

If Elizabeth had looked at her husband's face at that moment she would have seen such a look of love in his eyes that she would have been unable to stop the blush that surely would have warmed her cheeks. Intent on not disappointing him or their guests her sweet voice filled the room, accompanied by the lilting strains of the song performed by her new sister, Georgiana.

Darcy's rapt attention of the two women he loved above all else did not go unnoticed by Caroline Bingley who's jealousy was more than a little difficult to control and was inflamed by being forced to take part in the holiday celebration here at Pemberley. As enthusiastic applause greeted the end of the Darcy women's song, she watched him go to the piano and kiss his sister's cheek, Caroline cringed, Georgiana would never be her sister. But when she saw the look on Mr. Darcy's face when he took his wife's hand, it was more than Caroline could bear. In desperation she rose and moved to a window that overlooked Darcy's vast estate, an estate to which she had dreamed of one day being Mistress; now that dream was gone forever.

Hoping the outdoor view would help relieve her rage and disappointment Caroline was instead met by the sight of her brother and Jane walking arm and arm in the cold December afternoon. She bit her lip to stop the tears then quietly but quickly left the music room and ran up the stairs. The maid had told her that the guest room had been made up especially for her by Mrs. Darcy. She threw herself on the bed and allowed the tears she had been holding back to flow prodigiously.

Mrs. Darcy, a title that would never be hers, an estate where she would forever be nothing more than an unwanted guest and with her brother's marriage, even to the sweet Jane, she was no longer Mistress of his house. She had nothing. No one. What would become of her? The tears dried but she remained in the room until she was called to dinner.

Darcy slipped out of the library where he, Bingley, Mr. Bennet, Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Hurst were enjoying brandy and went to his mother's writing room. He stood in the doorway and watched his wife play a game with the younger women of the party. Jane sat demurely in a chair as Elizabeth gently drew Georgiana into the game with Eliza's sister Kitty. In the short time his sister had been with them he had watched his wife, with her natural exuberance and kindness, bring Georgiana out of her shell, something for which he had hoped and was grateful.

He looked at his pocket watch; it was a quarter before the hour. He and Elizabeth had decided on a small celebration for the New Year that would include an old fashioned custom they hoped would become a Darcy family tradition. He and his wife had discussed several things for the holidays that they hoped would become treasured family traditions. The New Year tradition would start tonight, their first New Year as husband and wife. Interrupting the game he asked all the ladies to join him in the west sitting room and then returned to the library with the same invitation to the men in the family.

Maids poured elderberry wine made especially for the festivities. Near the stroke of twelve Mr. Darcy, with a smile to his wife, asked Mr. Bennet (for it must be the family patriarch) to go the front door. Looking strangely at his new son-in-law he then glanced at his daughter whose playful smile made all questions flee his mind. He was followed in his progression by the entire party. The clock in the grand entry struck the twelfth chime and Darcy asked Mr. Bennet to open the door, thereby allowing the old year out and the New Year in. In the doorway they all toasted the New Year as the bells from the village church rang in celebration.

Before stepping on to the porch to join his guests, Darcy took his wife's hand and drew her just out of sight of the others and in his own high spirits and joy kissed her, "Happy New Year, Mrs. Darcy." Without embarrassment or concern for propriety Elizabeth kissed him back. In her husband's embrace she remembered telling her sister that nothing but the deepest love could ever induce her into marriage. A radiant smile spread across her face, she had found that love and could not imagine being any happier than she was right now.

January 1st was not always the start of the New Year. Before the Julian calendar was introduced in 45BC the New Year began at the Vernal Equinox, spring, the season of rebirth and new beginnings. When the Julian calendar was established it made January 1 the start of the year in an effort to standardize the calendar however it was still based on the Roman Solar calendar. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII instituted a new calendar to rectify the inconsistencies in the Julian calendar which had caused it to be more than 10 days out of alignment with the solar year. January 1st was retained in the Gregorian calendar as the beginning of the New Year. And so it remains.

There have been, over the centuries, several customs to ring in the coming year. The cleaning of the house and clearing of debts for new beginnings have been set aside in favor of more joyous revelry. The ringing of bells and banging drums to keep evil spirits away were fairly common during the Georgian and Regency eras, particularly in the English countryside. When the bells stopped ringing and no drum was available people would often use pots and pans from the kitchen to continue the noise making.

The Darcy's first New Year would have fallen in the middle of their first Christmas celebration and may very well have included the custom of opening the front door. Traditionally it took place at midnight on January 1 and was fairly common during Jane Austen's life. With the holiday coming in the middle of the Christmas celebration special foods, games and frivolity were the order of the day but not necessarily in celebration of the New Year. Drinking and noise making are the traditions that have come down through the centuries.

*As 2013 is the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Pride and Prejudice*. I suggest celebrating by re-reading it or perhaps reading it for the first time. Meet the Bennets, the Bingleys, the Lucases and the Darcys. Roll your eyes at Caroline Bingley's jealousy and Mrs. Bennet's silliness; widen your eyes at Lydia's antics. Feel Jane's pain when Mr. Bingley leaves and Elizabeth's shock when Charlotte accepts Mr. Collins. Fall in love with Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy all over again.*

Have you ever wondered if Mr. Darcy was real? I did and my answer to the question is Yours Affectionately, Jane Austen. After visiting Longbourn, Netherfield, Rosings Park and Pemberley spend some time at Chawton Cottage and Great House with Jane Austen then hop the pond to Pemberley Farms, Virginia and meet Fitz Darcy; the embodiment of one of the most romantic characters in English literature.