

## **Christmas tide With Jane Austen's Literary Families – A Mash-up**

### **Scene I – Boodles Gentlemen's Club London**

**Fitzwilliam D'arcy and Charles Bingley, both having business concerns in London travelled there in November so the year's business could be concluded and they could return to their estates in the counties to enjoy Christmastide with their families. They spent their evenings at Boodle's Gentlemen's Club where they would enjoy extremely fine dining. Boodles was founded in 1762 and oddly was named after the first head waiter – Edward Boodles. Boodles still exists today at 28 St. James Street in London.**

**After dining they would relax in one of the many libraries, studies or bar areas for their after dinner brandy or whisky while they enjoyed conversation earnestly trying to ignore the smell and smoke emanating from the churchwarden pipes being puffed on by other members. "Pipes", D'arcy had pronounced to his wife Elizabeth one evening, "are for old men and posseurs!"**

**On this particular evening they were conversing about the grand, and much looked forward to Christmastide celebrations their wives were planning. 'Twas to be held at Pemberly since Elizabeth was expecting to give birth to the Darcy's 3rd child in the New Year**

and she would not be up to travelling. Although their mutual father-in-law had come with them on this trip, he was to spend that evening enjoying dinner with his brother and sister-in-law the Gardners and so did not join them at Boodles.

So much had happened since the D'arcys and the Bingleys had become married couples and started their families. The new baby would be the D'arcys' third. Their first, Bennet Fitzwilliam D'arcy (called 'Benny' by the family) was 5. Their second, Jane-Anne (named after Elizabeth's sister and D'arcy's mother) was 3.

The Bingleys, on the other hand had produced 6 offspring in the 6 years since their marriage. Poor Jane!! They were all girls Eliza (Liza), Edwina (Winnie), Emily (Em), Eudora (Dora) , Elsbeth (Beth) and Clara (they just ran out of 'E' names they liked). Mrs. Bennet was already organizing their society in search of prospective and prosperous marriages for her granddaughters.

On this evening D'arcy and Bingley had encountered Mr. Knightly as they entered the club, the latter being in town to attend the auctions at the Tattersall Horse Repository properties. The Repository was where sporting hounds and horses were kennelled and bred. Knightly was in need of some new hunting dogs.

**Mr. Knightly had, at the Repository sat with Colonel Brandon, Sir Thomas Bertram and his son Tom who were in town persuing the same interest. They agreed to meet for the evening at Boodles . The group had also chatted there with Captain Frederick Wentworth and had invited him to dine. Unfortunately he had personal business to attend to on behalf of his brother-in-law Admiral Croft and hurried back after the auction to Bath where the Admiral and his wife were taking the waters.**

**Brandon and the Bertrams were already there. All 6 decided to sit and dine together since all were deeply involved in country matters as landowners and leaders in their communities. After dinner Tom had proposed they adjourn to the games room for a game of 'sixes'.**

**"Sixes" is a game of billiards whereby there are two teams of three players. Player 1 competes with Player 1 on the opposing team, then Player 2 against Player 2 and so on. The accumulated score deteremines the winner. (This is a totally fictional game).**

**Just as they were about to order Bingley said looking at Sir Thomas, "I say! Is that not your second son Edmund I see speaking with the 'major domo'? He seems to be gesturing our way."**

**"It is indeed Edmund!", said Sir Thomas. "He is in the city attending a reading today of excerpts from a novel by an unattributed author. The novel is called Pride and Prejudice and claims to be authored by that unprincipled scalliwag who wrote a salacious and clearly false story about you, Colonel Brandon. Sense and Sensibility I believe it is called. Rumour has it that this new novel contains veiled satirization about Fordyce's Sermons! Can you believe it? Young Edmund has always held more modern views about a female's place and duties in society. I'll warrant he has been seduced in this regard by the ebullient and often shocking attitudes of and pronouncements by Fanny Price my dear wife's niece. I dare say these leanings will be reinforced by today's reading.**

**Turning to Edmund who has now reached their table, "Come sit dear boy, come sit. We were just discussing whether we should wile away an hour or two in the games room. Is your disposition such that we could tempt you into a few bets at the tables?**

**D'arcy has been hoping they would not be able to play 'sixes' because the game can often become rowdy and unbecoming of gentlemen whose standing, wealth and reputations can be crippled should word get out of such behaviour. Gentlemen's clubs were rife with gossip and D'arcy was well aware of Tom**

Bertram's earlier penchant for drunkenness and womanizing. As well, any game that involved betting could promote similar rowdiness. So now he faced what seemed like an inevitability. He had to think apace.

"Instead of attempting a game of 'sixes' at which I am deplorably inadequate or betting on card games at which I am equally inept, perhaps you gentlemen may help me out with a situation I expect I must manage come Christmastide. Shall we order dinner and some wine while we chat, and hopefully you will help me sort through my approaching quandry."

All were intrigued and agreed.

D'arcy began. "I am happy to share with you that my wonderful wife Elizabeth is indisposed as she is giving birth to our third child near Candlemas (February 2<sup>nd</sup>). She is thus unable to travel and although is quite content and able to keep to her normal routines believes it is unwise for her to attend our usual round of Christmastide celebrations outside our estate. We have thus invited the Bingleys and their six girls to join us for the season along with, Kitty, Mary, Mr. and *of course* (with a heavy sigh) Mrs. Bennett. "

Colonel Brandon commented, "My goodness D'arcy, you will be overwhelmed by the women! The four Bennett sisters and (with a smile of understanding) of course Mrs. Bennet. What are you, Charles, Mr. Bennet and little Benny to do with such a flock around you?"

"My challenge explained 'in one'", said D'arcy with the broadest of smiles and a clap of his hands! "Right! You shall all come and join us for the season!"

The other gentlemen sat back in their chairs slightly non-plussed. Charles was the first to respond. 'Well done, D'arcy! I've had it in my mind that we shall be in need of additional male companionship elst we end up leaving Benny to fend for himself in the nursery thence retreating to the pub in Lambton from each mid-day until the pub closes. What a jolly invitation! What say you, men?"

There was some hesitation before Mr. Knightly with a worried expression said, "I'm sure Emma and I would much enjoy a stay at Pemberly but by tradition at Donwell Abby we entertain the estate staff and tenant farmers and many gentlefolk from Highbury on Christmastide Eve. It is an event much enjoyed by us all and most particularly by my Emma and my father-in-law. The timing of our attendance at your festivities makes this a bit of a muddle."

**“What say you, Brandon?” said Bingley. “I dare say your family would find it all merriment to spend a fortnight with all of us at Pemberly eh, what?”**

**Colonel Brandon whose character was rather reserved and whose family had not yet recovered from the notoriety caused by the aforementioned novel that he felt had treated his sweet love Marianne so ill, had eyes downcast in thought. The book had made a mockery of her deeply romantic nature and her youthful naitvité in being swept away by a blaggard so insensitive and diabolical as John Willoughby. She had still not fully recovered from the phlegmy rheum she had contracted as a result of her former devotion to that damnable scoundrel.**

**“To be sure it is a very thoughtful and generous invitation.”**

**Colonel Brandon paused. “It is a gracious consideration indeed. But I must balance my personal wishes to spend this time amongst you with my responsibility, nay my commitment to cosseting my Marianne and by doing so bring peace, stability and serenity to my new in-laws the pleasures of which have been heretofore in question for that family for these many years.”**

**For his account Sir Thomas Bertram was all enthusiasm for the project. “For my family the timing couldn’t be better. Tom here has undertaken some major and much needed renovations and**

repairs of Mansfield Park meanwhilst the noise and confusion have near on driven Lady Bertram's Pug to the edge. The whimpering, barking and cowering have led Lady Bertram to double up on her doses of nerve medication." "Indeed Papaa", joined in Tom and Edmund. Tom added, "We should all require either a dose of Mamaa's nerve medication or, as a better choice a Christmastide journey to Pemberly."

D'arcy was not about to give up on Mr. Knightly. "Mayhaps, George you would be able to join our party after you have fulfilled your family duties thence travelling to Pemberly mid-week to be in time for Twelfth Night festivities!" (January 5<sup>th</sup>).

"I shan't make any firm promise for I must speak first with Emma, but I can see no real impediment to this plan," rejoined Mr. Knightly.

On that happy note Sir Thomas said, "Well, that's settled. Now, may I offer you one of my prized West Indies cigars? I have just started importing them from my new tobacco plantation. I have given up on cotton at the urging of young Tom here and I expect we will do very well since although it is new to the market here it is much enjoyed by the upper classes in other European countries that have land interest in the colonies.



## Scene 2

The drawing room in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bennett. Mr. Bennett has just advised his wife of the proposed plans for Christmastide and she is beside herself with excitement. Kitty is giggling but Mary is somewhat dour. Mr. Bennett says, "Come now Mary. You seem not to be charmed by the thought of sharing such a cheerful time with your family and especially your little nieces and your nephew. I thought you would be over the moon."

"Oh bother!" said Mrs. Bennett with an impatient sneer aimed at Mary. She is just pouting over the possibility that she will not see enough of young Mister Donleigh. A comely man indeed but what is *he* to *you*? Why would *he* want to spend time with *you* during Christmastide? Don't be so selfish Mary! You shall ruin Christmastide for all of us! So like you."

It was not known widely that Mary had finally realized that her musical talent lay not in playing the piano and singing but in creating arrangements for organ and choir. After the marriage of her two sisters her mother had allowed and her father had approved that she could take further musical studies with mentoring from the Organist and Master of the Choristers at their local church – Mr. Frederick Donleigh. Mary had blossomed with the innovation she created in her musical arrangements and the

approval she sought and received from Donleigh. Their musical partnership in turn provided much local renown for the choir, the Master of the Choristers and for Mary herself.

“Here’s a thought”. Then Mr. Bennett smilingly recounted Mr. Knightly’s plan about joining the group at Pemberly *after* Christmastide Eve.

“I dare say D’arcy would be glad to send a post coach to fetch Mary when her responsibilities to the choir and to Mr. Donleigh have been fulfilled.”

Mrs. Bennett was all smiles again. “There you go, Mary! You can have your time to set your cap for Mr. Donleigh, thence join us at Pemberly. “

Kitty chimed in. “But, Mamaa, is it safe for Mary to travel on her own?”

“Pish tosh! Mr. D’arcy will no doubt send his best coachmen and team to fetch Mary and she is not much in danger of personal harm since she is not nearly as comely as you and my other girls.”

Trying to soften the insulting turn Mrs. Bennett’s comments to Mary had taken Mr. Bennett smiled widely and said, “So it is settled then, is it Mary?”

Mary had long since ignored her mother's dismissal of her and since Lizzie and Jane married and Lydia had disappeared in disgrace, Mr. Bennett had spent more time in his gentle way, helping his remaining two daughters develop more self-confidence and independence. They had learned to ignore their mother's inconsiderate characterizations of their perceived faults.

Mrs. Bennett moved swiftly on by announcing that new dresses must be made for the girls and herself. "We must pay close attention to the latest fabrics and fashions for I heard Mrs. Olsen say that Mr. Henry Tilney is very knowledgeable in fabrics – particularly muslin."

"There, there. Not to worry, Mrs. Bennet. Mr. Henry Tilney will not be joining our group as he and his new wife are on a bridal tour in France. You need not worry about muslin. That should put your mind at peace." Mr. Bennett rolled his eyes and the girls giggled at their father.

"Well and good" harumphed Mrs. Bennet. "It's just as well the Tilneys will not be present for the festivities. That General Tilney is sour and unhandsome of demeanour. But all the same I shall miss Mr. Henry Tilney's opinions of our new costumes."

## **Scene Three**

### **Mansfield Park**

**When told of the proposed visit to Pemberly Lady Bertram had at first raised concern. "But my dear, I cannot be away from my dear Pug for such a long period of time. And think of the bother it will cause for the servants and how very tiring such a long trip shall be. I may have to take to my bed for days after our arrival to have energy enough for socializing."**

**Lord Bertram said, "Well, well Lady Bertram I think you will be softened in your hesitance to learn that your attachment to dear Pug is well known amongst society and Mr. D'Arcy has already anticipated that you will wish to have the pup with you. There will be a special bed for Pug in your chambers as well as in all the social rooms."**

**"Yes, maaaa" chimed in Tom. "And we are all aware that you, of all of us have extra need for rest. So having you lying two days abed after our arrival at Pemberly will not cause all parties any undue hardship. We will hardly notice your absence at all." Lord Bertram gave Tom a firm stare and Edmund merely smirked at his brother while Fanny looked at Edmund with eyes agoggle."**

**Lady Bertram was impervious to the good natured sarcasm of her son. "Well, my dears. I suppose as long as I am with my dear husband and have my family to look after me, I shall endure the inconvenience."**

## **Scene Four**

### **Donwell Abby**

**The Knightlys had moved in with Mr. Woodhouse after their marriage to assuage the old man's fears of – well – pretty much everything in general. His flights of imagined disaster about anything that disturbed the normal routine of life had pretty much limited their connection with society outside of their county and it was starting to negatively impact the normally buoyant Emma.**

**Accordingly George believed the opportunity to escape for a fortnight for a few days of freedom would give his beloved Emma a fresh opportunity to gossip and meddle which were her favourite things to do (although she was not as high-handed as she had been prior to her marriage having taken to heart George's rebuke of her previous thoughtless comments about Miss Bates).**

**Presently, George and Emma Knightly are gathered with Mr. Woodhouse in the library of Hartfield. The Knightlys have just announced their plans to spend a fortnight at Pemberly over the Christmastide season. As was his way, Mr. Woodhouse imagined**

all the possible horrors that could take place if such an undertaking is pursued.

**“You must not do this thing, Emma. Surely *you* see, Mr. Knightly what an incautious undertaking this is! Whilst you are away thieves could break into Hartfield, take all of our precious paintings, steal our horses, frighten the staff into a craze and then who shall take care of me? No, Emma! You must not do this thing!”**

**George Knightly knew from experience that Emma was best positioned to calm her father’s fears. He leaned against the piano forte while Emma took a deep breath and forged forth. “Papaa! You know we would never leave you unless we had measures in place to keep you well protected. And besides, you know you would greatly dislike travelling at this time of year. You remind me of this every time we join the Westons for a Christmastide meal.” Mr. Knightly grins to himself, “Indeed, as well as when we travel to services on Sunday, or to visit Isabella and her family, or to sit for an evening in any room that is not this library.”**

**“Mr. Knightly has organized everything for your comfort and protection. Mr. and Mrs. Weston have agreed to stay with you whilst we are away. You remember Mrs. Weston? She was my governess Anne Taylor before she married. You so fretted about**

her leaving our household and now, here she is coming back for a while as your companion and friend.”

“And you so love little Harriet and her husband Robert Marten. They will be coming to visit you each afternoon and have promised to bring with them Miss Bates a few afternoons a week. Laaa, you will have enough company to round up a few tables of cards should you feel up to it. So what do you think of that, Papaa? ”

Before Mr. Woodhouse had a chance to think up another whinge Mr. Knightly said, “Right then! It’s settled. All is well and Mr. Woodhouse you will not even notice Emma’s and my absence you will have so much pampering and entertainment.”

By then Mr. Woodhouse had nodded off.



## **Scene Five**

### **Pemberly**

**The mansion was abussle with activity. Coaches were arriving at the port corchére. Mrs. Reynolds, the D'arcy's housekeeper had everything under control.**

**Trunks and bags were being brought in and taken to the guest's suites. Additional porters, maids and wait staff had been hired by Mr. D'arcy and the guest families were invited to bring their personal valets and maids. The Bertams' entourage had come ahead and were already in place in the Bertrams' assigned wing of the mansion to unpack the trunks.**

**The Bingleys were currently in residence as were the Bennets (temporarily minus Mary). All were in the entrance hall to greet the Bertrams.**

**The D'arcy and Bingley children were darting around their grandparents and the new guests in a vigorous game of tag chased by Nanny Poppy and Nanny Pheephee (feefee) who were doing their best to herd the children away from the group so as to prevent a collision.**

**Much to their mother's dislike, both Elizabeth and Jane were raising their children to have a strong sense of curiosity and to**

celebrate the joys of life. Although they spent several hours in the nursery with their nannies, all of the children looked forward to daily romps in the fields, riding their ponies and picnicing. Elizabeth was the ringleader in the D'Arcy household while Jane, being of a more subdued nature and clearly worn out from 6 rather quick pregnancies let her husband Charles share with their brood his ready enthusiasm for life.

Mrs. Bennet was often heard to whinge, "They have no care for my poor nerves!" This followed by her betraying a begrudging smile as Benny reassured her saying such things as, "Grandmama. We love you very much and we have great care for your nerves." (a slight pause, and then) "Grandmama, what *are* nerves?"

Lord Bertram wrapped his arm around Lady Bertram to guide her safely through the commotion created by this group of happy hooligans with Pug surprisingly non-plussed by the scuffle, safely tucked in the crook of her arm. She had an almost otherworldly look of serenity on her face. (Perhaps she'd had three doses of her 'medication'). In all everyone was in a good humour.

Once the clamour had settled a bit D'Arcy, his mastiff Barron sitting stoically by his side as two of the children patted and hugged the pet said, "Well, then. I recommend our new guests retire to their quarters to get settled and then we can gather in

the drawing room to nuncheon on some of cook's best offerings of meats, fruits, breads and especially her famous sponge with lemon sauce."

This was met with great enthusiasm by all save Lady Bertram who gazed (or perhaps better put - glazed) and smiled up at Lord Bertram not offering a yea or a nae.

"After we eat I recommend the ladies rest for the afternoon whilst the men gather with me for a ride over the acreage of the estate. I believe I have steeds enough for all of us. What say you?"

"What about us, Papa?" chimed in Benny. Poppy and Pheephee began herding the children promising them "Come children. You must have something to eat in the nursery and after you have a nap we will start preparing something special to share with everybody some evening during the week after all guests are arrived and settled."

"What is the 'something special' Nanny Poppy? asked Edwina.

"It's so special it's a secret, Winnie. One which all you children shall learn after you've had your naps and which you shall promise to keep secret until the event."

**“Nanny, must we keep it secret from maaaa and papaa?” piped in Jane-Anne as she looked questioningly at her mother who nodded in approval.**

**“Yes Jane-Anne. It must be kept secret even from your maaaa and papaa. Now mind you don’t trip as we go up to the nursery.”**

**The children giggled and whispered as the nannies ushered them up the stairs. Barron galloped ahead then watched from above as the children clambered behind with the nannies helping the little ones keep up.**

## **Scene 6**

**Pemberly: Three days before Christmastide. All the guests have arrived, were settled in their suites and had enjoyed many merry times. Whilst D'arcy, Bingley, and the Bertram gentlemen had been riding the estate on the first day of their arrival they had noticed one of the many ponds had frozen over enough for skating.**

**Mr. Bennet had not joined them on this ride as Mrs. Bennett was worrying herself about one thing or another. Elizabeth was being too active. The children were running amok. Her personal maid hadn't packed the right gowns. Her reputation would be in tatters if Lady Bertram saw her in such poor array. And what if D'arcy should provide Mr. Bennet with too spirited a horse and he should fall and break his leg so that he should not be able to escort her to the ball they were to have at Pemberly? No! it was too much for her poor nerves. He must stay away from the horses and retire to the library so she could direct her worries into advising D'arcy's housekeeper Mrs. Reynolds about her own particular needs whilst she was staying at Pemberly.**

**Mr. Bennett tried to calm his wife. "There, there my dear. Perhaps you require some of Lady Bertram's medication to calm yourself. I shall ask Lord Bertram for some if you so desire." This met with a**

violent shaking of her head as Mrs. Bennett cried out, "By no means shall we allow such grand people to think that we are not in complete calm and satisfied in all circumstances. Do not speak to Lord Bertram about such! All will be well if you just stay away from those horses." And Mr. Bennet did what Mr. Bennet always did. He retired to the library.

## **Scene 7**

**By now the entire group had gathered at Pemberly including the Gardners. Mr. D'arcy would forever be grateful to the pair for it was they who, whilst travelling with Elizabeth on a tour of the Derbyshire area had visited Pemberly thinking he was not t'home. 'Twas during that fateful trip that Elizabeth had softened her heart towards D'arcy and although there were many Bennet family dramas to follow D'arcy had as a result of the unexpected meeting, been able to pursue his suit of his dearest Elizabeth. The Gardners were from that time welcomed at Pemberly as honoured guests.**

**The merry group and their guests had spent many an hour sledging out to the pond and rather hilariously trying their best as they skated, not to fall. Not all the gentlemen and ladies participated for Lord Bertram considered himself too dignified for such a wild romp. Lady Bertram, as was her habit still lay abed in the morning hours.**

**Jane too tried to participate but found herself more satisfied in helping the nannies who, though ever watchful found themselves constantly picking up one or the other of the children who had fallen and soothing those who, although unhurt took advantage of the opportunity for a cuddle from Jane or one of the nannies.**

D'arcy himself was content to sit with Elizabeth in the sledge keeping her warm and rosy cheeked under a mountain of blankets, cradled protectively in his arms. But Tom, Edmund, Charles, Kitty, Fanny and Emma would race around the frozen surface often scooping up snow, fashioning it into a ball and aiming at one of the other skaters.

Edmund had the truest aim and his target was mostly Fanny who was good humoured about the attack even when she received one so deadly it pushed her bonnet ascew. Edmund was all sorrow and concern. Fanny took great advantage of his chagrin by pouting but could hold her scowl for only a short space of time until she betrayed herself by laughing out loud.

On days when the gentlemen save for Mr. Bennet, were on a hunt some of the ladies would tour the gardens surrounding Pemberly and gather evergreen branches to decorate the mantles and stair rails of the great home.

Somewhat suspiciously, once Mary had arrived she, Fanny and Emma seemed to be absent from afternoon activities for several hours at a time. Elizabeth once remarked, "Mary, Fanny and Emma seem to be spending an unusual amount of time in the nursery with the children and the nannies. It is most curious for I thought Mary not to be comfortable in the company of children.



Perhaps her Mr. Donleigh has put thoughts of family in her head. Would not that be a happy turn of events?" she smiled cheekily at her mother. Mrs. Bennet's eyebrows rose aiming a horrified look at her daughter. Mrs. Bennett had hopes of her unmarried girls matching up with gentlemen as high in society as had Lizzie and Jane. Lizzie gave her mother a sly smile but did not pursue the notion further.

Once the children were abed the group would gather in the larger of the two parlours and play games such as Brag, Piquet, Charades, Blind Man's Bluff and after one fine dinner they even played a game of Bullet Pudding. Most usually Lord Bertram was content to watch the proceedings whilst smoking one of his Indies' cigars whilst Lady Bertram elegantly draped on a chaise longue looked on indolently sipping a well fortified toddy with Pug snoring at her feet.

Elizabeth often tired earlier than the others and of course was unable to participate in the more raucous games. Ever watchful of his expectant wife D'arcy would then pardon them from the group, escort Elizabeth to their chambers thence returning to join their guests until all were yawning and glad to find their way to bed so they would be ready for the next day's adventures.

## Scene 8

It was January 4th. The next day they were to have a grand ball. All the guests had been in residence for enough time to form lasting bonds (or at least civil bonds in the case of Mrs. Bennet and Lady Bertram). Previously the ladies had not had as many chances to meet since the families' connections were primarily those of the gentlemen who often met one another at business or sporting events as they had those months ago at Boodles. By now the younger women had become great friends and were even planning on future visits with one another particularly when spring came and travel was less strenuous.

Several evenings prior when they had sat for dinner they had discovered on each of their plates a letter-sized piece of paper that invited them, in what was clearly childish scrawl to attend a 'secret' play in the great hall at four o'clock on January 4th. "Well then", bubbled Mrs. Bennet (completely ignoring the flagrant clue offered up by the style of printing on the invitation), "How exciting this may be! Have you, Mr. D'arcy hired some players and musicians to entertain us all?"

"T'is a mystery to me as t'is to you dear lady." Everyone save Lady Bertram who as always remained serene and and pleasantly detached gave each other knowing looks. "Nevertheless this

invitation is as intriguing as anything I have heretofore encountered here at Pemberly. We must surely all attend at the great hall on the invited date to unravel the mystery” he replied in a very serious and dramatic way.

The entirety of the household knew all about the ‘secret’ in spite of the children’s earnest promise not to let the cat out of the bag. In fact it didn’t take long for the adults to sort out why various items of their clothing and personal effects were absent from their dressing rooms. Emma, Fanny and Mary had conspired with the nannies to send the older children on surreptitious missions to borrow hats, ties and other items identifiable as belonging to their parents to be used as costumes for a performance featuring a scene depicting a family engaged in a shopping adventure in town. It was to be titled, as was the children’s design “A Family Adventure to Lambton.” Mary had created a piano forte fanfare for the beginning and end of the production and as well had coached the children in singing a traditional song of the season, “The Holly and the Ivy”. With the exception of Benny and Liza who were the oldest among them, these words usually came out of the children’s mouths as “The Howwy and the Iwie.”

## Scene 9

The afternoon of the event came. D'arcy found Elizabeth in the sitting room and questioned, "Darling, have you seen Barron and Pug?" I have been searching for both of them for the past hour and can find nothing of them in the house nor in the stables. " The two dogs had developed an unlikely relationship. It was unclear whether or not Barron viewed Pug as a frail creature requiring protection or if Pug viewed Barron with some arrogance as his (this version of Pug was a male) manservant. But whatever the connection Pug was glad of Barron's company on the morning stroll. D'Arcy and Tom would pull alongside them a child's size sledge in which to haul Pug when he tired (usually about 5 minutes after they started the walk.) Pug enjoyed the fresh air and the panting attention of Barron but he was used to a much better conveyance, that normally being Lady Bertram's arms.

The walkers were sure to return to the house in time for Pug to return to Lady Bertram's bed before she woke up and found him missing. She had commented to her maid on a few occasions, "Why is Pug's nose so abnormally cold this morning, Sally? I hope he hasn't come down with some sort of ague!" "No m'Lady. Pug seems not to appear sickly to me. 'Tis a little chilly in the room

**this morning and Pug may have slept with his head above covers instead of tucked warmly inside as is usual for him.”**

**Elizabeth knew full well where the two dogs were but she allayed D’arcy’s alarm by sharing as little of the secret as she could. “Don’t worry my love. Emma and Fanny have the two well in hand and they are perfectly safe and not at all into mischief. We must hurry to dress for this afternoon’s performance. Mrs. Reynolds has arranged for the footmen and butlers to set up an arrangement of comfortable chairs in the great hall and we have invited the entire staff to attend our children and nieces’ production for they are to serve dainties and tea upon its conclusion.”**

## **Scene 10**

**As the guests entered the great hall they could see a semi-circle of lounges and wingback chairs positioned in front of the fireplace. There were two lavishly decorated large French screens each with four panels set up with one on the right and one on the left of a small stage. A lot of scuffling and childish giggling could be heard coming from behind the screens.**

**Mary sat at a piano forte waiting for the group to get settled before the production started. Emma and Fanny left their husbands' sides and stepped onto the stage.**

**"Dear family and guests," Emma started. "We welcome you to a work by the D'arcy and Bingley children called, A Family Adventure to Lambton. Edited and directed by my good friend Fanny with musical arrangements and additional libretto by Mary Bennet.**

**With a flourish of her arms Fanny announced, "And now...on with the finest play you will ever see!"**

**Both women turned and rushed to join the children and the nannies behind the screens. Mary played a jubilant entrance trill on the piano forte and from behind the right screen came a row of children walking in order of height toward the centre of the stage.**

At the end of the row were Jane Anne and Eliza both wearing bonnets festooned with feathers and jewellery both items purloined from their mothers' dressing rooms and both carrying not the ordinary cloth reticules normally used on a shopping trip but rather bejewelled evening reticules obtained from the same source. Although Benny had warned them that their mothers would never carry such elegant items into shops the two girls had insisted that this very special performance would surely require very special costumes. Benny was out numbered and out-argued.

Jane Anne was pushing a doll pram and seated serenely in it and wearing a woollen bonnet was Pug, a blanket covering him. Lady Bertram who had said little and smiled much during the entire stay blurted out, "Pug!! Darling Pug! Look, my dear. And isn't he a great actor!" "Yes, yes, my dear said Lord Bertram and Tom and Edmund smiled indulgently at their mother.

Mrs. Bennet turned to her husband and wondered out loud why Benny wasn't on stage with the girls. "I do hope he has not taken ill as if he has we shall all fall prey to the same pestilence." "Do not worry my dear. His part in the production most likely comes later in the sequence" calmed Mr. Bennet.

The play nearly ran amok as soon as the parade of children stopped centre stage and turned to the audience as though to look

into a shop window. As soon as they saw their parents the younger children started giggling and waving wildly at them. Clara, upon seeing her mother toddled off the stage crying out, "Mama, papa! Look at my fine lace underthkirt" (as she pulled up her dress)" then threw her arms around her mother's waist.

Everybody laughed while the nannies tried to wrestle everybody back into order. Clara did not return to the stage but instead settled on the warm lap of her father quite enjoying the cuddles.

Mary got everything back on track by softly playing a merry tune stopping when the audience settled down and nanny Poppy gave her a nod.

Jane Anne began in her version of an adult voice, "Well, my dear do you think my husband would approve of this fine frock displayed here in the window. We are both looking forward to the upcoming ball to be held at Pemberly and I would wish him to be proud of me."

Dora tugged at Jane Anne's dress whining, "Mamaa, when are we going to get the barley drops you promised us? You said we should each have a small bag."

"Yeeesss, mama!" chimed in the others. "Barley drops are much more important than dresses."



**“Now then, Dora. If your sisters and cousins will leave give us but a few more minutes looking in these windows I promise you we shall buy each of you a small bag of lemon drops as well as barley drops.” (The children started clapping and jumping up and down in excitement.) “But, you must promise after we return home to give the bags of drops to your nannies who will portion them out to you when you behave. You musn’t make your tummies ill.”**

**Just then Fanny and Emma strolled out from behind the left screen. Both had changed frocks and were wearing bonnets and carrying baskets almost full of purchases they had just made.**

**“Well hello there Eliza, Jane Anne,” Fanny called. “What a surprise meeting up with you. We were just finishing our shopping. Our carriage is just around the corner near the park.”**

**Addressing the children Emma said, “We have just come from the confection store and I have some lovely pieces of sweetmeats in my basket. Would you like me to share some with all of you?” This was met with universal approval.**

**“We were trying our best to select some fabric and decide on a fashion for my new frock” said Liza. “Perhaps you could tell us what you think of this lovely muslin.”**

**Just then Benny appeared galloping through a door at the back of the room on Barron. One of the coachmen had helped Benny adjust a saddle that belonged to one of the ponies so Barron could be ridden. Barron charged toward the stage and Benny leapt off completing his charge on foot.**

**“My dear, my dear” he cried out to Jane Anne. “We must make haste back to Pemberly for we are to play host to a gentleman named Sir Walter Scott and his family. Their carriage had a break down quite near our estate. One amongst the travellers was injured in the accident and – oh my dear – we have had to fetch a doctor.”**

**Jane Ann took charge. “Well, then children we must forget our shopping and hurry back to Pemberly for it would not do well if we were not gracious to these unexpected guests.” Turning to Emma and Fanny Eliza said, “We are sorry to not spend more time with you but as you can see needs must when misfortune arrives.”**

**Elsbeth piped up, “Miss Fanny, do you think you could let us have more sweetmeats for our ride back home. We were supposed to get barley and lemon drops but now will have nothing.”**

**“Elsbeth!!!”, Jane Anne chastised. “That is most rude of you!”**

**“Not at all”, chuckled Fanny. “For I also have barley and lemon drops in my basket and you shall all have plenty to carry you over until you get home.” There was much merriment among the children with vision of all the tasty treats they had in store for them. The nannies scurried to get them all in their graduated line facing the audience.**

**Once order had been restored, Fanny turned to the audience and said, “We hope you have enjoyed this special presentation.” Emma added, “And now we would like to have you join us in singing a Christmatide song which you all by now know...The Holly and the Ivy.”**

**And so, with Mary at the piano forte the whole group, including the entire serving household sang with gusto. After which the children lined up to bow to the audience including Barron who sat well-behaved alongside Benny and Pug who still sat serenely in the doll carriage.**

**“I say, D’arcy! We’ve all had such a jolly time together I dare say we should all get together at next Christmastide which Lady Bertram and I will host. Tom smiled slyly at Kitty but said to his father, “Yes, Papa. For we have formed such good relationships here that we would be remiss in not continuing to forge a connection.”**

**Edmund chuckled, Kitty blushed, and Mrs. Bennet was agape. She**

had not paid much attention when Tom had joined them when they gathered fir branches and had most particularly assisted Kitty in the activity.

And so the group was in extremely good humour when the next evening the Twelfth Night Ball was held.

### **Epilogue**

As the years followed Elizabeth was to bear one more child. This time a boy who they named George after D'arcy's father. Jane and Bingley seemed content with their six girls. Kitty's flirtation with Tom Bertram had been but a passing fancy much to Mrs. Bennet's delight. Kitty's attention turned instead to Mr. Donleigh's brother Jonathan who it turns out was heir to the Donleigh fortune of £15,000 a year! Mary had grown closer to Donleigh although it would be two years after her sister wed that she too would find happiness and considerable notability amongst society as she and Frederick were in great demand for their choral work.

As for the Knightlys, upon Mr. Woodhouse's passing they were able to move their household to Donwell Abbey and, to Emma's delight Isabella and her family moved and made Hartfield their permanent home.

**Tom's improvements to Mansfield Park had been primarily structural and it still retained the Gothic eeriness that had at first intimidated Fanny. As time passed the mansion had become more friend than foe. More inspiration than intimidation. With her very florid imagination she had started to write children's stories centred around ghosts and goblins, fairies and talking beasts, magic and flights of fancy. Her heroes and heroines were always children. Mrs. Bennet thought them ghastly but the D'arcy and Bingley children were swept away by the fantasy of them and often turned them into little plays.**

**The families did meet from time to time but there was never again a Christmastide so merry and full of laughter as the one held that year at Pemberly.**