

Elizabeth skipped down the stairs, still unable to stop smiling after three weeks of marriage. She laughed, she really was blissfully happy. She already felt at home, helped no doubt by the fact the Mr. Darcy seemed to be just as happy.

She stepped into the breakfast room, a small west facing room already warmed by the morning sun. It had been Mr. Darcy's favorite rooms in the house. A slight blush warmed her face for he had told her that their bedroom was now his favorite.

She picked up the envelope tucked next to her plate on the table set for just the two of them. It was a letter from Jane. At the window she snapped the seal and unfolded the small paper.

Darcy stood in the doorway; she was breathtaking; the sun glistening in his wife's hair. He smiled at the word then silently crossed the room. Elizabeth startled slightly when he bent and kissed her neck. A small whimper escaped her throat as he continued the soft butterfly-like kisses up to her ear, then whispered, "Good morning, Mrs. Darcy." She turned and kissed him full on the mouth, stopping only for her own greeting, "And good morning to you, too, Mr. Darcy."

"What has your sister to say?" He asked gesturing to the letter.

"Jane would very much like to come as soon as possible rather than Christmas Eve and they would like to stay through Twelfth Night."

"Is there a problem at Netherfield?"

"Jane does not say it but even her sweet tempered nature and Mr. Bingley's patience are, I am sure, sorely tested by my mother and Aunt Phillips."

"Then come they must." He paused slightly, "That means Bingley's sisters and Mr. Hurst will come as well."

Elizabeth sighed, "Mr. Bingley and I are now brother and sister and so I must accept his family as my own."

He gently lifted her chin and gave her light kiss. "You are very wise my dear."

She smiled, "He must find a home away from Longbourn."

Darcy looked over her head and out the window, but she saw the sly smile light his face.

"What scheme are you brewing?"

"It is not my scheme." He whispered, "Shall I tell you a secret?"

"Yes, you shall or I will tease you unmercifully until you do."

"Bingley has already purchased an estate not thirty miles from here."

Her eyes lit even more brightly, "Only thirty miles from Pemberley?" Elizabeth threw her arms around his neck, "Thank you, thank you." Only slightly surprised by his wife's spontaneous embrace he encircled her with his arms.

"Why are you thanking me?"

She gave him a knowing smile, "Mr. Bingley does nothing without your counsel, advice and approval." She laughed and kissed him again.

Over breakfast they discussed Christmas. The new Mr. and Mrs. Darcy were excited by the prospect. Darcy and his sister had, since the death of their parents, kept Christmas subdued; generally spending Christmas only with each other. Elizabeth's were a bit more hectic due mostly to the size of the family. This year she would be hostess in her own home and they both looked forward to it.

The house would be filled with family. Georgiana was arriving tomorrow with Jane, Mr. Bingley, Caroline and Mr. & Mrs. Hurst shortly thereafter. Col. Fitzwilliam was expected to follow shortly as were Elizabeth's parents, sisters and the Gardiners.

The house would be festive. Nothing pretentious but they would, no doubt, fill it with evergreens. Probably not a Christmas tree simply because they were not yet a tradition. Legend has it that Christmas trees were introduced to Britain by Prince Albert in 1840. However Queen Charlotte, wife of Charles III, born in the German duchy of Mecklenburg-Strelitz had grown up with Christmas trees and so included trees in the British royal family's celebration of the holiday as early as 1761. Victoria and Albert did make them popular after a photograph of the family next to the tree was made public.

In fact Christmas trees have been fairly common since the 16th century in Germany where it ultimately spread to the rest of the continent. There is a story about why lights are put on trees that I used in *Yours Affectionately, Jane Austen*.

The blue Jeep rolled down the drive toward Pemberley woods and the wrought iron gates of Darcy's estate. In the rearview mirror fireflies were dancing in the pale light of the new moon. The scene reminded Fitz of a story he'd heard as a child about Martin Luther seeing stars shining through the trees in the forest. Unable to describe it to his family adequately Luther had put candles on the branches of an evergreen tree and lit them. Legend held that was how lights came to be on Christmas trees. He doubted the veracity of the myth, but that was exactly how the woods looked, like tiny white Christmas lights were twinkling on every tree.

Long before Christmas trees were brought into houses, evergreens were a tradition. The pagans brought in boughs to help lighten the dark of winter and in celebration of the winter solstice.

Evergreens aren't only pine and juniper. Ivy was popular in decorations and I would imagine a carpet of ivy may well have covered the floor of Pemberley woods. Entwined in the stair banister and chandeliers, accented by red ribbon the ivy might have been used extensively. Junipers with their blue berries would add a festive touch to the mantels. No doubt hedgerows were

incorporated into the landscaping on the estate and the shiny, dark green leaves of the boxwood make beautiful wreaths and swags.

Perhaps a 'kissing bough' of holly with candles was suspended in the entry to greet guests. The church was against using mistletoe for a 'kissing bough or ball' because they considered it unholy as it is a parasite. However, I suspect that it may have more to do with the fact that the Druids used it in fertility rituals. So too the Vikings revered it because it sometimes grew on the sacred oak. Viking warriors who found themselves under such an oak with mistletoe were to disarm themselves and embrace even if they were enemies. So it is a combination of these two legends that makes mistletoe the branch under which you kiss. Ultimately the Church lost that battle since the tradition of kissing under mistletoe has survived to this day.

December 6 was the day for exchanging gifts as it is the feast day of Saint Nicholas and for the Austen's that would have been particularly important as he was the patron saint of sailors. It would have been a time for charitable giving as well. There would have been parties and balls, play acting (something we know the Austens did with relish), games and lots and lots of food. Special foods like candy, pastries and cakes. An example of which is Martha Washington's Great Cake which she made or had made for Twelfth Night. No doubt the chef at Pemberley would have done something similar.

Take 40 eggs and divide the whites from the yolks and beat them to a froth. Then work 4 pounds of butter to a cream and put the whites of eggs to it a Spoon full at a time till it is well work'd. Then put 4 pounds of sugar finely powdered to it in the same manner then put in the Yolks of eggs and 5 pounds of flour and 5 pounds of fruit. 2 hours will bake it. Add to it half an ounce of mace and nutmeg half a pint of wine and some fresh brandy. This cake was made in one pan, making a very large, tall single layer. It would have been frosted with a meringue type icing accented with holly decorations.

The Pemberley chef might also have done something special like a marzipan village or a sugar sculpture as a decoration for the dining room.

With the country house decked out for the coming holiday would have been a warm and inviting place for the Darcy's first Christmas at Pemberley and the newlyweds looked forward to welcoming their friends and families.

A very merry Christmas to the Darcys and to all of you.