

Please ignore all mistakes - this has not even seen the editor's pen yet.

~ * ~ * ~ * ~ * ~

Chapter 1: Through Many Dangers

February 1819

A sudden jolt made him open his weary eyes. It took him a few seconds to realize his arm had fallen off the chair causing him to awaken. He repositioned himself, turning more into the corner of the large wing backed seat that had become his only means of any sleep these last few weeks. Even though the exhaustion was unbearable, he knew he would not sleep again soundly anytime soon.

He looked towards the bed. His wife of six years lay there, her dark brown hair splayed out on the white pillow, her bright eyes closed to all that went on around her. The crisp white sheets were pulled up to her chin and tucked in all around her still body. Even in the dim candlelight he could see how pale her features were.

With shaking fingers, he reached out to touch her hand. His heart hoped she would respond, but there was nothing. No response at all. She did not move. Her fingers lay lifeless in his hand, and his heart broke once more.

Will you ever awaken? The thought had become his constant companion over the last few weeks.

He wound their fingers together, bringing her hand up to place a kiss on it. The strained whisper he often repeated came out through parched voice. *"Please, my Elizabeth, come back to me."*

A gentle knock on the door interrupted the moment, but Darcy knew it was for the best. "Enter," he called out.

"I thought you might need to stretch."

“No, I am well enough in here.” He gently placed his wife’s hand back on the bed. Then he stood and walked over to the window, drawing the curtains back. The sun was just beginning to come up over the horizon and the gardens and fields of Pemberley’s land—*his land*—would soon awaken to a new day with new opportunities. He felt his cousin’s strong hand on his shoulder as he was joined at the window.

“Will today be the day?”

“I know not—but we must be prepared for whatever is to come. What do you need, Darcy?”

“*I need my wife.*”

“I know,” was all Richard could quietly say to his cousin’s anguished words.

The two stood beside each other in silence and watched as the sun slowly rose into the heavens, taking the fog that had settled over the land with it and revealing the snow that had fallen overnight.

Finally, they stepped away from the window. Darcy walked slowly back to his chair while Richard strode towards the door, just as had become their custom every morning.

“Fitz?”

He turned, “Yeah, Darcy?”

“Thank you.”

Richard gave a nod and quietly stepped from the room, latching to door and leaving the couple alone once again.

Darcy stretched his arms over his head, arching his back in hopes of the kinks being released, however it did no good. His back had been sore for the last month, and he doubted very much if that would change anytime soon.

Today would at least be a change from the conventional in that his sister was to visit, along with her husband. They would only stay for a few short hours though, as they had a long journey still ahead of them to return to their home further north.

Darcy sighed heavily. Even in the midst of this tragedy his heart rejoiced with his sister's recovery. It was at Georgiana's bedside in London just three weeks ago that he sat when the express from Bingley had come saying Elizabeth was in an accident and he must come home. He left his sister's side, not knowing if she would make it through the difficult delivery of her first child. He received word just four days after his return that he was now an uncle to a beautiful baby girl named Anne, named after their mother. Today he would be introduced to his new niece.

He shook his head. It was hard to believe Georgiana was now a mother. She was the same age their own mother had been when he was born. *Abhh, their mother.* She was so lovely, and Georgiana was very much like her. Lady Anne Fitzwilliam fell madly in love with George Darcy during her first Season, but he wanted nothing to do with her. Instead he was seen gallivanting all around London, dancing with anyone who turned his eye for two seconds, promenading with a different lady every evening, and generally avoiding the little sister of his closest friend and neighbor.

The next year Lady Anne was determined to avoid him just as he had avoided her the previous year, but when she arrived in London everything changed.

George Darcy was visiting his friend when she arrived. He watched as the gorgeous blonde stepped down from the carriage, and Darcy elbowed his friend, asking who she was.

"That is my sister Anne," he replied.

It was from that moment on that George Darcy gave his attentions only to her, and Anne gladly accepted this change. By the summer, the two were married and living at Pemberley, George Darcy's family home.

While Pemberley was an enormous estate, and thus had a large income, there was one thing it had lacked in each generation of Darcys before—a longstanding mistress. That is not to say the mistresses did not care for it properly while she were able to do so. Indeed, each did their best. However, the Mistresses of Pemberley, in each generation, did not live long enough to leave many marks upon the estate.

Just as in the past, Anne Darcy died young. Fitzwilliam Darcy was only twelve years of age when his mother delivered his baby sister, giving her own life in exchange. They thought the babe would not live either, but she pulled through and began to grow strong. She was named in memory of the love her two parents held for each other, a combination of their two names, George and Anne—Georgiana.

George Darcy never fully recovered from losing his wife. He retreated into his own quiet world of grief, not going to London any longer and only receiving guests when they were his closest friends. No one else dared show up at the doors as it was known he would refuse them entrance. He had once even refused entrance to his wife's only sister, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. George found her to be overbearing and was weary of hearing her espouse that her own daughter should be married to his son Fitzwilliam. His boy was not even out of school yet, and she was already planning their children's names. And so, when she arrived uninvited at Pemberley, he refused to even allow her entrance into the park. When she was turned away she swore revenge upon him, but in his lifetime it never happened.

George Darcy lived only until his son came to the age of twenty-two, then his sorrow overtook him and, while taken ill, he lost the will to fight. He died, leaving his son the lands that had been in their family for generations, and leaving his precious daughter's care to his son, Fitzwilliam Darcy, and his nephew, Richard Fitzwilliam.

So it was that the next generation of Darcys took over the vast lands and fortune of Pemberley. It was several years before he found the person he wished to marry, and the story of how it came to be was one for the books, with his insulting her upon their

first meeting and her refusal of his first proposal. There were lessons of pride and prejudices to be learned by both, but eventually he won her heart and the two were joined in holy matrimony in November of 1812, right alongside his best friend, Charles Bingley, and Elizabeth's eldest sister, Jane, who were also wed that same day.

The Darcy family was blessed with the birth of their first child—a son—during the second year of their marriage. James Bennet Darcy was the golden child of Pemberley—spoiled by his parents and the staff alike. Though the cause was unknown, it seemed the Darcy's were not to be blessed with another child in the years since James' birth. He was now four years of age, soon to be five in just a few short weeks.

The best doctors in all of England were called in to care for Elizabeth Darcy, but nothing they did would pull the mistress from her slumber. It was with baited breath that everyone waited to find out whether the same misery would befall this generation of Darcys just as it had the generations past.

Through it all her husband lingered at her side, refusing to let her go. He would read aloud her favorite books, talk of things the two liked to discuss, and tried to encourage her to open her eyes. Every day it became more painful for him, but he still refused to leave her side. No matter what happened, he wished to be with her when it happened.

Three weeks of this distress. Three weeks of his heart crushing within his chest at every minute that passed. Three weeks of the agony of knowing that every minute she remained asleep was one minute longer the two were held within the grasp of a chasm between life and death.

Three weeks.

When would it end? Would it be the tragic death of another Mistress of Pemberley?

If he had anything to say about it, Fitzwilliam Darcy would give every ounce of his own strength to see that Elizabeth made it through this. Their son deserved to have his mother, and Pemberley deserved to have its mistress.

It was during this time that Fitzwilliam Darcy came to understand, more than any other time before, just why his father had given up the will to live when he became ill. George Darcy had lived with this kind of grief for years and it was too much to bear any longer. He needed to be with his Anne once again.

A soft knock at the door interrupted Darcy's musings, and he realized it had been hours since his cousin had left him alone. The person knocked again and the familiar sound made him smile. *Georgiana*. He stood and quickly walked to the door, opening it and embracing his sister in a crushing hug.

Georgiana wrapped her arms around her brother's larger frame and he clung to her in a way she never expected. Tears formed in her eyes and her heart broke. She should have come before now to be by his side, but it was simply not possible due to her own difficult confinement. Her doctor was not even certain she should be traveling such a distance now, but she insisted it was time they return home. Her husband knew it had more to do with the fact that Pemberley was on the way to their own home, and she needed to see her brother to be assured of his well-being.

During the journey she had thought of all the reasons they should remain at Pemberley, but every mention to her husband was quelled with his insistence that she needed to rest and they must return home. She knew he was right. If she remained here she would be at her brother's side constantly worrying over him. Pemberley was not where she belonged any longer. No, she must return to Parkwell Manor with her husband and their dear, sweet, precious babe Anne.

Finally Darcy released his sister's much smaller frame, apologizing for his actions.

She lifted her hand to cup his cheek, the rough hair from days without shaving were felt even through her glove. "Fitzwilliam, what do you need? I am here for you, so please tell me what you need."

"I am well enough," he replied quietly.

"Your cheeks are hollow, your eyes are sunken in and dark. Richard says you are not eating. He says even Mrs Bingley cannot convince you to take some broth." She

stepped back and looked over his body. “Your clothing is hanging off of you like they belong to someone else. You must not let yourself go like this. You must eat something. Let me call for Mrs Reynolds to have cook prepare your favorite meal.”

“No, I could not eat at this time.”

“Oh, Fitzwilliam, you know Elizabeth would not wish you to be like this. She would always wish good health upon you.”

He gave a wan smile, remembering the promise his wife had once extracted from him when she was ill a few years before and he refused any food. “I will eat, but only if you join me in here.”

Georgiana smiled, “I will.” She turned to nod at Mrs Reynolds, who awaited the signal that the Master of Pemberley would finally take a meal. The housekeeper looked relieved as she turned made her way below stairs to speak with the cook.

Georgiana entered the room and removed her spencer and gloves, laying them on the chair by the door. She walked over to the table that held a vase with Elizabeth’s favorite roses in it. They were old and the dark petals were falling off the stems, so she gathered the petals in her hand and placed them into the bowl Elizabeth kept on her dressing table just for petals such as these. She would often make scented oils and water with the flowers her husband routinely picked for her.

“Fitzwilliam?” When her brother turned towards her, she continued. “You have not kept your promise to replenish these flowers. After we eat, you must accompany me to the garden. We cannot have Elizabeth awaken to such a dreadful sight as this.”

“I... I have not left her side.”

“I know; Richard told us. We will be just outside though.” She walked over to him and wound her arm through his, leading him over to the window. “Just down there, below this window. That is all I ask you do to. We can even take the back stairs if you wish to not walk all the way around to the garden from the front entrance.”

The barren garden below reminded him of the sorrow within his chest. Then his eyes came to rest on the small greenhouse in which Elizabeth kept her favorite flowers. The hothouse would give Elizabeth just what she desired all year long, and Fitzwilliam had gifted it to her just a few years before. Since then she could often be found in the enclosure on these cold wintery days. He knew he would find the perfect flowers to brighten her face when she did awaken within the glass walls. After a large intake of breath, he finally said, "Five minutes."

"Yes, we will quickly pick the roses and you can be back at her side in just five minutes." When she felt his arm relax a little more, she said quietly, "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For letting me care for you during the few short hours I am able to be here at Pemberley."

He reached around her shoulders and pulled her close to his side, resting his chin on the top of her head as the siblings stood by the window looking out across the snow-covered lands below.

"You must meet my Anne as well," Georgiana said quietly. "She is simply gorgeous; the most precious babe."

Darcy heard in his sister's voice that she needed him to do this for her, so he willingly gave in. "Perhaps a few minutes longer then, but we must eat in here."

"Yes, we will eat in here first."

Mrs Reynolds returned with their meal in record time. It was clear that the staff had the food prepared for just the opportunity when their master would agree to take sustenance.

Darcy ate what he could, but it was not much. When his sister was satisfied that he had done his best, she pulled her spencer on and picked up the basket Elizabeth often

used when gathering flowers, then turned towards her brother who stood beside his wife's bed looking down at her lifeless form. "Are you ready?"

With a heavy sigh, he lifted Elizabeth's hand to his lips, placed a tender kiss upon it, and smoothed the blanket before he laid it back down on the bed once again. "I promise to return in just a few minutes," he said lovingly. He then joined his sister and the two left the room, latching the door quietly and leaving Elizabeth Darcy alone in her chamber.

~ * ~ * ~ * ~ * ~

Chapter 2: Life Endures

There was someone beside her. She could hear his deep voice, but who was he? Now there was a tinkling voice—much younger, and obviously a female, but again she did not recognize them.

Everything was dark. Why could she not see anything? She tried to open her eyes but nothing could compel them to do as she wished.

In exhaustion, she finally gave up, slipping back into the sleep that held her captive.

~ * ~ * ~ * ~ * ~

After picking some flowers, and spending a few minutes with his family and getting to meet his new niece, Darcy reentered his wife's chamber. Georgiana was right behind him with Elizabeth's basket, and the two went to the table where the vase sat.

Darcy pulled out the chair and sat down heavily, his elbows on the table and head held in his hands. "What am I to do if she...?"

Georgiana's gentle touch to his shoulder made him lift his eyes to hers.

"All will be well, Fitzwilliam. Even if the worst befalls Pemberley, we will endure this together. It is not the first tragedy, and I dare say it will not be the last, we shall face in our lifetime."

He shook his head, “Yes, as you say, we will endure it together.” He folded his arms on the table and laid his forehead down on them wearily.

Georgiana went to the window and unlatched it, then opened it to let the cool breeze filter into the stale room. She held the vase out and emptied the old water before walking back to the dressing table for a cloth. After wiping the vase clean, she filled it with water again, and began to arrange the roses in a becoming manner.

When she had completed her task, she placed the vase in the middle of the table. Then she leaned down and kissed her brother’s rough cheek, “Come, Fitzwilliam—you must rest.” She urged him to stand.

“No, no—I do not want to leave her side.”

“Very well, then allow me to do what I must to see to your own comfort.”

At his nod of acceptance, she went to the wall and pulled the cord, then stepped out into the hall to await Mrs Reynolds.

Darcy was once again sitting in the wingback chair at his wife’s side when Georgiana and Mrs Reynolds returned, the housekeeper directing two footmen, as quietly as she could, with the moving of some of the furnishings.

“Yes, that sofa must go. For now put it in the hallway. No, no, the table is remaining. Do not forget that,” she said to one footman as she pointed to a footstool. Her directions were carried out quickly and efficiently.

When there was room enough, the footmen then entered with a small bed frame and placed it where the housekeeper directed.

Georgiana went to her brother’s side, “This frame might not be the most comfortable for someone of your stature, but it was the only one we could move through the doorway without making too much fuss. I saw it in the nursery when I went to see your son. I explained to James that his daddy needed to rest on it, and he was most eager to allow us to bring it in here.” She smiled, “He is so much like his mother.”

Darcy nodded, “Yes, he has her intelligent eyes.” He chuckled, “You should hear

some of the things he says to me when we are sitting here. He is so very inquisitive.” Darcy continued to watch the activity as he held tight to his wife’s hand.

“I am glad to hear that you and he are able to find solace together during these trying days.”

When the mattress had been placed upon the frame, Mrs Reynolds shooed the others from the room and took over the duty of preparing the bed for her master herself. The sheets were laid out and tucked in, layer upon layer, just how he liked the bed in his own chamber to be arranged. Her final touch was to spread a quilt out on top. It was one Lady Anne Darcy had made it for her son when he was a young lad, and it was just the loving gesture her master needed at this time. Her task now complete, Mrs Reynolds looked at the two and nodded, then quietly took her leave of the room.

Georgiana reached for her brother’s hand that still held fast to Elizabeth’s. She squeezed it, then said to him, “It is time you rest.”

He lovingly looked at his wife’s peaceful visage for a long minute before he released his hold on her and stood to let his sister lead him over to the other bed.

When he sat on the bed, she leaned down to give him one last embrace. “I will see you again soon. I promise. If you need anything, please write to me. We can return if that is what you wish.”

“No, I would not want to hinder your own recovery. I am certain she will awaken at any time now and all this will be quickly put behind us.”

Georgiana kissed his cheek and took her leave.

When he was alone once again, he removed his boots and went to the window to ensure it was latched tightly. Then he stoked the fire in the fireplace, placing more coals on it. When he was satisfied with having done as much as he could do, he returned to the bed and laid down, cuddling beneath the quilt his mother had made so many years ago. He could feel her arms around him as he finally allowed sleep to overtake his weary body.

~ * ~ * ~ * ~ * ~

Darcy's eyes opened and he saw his sister-in-law standing beside Elizabeth's bed. She was gently doing what she and Mrs Reynolds had been doing now for three weeks—giving his wife some nourishment. It was a painstakingly slow process, and the two would spend hours each day spooning broth into his wife's mouth in small amounts. If it was too much, it would just trickle right back out again, causing a mess of her bedclothes and the sheets. Over time, the two had learned just how to best achieve the desired results.

He sat up and Jane turned to look his direction. "Good evening, Fitzwilliam."

He rubbed his eyes and stretched his back. "It is evening already? How could I sleep so long?"

"My guess would be that your sister had your food dosed with something," she said in her sweet tone.

Darcy groaned, "That sounds like something she would do."

"Mrs Reynolds thought you would awaken soon. She has your your man awaiting you in your dressing room with water for a bath."

He stood, scratching the beard that was beginning to form nicely on his chin, "Yes, perhaps it is time I get cleaned up."

"Exactly—you do not want to have your wife awaken to such a frightful sight," she said with a little mirth.

He chuckled, "No... no, it would not do." He stood. "Thank you," he said, then left the room.

He bathed as quickly as he could, but when it came to his man shaving his face, that task was a little more involved than usual due to the length of the hair beginning to form a nice beard along his jaw. When he was finally able to return to his wife's side, he was anxious to hear if anything had changed.

Jane was sitting in a rocking chair on the other side of the bed, quietly knitting and rocking, just as she had done for many hours during these last few weeks.

Darcy walked over to Elizabeth's side and looked at her face. He drew his finger across her cheek, removing some hair that had fallen there. Her cheeks had just a bit more color, and he said as much to Jane.

"Yes, I noticed that as well. It is a good sign."

"Has the doctor been to see her today?" he asked as he drew the wingback chair as close as he could to the bed and sat down.

"This morning he came, but he did not remain long. There was nothing new he could say of her situation. We simply must remain hopeful that Elizabeth will awaken very soon. He did say though that the longer she remains asleep, the less likely it is that she will..." she could not finish the sentence as her voice caught in her throat and tears began to gather in her bright blue eyes.

"Yes, I understand," Darcy said quietly. "We will hope where no one else has the strength."

"Exactly; you and I must continue to do so for Elizabeth's sake." Jane stood, laying her project in the chair. "It is time I checked on the little ones in the nursery."

"Will you please have James brought down to see his mother?"

"Yes, of course," she replied and left the room.

Darcy had a few minutes alone, so he reached for Elizabeth's hand and, taking it in both of his, began doing what he had often found himself doing these last few weeks—praying. He had pleaded and cried and bargained with God, and yet his wife still lay in this bed. Today though, his prayers changed. Today he began to thank the Lord for giving him the strength to continue on for as long as Elizabeth needed him by her side.

He heard his son's familiar knock at the door and ended his prayer before calling out for James to enter.

Mrs Reynolds held tightly to the boy's hand as she gave him a warning, "Now remember, we must be very quiet when we visit your mother."

"Yes'm," James said to the housekeeper. When he saw that his father was sitting in his usual chair, he quickly ran across the room and climbed onto his lap, his tiny arms giving Darcy the biggest hug the four year old could accomplish for such a large man as his father.

Darcy loved his son. Just like Elizabeth, James knew instinctively just what he needed. Darcy clung to his son until the boy finally loosened his grip and began to pull away. "Thank you, son." He looked to the doorway and gave Mrs Reynolds a nod, dismissing her.

James settled on Darcy's lap and the two looked at Elizabeth in silence for a long time. Finally, James asked quietly, "Did you try kissing her, Papa?"

Darcy looked curiously at his son. "Now why would I do that?"

"Aunt Jane telled me that story."

"Told; and what story is that?"

"The one with the princess who sleeped just like Mama. When the prince kissed her, she came awaked."

"Awakened," he corrected.

"Right, she came waked."

Darcy chuckled at his son's blunder of the words again.

“So did you kiss her?” He looked at his father as if the entire solution was held in that simple gesture.

Darcy could deny him nothing, so he replied, “I have tried. Perhaps what she needs is your kiss instead?”

He smiled, “I can do that.”

“You must be gentle,” he chided as he helped his son climb onto the bed beside Elizabeth. He watched as James kissed her cheek and then he cuddled down beside her, taking her hand in his. He began to sing a hymn, ever so quietly, filling the air with the beautiful words often sung by him and his mother.

It was all Darcy could do just to watch in awed silence as his son’s voice was left alone this time to sing the familiar tune.

~ * ~ * ~ * ~ * ~

She felt so heavy. Her arms would not move no matter how hard she laboured to do so. She tried to focus on just lifting her finger, thinking it would be easier, but there was no movement.

In frustration she wished to groan, but even that was impossible. She could not talk. She could not even open her eyes. Twitching her toe was not possible either.

The only thing she could do was remain in the dark world that had engulfed her and hope something would pull her from its clutches soon.

She had begun to hear people talking around her, but so far she did not recognize any of the voices. A solemn sounding gentleman was there most often. Who could he be? Was he the doctor that sat beside her bed?

She heard from a lady, but it did not sound like any of her sisters. If it was not, then who could it be? Where were her sisters? What of her parents? Were they unaware of wherever she lay?

The distress of the situation began to build in her chest until she felt it would tighten and pull the last of the breath from her. Then she heard the soft voice of a child begin to sing.

“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound...,”

Elizabeth heard the familiar words of her favorite song, but she did not recognize the voice. It did not sound like her young cousins, but perhaps it was?

“That saved a wretch like me...,”

The boy continued past the word he could not pronounce properly and she somehow found joy in hearing it being sung in such a way. She tried to laugh, but the laughter just caught in her throat, refusing to be released.

“I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see...,”

Yes, I am lost. Will I be found, she thought. Will I see again? She questioned as she tried, once again, to force her eyes to open. There was still no response and again emotions rose in her chest nearly strangling out the words the child sang. Suddenly she knew she had to refuse this course—that it would lead to the end, and she was not ready for life to end. There were so many things she wished to still do. She must endure. The young boy’s voice cut through her thoughts once again with the perfect words to give her strength.

“The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures;...”

She knew this was true, and knew that holding onto that promise was what would get her through. Though she could not do so aloud, she sang the next line with the boy, “He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.”

Everything began to fade away again and weariness overtook her thoughts, until the boy’s voice was finally just a distant memory and she was once again asleep.

~ * ~ * ~ * ~ * ~

(That's it for now!!)