

*DARCY'S TEMPTATION  
(AKA DARCY'S DREAMS)*

Chapter 7

“Silly things do cease to be silly if they are done by sensible people in an impudent way.”  
**Jane Austen, *Emma*, 1815**

The morning Darcy left for Hull, Elizabeth grieved before his carriage even departed Pemberley's grounds. Against propriety, she embraced him in the courtyard while Darcy waited for his luggage to be secured. Darcy clutched her to him, and Elizabeth rested her head on his chest. He stroked her hair and whispered endearments as he supervised the proceedings.

“Elizabeth,” he encouraged her to withdraw, “I must leave, my Love.”

Elizabeth knew her very public display of affection would be the talk of the servant quarters this evening, but feeling bereft of Darcy's warmth before he even left the grounds, she cared not. “Fitzwilliam, please do not go,” she pleaded.

“There is nothing of which to worry,” Darcy cautioned her. “I will stay with Lord and Lady Pennington in Nottingham this evening. Perhaps they may tell me more about Captain Rutherford than we already know. I will travel to Hull tomorrow. I swear to be home within the week,” he reassured her.

“But Fitzwilliam,” she began, “do you not feel it too? Surely if I feel it, you do also. Something is amiss.” Elizabeth's words held her fears.

Darcy reached out and caressed her cheek and then lightly kissed Elizabeth's lips. “It pleases me you will so miss me, my dearest Elizabeth.”

“How may I survive without you? It is not fair; you make me depend so dearly upon you, and then you leave me, Sir.” Elizabeth nearly pouted.

“I shall think of you every moment, my Love. I cannot imagine my life without you as my wife. I shall hurry back to once again be in your arms.” Darcy lifted her chin and lightly brushed Elizabeth's lips with his. Then he quickly got in the carriage, rapped on the roof with his walking cane, and left.

Yet, he could not leave without looking back at Elizabeth, standing in the circular carriageway, tears streaming down her face. Darcy ached at having to leave her. He spent nearly a year earning Elizabeth's love and leaving her side, even for a few days, seemed an incomprehensible act.

Elizabeth watched the retreating coach. The distance between them increased by the second until only silence remained. Reluctantly, she turned towards Pemberley, finally entering the foyer. “He is gone,” she said to Georgiana when they met in the drawing room.

“Fitzwilliam will return soon. He loves you, Elizabeth. My brother will not tarry in Hull.” Georgiana smiled at seeing Elizabeth so distraught.

“I know I am being foolish, Georgiana, but I feel I may never see Fitzwilliam again.” Elizabeth sat down in Darcy's favorite chair, touching the arms of it as the emptiness overtook her heart. “Please be safe, Fitzwilliam,” she whispered.

Darcy spent the night at Lord and Lady Pennington's estate. "We are pleased you are back so soon, Fitzwilliam." Lady Pennington told him over dinner. "Why do you travel to Hull tomorrow?"

"I have important business."

"What kind of business could take you from your bride so soon?" His Lordship asked in an amused manner.

"May I be discreet?"

"Of course," Lord Pennington added quickly and then dismissed the servants in the room.

Darcy waited patiently until only they remained. "I travel to Hull because it has come to my attention your former guest Captain Rutherford has on more than one occasion questioned my sister regarding our family's interest in Mr. Harrison. Harrison believes the captain to be a dangerous individual."

Lady Pennington gasped, "This cannot be, Fitzwilliam!"

"I hope you are correct, Lady Margaret. Yet, I must find out what others know of the captain. If he simply opposes Mr. Harrison's views, I want to know. If the captain has more aggressive ideas, I must be aware of those also."

"How is Mr. Harrison a factor in Georgiana's future?" Lady Margaret asked.

"Harrison spent nearly a month at Pemberley learning how to run Hines Park. He expressed an interest in Georgiana, but Mrs. Darcy insisted the man wait until after Georgiana's next birthday to openly express his intentions. Elizabeth feared we knew too little of him."

"Your wife is very astute," Lord Pennington remarked, and Darcy nodded in agreement.

Darcy returned to his retelling. "Mr. Harrison has very strong beliefs about the slave trade. He sold off his father's holdings in the Americas because of his beliefs. Although I am not so politically inclined, I admire Mr. Harrison for his fortitude and his integrity. Yet, I do not wish to place my sister in danger."

"Then you believe Georgiana returns Mr. Harrison's interest?" Lady Pennington inquired.

"Elizabeth believes as such, and she has Georgiana's confidences. They have become quite close."

"Then we too will make ourselves more aware of Captain Rutherford's associates," Lord Pennington stated.

Darcy asked, "Then you know little of him?"

"An acquaintance from Leeds recommended the captain, with the understanding he was also familiar to Edward," Lady Margaret shared. "We know his father, although not well. He has a reputation for being quite ruthless; we were pleasantly surprised to find the son to be so amiable."

"The apple does not fall far from the tree," Darcy said with a degree of irony. "Could the captain's appearance be a façade?"

"Anything is possible," Lord Pennington answered.

"May I ask your Lordship if you think of anything of which I should be aware, you will send word to me at Pemberley?"

"Then you will not return here after you leave Hull?" Lady Margaret asked.

“Under the circumstances, I believe it best to go to Leeds to ascertain what I can of the captain and his father the Earl.” Darcy mused.

“You are correct, my boy,” Lord Pennington agreed thoroughly.

The evening finished with the three of them sharing every conversation they had with Captain Rutherford. Darcy departed early the next morning for Hull, concerned more than ever with his sister’s safety and the mystery surrounding the “amiable” Captain Rutherford.

North of Hemswell, Darcy’s coach came to an abrupt halt along an isolated stretch of road. At first, Darcy knew not what happened, but as he opened the coach door, a long gun greeted him, and he immediately knew the precarious position in which he found himself. His coachman and a postilion stood with their hands raised as three armed men moved them gingerly away from the coach.

“There be no killin’ if ye do what we say,” one of the men called out. Another of the men began to rummage for valuables and weapons found upon the coach, tossing trunks along side of the road.

“Take what you want, but leave my men alone,” Darcy ordered the man holding the gun on them.

“Ye stand back,” the man ordered and leveled a gun at Darcy’s face.

Darcy stepped back, allowing the man access to the coach. The belongings could be replaced; a man’s life could not. Once the robbers took what they wanted from the coach, they motioned for Darcy to move off towards the woods.

Darcy demanded, “You have what you want; leave us alone.”

“We think ye oughter be askin’ for mercy,” the man laughed.

Darcy saw the robbery might not be the whole purpose of this detainment. He edged back; in the past he might take a chance, but with Elizabeth and the baby in his life, Darcy took a more cautious approach. “What else do you need from me?” he asked softly.

“Ye be askin’ too many questions,” the man asserted.

“Questions about what?” Darcy began to look around, trying to determine what should be his next course of action.

The third man warned, “Aye’m not done w’ye.”

Darcy saw the coachman take a step to the side; he tried to warn the man with a nod of his head, but it was too late. The coachman lunged at the shortest of the attackers, and the melee began. The postilion died instantly, a bullet to his head. Darcy saw it out of the corner of his eye, but he struggled with two of the men. The blows came hard and fast; Darcy fought valiantly, but the men’s combined strength proved too much for him.

As if in slow motion, Darcy felt the robber’s fist strike him under the chin. His jaw jammed shut, and the blood spurted from Darcy’s mouth as he bit his own tongue. The blow spun his head around, forcing Darcy to turn awkwardly in place; losing his balance, he found himself falling backwards. When his head hit the rock, the pain immediately came, and the blood gushed from the gash. He tried desperately to raise his body from where it lay, but try as he may, all Darcy could do was to roll to his side.

He saw the men shoot the coachman and climb onto their horses to retreat, but he could make no sense of what else happened. A fourth well dressed man bent over him.

“You will not need these items, Sir.” The man hissed as he took Darcy’s walking stick and diamond stickpin. “Nor this,” the man ripped the ring bearing the family crest from Darcy’s finger.

“No,” Darcy moaned loudly, trying to resist the man’s thievery.

Then the filcher strode to the horse awaiting him. Mounting, the man looked back at Darcy lying on the ground and tipped his hat to him. The man’s blonde, tight curls glistening in the late afternoon was all Darcy could decipher; riding tall in the saddle, the man took the lead. The rest became a haze, and Darcy lay without moving. “Elizabeth,” he whispered as his eyes closed – “my dearest, Elizabeth.”