stopping when there was too much food in his mouth to continue. Then he would swallow and begin again.

After the meal, she anticipated he would wish to adjourn to his study to further prepare his sermon, but he insisted upon playing Backgammon until it was time to retire.

Alone at last, Mrs. Collins revelled in the peace and quiet of her chamber as she sat upon her bed, lifted her feet, and sighed at the sight of her painfully swollen ankles. She pulled her legs under the bedclothes and reclined back into the pillows. What a relief a good night's sleep would bring? Everything would be set to rights on the morrow; it would no longer be her anniversary.

Her eyes closed and she was just drifting to sleep when a knock sounded from the door to Mr. Collins room.

"Charlotte?"

Oh no! No! No! No!

The Eltons

By Diana Birchall

Mr. Elton was reading the newspaper. He had finished his coddled eggs, and over the crumbs of toast and broken shells was reading out bits of stories to his lady, who in truth could hardly listen, and occupied herself by sipping her tea and mentally planning a new sprigged cap.

“Oh shocking,” said Mr. Elton, “there are greater incidences of forgery in the kingdom ever before, the Courier says; and a larger number of bankrupts too. No surprise then that the dreadful crime of self-murder is occurring in unprecedented numbers.”

“Murders!” shuddered Mrs. Elton. “Do not say so, Mr. Elton. You quite upset my breakfast.”

“I wonder if I ought not to say something about that from the pulpit this Sunday,” he mused. “Just in case one of our workingmen, or some person like that, is considering such a thing. If I tell them it is wrong, it may be prevented. A word to the wise, you know.”

“Mr. Elton!” his wife exclaimed. “I never interfere with your sermons, but I beg you will not say any such thing. Nothing of that sort could happen in Highbury. You will lose your place if you say such things, I know,” she nodded vigorously.

“Oh nonsense, Augusta. But I will read you something else. Perhaps you will prefer to hear about the snow-storm they are having in Vienna – it has given rise to a sledge party of great splendor, on the ice.”

“That is better,” she agreed, taking up her sewing reticule and beginning to hunt for a certain roll of spotted muslin. “But it is so far away, Mr. Elton. I cannot really be

interested in any thing that happens farther away than London. You might read about what plays are going on. Mr. Kemble is doing Macbeth, I have heard; if only we could go to town to see some plays, that would be the very thing.”

“Impossible, my dear. My church duties at this season – why Shrove Tuesday is practically upon us.”

Mrs. Elton dropped her needlework. “Shrove Tuesday! Is it indeed! Why, I almost forgot – and yet, how could I forget the most important event of our two lives?”

He looked up from his paper a trifle apprehensively, having been married too long to show his ignorance of such a subject.

“Why, don’t you know? Our wedding day. We were married just before Shrove Tuesday, one year ago exactly.”

“Ah, yes of course, my dear Augusta; I do not forget the felicitous event that made me the happiest of men.” And thinking he had dealt with the subject handsomely, he went back to his paper. “You like local news – but this is bankruptcy too, for since Stanton of Lowbury Farm ran up those debts, all his livestock is now for sale. Most of it is oxen and such, but if you like, we might add to our poultry for a song, I think.”

Mrs. Elton treated that subject with the scorn it deserved. “Really, Mr. Elton, if you think you can get chickens away from Mrs. Weston at auction! She is a mild woman, but not when it comes to her hens.”

“Ah, I suppose you are right. Well, are you angling for a present, in remembrance of our wedding, a year since? A new cap, will it be, or a new shawl?”

“I do want a new cap,” Mrs. Elton said consideringly, “but I think we ought to honour the day with something more. Yes, I should like to give a party. We might invite our most select neighbours, you know, for tea, and cards, and a little repast; there is no need for any thing more, the days are still so

short and the weather so cold.”

“My dear Augusta!” exclaimed Mr. Elton, his eyebrows raised. “Do you propose cassino or whist at the Vicarage? I beg you to remember our station. What might pass at other times of the year, will never be appropriate on the threshold of Lent.”

“Oh, but people play all sorts of games on Shrove Tuesday, Philip. I must speak to Cook about the pancakes for the pancake races, and I am sure some of the worse sort of villagers will have cock-fighting and bull-baiting and all sorts of games.”

“I must speak to Knightley about putting a stop to all that,” Mr. Elton said gravely.

“Then you can invite him to our party,” his wife put in quickly, “if you are going over to Hartfield this morning.”

He gave her a look. “You don’t suppose that Mrs. Knightley will accept our invitation,” he said dryly. “She has always been disdainful and above herself, and since her marriage, her propensities have only worsened.”

Mrs. Elton’s face lengthened. “Tis too true,” she agreed, “but you must try, all the same. If we have the Knightleys – and the Westons – and the Coles – “

“But, my dear Mrs. Elton, you forget,” he protested. “There is no time for a party. Shrove Tuesday is next week, on the seventh of February, and our wedding-day was not until the twentieth, if I remember correctly.”

“You do, but it is impossible. How could we have been married in Lent?”

“We were not,” he told her patiently, “Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday fell much later last year. No, we cannot have a party.”

“Oh but we must, to celebrate our year of wedded bliss,” she insisted. “It need not be on the exact day. Do you go, while Susan is clearing up, and call on Mr. Knightley. We

can have the party this very week.”

At Hartfield, Mr. and Mrs. Knightley were enjoying their own wedded happiness, sitting by the fire after breakfasting on delicate slices of their home-cured ham. Mr. Woodhouse had not come down to breakfast, and was having a little repast of gruel in his bedchamber, as best suited him these days.

“I declare, Emma, I ought to go have a word with Larkins, the ground is quite frozen, and I do not want the vegetables to turn to ice. Yet I can hardly tear myself away from you. Even after four months of marriage, I am as happy as a bridegroom.”

She smiled at him sunnily.

“You look very happy, my dear wife. Dare I inquire the reason?”

“You may. You have some news to hear, of a sort I hope will make you as happy as myself.”

He took her hand. “In that case, lose no time telling it.”

“I will not delay your happiness one moment. My dear, we are – we may expect – “ Her face was overspread with blushes.

Mr. Knightley bounded to his feet. “Emma! You don’t say! Can it be? Is it really true? Are you quite sure?”

She bent her head shyly. “Yes. It is quite certain. I have missed...two...and Mrs. Weston sent Dr. Perry to talk to me, and they both say...that the event will take place some time in the latter part of the summer...” She said no more.

A look of such happiness as she had never seen before overshone his face. After a moment he asked earnestly, “And you are sure you are well, my dear Emma – quite well?”

“Oh yes indeed,” she said merrily, “you know I always am; though that is the reason that I did not eat as much as usual of our excellent Hartfield ham this morning!”

At that most inopportune moment, the young maid Hannah came into the room and bobbed a curtsy.

“Oh! If you’ll excuse me, sir – and ma’am – I am sorry, but Mr. Elton is here. I told him you was at breakfast, but he will see you.”

“Elton! What can he want, so early,” exclaimed Mr. Knightley, with irritation.

“Perhaps it is a matter of some importance,” said Emma more gently, “we have finished eating, so you may send him in here, Hannah.”

Mr. Elton, in his best black broadcloth, strode beamingly into the breakfast room. Emma hospitably offered him a cup of tea, but he shook his head. “No, I thank you, Mrs. Knightley. I do not wish to presume, or to disturb you for more than one little moment – but time was important, as I wish to secure your presence, as early as possible. Mrs. Elton and I have decided to give a party, on this very Saturday. It is to celebrate our wedding-day. We were joined exactly a year ago, and you know it is every married man’s duty to raise a toast to his wife, after she has made him happy for a whole year! I hope and trust you will come?”

The Knightleys were speechless for a moment. “A party – oh, no, no, Elton. I am sorry. It is out of the question. Mrs. Knightley is, you see, indisposed.”

Mr. Elton looked uncertainly at Emma’s rosy, healthy, beaming countenance, but did not dare to contradict. Mr. Knightley continued, in an elated tone, “I cannot consent to her riding out in the carriage, over frozen ground, in this cold February weather. Our apologies to your good wife. I am sure you will be more successful with the Westons.”

“But – can you not come yourself, Knightley?” Mr. Elton almost pleaded. “Augusta will be so very disappointed!”

“I cannot leave my wife,” Mr. Knightley said so firmly

the vicar saw there could be no argument.

After he had gone, Emma remonstrated gently with her husband. "My dear – was it not soon to tell him?"

"Me? Why I said nothing. Only that you were indisposed."

She laughed and shook her head. "Mark my words, Mr. Knightley, the news will be all over Highbury tonight."

And it was. By six o'clock Miss Bates was telling Mrs. Goddard and Mrs. Martin, who were taking tea at the Martin farmhouse, "Have you heard the news? Mrs. Knightley is expecting! And she has refused Mr. Elton's invitation to their party. Yes, he is giving a party. To celebrate their wedding-day, a year ago."

"Is it a year the Eltons have been married?" Mrs. Goddard wondered, while Harriet only smiled. "Why, Mrs. Knightley and I will have our babies at the same time," she whispered softly to herself.

Mrs. Goddard did not hear her. "Well, well, to be sure I wish the Eltons continued happiness."

"Oh yes, indeed," said Miss Bates eagerly. "Anniversaries are such good things!"

"And babies, too," smiled Harriet.

"Now that I think of it, it is a wonder we have not heard such an announcement from the vicarage," observed Mrs. Goddard. "A whole year, and no sign of a new sprig. I wonder if any thing is wrong there..."

And they began to gossip.

Anniversary at Abbey Mills Farm

By Maria Grace

Rain pelted the window even as the sun tried to rise. Warm beneath the soft quilt made by dearest Mrs. Martin to celebrate their wedding, Harriet cuddled into her husband's shoulder. "I suppose you shall not be able to mend fences today after all."

Robert Martin leaned against the headboard and muttered under his breath.

She stroked his face. "Do not get all grumbly and ogreish—you would not wish to prove your sisters correct."

"About what? That I am churlish and disagreeable when it rains?" He folded his arms over his chest.

"Indeed." She looked up into his face. All these days now and she still loved seeing the bleary-eyed look he always wore in the mornings.

"But I am exceedingly disagreeable in foul weather." He huffed as if to prove his point.

"I cannot agree." She rolled to her side and propped up on an elbow. "Was it not on a day very much like today one, on which you could not mend fences, that we first met?"

"Indeed it was." He drew her very close. "Have I told you how very thankful I am that we did?"

She kissed his cheek. "Once or twice I believe."

"Perhaps I should again." He turned toward her and laid his hand on her increasing belly. "How is little Robert George Martin today?"

"How can we say when we do not know that indeed our wee one is a Robert or... a little girl? What shall her name be if—"

"Anything but Emma." His voice turned cross as it always did when we referred to her.

“You have not yet forgiven her?”

“Forgiven, perhaps. After all, I no longer wish to do or say any one of a number of untoward things when I see her.” He rubbed his palm with his thumb.

“But is that forgiveness, or your friendship for Mr. Knightly?”

“A touch of both I suppose. I still cannot understand why he would take such a silly woman as a wife.”

Harriet plucked at the hem on the sheets. “She has improved you know.”

“She has ceased her matching making, I will grant you. But I still doubt her good sense.”

“But what use has someone of her station for good sense? She has servants, and a husband for that.”

“Now Harriet, what kind of statement is that? You very well know how much I rely upon your good judgment, especially where my younger sisters and brother are concerned. Now you are free of her, I am entirely confident in your sagacity. The new Mrs. Knightly is an entirely different matter. She is clever and silly, a disastrous combination in a woman of wealth and breeding.” He grumbled deep in his chest, the way he did when he was truly and deeply unhappy.

“Her interference was well meant.”

“But insupportable. How many months of misery did she inflict upon all of us? You cannot tell me you were happy whilst she played with your hopes and affections.”

“No.” Harriet pulled away slightly. “I do not like to think of it at all. I feel very foolish and stupid whenever I think of it.”

“I am sorry.” He reached for her, but she scooted away. “No, do not do that. Come here.” He sat up and pulled her very close against his chest. “I cannot bear the thought of you distancing yourself from me again.”

“How can you be so kind to me after—”

“Dearest wife of mine.” He laid his chin on top of her head and his arms around her belly. “Let us settle this once and for all. Yes, I am disappointed that you were influenced by Miss Woodhouse and Mrs. Goddard, but my true unhappiness in the matter is laid at their feet, not yours. And with respect to Mrs. Goddard, she has been a mother to you. It is a testament to your good heart and loving disposition that you should have listened to her and the friend she pushed you towards.”

“I should not have been so flattered by her attentions that I allowed her whims to overrule my own judgment and inclinations. I am grateful Mr. Knightly had a better sense of Miss Woodhouse’s shortcomings and kept your spirits up.”

“Him I consider the truest of friends. Without him I would have lost hope.” He kissed the top of her head. “Do you resent...that is are you unhappy that I have asked you not to call upon Mrs. Knightly?”

“No, not so much. I should want to visit with her, but it is all awkwardness and politeness that is very tiresome when I do see her. I am just thankful you still encourage our connection with Mrs. Goddard.”

“She is far easier to reconcile. Who would not pursue the best for their child?”

“You will be gratified to know, she is in full agreement with me. You are the best thing for me.”

He kissed her deeply, satisfaction rumbling in the back of his throat. “Do not ever forget.”

She turned her face up and rubbed her cheek on his, enjoying the scratch of his stubble. “You will be an excellent father, you know.”

“I want to do well by you Harriet, both of you.” He stroked her belly and the baby kicked under his hand.

“It seems your child thinks you will.”

“As long as neither of you stop believing that, I will be a very happy man.”

“I think then, you are in a very good way to be so.”

Edmund and Fanny Bertram

By Jack Caldwell

The morning sun had been up several hours when Tom Bertram, eldest son and heir of Sir Thomas Bertram, Bart., of Mansfield Park, Northampton, rode up to the structure near Thornton Lacey that served as a stable and barn. A boy took the reins of Tom's horse after the rider dismounted, and the man made his way into the parsonage by the kitchen door. Tom preferred to use this informal entrance to his brother's house, and being an almost daily visitor, his appearance came as no surprise to those within.

"Good morning, Cathy!" he exclaimed as the maid approached to take his hat and coat. "Are my brother and sister in the dining room?"

"No, sir." The young maid seemed to be excessively diverted. "But the breakfast is laid out. Will you be wantin' coffee, sir?"

"Please." Sir Thomas had keenness for coffee in the morning, given his time in the West Indies. His preference for the beverage extended to his sons, so the baronet saw to it that Thornton Lacey never lacked for beans. "Is everyone well, Cathy?"

Now the maid actually giggled. "Oh, yes, sir!" At that, her face a bright red, she dashed for the front hall with his outerwear.

Tom stood in the doorway out of the kitchen, puzzled by the odd behavior of Edmund's maid. Since sobering up after his near-death two years before, he had thought he had seen the last of strange conduct. With a shrug—*Who among us truly*

understand the ways of servants, he decided—he filled a plate and sat down at the dining table.

Minutes later, a now-composed Cathy poured for Tom and the Reverend Edmund Bertram came into the room. Edmund was quite disheveled, which alarmed Tom. In the past, it was always the incorrigible Tom who appeared as something the cat drug in, not the fastidious Edmund.

“Edmund!” cried Tom. “Are you well, brother?”

Cathy laughed.

“Never better, Tom. Good morning,” Edmund said in a distracted manner. “Coffee please, Cathy.”

“Of course, sir.” The maid was clearly biting her lip. “Will the Mistress be down?”

“Err... no. Send up a plate, please. What do we have?”

“Some chicken, ragout, and potatoes from last night,” she reported as she poured. “Toast and scones.”

Edmund ran a hand through his hair. “A bit of the chicken and potatoes, please, and toast. Bring her some of those preserves she fancies, the, ah...”

“Strawberry, sir.”

“Right. And tea! Bring tea, please.”

“Of course, sir.” Cathy giggled again as she left the dining room.

Tom grew alarmed. *Fanny is still abed? Fanny is always up in the mornings!* It was one of the reasons he came often for breakfast. He could always count on good food and lovely company at Thornton Lacey. Breakfast at Mansfield Park was anything but: Mother keeping to her room, Cousin Susan Price attending Mother, and Father nose-deep into his newspaper. His brother and sister had become two of his favorite people in the world, especially first thing in the morning.

Indeed, kind, caring, loyal, and loving Fanny Price Bertram was the sister Tom always imagined. Julia was spoiled and selfish, and Maria was ill-tempered and immoral. Tom was delighted that Fanny married Edmund, for they would spend the rest of their days near Mansfield. But as much as he respected and trusted Edmund, Tom was still a bit protective of his gentle cousin.

Meanwhile, Edmund had returned from filling his plate. “So how are things at Mansfield, Tom?” his brother offered without any real interest.

Good God, Edmund hasn't shaved! Tom realized with horror. *Matters here must be terrible!*

“Edmund, enough of your prevaricating!” Tom demanded. “What is the matter? Has anything happened to Fanny—*AHH!*” Something had leapt onto his right leg.

Tom looked down to see a furry, flat, snorting face, gazing at him hopefully, his tongue lolling out.

Edmund lost not a bite as he said to his wife's Pug, “Snuck out of the room behind me, Pugsly? Kindly climb down from Tom's leg, will you?” The scolding was unpersuasive.

Tom slipped Pugsly a piece of his toast. The dog wolfed down the offering directly, earning an affectionate rub of the head. “Ha, ha! Pugsly knows ole Tom is good for a bit of treat, eh, old man?”

Pugsly snorted in return.

Edmund looked on disapprovingly. “You spoil him, you know.”

“And Fanny does not?” Tom's voice hardened. “Brother, tell me the truth. Is Fanny well?”

Strangely enough, Edmund grinned. “Very well, I assure you.”

“I am glad to hear it. Forgive me my rudeness, but why does she remain upstairs? You must admit that this is unusual behavior for my sister.”

Edmund coughed into his napkin, and Tom though he caught him smiling again. “You do recall what today is.”

“Friday. What of it?”

Edmund just raised an eyebrow.

Tom grew frustrated. “Apparently I have forgotten something, but I must beg you to forgive me. As you know, the Yates are visiting, and that is enough to drive anyone to distraction!”

“I thought our brother Yates was your friend.”

Tom waved him off. “That was when I was still a drunkard. The question remains.”

Edmund leaned back in his chair, a self-satisfied smirk on his face. His unusual countenance was slightly unnerving. “I suppose it falls to me to recall such a momentous occasion. One year ago today, Fanny made me the happiest of men.”

“Oh.” Tom tilted his head. “Really? One year? Has it been that long—or short? I cannot tell.”

“I beg your pardon?”

Now it was Tom who was amused. “If you recall, Father and I were aware of Fanny’s feelings for you well before you recognized them yourself! I believe we gave you a slight push in her direction.”

“A slight push—hah!” Edmund chuckled. “Father dragged me into his study and demanded to know if I had lost my senses or if I was simply blind as a bat.” He looked up, smiled, and sighed. “I tried to tell you both I was only waiting for the right moment to propose—”

“And Father commanded that within a fortnight you either make Fanny an offer or release her,” Tom finished the tale. “You two have been friends for so long, it is hard to

remember when you were not together.” He frowned. “Even when those blasted Crawfords were here—”

“Please do not use that kind of language, Tom.”

“I apologize, Edmund, not just for my rude choice of words, but for bringing up those . . . persons.” Tom was still angry with Henry Crawford and his sister Maria for the scandal they caused. “Especially on such a day.”

“Thank you.”

Tom’s black face turned curious. “But, is there something about marriage of which I am unaware? Is there a tradition that wives spend their wedding anniversary in their apartments? If so, our Mother takes it quite to the extreme.”

Edmund started at his brother, his face growing redder by the moment. He then doubled over in laughter. Tom was completely nonplussed by his brother’s reaction. It took a full minute before Edmund could gather control of himself.

“T-Tom,” he chuckled, “it is not like that at all! At least, I-I do not think so!” At that he was lost in laughter again.

The whole thing was proving irksome to Tom. “I kindly request you cease taking amusement at my ignorance, brother!” he demanded.

Just then, Cathy reentered the dining room. “Begging your pardon, sirs. Mrs. Bertram sends her regards to you, Mr. Bertram, and requests the Master’s immediate attendance above stairs.” The maid could barely keep a straight face.

That sobered Edmund. “Indeed?”

“Y-yes, sir. S-she said it was a matter of s-some importance—” She did not finish; she threw her apron over her face and fled into the kitchen.

Tom was shocked silent by the extraordinary behavior. For his part, Edmund drew a long breath, smiled, and rose to his feet. “If you will excuse me, Tom. Enjoy your breakfast. I

believe we are to dinner at Mansfield today. We will see you then.” He made to leave.

“Wait, Edmund,” Tom cried. “You cannot leave it like this! What is going on?”

Edmund turned with a grin. “When you are married, you will know, if you are fortunate. But it would be well to remember our grandfather’s observation about shy, reserved ladies. That their gratefulness for a gentleman’s attention and affection can be... astonishing.”

He paused to give Tom a moment to recall, and then he winked and walked out the room, Pugsly trailing happily behind. Man’s and dog’s steps could be heard moving rapidly up the staircase.

It took Tom a full minute to comprehend both his brother’s words and actions. It took another five minutes for his face to return to a normal color.

A Happy Anniversary at Delaford Park

By Jane Odiwe

Elinor Ferrars untied her apron, and checked her reflection in the looking glass in the hall before dashing upstairs to tidy her hair. No matter how many times her darling husband Edward told her she should leave domestic duties to the servants, she found she couldn't stand by and watch as they struggled with their daily tasks. Old habits die hard, and having become practised at helping out in the kitchen at Barton cottage, or outside in the vegetable garden, she was determined to be as useful at Delaford parsonage where she could. Not that she'd been idle at Norland, her former childhood home, but her pursuits had tended to fall into that category thought suitable for the daughter of a rich landowner. Reading and drawing had been her daily tasks then, but, when their circumstances had changed, Elinor had been the first to embrace the real chores at hand, helping the servants wherever she could to lighten their load.

On this chilly autumnal morning, she was in a hurry to finish the jobs that needed doing; especially as her sister Marianne was expected in a short while to discuss their anniversary plans. Elinor thought with pleasure how fortunate they were to be married to the men who suited them best in the world, and to live within a stone's throw of the other was the greatest comfort. It would be fun to celebrate their anniversaries with a ball – Elinor could not help but wonder where the last two years had gone, and to think there had been a time when she thought she might never be able to marry the

man she loved so well. Of course it had taken Marianne a little longer to fall in love with the colonel, and Elinor smiled to think about how she and her mother had contrived to get her sister up to Delaford as often as possible to assist the wheels that had been set in motion. A year later all that had been accomplished, and Edward had even had the pleasure of marrying them.

It was just like Marianne to want to celebrate her first wedding anniversary with a grand ball, and her plans to have musicians, poets and players, as a surprise for her husband, was just the sort of lavish entertainment to keep Mrs Brandon amused. Elinor knew how excited Marianne was about her schemes, and as she took up her hairbrush to sweep her curls back into place, she knew Marianne would be arriving in her carriage at any moment.

Elinor recollected her first anniversary last autumn. She and Edward had just wanted to spend the time quietly at home, wrapped in one another's arms by the fire, as the copper leaves drifted from the oaks by the gate, scattering like topaz jewels over the gravel sweep.

'Who would have thought when we first met at Norland that I would be the lucky man to marry you?' Edward whispered, pulling Elinor closer and stroking her hair.

'No, indeed – certainly not *me*,' said Elinor, a smirk forming on her lips. 'You were such a puzzle to me, warm and confiding one moment, acting like a lover should, and then cold and distant the next. I was so confused, I could not decide if you even liked me, let alone if you had any true feelings for me.'

'You did not know I was engaged, and in such a complete turmoil of feeling, unable to solve my dilemma. Having met you, and after spending time with you, I realised that my infatuation with Lucy as a very young man, had been

exactly that. I'd fallen in love with you before I left Norland, but knew I could do nothing to secure your affections. How I suffered.'

'How *you* suffered?' Elinor laughed. 'You didn't have to listen to Lucy telling me all about your secret engagement, and how you looked upon me quite as a sister!'

'Dearest, it pains me to hear how you were treated. By my own stupidity I might never have been in a position to claim you as my wife,' said Edward, serious for a moment. He took Elinor's hand, and kissed her palm. 'Thank heaven for my brother Robert. I do not think he knows what an excellent service he did me, though I am sure he must regret such haste in taking Lucy off my hands.'

'Oh, I think they suit one another very well, they're both very adept at putting their own needs first. Goodness, how long ago it all seems now. I shall never forget your face at Barton on that fateful day when I enquired after Mrs Edward Ferrars. When Thomas told me he'd seen Lucy, "Mrs Ferrars" he called her, I naturally assumed he meant she'd married you.'

Edward laughed. 'You hadn't reckoned on the fact that the younger Mr Ferrars was now a much more interesting prospect having lately come into my inheritance.'

'Oh, they are welcome to it,' Elinor sighed. 'I could not be more happy with you if we had fifty thousand pounds in the bank. We have all that we need and more.'

'Except ... there is one thing I would like,' said Edward, 'something that I think would increase our happiness.'

Elinor struggled out of Edward's arms to turn and look at him. 'Increase our happiness? You may speak for yourself alone because my happiness is quite complete, I assure you.'

'Perhaps you will think my request is a selfish one, but it is something I find myself thinking about more and more.'

'Not selfish, Edward, you could never be that. But, I

confess, I am surprised. I cannot imagine how I could be more content. I adore every moment, each second we spend together – there never is enough time to sit with you, like this, in such perfect felicity. I am sorry to think you find it wanting.’

‘Oh, my sweet Elinor, how very wrong you are in thinking I should find such precious moments wanting. I must explain myself.’

‘Please do, for I am anxious for an answer.’

He looked thoughtful. ‘I would like to see the chamber next to ours put to full use.’

‘Is it your mother that you’re wanting to invite to Delaford? Edward, I sincerely hope to make her very welcome when she does come, but I do not think that chamber would do. It is rather on the small side.’

Edward put out his hand, and with one finger silenced his wife, stroking the lips he loved. She looked so beautiful and he could wait no longer to kiss her. Pulling her closer his lips found hers, and she kissed him back, savouring every moment. When he finally pulled away, the look of love was such that made his wife blush quite pink.

‘I have never been very good with words, Elinor, but I can only tell you what’s in my heart. What I’m trying so badly to say is that I think it would be wonderful if we were a family with our own babe in the nursery.’

Elinor started to laugh, showing her pretty mouth off to perfection. ‘Edward, I am so relieved to find it is a baby who will be my rival for your affections. And I couldn’t agree more, my darling ... I’m sure when the time is right, we shall be so blessed.’

‘We are blessed indeed, Elinor, and I do wonder if it’s wrong to be asking for more ‘riches’ in our life when we have so much besides.’

‘I do not know that it is wrong to keep hoping that the

desires of your heart will have a happy outcome. In our case I longed for you and waited, and it came right in the end. I have high hopes our wishes will be realised if we are patient.'

Edward nodded. 'You are always so wise. You'd make an excellent clergyman.'

'Now for that to be accomplished would be a hope in vain, I think, and I am sure I'd never do such an excellent job as you. Amongst your other talents in the pulpit, I've watched you settle the babies after their wetting at the font. You have quite a way with them.'

'I enjoy holding them, soothing them. I like to imagine what it would be like to hold one's own flesh and blood, to have a baby of our own to love.'

'Oh, Edward, wouldn't it be wonderful?' Elinor draped her arms about her husband's neck and gazed into his eyes. 'Having a baby with you would satisfy all my dreams ... but, you know the trouble with talking about babies ... it does not produce them.'

She hadn't needed to say anything more.

Elinor was brought back to the present by the sounds of endearing snuffles and shuffles from the cradle in the nursery close by, aware that her first-born son was awake and stirring. Colonel Brandon, who was always so generous and thoughtful in helping the young couple, had insisted she have a nurse to help in the first few months, but she'd had little to do. Elinor was a dotting mother, and had wanted to be involved with her baby's upbringing as much as possible, but she admitted there had been times when having someone else to help out had been invaluable. When she walked into the room, the nurse handed little Henry into her arms, and she was greeted with such gurgling smiles that she couldn't help thinking, once more, how lucky she was to have him. His face was rosy and pink

from sleep; his dark curls damp against his forehead.

‘Do you have any idea just how much you are loved?’ she whispered to him and planted a kiss on a cheek that was as smooth as a peach.

The sounds coming from below heralded her sister’s arrival. She heard the front door shutting, steps across the hallway and the murmur of low voices. Reluctantly, she handed her precious bundle back into his nurse’s arms. Marianne would require all her attention, she knew. Elinor gave him one more squeeze with a promise to attend him later before heading downstairs.

‘Marianne,’ she called, ‘as she entered the parlour, ‘how wonderful, you’re early!’

But it wasn’t Marianne she saw, and for a moment she couldn’t think exactly whom it was standing by the fireplace warming his hands against the chill of the damp autumn morning, until he turned around.

‘Mr Willoughby!’ Elinor blurted out the words, the shock was so great.

Mr Willoughby, expensively dressed in a black mourning coat and hat, bowed gravely, before moving swiftly towards her to offer his hand.

Elinor took it briefly, her mind racing with all the possibilities of his intrusion.

‘I imagine you are very shocked to see me, Mrs Ferrars, and I hope you will forgive me for not giving you notice of my visit. I hope you are well. I heard about the birth of your child, and would like to offer my congratulations. He must be about three months old now, I believe.’

‘I thank you, Mr Willoughby. Yes, little Henry was born in June.’

Elinor was more than a little taken aback. She couldn’t help thinking back to the last time she’d seen him when

Marianne was ill, and he'd come to ask for her forgiveness. He'd broken her sister's heart and married for money, but those were not his only crimes. She couldn't help thinking also of the colonel's ward, Miss Williams, who'd been preyed upon by Willoughby, and she wondered about their child, the baby he'd never even seen. Elinor had forgiven him, but when he'd declared his undying love for her sister, she had told him in no uncertain terms that Marianne was lost to him forever.

'I am expecting Mrs Brandon to call at any moment,' Elinor continued, deciding she would not offer him a seat. She did not wish to be discourteous, but she did not want to encourage him to stay. 'Forgive me, but I hope your visit will be brief, Mr Willoughby. I do not think my sister will be pleased to learn you are in the vicinity, and I am certain that if Colonel Brandon had any idea he would not be at all happy.'

'I've seen the colonel lately in town, Mrs Ferrars. He doesn't change much ... he's still one of those people whom people speak well of, but nobody cares about, whom all are pleased to see, and yet no one can be bothered to converse with. I had business with him on another matter ... he was civil, as a gentleman *should* be.'

Elinor could imagine what the other matter must be – she was sure it was something to do with Miss Williams and Willoughby's child.

'Colonel Brandon is always very kind, an exemplary gentleman, and in the circumstances, I think he deserves both your respect, and your polite consideration,' Elinor answered stiffly. 'And now, may I ask what brings you here, Mr Willoughby? Time is most pressing.'

'Forgive me, Mrs Ferrars, but my mind is clouded by remembrances of the past. I could not journey through this part of the country without a thought to old friends and acquaintances, and was determined to pay my respects to you.'

Elinor was about to interrupt, but Mr Willoughby held up his hand, speaking without a pause for breath. ‘I wondered if you had ever received news of my present circumstances? My wife sadly died these twelve months past, along with the poor dead babe that didn’t take his first breath.’

Elinor had heard something of the matter from Mrs Jennings, their old friend and mother-in-law to their cousin, Sir John Middleton. She was always a fount of knowledge and gossip. Marianne had been very quiet on the matter afterwards, and had neither referred to, nor spoken about it to Elinor’s knowledge.

‘I was very sorry to hear of it, please accept my condolences.’

Why was he here? Elinor wondered. If Marianne were to see him ... Elinor did not want to risk upsetting her sister by making her revisit the past. She knew her sister held no regrets, but even so, she knew that as time had gone on her heart had hardened further against the man who’d used her so ill.

‘I have thought about you and your sister very often, and of happier times,’ Willoughby went on. ‘Is it an impossible wish that we could be friends, that I might find some peace. My guilt, my anguish over the way I treated your sister, Mrs Ferrars, has only increased over time. You were so very generous to grant me your forgiveness that last time I saw you when Marianne was ill, but I still have not received the pardon from the one person who still has such a hold on my heart. I will never rest easy until I have it from her lips.’

‘Mr Willoughby, you know your desire is fruitless. I am very sorry that you should feel so, but cannot you see that your expectation is a hopeless one. Mrs Brandon has forgiven you in her own way. More than that, you cannot anticipate.’

‘Please do not speak her name in that way ... not twinned so intimately with *his* name ... I cannot bear to hear it.

Have some pity, some compassion for an old acquaintance, Mrs Ferrars. Could I not stay now, and see her ... just for five minutes? I *need* to explain myself.'

'I am sure she would *not* wish to see you. I am sorry, Mr Willoughby, but I must ask you to leave,' Elinor said in her firmest tone and moved towards the door. 'Be assured that you have nothing to feel anxious about. Marianne does not think any more on the matter. She is *very* happy, and I must say, I do not think your coming here was kind of you. Even if you could see her, what could you hope to achieve?'

Before Elinor had finished speaking, voices could be heard out in the hall.

'You must go, Mr Willoughby,' Elinor commanded.

'It's too late – she's here now, I can hear her voice. I know she will listen to me.'

The door opened and Marianne waltzed through in her usual fashion. She was looking exceptionally beautiful this morning in a blue gown, the perfect foil for her hair, which was swept up and caught in a silk sash wreathed about her head. Her smiling countenance changed as she was stopped in her tracks, suddenly aware who was standing in the room addressing her sister.

Mr Willoughby bowed once more. 'Marianne ... Mrs Brandon, forgive me, I know you will be surprised to see me here.'

Marianne could not speak, her emotions showed in the blush that immediately spread over her pale cheeks, and flushing her white throat.

'I am sorry, Marianne, I had no idea of Mr Willoughby's calling this morning,' said Elinor, 'but he is leaving now so you must not trouble yourself. Mr Willoughby, let me see you out.'

'Please, I beg you, Mrs Brandon,' Willoughby pleaded.

‘I came to see you with no other intent than to beg just a few minutes of your time. I will not rest easy until I have explained to you all that happened, and until I have your forgiveness I will have no peace.’

Marianne was in such a state of shock she hardly knew what to do or say. Seeing him again aroused so many emotions. He was more handsome than she’d ever seen him, and his manners were so very much the same as they had always been. And yet, despite these outward attractions she felt herself able to look on him with equanimity, and see him quite like a stranger. She would be lying to herself if she did not admit that she’d wondered about him, and what might have been, emotions that had stirred once more when she’d heard of his wife’s untimely death. But, those feelings had soon passed. Marianne loved the colonel too well to be disturbed by the recollection of a lost love who’d chosen money and his pocketbook over her.

‘Leave us, Elinor,’ she said at last. ‘I *will* hear what Mr Willoughby has to say, on the condition that he leaves immediately afterwards, and makes no further attempt to make any contact with me.’

‘If you are sure, dearest,’ said Elinor hesitantly, ‘I shall just be without, if you need me.’

Silence filled the room when she’d gone. Only the sound of the rain drumming against the casement window could be heard, reminding her of the tears she’d spent over this man when he’d first broken her heart. Marianne put those thoughts aside, bade him sit down, and waited.

He spoke at last; his voice soft and low. ‘You are, without doubt, the singularly most beautiful woman of my acquaintance, Marianne.’

‘I do not wish to hear what my husband tells me every morning, Mr Willoughby,’ said Marianne, knowing that her

words would remind him of her waking in the colonel's arms, and a small part of her hoped they would wound. 'My time is limited, I have much to be accomplished today and I would be very grateful if you'd be swift.'

'I hope I may still call you by your name, Marianne, that we might be friendly again.'

Marianne was beginning to lose her patience, and her composure. 'I do not understand why you have come here, Mr Willoughby. Please speak plainly of your business with me, and let me get on with mine.'

'I have never had the chance to explain all that happened to you in person, though I trust that your sister relayed my words to you. I was so worried for your welfare when you were taken ill that time, and you became more dear to me than ever when I realised that Marianne Dashwood might have been taken away from us forever.'

'My sister told me everything, Mr Willoughby. I have no doubt that you had true feelings for me at one time, but the fact remains that you chose to marry someone else. Money was evidently more important to you than any love you might have had for me then. I admit, I felt wounded at the time, but I have since come to realise that you would never have been happy had you married me, especially if we'd been poor. And I would have been made miserable by the connection.'

'But, Mrs Smith *would* have made us rich, she said as much in the end, and I cannot tell you how much I have regretted my decision not to claim you there and then. I have loved only *you*, and longed *only* for you. Can you not admit that you felt the same?'

'Mr Willoughby, even had you decided against Miss Grey with her fifty thousand pounds, or come to me later, I'd had time to reflect on your conduct. And not only on your behaviour to me, but on your *despicable* actions towards the

colonel's ward. *She* is the woman you *should* have married.'

Willoughby twisted the hat he held in his hands, gazing at the floor as he spoke. 'I cannot excuse the past, but I want you to know I have tried to make amends to Miss Williams and her child, as far as I can. Your husband is a most generous man in assisting me in that endeavour.'

'He is the most wonderful man I have ever known, Mr Willoughby, and he has made me the happiest of women. I want you to know you should have no regrets; you have, in fact, done me the greatest service in the world. If anything had happened to the contrary, I could not be in the present situation I enjoy, nor be able to appreciate how very fortunate I am.'

'Then I take it, there is no hope ever of a reconciliation between us?'

Marianne shook her head in disbelief. 'I do not understand you, Mr Willoughby. I think you know we could not be friends, though I have forgiven you completely, let me assure you. I did love you once, and a part of me will always remember that time with fondness, but it was a first love, and with passing time comes wisdom. A first love is not always the foundation for a lasting one, though it is a useful exercise in training for an enduring one.'

'You heard my wife had died?'

'I did, and I am sorry for you.'

'I wish I were more sorry, but I cannot lie to you, Marianne. It was a marriage of convenience, there was no love on either side.'

'But, you are rich now, and you will be able to marry again.'

'Is it too much to hope that if you ever found yourself in similar circumstances ... I have thought of marrying again, but whilst you live and breathe in this world, I have only hope ...'

Willoughby's voice trailed away. He knew it was useless to continue – she would never consider becoming his wife even if the colonel were carried off to an early grave and had inscribed it in his will. No, he could see perfectly well that she was truly lost to him more than ever.

Mrs Brandon took a deep breath. 'I think it's time for you to go now, Mr Willoughby.'

Marianne watched his carriage depart through the window of the parlour. She had no regrets, and could not even take satisfaction from the knowledge that she was still very much an object of Willoughby's desires. At least it was over, and she could get on with the business of planning the ball.

'I hope he did not upset you, dearest,' said Elinor, shocked to see her sister's drawn expression when she came back into the room.

'No, not at all,' came Marianne's reply. 'I feel rather sorry for him. He's still in love with me, you know.'

'Of that I have no doubt, but I hope he did not come to make mischief between you and the colonel.'

Marianne laughed. 'He could not, even if he wished to do it. I love my darling James with all my heart and soul. We could never be parted, however many good-looking scoundrels might come my way.'

'I am relieved to hear it,' said Elinor, sitting down at the table with a sheaf of papers, 'not that I ever doubted *you*, but Mr Willoughby was so ardent, and he has a very persuasive manner.'

'But not winning enough to tempt *me*, my dearest sister.'

Elinor passed the top sheet to Marianne. 'Are you ready to get on with our plans?'

'Oh yes, indeed! I am so excited ... now, what do you think? I've managed to secure a troupe of performing gypsy

players; won't that be most romantic?'

Mrs Ferrars couldn't help but smile, and was relieved to see her sister most happy once more.

The evening of the ball was soon upon them. Elinor and Edward were staying up at the mansion house so they would not have to worry about travelling the short distance back to the parsonage in the dark and could collapse into a cosy bed when it suited them. Baby Henry was tucked up in a cradle with his nurse in attendance, and his dotting parents wished him goodnight before dressing for the festivities. Everything was in place, surprises and secrets planned with precision for the evening ahead, and Delaford transformed like a castle in a fairy tale, lit up with coloured lamps, and a hundred candles glittering in the ancient chandeliers and sconces hung up in the ballroom.

'Do you realise this is the first time we've been dancing in quite a while, Elinor?' said Edward, straightening his satin waistcoat. 'I must admit, though I've never been a dancing man, I'm looking forward to showing you off at the ball.'

'There hasn't been much time for dancing,' Elinor laughed smoothing on elbow-length gloves and checking her reflection in the glass. 'I am looking forward to the celebrations, I just hope I haven't forgotten my dancing steps, and will do you proud!'

'Two years today, my love. Elinor, thank you for making me the happiest man alive and for giving me all that my heart desires.'

'Thank you, Edward,' Elinor replied, helping him on with his coat. 'I could not ask for more love or more happiness.'

Edward smiled, and opened the drawer on his washstand. 'I have a little trifle, my dear, something I hope you

will wear tonight.’

Elinor gazed in wonder as her beloved husband produced a slim leather box. She couldn’t speak, she was so touched, and when she opened her gift she gasped with pleasure. Nestled on green velvet was a topaz cross on a gold chain, and it was only when Edward put it around her neck that she found her voice again.

‘Oh, my darling, it’s so wonderful, I cannot thank you enough.’

‘It’s a charming cross, if I say so myself,’ Edward replied, ‘rendered more beautiful by the lady who stands by my side. Happy Anniversary, Mrs Ferrars - here’s to many more!’

James Brandon and his wife were putting the final touches to their evening dress. Marianne had never looked more divine, he thought. She looked like a goddess dressed in white silk satin, and with a sparkling diadem in her hair, a gift on their wedding day, she had the regal stature of a queen. He’d never loved her more than he did at this moment, but there was something troubling him. There’d been a report of such a nature that he didn’t know quite what to think about it. One of his men had told him there’d been a sighting of his old foe in the neighbourhood, and if it was correct that could only mean trouble. If Willoughby had merely been passing through, he might have dismissed it, but Colonel Brandon had it on good authority that his carriage had been seen coming from the direction of Delaford Parsonage. The fact that neither his wife nor his sister-in-law had mentioned the visit was perturbing, though he reasoned that there had not been much opportunity for bringing up a subject bound to cause him discomfort. Most of all, he wished to know exactly what Willoughby was doing, and why he’d had the damned nerve not only to trespass on his land, but to seek out his wife. That surely must have been his

true course of action, and his endeavour. He must admit, when he'd heard that Sophia Willoughby had died, making her husband a free man, he'd felt concerned that Marianne might have harboured misgivings. Would she have preferred to be with the much younger, handsome Willoughby, he wondered, and had spent many nights torturing himself with this idea. Had the beautiful, passionate creature he'd married ever regretted her decision? Not that Marianne had ever given him any concern for his wild imaginings. No, he was sure of her love, and as if to prove the point, though no words had ever been spoken, Marianne had seemed to love him with more tenderness and more ardour in the time following the news that Mrs Jennings had delighted in relating. However, despite all these ruminations, it was no good, he could not let the evening start without knowing the truth, he decided, whatever it might be.

Marianne, ever sensitive to her husband's moods knew something was amiss. James had been quiet and withdrawn all day. She wondered if his business with Willoughby was preying on his mind, but she wasn't quite sure how she should bring up the subject. She wanted to tell him that Willoughby had been to see her at Delaford, that she'd spoken to him, but was sure the news would upset him. However, she hated to keep anything from James, and felt that now was as good a time as any to get it over and done with.

When they spoke, they did so at the same time. There was a little nervous laughter before Marianne begged that the colonel should speak first, but when he started to say that he'd been concerned about something reported to him, she stopped him in mid-sentence.

'Dearest James, I didn't know how to tell you. I would have said something eventually, but what with the ball and everything else, there just hasn't been the right moment. You

are referring, I think, to the fact that Mr Willoughby came up to the parsonage when I was visiting Elinor.’

‘How *dare* he invite himself! To have the very nerve to come to Delaford, and then demand your attention is the last straw. Marianne, my darling, if he has harmed you in any way at all, I will bring him to justice.’

‘My love, he wanted nothing, but to talk to me,’ she added calmly. ‘Please let me explain.’

‘I know him of old. Talking is *not* what he wants, Marianne.’

Marianne saw the colonel’s expression, and the mixture of fear and love in his eyes. His fear that Willoughby might take her away from him, as Brandon’s brother once took away his first love, was etched on every feature.

‘No, it is not what he *wants*, but he can *never* have what his heart desires. My darling, when I married you I was marrying the man I love most in the whole world, and you are still the only one that stirs the greatest feelings I possess deep within my soul. No man, except you, will ever lay a claim to my heart, not as long as I live, nor for all eternity.’

James took her in his arms, holding her fast. ‘Oh, Marianne, I thought I might lose you for a moment. I’ve never doubted that you love me, but I must admit, when Willoughby became a widower all those months ago, I was made to wonder if he might tempt you away from me.’

Marianne threw her arms around the colonel’s neck, and peppered his face with kisses. ‘Never, *never* could I be tempted away from you. James, please believe me when I say, for better or for worse, you are saddled with me forever.’

Colonel Brandon hugged his wife tighter. ‘Likewise, my beloved Marianne. Having found you, I am not about to let anyone steal you away.’

‘He’s gone for good, I promise you. Mr Willoughby

knows exactly what I think of him, and precisely how much I am in love with you.’ Marianne gazed into her husband’s eyes and whispered softly. ‘Besides, I could not very well run away in my condition.’

The colonel stared blankly for a moment, before his eyes grew wide with wonder. ‘Marianne, you cannot mean ...’

‘I do, indeed. How will you like being a father, do you think?’

James Brandon could hardly contain his feelings. ‘How will I like it? Good lord, Marianne, I am beyond all words with happiness.’

‘As am I, my love ... there is not a single expression that could come close to the way I feel at the prospect of becoming a parent. To know we are starting this extraordinary journey together is the most wonderful experience of my life. Come, we have a ball to open, and I am in the mood for dancing. While I think on it, may I wish you a very happy anniversary, Colonel Brandon.’

‘And a very happy anniversary to you, my darling, Mrs Brandon. But let me look at you once more. The ball can wait, and as for dancing, are you quite sure you should be thinking of such galloping about now? I’d much rather have you rest with your feet up.’

Mrs Brandon looked sideways at her spouse, who was showing all the signs of a concerned father. ‘I am not ill, and I’m assured by our very own doctor that it is quite safe so long as I do not tire. You should know me better after a year of marriage – nothing will stop me from dancing with my husband.’

Colonel Brandon swooped her up in his arms to twirl her around until she laughed. ‘And never have I been so proud to dance with my wonderful wife. Just you wait, my darling, you’ll be begging me to sit down before this night is over!’

Marianne, happy beyond all measure, took her husband's arm, and together they descended the grand staircase to greet their guests.

Charles and Mary Musgrove

By Kara Louise

Anne was enjoying the solitude and quiet that filled Kellynch Hall on a sunny, but chilly morning. Her father and Elizabeth were away, and she sat in the drawing room reading a book. It was all too often that she found herself being summoned to do something for her family and she treasured those few times when she was not.

She sat in front of the fireplace; the wood still provided a little heat, but was no longer ablaze. She was stirred from her reverie, however, when she heard a knock at the front door. She looked up when the butler approached.

“Pray, excuse me, but a letter was delivered from Uppercross for you, Miss Anne.”

She smiled at his apologetic expression. “Thank you.”

As he handed it to her, he cleared his throat and said softly, “The servant arrived in the Uppercross carriage and is awaiting your reply.”

Anne’s brows pinched together. “A moment.” She quickly opened the missive, read it, and then nodded her head. “It appears Mary needs me.” She stood up and smoothed her dress. “Please inform him I shall be ready shortly.”

“Certainly.”

When he stepped from the room Anne sighed and then reread the letter.

Dear Sister Anne,

Mary is not feeling well today and wonders if you might be able to come see her. You are always so helpful to her and she is having a rather difficult day. I know this is rather short notice, but if you can come by at your convenience, we would

certainly appreciate it. It was one year ago today that our lives were joined together in holy matrimony, and it grieves me that she is unwell on this occasion. I would so much wish for her to enjoy it. I am certain your presence here would help in so many ways.

Charles

Anne's hands dropped to her lap. Despite the words Charles had written, she could readily conjecture the real truth behind this missive. Mary likely claimed to have a headache, the baby was in all probability fussing, and the nanny was not able to keep him quiet. Mary would then have insisted that Charles write and tell her to come at once.

Anne pressed her lips together. She supposed that Mary would expect her to cancel any plans she might have and come to her assistance solely because it was their anniversary. She

Charles, however, would never insist she drop everything and come at once to Uppercross. At least he had the courtesy to make the request politely. She let out a sigh. Her agreeing to come would likely help him, as well.

Anne stood up and put her shawl about her shoulders. She did not need a special occasion to be of assistance to her family; she would have gone anyway, as she had no other plans. She would assist in whatever way possible to help them enjoy the day.

Later, as she set out in the Uppercross carriage, Anne thought about Mary. Her sister had been so excited about the new baby, but once little Charles was born she began to view him as more of a burden than a blessing. She was never pleased with the nanny, who in her opinion, did nothing right.

Anne shook her head slowly. She would likely be doing the nanny a favour by coming today, as well.

Mary had always suffered from some ailment or another, imagined or real, and the birth of little Charles had

added another cause for complaint. Anne leaned her head back and closed her eyes. If she were ever fortunate enough to have her own child, she would appreciate the baby's cries as well as his smiles.

When Anne arrived at Uppercross cottage, she was shown into the sitting room to wait for Charles.

A few minutes later he walked quickly into the room. "Anne! I am so glad you have come!"

"Good day, Charles," Anne said as she greeted him with outstretched arms. "It is hard to believe a full year has passed since you were married!"

Charles nodded. "Thank you, Anne. I cannot believe it myself."

"I am sorry Mary is unwell. So unfortunate on a day worthy of joy and celebration."

Charles nodded in silence.

"Shall I go to her? Is she resting?"

"Yes, she has been resting all morning, but I am certain she is awake." His brows lowered and he took her hands. "I hated to impose upon you, but you always seem to know what to do to help her."

Anne smiled softly and gave her shoulders a slight shrug. "I cannot agree that I always know how to help her, but I will try."

Anne turned to walk out, but then stopped and looked back. "Charles, since Mary is not feeling well, perhaps you ought to do something you enjoy." She tilted her head and smiled. "I would imagine you might wish to be out hunting."

A wide smile appeared on his face. "Oh, I would, but I did not dare leave her. Do you think I ought?"

Anne nodded. "Enjoy yourself."

"Why, that is a splendid idea! I believe I shall!"

Anne walked to Mary's room and found her lying on

her bed. "Hello, Mary."

"Anne! You came!" Mary flailed her arms back across the pillow, and one hand ended up resting across her forehead. "I have such a headache!"

"So I understand. What can I do for you?"

"I could use some tea. Could you please ask Cook to prepare me some? And ask her to bring me biscuits and honey."

Anne took in her sister's demeanour. "Certainly. Is there anything else you need while I do that for you?"

A cry was heard off in another room.

"Go talk to the nanny. Mrs. Hawkins cannot seem to keep little Charles quiet! He fussed all night! I could not sleep at all." She reached out and grasped Anne's hand. "I know you can make him quiet."

"Mary, I..."

"Please try, Anne. I do not think I can bear it any longer."

Anne nodded resignedly. "I shall return shortly. See if you can rest."

"Yes! Do hurry!"

Anne stopped by the kitchen and talked to Cook, and then went to see the nanny. She was holding the baby and rocking him to sleep.

"How is he this morning?"

Mrs. Hawkins looked up with a haggard expression. Her eyes were red, and her cheeks were flushed. "He is a normal baby boy, Miss Elliot, and Mrs. Musgrove needs to realize that babies cry. I cannot keep him quiet every moment of the day." A tear trailed down her cheek.

"You are performing your duties admirably, Mrs. Hawkins. My sister has just been having a rather difficult time. Try not to let what she says trouble you."

Mrs. Hawkins shook her head. "The cottage is not big enough to keep Mrs. Musgrove far enough away from the baby or keep any sound from reaching her *delicate* ears." She gave Anne a pointed look.

"I understand," Anne replied with a sympathetic smile. "Do what you can."

Anne left the nanny only slightly reassured and then returned to Mary, who had been served her tea and biscuits. "Is there anything else I can do, Mary?"

Mary took a sip of tea and then slowly lowered the teacup. "Yes, my good sister, as a matter of fact, there is."

After several hours of tending to Mary's physical, emotional, and household needs, as well as spending some time with the baby, Anne was quite exhausted. With dusk drawing near, she decided to return to Kellynch Hall, as Charles would likely be returning home any moment.

She went in to take her leave of her sister. "I hope you are feeling better, Mary."

Mary gave her a weak smile. "Oh, I am, Anne. Thank you so much for coming."

"You are very welcome, Mary."

Mary let out a long sigh. "You have made this day a most agreeable one."

Anne pinched her brows. "I am... glad."

When she walked out to her carriage, Charles was returning. It was apparent he had been fairly successful hunting, as he carried several birds. "I see you had a good day, Charles."

"Not a good day, a great day! Thank you so much for coming, Anne."

"You are welcome. I do believe Mary is feeling better," she said with a smile.

"Oh, splendid! I ought to have asked about her. I am

glad to hear that.”

He walked Anne to her carriage. “I want you to know how much we appreciate you. You helped to make this a wonderful day!”

Anne nodded silently and stepped into the carriage.

“Good night, Anne! Thanks again!”

“You are welcome. Have a good evening.”

“Oh, I believe I shall!” Charles turned to walk to the house, whistling as he did.

Anne bit her lip as she looked out at the setting sun. She hoped Charles and Mary would spend some time together now that they had both had such a pleasant day. This was not, however, how *she* would wish to spend her anniversary of being married one full year.

Thoughts of Frederick suddenly assaulted her. Her mouth went dry and she could not prevent the tears from welling up in her eyes. If they had married, they would have had several anniversaries by now. Her chest tightened as she considered that she would want to spend every moment by his side, in his arms, being kissed by him, and being loved by him.

She leaned her head back and did not bother to wipe the tears that began to fall.