

Scene 1

December 22nd, 1815, afternoon at Pemberley Estate. We find the drawing room, which has grand windows letting in the afternoon light, couches and seats. On one side is a library with bookshelves built into the wall that surround a desk. On the other side is a piano. In the center of the room is a large, bare Christmas tree.

Elizabeth Darcy admires the tree, amused by it. Fitzwilliam Darcy enters, shocked to see a tree in his house.

DARCY. Dear God, Mrs. Darcy.

LIZZY. Isn't it grand, Mr. Darcy? Imagine it with ribbons and lanterns on the boughs. Perhaps we can cut out paper stars to decorate it. Would that not be handsome?

DARCY. What is that?

LIZZY. It is a tree! And a large and lovely one too.

DARCY. I can make out that it is a tree, Mrs. Darcy. My foremost question is why the tree is *inside*.

LIZZY. Because it is a *Christmas* tree. A popular German custom. An evergreen reminds us of life even in the deep midwinter. Isn't that wonderful?

DARCY. It would be were we suddenly German.

LIZZY. I'm attempting a new tradition at Pemberley.

DARCY. Which entails cutting down perfectly healthy trees and humiliating them in the drawing room.

LIZZY. I am far from humiliating my tree. We celebrate its beauty and fortitude against the winter.

DARCY. Which I fear I shall never persuade you should happen outside.

LIZZY. No you shall not. Besides, what fun is a marriage of persuasion, when it could be a marriage of surprise?

DARCY. You manage to surprise me by the hour, Mrs. Darcy.

LIZZY. Which will keep us both young and forever intrigued. Now I know you did not seek me out to discuss foliage. What can I do for you, Mr. Darcy?

DARCY. Yes. Well. You recall the news from Rosings that my aunt, the Lady Catherine, has died.

LIZZY. (*Fibbing.*) So sad.

DARCY. Terrible. Indeed.

LIZZY. Terrible for her daughter. Poor Anne. She scarcely seemed to breathe without her mother's permission. Since I rather disrupted Lady Catherine's plan for Anne to marry you, I wonder what will become of her?

DARCY. Anne will be provided for generously—she receives ten thousand, I understand.

LIZZY. In addition to the estate?

DARCY. No, the estate is entailed to the male heir.

LIZZY. But I recall the de Bourghs being adamant that Anne would inherit, despite the usual custom.

DARCY. It appears that was more a circumstance of Lady Catherine's iron will than her husband's *actual* will. There is a cousin, a Mr. Arthur de Bourgh, whom I only know but slightly; it is he who is set to inherit.

LIZZY. And who is this gentleman of whom I've never heard, much less met?

DARCY. He is the only son of the late Sir Lewis de Bourgh's elder brother. I knew him as a boy, mostly. He's an Oxford man, a student of...everything really. I never knew him when he wasn't studying.

LIZZY. Studying what?

DARCY. Snails, when last we met. I recall the too frequent mention of them over dinner.

LIZZY. Mr. de Bourgh and his snail collection.

DARCY. *Lord* de Bourgh, I believe. He inherited the title and some land when his own father passed, and he now has a grand estate to accompany it.

LIZZY. What a Christmas it shall be for His Lordship.

DARCY. Indeed. A Christmas he shall enjoy...here.
LIZZY. Here? What do you mean, "here"?
DARCY. As he has no family to speak of and has not been to Rosings for years, I have made an offer for Lord de Bourgh to join us. Here. Tomorrow.
Thank you.
LIZZY. Mr. Darcy, today it is you who surprise me. Well, the entire family is gathering, why not add one more. I'll let you keep your lord if you grant me my beautiful tree. Are we agreed?
DARCY. Indeed we are, my dear. (*Trying to sound honest.*) And, you know, I rather...like your tree.
LIZZY. You perjure yourself. But I thank you.
A commotion from the main hall.
Oh! That must be Jane! I care not a whit about anything as long as my sister is arrived safely and enormously. Happy Christmas, Mr. Darcy.
DARCY. Happy Christmas, my darling.
They kiss just as the commotion brings in Charles and Jane Bingley. Jane is quite pregnant.
Mary Bennet trails behind them.
JANE. Lizzy, dear!
LIZZY. My Jane is here at last! Happy Christmas to you!
JANE. My darling sister. Happy Christmas!
LIZZY. Look at you! You're radiant.
JANE. I'm as large as a cottage.
LIZZY. And exactly as a cottage, you are warm, full of life, and lit from within.
JANE. I've missed you so much, darling Lizzy.
BINGLEY. Darcy, my friend. How are you?
DARCY. Quite well, Bingley, and I do hope your trip was easy.
BINGLEY. Easy enough for winter.
LIZZY. Certainly easier than it was for our dear Jane. Was it horribly uncomfortable?
JANE. Not horribly. But I am quite relieved to be on solid ground.

DARCY. Sit. Please sit.
MARY. You should elevate your legs as well. I have read that it encourages circulation and will make you vastly more comfortable.
JANE. Thank you, Mary.
LIZZY. Oh Mary, I have yet to even look at you in all the fuss over Jane. Do forgive me, sister. And welcome. Happy Christmas.
MARY. Thank you, Lizzy, though to be perfectly accurate, Christmas is still three days away. You look lovely.
DARCY. Doesn't she? Welcome Mary.
MARY. Mr. Darcy. The estate is as fine as ever.
DARCY. I hope you will all treat it as your home while you are here.
JANE. How kind, Mr. Darcy, thank you.
MARY. Yes thank you—oh! The library.
LIZZY. It took her all of two minutes to find the books. And I'm surprised it took that long.
BINGLEY. Mary was quite the help in the carriage. The bumpier the road the more she distracted us with a summary of whatever it was she had just read.
MARY. (*Taking out her copy of Lamarck, which is ever at the ready.*) Lamarck's *Zoological Philosophy*. It is a captivating survey of the natural inclination for animals to change because of their environments—
LIZZY. Which we can discuss at length later tonight, I'm sure, once everyone has had time to settle in.
MARY. Yes, but—
JANE. After dinner perhaps, Mary.
MARY. That would be suitable, but Lizzy I wonder—
LIZZY. You're always wondering, Mary, what is it now?!
MARY. Why do you have a tree growing in your drawing room?
JANE. Oh! She does, doesn't she?
BINGLEY. I thought it best not to say anything, but I did find it somewhat unusual.
JANE. Whatever is it doing here, Lizzy?