

LIZZY. As we decorate on Christmas Eve we shall include this marvelous creature. We'll put a skirt around the base, and deck it in ribbons and jewels.

MARY. Is it going to a ball?

*Darcy thinks this is funny.*

LIZZY. No. We shall gather round it and celebrate Christmas together because this is a Christmas tree.

MARY. And here I did not know trees celebrated.

LIZZY. Well Jane and I shall enjoy the beauty of this tree by ourselves. And the rest of you shall not be invited.

BINGLEY. I do hope I shall merit an invitation. I can think of nothing more perfect than sitting with two charming ladies and a fir tree.

JANE. Mr. Bingley.

LIZZY. How lovely.

MARY. It is a spruce.

BINGLEY. All the same to me!

DARCY. Come, Bingley! I have recently discovered the location of our reserve brandy.

*Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley exit together.*

LIZZY. Mary, you have a brilliant capacity to pour the chill of accuracy on every gesture of goodwill.

MARY. It's obviously not a fir tree, look at the needles. It's a dedicated and uncompromising spruce.

LIZZY. You made your point but missed your tact.

JANE. Now, Lizzy, I appreciate Mary's consummate...correctness.

MARY. Thank you. I know of no other way to approach facts.

LIZZY. Humor, Mary. Levity. Facts are part of life, but life is seasoned with joy and courtesy. And in this regard you have always lived under-spiced.

MARY. I am not "under-spiced."

LIZZY. Salt doesn't count. Now was I mistaken in my impression that Lydia was to travel with you?

JANE. She did not.

MARY. Thank goodness.

JANE. But she'll arrive from Bath on her own tomorrow.

LIZZY. And where will Mr. Wickham be celebrating the holiday? I regret it for Lydia's sake, but Mr. Darcy remains resolute that man will never cross the threshold here at Pemberley after his past behavior, despite the fact that he is now family.

JANE. Mr. Wickham is staying in Bath for the holidays.

MARY. And let us all hope that Lydia leaves her ceaseless whining with her conspicuously absent husband.

JANE. *Mary.*

MARY. Is it not true? Every single letter from her is flooded with such obvious prattle; it could only be hiding the fact that Wickham is her husband in title only and not in heart.

JANE. Mary, that's enough. We're all of us nothing but horrible gossips.

MARY. You do not want facts *or* gossip. I am at a loss.

LIZZY. Besides, what do you know of heart, Mary? Have your books on botany illuminated the romantic schemes of plants?

MARY. I would rather marry an interesting plant than an idiot man.

JANE. Now, now.

MARY. Not that anyone expects me to marry anyway. An unmarried old maid is the popular presumption, is it not?

LIZZY. Only because you do not want to marry.

MARY. Because I long for a life other than merely being someone's wife and helpmate.

JANE. That is not my experience of marriage.

MARY. You and Lizzy are mistresses of grand estates with husbands of wit and charm. You make marriage and men look easy. I shall never find a husband who understands me, certainly not at Longbourn.

LIZZY. Careful, Mary. Such thoughts may betray you one day.

JANE. I think we can find something more pleasant to discuss than this, don't you agree? Mother and Father will arrive on Christmas Day with Kitty and we shall be a complete set.

LIZZY. A complete set, plus one! Oh Jane, I'm so excited for you. Now tell me everything. How are you feeling? And how is Mr. Bingley readying himself?

JANE. On Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, Mr. Bingley is thrilled with the certainty that it will be a boy. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, he is convinced it is a little girl and couldn't be happier. He can't decide which will bring us more joy, so on Sunday he wishes for twins so he can be doubly happy. It is sweet to watch and nearly makes up for how awfully uncomfortable I am. But you'll know yourself soon enough, dear Lizzy. At least I hope you will.

LIZZY. There is time. Mr. Darcy is somewhat impatient for a family; he is quite enthusiastic in the pursuit. It is amusing, exhausting, and lovely all at the same time. He is just arrogant enough to think he can exercise some kind of control over the process.

MARY. Would you like me to instruct him on the mechanics?

LIZZY. Mary! Absolutely not! Not unless you'd like to embarrass him thoroughly.

MARY. Wouldn't that be fun?

JANE. Some knowledge is better left within the pages of books, Mary.

LIZZY. Yes, let us *please* turn our thoughts toward being here, *together* again, and what better state is there in the world.

MARY. I have not yet had the privilege of experiencing many other states, so I will refrain from comment.

JANE. Mary, you've been out of sorts the whole journey. If you're not picking on Lydia you're making cryptic comments such as that. What on earth is the matter?

LIZZY. Indeed. I thought you were happy at Longbourn with your books and your pianoforte and your...self.

MARY. For a time I was. I relished the unrestricted access to Father's library and not being scolded for practicing the piano whenever I liked. But I lately struggle to find solace in either piano or books. It's a curious discontent. I cannot place its origin and therefore I cannot solve it.

LIZZY. I don't understand.

MARY. I know I am meant to be the dutiful middle sister, and

everyone expects that I shall care for Mother and Father until they die and Mr. Collins takes possession of Longbourn and I end up in someone's attic.

LIZZY. It's not as bleak as that, is it Mary?

MARY. Isn't it? It is not a life *you* would have chosen. Either of you.

JANE. Well, no, but...

MARY. I never chose this life either. I don't recall ever being asked.

JANE. Asked what exactly?

MARY. If I longed for something of my own.

JANE. But you have us. We love you.

LIZZY. Yes and Mother and Father, who need you. And...your music and...

JANE. You could always be a governess—

MARY. And teach young sticky things about the glories of a world I'll never see.

LIZZY. I think you're being unnecessarily dour, Mary. We all must make the most of the situation we are in; one cannot know what the future will bring.

MARY. Yes. (*Sighing.*) That would break a rather fundamental law of the universe.

LIZZY. Now, come, Jane dear, you must be exhausted. Shall we find your room and rest for the afternoon?

JANE. I would like that very much. I am suddenly so tired from the trip. Mary. I am very glad you're here with us.

LIZZY. As am I.

MARY. Thank you—

LIZZY. (*To Jane as they exit.*) Oh, Jane, I nearly forgot to tell you! Mr. Darcy is receiving a *lord* to the house for Christmas.

*Lizzy and Jane exit leaving Mary who goes to the piano and starts to play whatever is on the piano as sheet music. Of course it's a love song. She starts to pick out Cooke's "Nobody Coming to Marry Me"...*

MARY.

"Oh, dear what will become of me