

# Anniversary February



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# Anniversary

## *February*

by

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Published by: White Soup Press

Anniversary February

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DEDICATION  
For our devoted readers.

# *Authors' Note*

We hope you enjoy this brief collection of scenes featuring anniversaries for Jane Austen's characters from our website [JaneAustenVariations.com](http://JaneAustenVariations.com).

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*Maria Grace*

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# **Admiral and Mrs. Croft**

By Shannon Winslow

*I have a warm spot in my heart for Admiral and Mrs. Croft, especially since developing their relationship through their counterparts in The Persuasion of Miss Jane Austen. According to my premise in that book, Jane Austen modeled Admiral and Mrs. Croft after a fictitious couple by the name of Crowe, of whom she thought very highly. They were my inspiration for this anniversary piece, which takes place during the time span of Persuasion, the day the party from Uppercross walked to Winthrop. If you remember, the Crofts, at Cpt. Wentworth's suggestion, insisted on giving a weary Anne a ride home in their gig. This is what happened next.*

After depositing Anne at Uppercross cottage, Admiral and Mrs. Croft continued on toward Kellynch at a gentle pace, the admiral returning to a former topic by and by.

“As I was saying to Miss Elliot before, my dear, sailors cannot afford to go in for long courtships during war, and who knows how long this current peace will hold? Your brother must not tarry about the business of choosing one Miss Musgrove or the other if they are to preserve time to enjoy themselves before he returns to sea.”

“I should very much like to see Frederick well married,” returned Mrs. Croft. “I only hope he will not be in too much of a rush to the altar. I like the Miss

Musgroves well enough, but, upon further reflection, I am convinced it will take more than an a little beauty and a few smiles to win my brother's heart. He deserves a wife with a strong mind and sweetness of temper as well. This is how he has described to me the woman he wants."

"So, you see he has been thinking on the subject seriously."

"Yes, and I trust it will serve as some protection against an overly impulsive choice."

"Ah, that is where you are mistaken, Marguerite. Like all men, he thinks he will judge soundly, but it is more probable he will lose his head and end by making a very stupid match."

"For shame, Caspian! How can you say such a thing? This is no very fine compliment to me, I fear, or to yourself either. And on our anniversary too!"

"Patience, my dear, he said, patting her hand affectionately. "Patience. I only meant to say that I deserve none of the credit. I lost my head like every other young fool in love. But I had the great good fortune to lose both head and heart to a woman of superior worth. We must hope your brother has the same good luck. Which Miss Musgrove it is to be, I cannot say, for I can never learn to know one from the other. When Frederick introduces the young lady to us as our future sister, that will be time enough to remember her name."

Mrs. Croft shook her head in wonder, thinking to herself that she was the one who had been gifted with unexpected good fortune in this man. Had not that storm years ago forced the admiral – a captain then – into the port town where she lived, seeking emergency repairs to his ship, they would never have met. What

might have become of her then? Perhaps she'd have married somebody else eventually, but she could hardly imagine that she would have been as happy.

Between herself and her husband, there was more depth of affection and mutual respect than she would have dared to hope for. No love sonnets were required to prove it; it was understood between them, conveyed in the most seemingly insignificant gestures – the smallest look, word, or touch. The light burned so steadily bright between them that it could not be denied.

Sometimes she wondered if their uncommonly strong bond was the natural outgrowth of their compatible dispositions or if it could only have been forged by their weathering trials and dangers together over the course of the years. She thought once again of their private sorrow of having no children. No, they had not enjoyed that blessing, but there were other compensations...

The admiral interrupted his wife's reverie. "What shall we do when we reach home... to further celebrate our anniversary, I mean?" he asked.

"We need not make a fuss. Remember, we agreed to keep it to ourselves. Frederick, from all appearances, did not connect any special significance to the date, and there is no reason anybody else should know. We have had our drive in the country, as I wished for, and I have ordered a fine dinner. I need nothing more to make me happy."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing I can think of."

"Well, Mrs. Croft, it is lucky you have *me* here. I have one or two more ideas for making you happy before we blow the candles out tonight, things you

may have forgotten or are too proper to propose in the light of day."

Mrs. Croft considered that she could pretend to be shocked by her husband's suggestive words or deny that she understood his meaning altogether. They knew each other far too well for that, however. Instead, she simply smiled to herself for the thought of what lay ahead. It was a time-honored anniversary tradition, after all, and tradition must be observed. Who was she to dispute that fact?

# **Henry and Catherine Tilney's Anniversary**

By Kara Louise

Henry stepped into the small sitting room at Woodston Parsonage and smiled at the scene before him. His wife was curled up in a chair reading; her eyes were wide and her hand covered her heart. He shook his head and cleared his throat, causing Catherine to jump and quickly close the book.

“You frightened me, Henry!”

“You are not reading another Gothic novel, are you?”

She looked down, but Henry could readily distinguish her pink cheeks.

“Do you think it so wrong of me to read such novels?” she asked with a look of dismay.

Henry chuckled. “I simply do not understand why you find them so enjoyable.”

Catherine looked up and shrugged her shoulders. With a sly smile, she said, “I suppose it is because I find them delightfully frightening.”

“That is certainly an answer, although I do not fully understand it.”

“Was there something you wanted?” she asked.

“Oh, yes! I came to tell you that I have a surprise for you, my lovely Catherine.” Henry had a teasing glint in his eyes.

“For me?” Catherine jumped to her feet and ran

over to her husband. “What is it? May I see it?”

Henry put up his hands. “It is not something you can see... just yet.”

She began fingering his neckcloth and tilted her head. “You know I will not rest until you tell me what it is.”

Henry leaned over and kissed his wife. “And I will not tell you because it is far too much fun to watch you try to figure it out and squirm when you cannot.”

Catherine let out a sigh. “Will you give me a hint?”

Henry pinched his brows and rubbed his jaw. “Hmm, perhaps I can.” He wrapped his arms about his wife. “At the moment, I shall only say that it is something you will receive on our anniversary.”

A smile lit Catherine’s face. “Our anniversary? Oh, it is an anniversary gift! Then I must not try to guess. But how shall I wait two full weeks? Is it something I have always wanted? Will you tell me that?” Her eyes lit with anticipation.

He leaned it and pressed his nose to hers. “Hmm. I cannot say it is something you have always wanted, but it is something you often think about.”

Catherine giggled. “I cannot imagine what it is! Why do you like to tease me so?”

Henry fingered a stray curl and let it go. “Perhaps, my dear Catherine, it is because I love you so.”

\*~\*~\*

In the two weeks leading up to their anniversary, Catherine was able to discover a few things about her

surprise. They were going to go on a short journey and she would not be able to bring this surprise home. While that disappointed her, she still looked forward to it with great anticipation.

The day finally arrived, and they set out for their unknown destination early in the morning. Henry told Catherine it would be about a three-hour ride in the carriage. Since their marriage a year ago, they had taken day excursions around the country, enjoying the scenery and a picnic lunch, but other than when they visited her family, they had never before travelled somewhere and stayed overnight. Henry told her they would spend two nights at an inn. Catherine was greatly looking forward to it.

As the carriage traversed through the countryside, Catherine kept watch out the window. She could not describe her life as being one filled with adventure, but she enjoyed being married to this wonderful man. She was happy. So very happy.

She stole a glance at her husband, who was reading his Bible. He had a look of peaceful contentment on his face. As she studied him, he suddenly looked up.

“Is something amiss, my dearest?” He tilted his head and smiled.

Catherine felt her heart quaver as it always did whenever he smiled like that at her. His deep blue eyes twinkled and a small dimple appeared on one side of his face.

She shook her head quickly. “No, I was just thinking how happy I am.”

“I am glad. And you have made me the happiest of all men.”

She bit her lip. “Shall I get my surprise today?”

“Not today, but tomorrow.”

She rubbed her hands together. “I cannot wait!”

They finally reached the inn after travelling through lovely farmland, woods, and passing an occasional pristine lake. When the carriage stopped, Catherine looked out the window.

“Is this the inn?” She turned to Henry and exclaimed, “Look at the beautiful flower garden! This is the happiest place I have ever seen! It is charming!”

“I hoped you would like it,” Henry said with a smile. “Shall we?”

They stepped out of the carriage and walked slowly, admiring the array of flowers. Catherine occasionally leaned over to smell a fragrant rose or gardenia. She sat down on a bench near a small pond and turned to her husband. “How did you know about this place?”

Henry sat down beside her as their luggage was brought into the inn. “My family had acquaintances who lived nearby. I always thought I would like to stay here one day.”

Catherine reached over and took his hand. “I am most grateful for your friend.”

“Let us go inside so you can freshen up and we can

get something to eat. We shall relax today and walk about the grounds. I have secured a phaeton and we shall take a tour of the countryside tomorrow.”

\*~\*~\*

The next day dawned with a bright blue sky scattered with an occasional white puffy cloud sailing by. A basket with fruit, bread, and cheese had been prepared for the couple, and they set out for their touring adventure.

“It is such a lovely day, Henry.” Catherine looked about her as she pulled a stray curl away from her face blown there by a slight breeze. “Do you have a particular destination or are we just travelling at your whim?”

Henry looked down at her with a mischievous grin. “I had hoped to see if there was something still here. We shall see. It should be just up around the next bend.”

Catherine turned her head to follow the direction he pointed, eager for the first glimpse. She wondered if it could be another pristine lake, a forest glen, or possibly an expansive flower garden.

As the phaeton climbed a slight hill and turned, Catherine gasped. Off to their right, down a lonely dirt road, stood an old house. Catherine shivered.

“I certainly hope that is not what you were looking for!” She snuggled closer to her husband. “It looks very old!”

“And deserted!” Henry said with a soft laugh.

“Even more decrepit than I remembered.”

When Henry reached the road and turned onto it, Catherine wrapped her arm tightly about his. “You are certainly not thinking of going into it, are you?”

“No, but both of us are going to go inside.”

“But it cannot be safe. It looks so...”

“Gothic?”

Catherine nodded mutely.

Henry hopped down from the phaeton and helped his wife, who could not keep her eyes off the house. Several windows were broken, and sashes and doorframes hung askew. Weeds and monstrous bushes surrounded the house, and as they walked up to the steps, she could see several were missing. She tugged Henry’s arm to halt him.

“Oh, Henry. I do not think we should go in.”

“There is nothing to worry about, my dearest.”

Catherine looked up at him and winced.

“Besides, if something does happen, I am here to protect you!”

Her brows lowered at this and she paled. “But there are things... some things we would never be strong enough to conquer.”

Henry chuckled. “Like those in your gothic novels?”

Catherine looked down. “I know you enjoy teasing me, but still...”

“Come! It will be fun!”

They took the creaky stairs, mindful to keep from

stepping on the missing boards. The front door handle was missing, so Henry was able to easily push it open. Catherine held tightly onto his arm as he did.

They stepped inside. Straight ahead was a staircase, and to the right was a large room. They stepped into that room, which had long, heavy window coverings, making it quite dark. A long rip in one of the coverings let in just enough light to enable them to see cobwebs everywhere, indicating years of neglect. As they walked in, Catherine screamed.

Henry turned. “What is it?”

“I just walked into one of these horrid webs!” Catherine exclaimed, pulling it from her face.

Henry smiled and pulled the remainder from her hair. “There! I have performed my first rescue!” He turned and looked around. “Come! Let us continue our tour.”

The next room they came to had a few pieces of furniture, covered in white protective sheets, which in turn, were covered in layers of dust and dirt. This room had no window coverings so it was much brighter.

A portrait hung on the wall, drawing their attention. As they walked closer to it, Catherine shivered.

“He looks positively sinister!” she said. “I would not be surprised if he murdered everyone in his family and buried them somewhere in this house.”

Henry laughed. “Now, Catherine, remember how

your imagination played tricks on you when you first came to Northanger Abbey?”

Catherine shuddered. “I was so foolish to think your father killed your mother, and I regret it every single day!”

Henry took her hand and patted it. “And I regret my father’s inexcusable actions towards you every single day.”

A loud thud from upstairs drew their attention, prompting Catherine to smother her face in Henry’s chest. “What was that?” she whispered in a shaky voice.

“It is most likely the wind banging a shutter against the house.”

Catherine peered up at him. “There is no wind, Henry. It is perfectly calm outside.”

“Then we must go see!”

“No!” Catherine exclaimed, holding on to him tighter.

“Come! It will be nothing. Let us go back to the staircase.”

“Oh, Henry. I am not so certain we should do this.”

When they came to the staircase, Catherine gasped again and recoiled. “Henry, look! The wall candle is lit! It was not lit when we first entered the house. I know I would have noticed it! Why would a candle be lit in an abandoned old house?” Her breathing quickened and she put one hand over her heart.

“I cannot answer that, my dear, but it is fortuitous

because I can take the candle and we shall now have light!"

Catherine looked at her husband in disbelief. "You must not touch it! Do you not see that someone – or something – is here! We must leave at once!"

Henry shook his head. "No, my dearest. I am most curious, are you not?"

A look of dismay and uncertainty crossed her face. "Of course I am curious, but..."

"Good! Just hold onto me tightly."

Catherine reluctantly obeyed, and they took the stairs slowly. Catherine looked about her as they did, listening and watching for anything out of the ordinary.

When they reached the top of the stairs, Henry leaned over and kissed his wife. "See? All is quiet and safe up here."

They walked along the narrow passage way and came to a door. Henry tried to open it, but it was locked.

"I wonder what is in here," Henry said in a slightly apprehensive voice.

"I am certain it is nothing, and if it is something, we must not try to go in." Catherine's eyes suddenly widened. "Perhaps it is a secret passage!" She covered her mouth as she gasped. "Perhaps this is where the man in the portrait hid the family he killed."

Henry laughed. "You must realize, Catherine, that a secret passage usually does not have a door leading

into it.” He turned the handle one more time, but this time, it opened.

Catherine tensed as Henry slowly pulled open the door. They stared into the darkness. “Good thing I have the candle. Come, let us explore!”

Henry had to give a couple tugs on his wife’s arm before she followed him in. They stepped inside the room, and it seemed colder than the rest of the house had been. There did not appear to be any windows, so without the candle it would have been completely dark.

As Henry moved the candle around the room, Catherine noticed an old chest. She left Henry’s side and walked over to it. She tried to lift the lid, but it was stuck.

“What do you suppose is in there?” Henry asked as he walked over to help her.

“Oh, it could be any number of things!” The lid loosened with Henry’s help, but it still would not open completely. “It could hold a diary with all the names of the people that were killed and how they were killed. It could hold a piece of clothing from each of the victims. It could...” Catherine looked up to see that her husband was smiling. “Or it could just be an old trunk.”

When the lid finally gave way, Henry stood up, holding the candle above it. Catherine looked around and felt a great sense of disappointment to see it was empty, but as she looked up sheepishly at her

husband, a noise was heard at the doorway. They both turned and saw a figure standing there in the dark. When Henry quickly moved towards it, the candle went out.

Catherine screamed! “Henry! Do not leave me! We must get out! Someone is here!”

Henry came back for Catherine and the two of them rushed down the stairs and outside.

“Are you all right?” Henry asked, holding Catherine tightly against him.

“Oh, it was absolutely horrid!” she exclaimed. She took in several deep breaths. She was certain Henry could feel the clamouring of her heart against his chest.

He stood holding her for several minutes, and then Henry lifted up her face with his hands. “Catherine, there is someone I would like you to meet.”

He looked back towards the house, and Catherine followed his gaze. A young man was walking towards them.

“Catherine, this is my good friend, Albert Hawthorne. Albert, may I present my wife, Catherine Tilney?”

Catherine looked confused. “Do you mean you were the one in the house making all those things happen?” She looked up at Henry and then down, shaking her head. “I cannot believe you would do such a thing!”

Mr. Hawthorne stepped forward. “Oh, Perhaps I

went too far. I hope you were not too frightened.”

Henry looked back at his wife. “Oh, dearest Catherine, you know I would not do anything to intentionally alarm you. Albert is the good friend I told you about. When my family would visit his, we would often come and explore the house. I thought it would be fun if you could have your own gothic adventure.” He stroked his wife’s cheek. “I am sorry if you were frightened. Pray, forgive me if it was wrong of me to think you would enjoy it.”

Catherine slowly looked up, and the fear and dismay on her face had been replaced by a wide smile. “Oh, I think it was the most delightfully frightening thing that has ever happened to me!” Ignoring Mr. Hawthorne, she wrapped her arms about her husband and pressed her lips to his.

\*~\*~\*

They went back for a proper tour of the house. Mr. Hawthorne told them what he knew of it, and although there was nothing sinister in any of its history, Catherine could imagine other stories that might have taken place – without mentioning them to either of the men.

They then went to Mr. Hawthorne’s home and met his family, spending the remainder of the day there.

On the way home, Henry looked at his wife tenderly. “I do hope you were not unduly frightened. It would pain me to know you were upset by it.”

Catherine shook her head and smiled. “Oh, no! It

was quite fun. It was the most perfect anniversary surprise. At least I now know why those things happened. I could not figure out why you were not perplexed by that lit candle!" She laughed. "But my dear, there were a few things missing."

"Were there?" He looked at her with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh, yes! A howling wind with branches crashing against the house, a violent storm with lightning and pounding thunder, and rain beating down on the roof." She looked at him sheepishly. "Certainly you could have arranged for those things!"

"Oh, my dear!" Henry laughed. "I do ask quite a few things of the good Lord, and have received many an answer, but I believe asking for those things would have been a little too much!"

Catherine smiled and snuggled close to her husband. "I suppose." She paused and then added, "Happy anniversary, Henry. Thank you for my surprise. I hope you know how much I love you."

Henry smiled back and wrapped his arm about her. "I love you, too. Happy anniversary, my dearest Catherine."

# **Frederick and Anne Wentworth**

by Jack Caldwell

*The following is based upon my unpublished sequel to Persuasion, PERSUADED TO SAIL (previously posted online as The Unexpected Passenger). One day, I'll clean up the manuscript and publish it. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy my offering.*

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*March, 1816 – St. George's Town, Bermuda*

A weary captain Frederick Wentworth, dressed in his worn everyday uniform and Number Two hat, stepped off the ferry from Hamilton Parish onto the dock in St. George's Town. He had suffered a journey of several hours made up of barges, carriages and ferries, and he was not done yet. A few minutes' climb up several hilly street blocks lay ahead of him before he could rest.

Many things had changed in the year since he had been posted to His Majesty's Royal Colony of Bermuda. The capital had been moved from St. George's Town to Hamilton Town in Pembroke Parish, a dozen miles south. It was rather confusing to Wentworth that the parish surrounding Hamilton was named Pembroke rather than Hamilton. Of course, it may have something to do with the fact that the town of Hamilton and the parish of Hamilton were named

after two different gentlemen.

The wars against France and the United States were over. Frederick's naval duties were routine—looking for smugglers and pirates. It was also important to show the flag, for the possibility that the blasted Americans still desired the valuable naval base worried the Admiralty even though the war was over.

The most irritating change for Frederick was that HMS Laconia was no longer berthed in Castle Harbour near St. George's Town. She was now moored at the new Royal Naval Dockyard on Ireland Island, the southernmost isle in the Bermuda chain, directly across the Great Sound from Hamilton Town. That meant Frederick had to traverse the entirety of the fishhook-shaped island chain to reach St. George's. There awaited a small rented cottage and his sweet Anne.

Anne. That was the best change in this last year. Indeed, it was the best change in Frederick Wentworth's life.

After arranging the delivery of his sea chest, Frederick made his way up the street. The islands of Bermuda were, in fact, the tops of seamounts; there was little flat land in the colony. There was also no source for fresh water save from the sky. Therefore, each building had a white plaster roof designed to channel the plentiful rainwater into cisterns. The roofs gave the place a fairytale appearance.

At last, Frederick approached the door of his

cottage. The sound of a child's giggle from within caused a smile to grow on his weather-beaten face. Renewed energy flowed to his limbs, and he redoubled his pace and threw open the door. The welcome was all he could desire.

The mirth adorning the beautiful face of the lady with a small child in her lap changed to joy. "Frederick, you are home!" Anne Wentworth cried as she rose from the couch to her feet, clutching the baby close. She made to move toward him, but Frederick raised a hand.

"Be seated, my love!" He hurried to join her and was wise enough to greet her with a kiss before turning his attention to the precious bundle in her arms. "And how are you, my boy? By Jove, how you have grown!"

Three-month-old Kenneth Wentworth only stared at his father, not reacting to a kiss on his forehead.

"I do not know if he remembers me," Frederick complained.

"I am certain he does." Anne held the babe up to her face. "You know your papa, do you not, my little love?"

Kenneth giggled again.

Mary, their freedwoman maid, approached and made her curtsy. "Welcome home, Cap'n Wentworth." Raised in Jamaica, Mary spoke with that particular melodious accent common in the Caribbean Islands. "Dinner will be served soon, ma'am. Shall I take

Master Kenneth?"

"Thank you, Mary. Kenneth needs a lay-down." As soon as the maid left the room with the baby, Frederick gave Anne a proper Royal Navy welcome. It took Anne a moment to catch her breath. "Oh, Frederick, I missed you so."

"And I missed you, my dear. But I must beg your pardon—I am a disgrace. I must bathe and change before dinner."

"No, sir! I require you to remain where you are. After a month apart, I am greedy for your presence. There will be time for bathing after we dine." Anne softened her orders with a smile. "Do you recall what today is?"

Frederick smiled in return. "I do. One year ago today, you made me the happiest of men."

She kissed his cheek. "I did not know if you would return in time. Dinner will be a dull event, I am afraid."

"Belay that talk, madam! I have no need for finery or company neither."

"Is that any way to speak to the Queen of the Barky?" she teased.

Frederick threw back his head and gave a great laugh. "You remembered! I did not know you would!"

A year ago, Frederick Wentworth, famous for never wanting a woman on his ship, shocked his crew by bringing his bride along for the voyage to Bermuda. By journey's end, Anne had so charmed the

Laconians, they proclaimed her “Queen of the Barky” and named one of the cannons in her honor.

“How long are you in port?”

“Not long, I am afraid.” At her disappointed look, he added, “Now, none of that! I have news, but first I would hear yours. How have you fared these last weeks? Kenneth is well, I trust?”

Anne assured him all the inhabitants of the cottage were well. His son was growing bigger every day, Mary had been a tremendous help, and Anne had fully recovered from her lying-in. This last report was delivered with a blush.

He kissed her tenderly. “I am happy to hear all is well.”

She smiled wickedly. “I am certain you liked the last news most of all, sir.”

“Perhaps.” That was a topic for much later. Changing the subject, he asked about news from England.

“There was a letter from Captain Harville, and Lady Russell writes regularly,” Anne reported, earning a roll of his eyes from her husband. “Frederick!”

“I doubt your godmother has yet forgiven me for marrying you.”

“She writes only with news from Bath, Uppercross, and Kellynch Hall, and tells me how much we are missed.”

“You mean how much you are missed.”

“I assure you the Musgroves and the Crofts speak

of you constantly! And she expressed her joy for the birth of our son.”

Frederick stroked Anne’s hand. “You prevaricate very sweetly, my dear. But I shall learn to tolerate Lady Russell, never fear. As for Bath, any news from that quarter?”

“No, nothing, save Mrs. Smith thanks you again for recovering her late husband’s funds.”

Frederick waved that off. “It was a small thing. I am happy my efforts were successful for your friend. But your father and Elizabeth! Failing to acknowledge the birth of our child! I am rather put out by their disregard, but I should not be surprised. It is part and parcel of their character!” Anne’s pained expression did away with Frederick’s anger. “Forgive me, Anne, but I cannot abide their neglect of you.”

“I expect no more from them, although I do own that their conduct is painful. But enough of that. What is your news, husband?”

“We will not be moving to Hamilton Town, my dear.”

Anne was puzzled. “You wish to remain in St. George’s? I admit I love our little cottage, but I thought you wanted us closer to Laconia’s berth.”

Frederick smiled. “We will not be moving to Hamilton because we will be leaving Bermuda. I am recalled to England.”

“England! We are going home? When? Why?”

“Dear Laconia is rather old and shabby, and she is

badly in need of a refit. I am ordered to sail her to Portsmouth. We leave in a month.”

“We leave in a month?” A flustered Anne leapt to her feet. “Oh, I have so much to do! I have to pack and write a recommendation for Mary and—”

“I believe we can wait until after dinner, my dear.” Fredrick his wife’s hands again and guided her back to the sofa.

Anne could not help laughing at her silliness. “I am sorry, Frederick, but this is all so sudden! Is the condition of the ship the only reason for your recall?”

“I do not think so. With the Peace, the government will retrench, and the navy is not immune. There will be more than one post-captain without employment, you may depend upon it.”

“You will lose Laconia?”

“The admiralty does not share its plans with post-captains until their lordships see fit. I will certainly lose my dear Laconia. I have had her too long, and the navy amuses itself by moving the captains about. I might get another command, or it is the beach for me.”

A small frown appeared on Anne’s brow. “You will get another ship, Frederick. I am certain of it!”

“From your lips to their ears! I would prefer another frigate, but fellows with my seniority are for ships o’ the line. Truly, I would be satisfied with any ship, save a flagship. Serving as flag captain under an admiral is a duty I would like to avoid as long as

possible. Besides, it would be doubtful I could bring you along with an admiral aboard. No, it's either another independent command for me, or you must take the packet ship to our next posting. That is, if you do not choose to remain in England."

"My place is with you, Frederick," she said firmly. "I will not be left behind, nor will Kenneth!"

"What a bold wife you have become!" The two shared a passionate kiss.

"Oh, pardon me!" cried the maid. "Dinner is ready, Miz Wentworth."

Embarrassed, the pair broke apart. "We shall resume this later, my sweet," whispered Frederick.

Anne's eyes glowed. "I shall depend upon it, my dear captain."

## **The Wickhams Second Anniversary**

By Carey Bligard

Anna carefully stirred the stew over the fire, sweat running over her temples as she tried to avoid burning her fingers on the edge of the black pot again. She hoped that the brown mess would be edible tonight...she didn't have much experience cooking and she wondered if she had remembered to put in everything her mother told her to. Somehow, it didn't look the same as that of her mother, a capable woman who fed her large family and at least two boarders twice a day with hearty, filling food.

Perhaps Anna should have spent more time at her mother's side before hiring herself out to the Wickhams. But then, she had been hired as a nursemaid to care for Mrs. Wickham's two children, a boy of 15 months and a baby girl of five months. Since she had taken this position she had realized that "nursemaid" meant "nursery maid, laundry girl, and cook." She had hoped that working for such a handsome officer as Ensign Wickham would put her in the way of meeting other soldiers at the camp, but she never had time to leave the house, except to buy the food at the market.

Mrs. Wickham spent most of her time sleeping in until noon and then dragging herself into her clothes to go out to the shops, although she did not have enough money to keep her little boy in decent clothes,

let alone buy fripperies.

Anna looked again at the stew. Perhaps it would be good today. She wondered if she should put another potato in it to soak up some of the liquid and make it go further. She had not seen Mrs. Wickham since one of the clock, so she did not know if she and the Ensign were to be home for supper or not.

Before she could think further about this, the baby started crying and she put down the spoon to go take her out of her crib. Her grizzling had also awakened little Edward who began whining about being hungry. The rest of the afternoon she spent running between the two children to entertain them and prevent them from swallowing the pin cushion Mrs. Wickham had left on the arm of the chair, or reaching into the pot of stew and burning themselves.

It was not long after six of the clock that Ensign and Mrs. Wickham came in. They were both unsteady and watery of eye, and the missus had a tear in the hem of her gown. Anna helped the missus out of her scarf, an unneeded flourish to her dress in the heat of early fall, and the two plopped down on the settee, their legs sprawled before them. Little Edward ran to his father to show him the wooden soldier he had been playing with and was told to go play quietly. “Settle down, Eddie, my boy! Mama and Papa are tired.”

Anna ventured a comment. “Do you need some supper, sir, ma’am?”

Wickham answered her with a loose-lipped smile. “No, indeed, Anna, me darlin’! Mrs. Wickham and I have dined. Today is the anniversary of our marriage and we celebrated at the Fox and Hound. It’s been two years since our wedding, eh, Lydia?” He nudged her with an elbow and his wife opened her eyes. “Yes, my dear Wickham! It is indeed our anniversary! Two whole years!”

Little Kitty began crying again at the over-loud voices of her parents in the small room. Mrs. Wickham wandered over to the nursery crib and tried to pick up her daughter.

“Come to Mama, Kitty! I hope your aunt Kitty will be able to come see you soon! What a pretty baby you are!” She jostled the baby up and down to make her stop crying. “Why is she crying, Anna? Do you just let her cry all day? Do something!” Anna took the baby and tried to give her some milk in a cup, but she was having none of it. Then she patted her on the back to see if she needed to burp, but her gentle pats just seemed to make the baby scrunch up her face and shriek even louder. It was not long before Edward was screaming, too, and Anna could barely hear her mistress as she complained about the noise.

Within a few minutes, Ensign Wickham jumped up off the settee and whirled to face his wife. “Lydia, can you not quiet those brats down? Don’t just sit there!” He paced the short length of the room, becoming more and more agitated as the shrieking

continued. Mrs. Wickham, in the meantime, had retired to her room but she stepped out again, her gown half off, to join the shrieking. “You do something! They are your children. I spend all day here taking care of these brats while you are out enjoying yourself with your friends!”

Anna could see that there was a storm blowing up between her master and mistress and she quietly picked up little Kitty and Edward and took them into the nursery. She tried to stop her ears as she cleaned them up and got them ready for bed, hoping that her master would not slap her mistress, as he often did during their frequent battles. Maybe they had both had enough to drink that they would tire quickly and fall asleep. It would be nice if their anniversary would not end in blows.

As soon as little Kitty had settled down, ignoring the yelling still going on in the other bedroom, Anna crawled into the other bed with Edward and put her arms around him. She hummed a lullaby into his ear and soon they both fell asleep as the fight in the other room dwindled into snores. Anna smiled as she drifted into sleep.

## **Mr. and Mrs. Collins Celebrate Their First Anniversary**

by Mary Lydon Simonsen

*January 1812*

Mr. Collins looked adoringly at his wife who was busy making some minor repairs to a tablecloth. Had not Lady Catherine commented on his wife's many fine qualities, not the least of which was her frugality and ability to make the most of her income by mending and gardening?

From the corner of her eye, Charlotte could see that her husband, as he did every evening after supper, was admiring her handiwork, and she knew why: *Lady Catherine would approve of his wife repairing rather than spending. She was most frugal when it came to her curate's expenditures.* Lady Catherine's opinion was the gold standard in their home and foremost in Mr. Collins's mind. That was perfectly fine with Charlotte. In exchange for keeping accurate books, an eye on expenses, and coming when summoned to Rosings's parlor, their patroness had provided them with a handsome house and a decent living. With a year's experience as the wife of Mr. Collins behind her, Charlotte considered herself to be—if not happy—then at least content with her current situation. After all, she was the mistress of her

own home, had a decent monthly allowance, and servants to help her with the more mundane tasks. All things considered, life was good.

“Dearest, you do know what tomorrow is, do you not?” Mr. Collins asked with a smile in his voice.

“A full moon?” Charlotte said, her eyes glued to her needlework.

Mr. Collins tittered. “I see you are in a frivolous mood. As you well know, the moon is waning, not waxing.”

“Perhaps, it is Miss de Bourgh’s birthday?”

“Charlotte, I do believe you are teasing me. As you well know, Miss de Bourgh’s birthday is in June.”

“I am well aware what tomorrow is, my love,” she said, returning his smile. “I can hardly believe that you and I have been together for a full year.” *It seems as if I have been a wife for a very long time. Years in fact.*

“You remembered, dearest,” a pleased Mr. Collins answered.

Charlotte reminded her husband that he had mentioned their anniversary at breakfast. After putting down her needlework, she said, “My dear, if you are thinking of a gift, please allow me to remind you that cotton is the traditional gift for first anniversaries.”

“Bed linen is made of cotton,” he said, arching his eyebrows.

*Oh dear! That is a hint if ever there was one, and*

*it is not even Saturday.*

“Many things are made of cotton. Your hose, for example.”

“My *hose!*” Mr. Collins said, winking at his wife. “Are we speaking of a garden *hose* or do you have something else in mind?”

“*What an unfortunate choice of words! Obviously, Mr. Collins has plans for the eve of our first anniversary. He must be diverted.* And she had the perfect diversion in mind.

Because Mr. Collins could, at times, be ridiculous, Charlotte had not planned to tell her husband quite so soon. It was only in the last few days that the signs were such that the result was no longer in doubt. She wanted to hold off telling him for as long as possible because he had a tendency to blurt out the most intimate details of their marriage to his patroness, but Lady Catherine would know soon enough.

“I was thinking more along the line of bunting?”

“The bird?”

“No, Mr. Collins. A baby’s bunting.”

“For what purpose?” he asked confused.

“To put a baby in.”

“Is someone in the parish increasing?”

“Yes, Mr. Collins. Someone you know very well is to have a child.”

“I hope it is not that Mallow girl. I have already spoken to her parents and have warned them that if Alice continues...”

“Mr. Collins!” Charlotte said, rising. “It is I who is in need of bunting for a baby?”

Finally, a light went on in Mr. Collins’s eyes. “But how...?”

“The usual way.”

“I mean when?”

“Do you mean the particular day?”

“No. No. When is the happy event to take place?”

“Late summer.”

“Ah, yes! Harvest time.”

“That is one way of looking at it,” she said, disappointed at the comparison to a field of barley.

The parson was soon by his wife’s side. Taking her in his arms, he exclaimed, “Everything has changed!”

“Yes, everything has changed. Because of the baby, we must be careful.”

“Of course, my dear,” he said, placing his hand on his wife’s belly. “I would not wish to chase our little bunny around the rabbit hole, now would I?”

*Goodness! The things he says! I wish he would think before he speaks.* “No, dear, you most definitely would not,” she said, pleased at the way things had turned out. “Happy Anniversary!” she said and rewarded him a peck on the cheek.

Note: At this time, garden hoses were in use in Holland. I could not find a particular reference to English gardens. Liberties were taken.

## **Caroline Bingley Contemplates the Worst Day of Her Life**

By Susan Mason Milks

Caroline had not started out with a plan to drink to excess; it just happened spontaneously when she discovered a bottle of brandy hidden in a vase in the upstairs hallway. Undoubtedly, her brother-in-law, who dearly loved his brandy, had placed it there. Her sister Louisa had been trying to cajole him into reducing his consumption, and he must have secreted this one away so he could have an extra nip from time to time. Caroline reasoned she was actually helping her sister by removing temptation from Mr. Hurst's path. Checking to make sure no servants were observing, she concealed the bottle in the folds of her gown and hurried to her room.

Once in her room, she considered the bottle. She had never tasted brandy. Deciding to satisfy her curiosity, she found a glass and opened the bottle. At the first sip she nearly choked. Ack! How did men drink this? It was vile! The second glass, however, was quite soothing. The third and fourth went down even more easily.

Caroline was certain no one could condemn her for taking a drink on a day like this, the first anniversary

of what she had officially declared "the worst day of her life." It was worse than the time her brother had pushed her head first into a pond when she was wearing her new gown.

Of course, that was complicated by the fact she was not supposed to be wearing it outside, as it had been purchased specifically for a party to which she was invited. The pretty garment was ruined. Much to her mortification, she'd been forced to wear an old gown to the event.

It was worse than when she was seven years old and realized for the first time that being a gentleman's daughter was not something you could become by acquiring good manners and nice clothes. You had to be born that way.

It was ever so much worse than the day at Miss Henrietta's School for Young Ladies when Lady Elizabeth March humiliated her by calling her a "cit." Yes, the name "Elizabeth" had always been unlucky for her.

Today was worse than all of those events combined. It was the anniversary of her brother's wedding to Jane Bennet, and thus, also the anniversary of Mr. Darcy's marriage to Elizabeth Bennet. In other words, the end of all her dreams of becoming the mistress of Pemberley. Caroline had held out hope up until the last moment that Mr. Darcy would realize his mistake. Barring that, she prayed for lightening to strike Elizabeth on her way to the

church.

At the wedding, she contemplated jumping up and objecting when the minister asked if anyone knew of any impediments to the marriage, but somehow she could not further humiliate herself by shouting, "He was supposed to marry me!" when that was not exactly true. Darcy had flirted with her. She had been sure of it at the time, but now looking back, she could not be quite certain.

Caroline cringed as she remembered the set down Darcy had given her at Pemberley the summer before the wedding, "For it has been many months since I have considered her the handsomest woman of my acquaintance." Oh, her poor, wounded heart! That was when she first began to realize he was lost to her.

Caroline refilled her glass. How many had she had? Four? Five? She swirled the contents around, took a ladylike sip, and began to plot how she was going kill Elizabeth Bennet. Errr...Elizabeth Darcy. She could barely make her mouth form those offensive words. Yes, she must devise a plan to efficiently and painfully kill Elizabeth!

First, she thought of a knife but rejected it as too messy. So much blood and she might stain one of her beautiful gowns in the process. Next, she considered poison, surely an effective and unpleasant way to die. In her mind's eye, she could see Elizabeth's hands flailing at her throat as the poison did its deadly work until the light flickered out forever from those "fine

eyes." Caroline's gleeful giggle rose but fell quickly when she realized she had no idea how to obtain poison, let alone how she might put it in something Elizabeth would consume. She did not want risk poisoning Darcy or anyone else.

A venomous snakebite she dismissed as impractical. Where would she find a snake in the city, and if she did, who could she coerce into placing it in Elizabeth's room? She would never touch a snake! It was much too disgusting. Hiring someone to assist her opened up the potential she might be blackmailed at some later date, which would then necessitate her killing her accomplice, too. Very messy.

It would be easy work to go out walking with Elizabeth, and once they were out of sight of all the watchful eyes, push her nemesis off a cliff to her death. Unfortunately, there were no cliffs nearby in London, and she had not been invited to Pemberley since the wedding.

Recently, Caroline heard Elizabeth was learning to ride. She wondered if it would be possible to steal into the mews one morning before Elizabeth's riding lesson and loosen the girth on the saddle so she would fall off the horse, hopefully to her death. Unfortunately, Caroline had never saddled her own horse, and so she had no idea what to loosen that would result in the saddle coming off at the exactly the right moment when the horse was going fast enough to do some real damage. The same was true

for a carriage accident. So many straps and buckles! Which ones should she loosen? No, that would never do. Besides, she might break a fingernail in the process.

Reclining on the settee in her room, she held out her hand so she could better admire her graceful fingers and beautifully manicured nails. There must be another way.

A gun. Yes, a gun. Messy but effective. She had accompanied her father on one of his hunting trips years ago and had even fired a hunting rifle, although not with much accuracy. But if she was close enough to Elizabeth, accuracy would not matter. The problem was she had never loaded her own gun and had only a vague idea of how it was accomplished. She groaned miserably. Why did they not teach her something useful at Miss Henrietta's School?

Pouring herself another glass of the delicious, magic liquid, she pondered if it might be possible to frame Elizabeth for the murder of her sister, Jane Bingley. Now that would kill two birds with one stone, and the punishment for murder was extremely unpleasant—hanging. Caroline put a hand over her mouth to stifle a giggle that turned into a decidedly unladylike burp. A good idea, but again impractical. There was no guarantee the plan would result in Elizabeth's arrest, and a magistrate or jury would be reluctant to convict the wife of Fitzwilliam Darcy without very convincing evidence.

This time when Caroline sat up, her head was spinning. More accurately, the room was spinning, as she was certain she was not moving at all. Reaching out for her glass to take another sip of the wonderful, soothing brandy, she discovered her fingers were not working properly, and the glass fell to the floor. This brought another round of laughter bubbling from her lips. Just thinking about killing Elizabeth was too much fun to keep to herself. She simply had to share it. Where was Louisa? She would find all of this quite amusing.

When Caroline tried to rise to go look for her sister, she discovered her legs had turned to jelly. Falling back awkwardly on the settee, she giggled again. A nap seemed like a good idea, but closing her eyes only made the spinning worse.

Her murderous plans quickly devolved from reality to wonderful fantasy with the vision of Elizabeth standing in front of a military firing squad. That image was delicious. No, she had an even better idea! A guillotine! Just as she was imagining a terrified Elizabeth on her knees begging for her life beside Madame Guillotine, Caroline heard a sound at the door to her room.

“Caroline? Caroline? It is time for supper.” Louisa's voice sounded very far away.

Caroline blinked slowly and fought back nausea. When she looked up again, Louisa was standing over her shaking her head. Caroline reached up with an

unsteady hand and tried to grab at her sister's face.

"Please, do not move your head. It is making me dizzy." At least, that was what she intended to say. She was shocked when it came out more like, "Pleesh, dear, do not moof your head so quickly. Ish, make me dishy."

"What are you trying to say? Caroline, are you unwell?"

Through the haze, she saw Louisa examining the nearly empty brandy bottle.

"I do not believe it. You are not ill. You are quite foaxed!" said Louisa. "Do not worry. I will ask Mr. Hurst for help. He knows all the best remedies for too much drink."

As Louisa turned to go, Caroline's arm flailed out again, and she managed to catch hold of her sister's hand. "No, doona leaf me. 'M dying!"

"Oh, my dear, you are not going to die," Louisa said sympathetically.

Caroline tried to make her lips form the words to insist that, in fact, she was definitely going to expire and quite soon, but at this point, she could not because her lips were numb.

The next morning Caroline awoke with a thumping headache. Had elephants been dancing on her head? Her eyelids hurt and her mouth felt like the inside of a birdcage. Someone, either her maid or her sister, had removed her gown and put her to bed. Just as Caroline was taking inventory of all the parts of her

body that were in pain, Louisa appeared.

“I thought I heard you stirring, dear. How are you feeling?” her sister asked, brightly.

“How do you think I feel?” Caroline snapped. That was big mistake. Talking made her head feel even worse!

“You are looking a little green,” Louisa observed.

Caroline felt like growling, but it was too much effort so she settled on giving her sister a scathing look.

“I do hope you are feeling better this morning. We just received a last minute invitation to Darcy House for supper this evening. Charles and Jane will be there, too. And Georgiana. Is it not exciting? I have heard rumors the Darcys have a new cook who is simply amazing. There are other rumors, too, around town. Maybe they are planning to make a big announcement,” Louisa smiled and prattled on.

Just when Caroline thought things could not get much worse, now she would have to go to supper and face her nemesis again. Rolling her eyes, which brought on more pain, she wondered if she could possibly acquire some poison today after all. Then she could carry out her plan to rid the world of Elizabeth Darcy. When she tried to rise, she fell back on her pillows with a groan. If she was not feeling better soon, perhaps she should just take the poison herself so she would not have to endure the agony of yet another family dinner party.

## **The Perverseness of Mischance**

By L.L. Diamond .

“What did you bring? The entire contents of your wardrobe?” William Darcy groused as he dropped the luggage onto the chair. His own much smaller bag followed with a thud. “Why did you pack so much for two nights?” His shoulder throbbed, but as he reached to rub, a set of small hands began to knead at the base of his neck. His head dropped forward with a loud groan.

“I tried to tell you that the bag has a handle and wheels. You could’ve rolled it to the room, but noooo, you had to make it a demonstration of strength.”

“I was not! I thought I saw Caroline Bingley in the lobby, and I scarpered. Besides, I don’t remember you trying very hard to tell me much of anything since you were so busy texting Jane.”

“I wanted her to know I’d arrived. If I hadn’t, she’d worry and call me late tonight. You know I don’t hear my mobile when I’m sleeping, so you would’ve answered it. Our entire relationship would be outed whether we were ready or not.” Elizabeth’s fingers trailed around his sides to hug him from behind. “I confess it might be a relief if she did. I feel guilty hiding that there is an ‘us’ from her.”

William turned and wrapped her in his embrace. “The secret seemed so necessary at the time. I always swore I would ensure any relationship was solid and lasting before I introduced a woman to Ana—especially since Richard’s divorce from Julia. His daughter becomes so confused by the myriad of girlfriends he dated prior to Charlotte.”

“From what you’ve told me, Richard’s daughter is not even five years old. She’s a great deal younger than Ana.”

He drew back and brushed a few curls behind her ear. “I was hoping we could have tea with Ana on Sunday before you go home. I’d like to introduce you.”

“You want me to meet your sister?” The sparkle in her emerald eyes was lovely. She was so vibrant, so beautiful.

“I do.” He swallowed and nodded. “I’ve been happier in these last two months than I can remember being in years. I know you have concerns about your mother’s reaction, but I’m tired of waiting until Jane goes to sleep to come over. I want to be able to sit in front of the telly and eat dinner in the dining room, I want to spend an evening snogging on the sofa, and I want to have a lie in with you if we fancy it. No more sneaking around. No more hiding.”

Elizabeth’s cheeks pinked, yet her smile had grown wider as he continued to speak until her lip gave a wicked curve. “Well, if Caroline was in the lobby, we won’t be a secret much longer.”

“Haha.” He pinched her side as she giggled. “Seriously, though. You were concerned about your mother, but you’ve never said why. She wouldn’t object to me, would she?”

“God, no!” She withdrew from his arms and stood by the floor to ceiling windows that gave a postcard worthy view of London below. “My mother... my mother is mortifying. I dread you meeting her.”

She took a deep breath and sashayed forward, the knee-length skirt of her dress swaying with each hypnotic move of her hips. Her arms wrapped around his neck, and she pressed her cheek against his. “We’re in this posh hotel room for the weekend, and you made these mysterious plans for tomorrow night. Let’s not ruin our celebration with talk of my mother.” A cheeky hand stroked along the curve of his rear and squeezed. “I’ve something special planned for you, too.”

His breathing quickened and his heart began to pummel his ribs. “Special?” he choked out. “What did you have in mind?”

“I might be willing to share my secrets if you’ll share yours.” Her breath branded the flesh of his ear and sent a prickling sensation down his back.

His eyes closed, and he inhaled in a futile attempt to calm himself. Control! He had to maintain control or she’d spoil everything. “As much as I’d adore hearing your secrets.” His lips brushed her cheek until they reached her nose, where he bestowed a soft peck.

“I’m not telling mine.”

Elizabeth nipped his bottom lip. “I’ll make you sing, you know.”

Her throaty voice made him—well, parts of him stand up and take notice, but rather than indulge himself, he chuckled and stepped back. “You have failed to ferret information from me so far. Don’t get your hopes up.”

A glint appeared in her eye, she hooked her fingers in his belt loops, and pulled him forward. “Oh, I’ll get something up.”

The kisses she bestowed on his neck made it difficult to have a coherent thought, so he did not resist, pulling her flush to his body. His fingers delved into her long, curly locks and tilted her head so his lips could claim hers.

She was perfect. The exposed skin on her back was like silk beneath his fingertips, and he craved more. He turned them and with a nudge, pushed her back onto the mattress as she laughed and yanked him down on top of her.

Her chest pressed further against his with every breath, which drew his eye to her cleavage. The dress had to come off! He reached for the zipper, but a strange vibration and chirp made them both start.

“What was that?”

She grinned and reached into his coat pocket. “I think it was your mobile.”

The contraption rang again, and he took it from

her hand. “I need to be sure it’s not Ana.” He glanced at the screen and stared. “Why would Charlie be calling?”

Elizabeth tilted the phone towards her face and frowned. “What if something is wrong with Jane? Answer it!” How likely was it Charlie would call his number if there was an emergency with Jane? He pressed the screen to accept and turned on the speakerphone.

“I thought you had a date.”

A bit of static came across the connection. Did he hang up?

“Darcy! Thank God! You’ve got to help me!”

Why was he whispering? Well, one thing was certain. If Jane was ill or had an emergency, Charlie wouldn’t be speaking such a soft voice. He shook his head at Elizabeth, who exhaled and relaxed back against the mattress.

“Charlie, you have had sex before. Don’t tell me you need me to remind you how...”

“No!”

Elizabeth bit her lip with a wide smile.

“Then...”

“Just shut your gob and listen.”

William raised his eyebrows as Elizabeth did the same. Charlie never spoke so rudely, which meant he was agitated or frightened. The man had been a nervous wreck all week waiting for this evening and had annoyed everyone around him with his incessant

fretting. Had the pressure to perform finally gotten to him?

Charlie's voice came through the phone a bit louder but with a higher pitch to it. "I arrived at Jane's tonight to find she lives in an old gaol, complete with shackles and a ball and chain hanging on the wall!

"Is that a barbed wire toilet seat?" squeaked Charlie, causing William to lift up with a jolt. How did Charlie's voice hit that pitch? A recording of it could be used as a dog whistle.

What was Charlie's problem? Sure, Jane and Elizabeth's décor was unique and not typical for most young women, but did Charlie believe Jane was into bondage or something kinky? Oh wait! That was exactly what Charlie thought!

"And the barbed wire!" Charlie's next girlish exclamation caused Elizabeth to cover her mouth with her hands, stifling her giggles, as William made an unsuccessful attempt to suppress his laughter. A snort escaped and Elizabeth buried her face into his neck as her entire body shook.

Charlie gasped. "You're laughing at me!"

"No, I promise I'm not. Charlie, you need to calm down. Do you hear me?" He bit his lip to prevent himself from chortling while he waited for an answer that didn't come. "Charlie?"

The screen of his phone cleared, indicating Charlie had ended the call, as Darcy wiped his eyes. Charlie had a bad history of overreacting, but this one was

priceless! Just wait until he told Richard. The two of them would never let Charlie live it down!

Elizabeth pulled back and peered at the mobile still clutched in his hand. “You hung up?”

“No, Charlie ended the call. Well, unless Jane took his phone away to shackle him in the dungeon.”

“William, you have to ring him back!”

“Why? He’s an adult—well, most of the time anyway.”

“What if he dumps Jane? I mean, what was he imagining? The poor bloke sounded terrified.”

“Yet, you laughed.”

Her eyes flashed. “And you didn’t, William Darcy?” She reached for the phone. “Give me the mobile, I’ll ring them back.”

“No! This weekend is supposed to be for the two of us. No Jane. No Charlie. Just us.”

Elizabeth lifted her shoulders off the bed and stretched her arm towards his hand. “Give me the mobile!” He chucked it across the room, and she gasped. “You didn’t! If it was Ana, you would have returned that call straight away!”

“If it were Ana, I would’ve been home by now. She’s sixteen!”

With a huff, she dropped her arms to her sides. “I don’t want Jane hurt!” He nuzzled her ear, and her breath hitched. “You can’t possibly mean to now.”

“Why not? It’s our two month anniversary, and as you pointed out, we’re in this expensive room.” He

trailed his lips down her neck as she shivered.

“What about Jane?”

He lifted his head. “Mention your sister again, and I’ll spank you.”

Her eyes widened. “You wouldn’t dare.”

“Try me.”

She pursed her lips and glared. “Jane.” She drew the name out just a bit as she lifted one eyebrow.

Her impertinence didn’t surprise him, but he gasped as though it did. “You asked for it!” He made to flip her over, but before he could, her fingers dug into his sides. Argh! How could he forget that she knew about his ticklish spots!

He wiggled and squirmed until she was able to manoeuvre from beneath him and ran for the phone; however, she only made it a few steps before her shriek filled the room as he grabbed her around the waist and threw her back upon the bed. As soon as she hit the mattress, she scooted back to the opposite side, placed her feet upon the floor, and leaned forward with her hands on the bed, waiting for his next move.

They stared one another down from opposite sides until she made a break and bolted around the footboard. A few quick strides caught him up, and he scooped her into his arms as she squealed.

“You dare tickle me, Miss Bennet!” He assaulted her ribs with a light pressure that soon had her in giggles.

“Stop! William, please!”

He paused. “Do you surrender?”

She looked above her head as though considering his question. He loved her playful nature. She was unlike anyone he’d ever dated, and though he had yet to declare his feelings, he’d fallen hard within a few short weeks.

A sudden movement freed her from him as she jumped in the direction of the mobile while her laughter echoed through the room.

“Oh no you don’t!”

With an arm around her stomach, he pulled her to the bed and lay on top of her as he tickled her some more.

“William!” she cried between heaving breaths and chuckles. “Please stop! No more!”

His fingers halted their onslaught, and he rubbed up and down her side as she caught her breath. “I love you.”

She cupped his cheek, grinning as she panted from their exercise. “I love you, too.”

“Really?”

Elizabeth opened her mouth, but a knock at the door prevented her answer. Instead, she motioned with her head towards the sound. “Are you going to answer it?”

His gaze flitted down to her chest and then returned to her eyes. “No, I’d much rather remain where I am.”

Bang, bang, bang! The sound was louder this time.

“Mr. Darcy, this is Henry Rutledge, the manager. Would you please open the door?”

Elizabeth gasped. “Do you think we were too loud?”

He stood and straightened his clothes, tucking his shirt into his trousers as he strode to the door. When he pulled the heavy wood-stained panel open, the manager was not alone—a police officer joined him.

“Mr. Darcy, we have received several complaints from other guests on this level as well as complaints from the floor above you and the floor below.”

The constable stepped forward. “Sir, I believe you have a woman here with you. I would like to speak to her, please.”

Elizabeth, with her appearance tidied, appeared beside him and looked between the two men. “You wish to talk to me?”

“Yes, miss?”

“Bennet.”

The hotel manager backed from the door as the policeman took his place directly before Elizabeth. “Miss Bennet, do you require help?”

“I beg your pardon?”

Mr. Rutledge peered around the officer. “Mr. Darcy, due to the number of complaints and the appearance of the situation, I must request you take your belongings and leave. You will not be charged for the room.”

Before he could speak, the constable gestured

down the corridor. “I need the two of you to accompany me back to the police station.”

“Surely this is not necessary,” reasoned William. “Mr. Rutledge, we apologise if we were unruly. It shall not happen again. I can assure you. Isn’t that correct, Elizabeth?”

He glanced beside him, but she was not there. He turned at a strange sound to where Elizabeth was wheeling her suitcase to the exit.

She handed him his overnight bag. “They’ve asked us to leave, William, and I do not want to argue the point. Isn’t there somewhere else we could go?”

“After you accompany me to the station,” the policeman interjected. “I shouldn’t require much of your time.”

William’s shoulders slumped. “Do you truly want to go?”

“No, but I don’t want a scene either. Do you?”

He gave a long exhale, grabbed the handle of her luggage before she could, and followed the constable in the direction of the elevators. What a way for their weekend to begin!

Two hours later, William’s rear ached from the hard bench against the wall of the police station. With a growl under his breath, he drummed his fingers against his leg. Two hours! It had been two hours! Where was Elizabeth?

William scanned the office, but his eyes returned to the door across the room where they had whisked

Elizabeth upon their arrival. He hadn't seen her since.

He should've called his lawyer, but Elizabeth insisted it wasn't necessary. They had done nothing wrong, so the money spent for the service would have been a waste.

"Excuse me!" A passing woman in uniform stopped. "My girlfriend was taken in there two hours ago. The constable said we should be here no longer than a half hour. Do you know..."

"I'm certain she won't be much longer." Before he could ask another question, she hurried to a desk across the room.

This was ridiculous! He was not going to sit here all night! He pulled his mobile from his pocket, found the number for his lawyer, and was about to hit send when the dreary grey door opened and Elizabeth emerged. Thank God! She appeared annoyed as she snatched her coat from the officer, but she was at least unharmed.

"Elizabeth?"

She stepped into his waiting arms. "They said we could leave. I want to go home."

"Would my home work?"

She lifted her head and gazed into his eyes. "What about Ana?"

"I was going to introduce you on Sunday. What's a couple of days earlier?" He tucked a curl behind her ear. "Well?"

Her arms wrapped around his neck as she grinned.

“Sounds perfect?”

Someone cleared his throat, so they turned to discover the policeman from the hotel behind her. Elizabeth maintained her embrace despite the interruption.

“My apologies for disrupting your evening. You are free to go.” William watched as the constable walked away. My apologies? He did not even give an explanation for dragging them to the station, and why did the constable’s lip twitch as he spoke?

“Elizabeth? What did you tell them while you were in that room?”

“They wanted to know why we were so loud at the hotel, so I told the truth.” She placed a hand over his mouth. “Before you say a word, they requested we leave the hotel and called the police because people reported that you were beating me. They even had a recording of a 999 call. I swear it was Caroline Bingley.”

“What?” he choked out.

She sighed. “I don’t want to discuss this here where everyone can hear. Can we talk about it when we get to your house?”

“Yes, of course.” He made a quick call for a taxi, grabbed their bags, and accompanied her out the front exit, but as soon as they stepped into the night air, a barrage of blinding flashes assaulted them.

“Miss Bennet! Where did you meet Mr. Darcy?”

“Mr. Darcy! How long have you been dating Miss

Bennet?”

A few unintelligible questions followed, but fortunately, the taxi pulled to the kerb. Elizabeth shielded her eyes from the glaring lights with her hands as they rushed into the waiting car. When the incessant flashes subsided, Elizabeth remained with her face covered, her shoulders shaking.

“Elizabeth?”

A huge snort escaped as she erupted into peals of laughter. “We were so careful to keep us a secret for two months and by tomorrow morning, the entirety of Britain will know.” She placed a hand to her chest. “It’s just so ridiculous!”

After a moment, her amusement subsided, and her expression became serious. “My mother will know.”

He grinned. “So will my Aunt Catherine.”

“Any regrets?”

He laced his fingers with hers. “Other than the two hours we wasted at the police station, not a one.”

She bit her lip as she smiled, which in his opinion, was the sweetest expression she made. “Me either. I love you, William Darcy.”

“I love you, too, Elizabeth Bennet.”

The headline of *The Sun* the following morning read, “Darcy Bank CEO’s ‘50 Shades’ Tryst!”

# An Anniversary Request

By Maria Grace

*August 19, 1812*

Mrs. Bennet's unique rap sounded at the study door just an hour after dinner.

Mr. Bennet leaned his head back into the soft wing back. Even if it was expected, he did not relish the call. She had only begun to come downstairs once again the day before yesterday. Could she not afford him just one more evening of peace?

“Come.”

She bustled in, a hen with feathers ruffled, looking for someone to peck. “I would speak with you, sir.”

“I assumed that is why you have come.” He folded his hands on the desk.

“Then you will listen?” Her eyebrows rose.

“It does not appear I have a multitude of alternatives.”

She blinked as though she did not understand.

“I am listening, Mrs. Bennet.”

“Oh, very good then.” She pulled her shoulders back and nodded. “I insist you permit our dear Lydia to visit.”

And so it began.

“I believe I have already made my position clear on that matter.”

“I recall you voicing your opinion.” Her voice rose half a note, definitely off key.

“My decision.” He rapped his knuckles on the desk.

“You have not heard my piece on the matter.”

“You made your wishes quite clear on the issue. Clear, punctuated with great wailing and gnashing of teeth.

“But you have not heard my reasons.”

Reasons! She wanted to argue reason?

“I do not see how that makes any difference.”

“You go on and on about how you are such a rational sensible creature whilst you declare I am not. No, no do not dismiss me with that look. You should then listen and hear me out, see if I cannot reason as well as you.”

He pinched the bridge of his nose. What kind of travesty of thought would she lay at his feet? His stomach lurched. How disquieting would this be to his sense?

But, how disquieting would his refusal be to his sensibilities?

Which was worse?

“Pray madam, tell me your reasons, but do be quick with it.” Not that she was likely to abide by such a request.

She settled her feathers and clasped her hands before her like a school girl ready to recite her histories. “As you know, our youngest daughter has

been recently married, and they will be on their way soon to the North.”

He grunted. Why did she have to tempt him so?

“It is my firm belief that they should come, stay with us, rather they should be permitted to stay with us on journey north.”

He clenched his hand tightly.

“I beseech you, madam, make you point and do so with alacrity.”

Little creases lined the sides of her eyes. “Yes, as to that, sir, my reasons for my petitions are first, the servants surely heard your declarations that they should not be welcome at Longbourn. You know how the servants are apt to talk. No doubt the entire neighborhood will know, and what shall they think? More importantly, how will that reflect upon your other daughters? Surely you must see, we have more daughters who need husbands—”

“It seems our youngest had no difficulty in finding a worthless young man to marry her. I do not see why the others should have any further difficulties. I cannot admit your reason, nor your initial implication that servant gossip should be any concern of mine.”

She sniffed and straightened her shoulders. “I see, well then, my second reason—”

Actually it was her third reason—

“—is the impression you shall impart to your other daughters.”

“I have no notion of your meaning, Mrs. Bennet.”

“If the other girls see you rejecting your youngest daughter after her marriage, how will they think you will treat them after their own marriages? Consider Lizzy, your decided favorite. Why, if she fears the withdrawal of your affection, she might be reluctant to accept an otherwise acceptable offer of marriage.

He snorted into his hand. “An entirely ridiculous proposition on several counts. If my other daughters marry in such a way, they should very well expect paternal censure and well deserved at that. Lizzy is sensible enough to realize I would not shun her for marrying decently and in order. I will not listen to any more—” He braced his hands on the desk to rise.

“No, Mr. Bennet, you said you would hear me out, and I insist you do as you promised.”

He clutched his temples. Unfortunately it would take far longer to win that argument than to simply hear her out.

He waved her to continue. If only she would not don that smug expression.

“My third reason applies to your honor and sense of family. Recall, your cousin Collins came to us to mend the rift in your family. Should you now establish another?”

“I might remind you, he also visited during our time of uncertainty to suggest that we should turn our backs on her entirely and never see her again.”

“I...I...was not privy to that conversation. I am not entirely certain that was what he said as we only have

the reports of the other girls to go by. He is not the kind of man who would contradict himself and I do not think well of you doing it either.”

He chewed his lower lip. In truth, admitting Lydia simply to vex Collins was the most tempting idea she had offered yet.

“Still, madam, you have not persuaded me. It seems no matter what course I take, I shall please Mr. Collins. If that is the case, then I do not see why I should not take the one most in accord with my own opinions.”

“Must you take such delight in vexing me?” She stomped and her fists pumped at her sides. Exactly the same expression Lydia used.

“Perhaps I should remind you; it was you who came to me Mrs. Bennet. If you have exhausted—”

“No, no, not so fast, sir. I have one further reason.”

“Then, pray, present it quickly that we may finish this conversation and peace may return to our abode.”

Her face softened and the steel left her voice. “Are you aware, sir, of what today is?”

“Whatever do you mean?”

“The date, sir. Have you taken notice of the date?”

“No, I have not.” He squinted and scratched his head. “Oh.”

“Perhaps now you recall.”

He removed his glasses. “Yes, Mrs. Bennet, I do.”

“You might also recall, not everyone in your family was in support of our marriage. As I recall, your

mother favored a young lady with a larger dowry. She did not welcome us at first.”

“She never denied us entry to Longbourn.”

“No, she did not. And yet,” she bit her lip and turned her face aside.

A tear leaked from the corner of her eye.

She had been deeply wounded by his mother’s initial rejection. Had that ever really healed?

“In honor of our anniversary, sir. I ask that you might permit their visit.”

He threw back his head and dug his fingers into the back of his neck. What logic might he bring to bear to counter such a reason?

None but the most heartless.

And he was not a heartless man.

He polished his glasses and sighed. “Alas, Mrs. Bennet, you have indeed overcome me with your reason. I see little alternative but to accede to your request. You may write to Lydia and ask when they shall visit Longbourn.”

“Oh, Mr. Bennet.” She whispered, dabbing her eyes with the end of her fichu. “You are the best of men.”

She turned and looked at him with those same eyes that he fell in love with those many years ago. They were handsome in those days and had not changed that much in the ensuing decades.

Yes, she had become silly and nervous, but those feelings had not entirely faded.

“Perhaps we might go upstairs and continue to reminisce over our wedding?” He offered her his arm

She slipped her hand into the crook of his elbow.  
“A capital suggestion, sir.”

## **Jane Austen and Anniversaries**

By Diana Birchall

It is curious that Jane Austen does not describe anniversaries in her novels, and barely touches on them in any of her other writing. This may partly have been because birthdays and wedding anniversaries were not as commonly, universally celebrated in her day as in our more commercially enthusiastic age, with greeting cards and presents for everything from births to bar mitzvahs. And it may have something to do with her extra large extended family – if she attended parties for every one of her many young nieces and nephews it would have been a heavy incursion on her novel writing time!

Presents given to Jane Austen mentioned in her letters, such as the topaz crosses her sailor brother brought back for her and Cassandra, don't seem to have had anything to do with birthdays. As for the other two pieces of jewelry known to belong to Jane, the turquoise ring and bracelet, no one knows who gave them to her, or when.

In seeking to discover evidence of what Jane Austen thought of special days such as anniversaries, we find that her most famous mention of a birthday or anniversary is, perhaps tellingly, a very sad one. This is a poem she wrote on her own birthday, December 16, 1808, when she was thirty-three years old. What made the day sad is that one of her dearest and closest friends, Mrs. Anne Lefroy, had been killed in a fall from her horse on Jane's birthday four years earlier, in 1804. Jane wrote:

Mrs. Lefroy  
To the Memory of Mrs. Lefroy who died Dec:r 16  
— my Birthday.

*The day returns again, my natal day;  
What mix'd emotions with the Thought arise!  
Beloved friend, four years have pass'd away  
Since thou wert snatch'd forever from our eyes.—  
The day, commemorative of my birth  
Bestowing Life and Light and Hope on me,  
Brings back the hour which was thy last on Earth.  
Oh! bitter pang of torturing Memory!—*

It is a bitterly sad poem, and in it she painfully remembers what Mrs. Lefroy, a gracious older woman who seems to have been something of a motherly mentor, meant to her. She extols her friend's qualities:

*Let me behold her as she used to be.  
I see her here, with all her smiles benign,  
Her looks of eager Love, her accents sweet.  
That voice and Countenance almost divine!—  
Expression, Harmony, alike complete.—  
I listen—'tis not sound alone—'tis sense,  
'Tis Genius, Taste and Tenderness of Soul.  
'Tis genuine warmth of heart without pretence  
And purity of Mind that crowns the whole.*

She remembers "Her partial favour from my earliest years," and closes with the wish that the coincidence in the connection of dates might be an omen that they might meet in Heaven.

*Oh! might I hope to equal Bliss to go!  
To meet thee Angel! in thy future home!—  
Fain would I feel an union in thy fate,*

*Fain would I seek to draw an Omen fair  
From this connection in our Earthly date.  
Indulge the harmless weakness—Reason, spare.—*

It would seem probable that the thought of Mrs. Lefroy brought a shade of sadness to the rest of Jane Austen's birthdays.

In her letters, the only mention of an anniversary that I know of, appears in a letter to Cassandra on January 8/9, 1801, when Jane Austen had just turned twenty-five. She was at home at Steventon, and Cassandra was visiting their brother Edward Knight and his family at Godmersham in Kent.

The circumstances were that Mr. Austen had just announced, the previous month, that he was going to retire from his parish at Steventon, and move the family to Bath. (This is the occasion when Jane Austen was said to have fainted at the news.) Her oldest brother James Austen was going to take over Steventon rectory, and it is said that his wife Mary made herself unpleasant, being all too eager to move into her new abode.

Jane Austen was clearly feeling shaken and unhappy at this turn of circumstances, for in telling Cassandra how James and Mary were planning to celebrate their fourth wedding anniversary, she writes:

“The wedding-day is to be celebrated on the 16<sup>th</sup> because the 17<sup>th</sup> falls on Saturday – and a day or two before the 16<sup>th</sup> Mary will drive her sister to Ibthrop to find all the festivity she can in contriving for everybody’s comfort, & being thwarted or teized by almost everybody’s temper. – Fulwar, Eliza & Tom

Chute are to be of the party; – I know of nobody else.  
– I was asked but declined it.”

From this we can see that the idea of having an anniversary party was not an unheard of thing, and such an anniversary was referred to as a “wedding-day.” For example, in *Heartsease*, a novel by Charlotte Yonge, an author born just after Austen died, who grew up to be a friend of Austen’s nephew James Edward Austen Leigh, she has the young wife Violet wish her husband Arthur not to go traveling because it will be their wedding-day, the first anniversary of their marriage.

Perhaps we may detect a shade of disapproval in Austen’s letter. She writes with slight wry disdain of Mary trying “to find all the festivity she can,” as if she is perhaps making an unnecessary fuss; and the only people she knows who are going to the party are the wealthy family that lived at The Vyne, just within the parish that had been her father’s, and was now James’. Perhaps she thought James and Mary were courting the “county” important people. There is nothing ambiguous about her decided, clipped comment, “I was asked but declined it.”

Even though there are no anniversaries mentioned in the novels, we can turn to them for glimpses of what Jane Austen thought about the operations of time passing. In *Sense and Sensibility*, when Edward Ferrars finally makes his proposal to Elinor, he does not “expect a very cruel reception. It was his business, however, to say that he did, and he said it very prettily. What he might say on the subject a twelvemonth after, must be referred to the imagination of husbands and wives.”

Here she is making humorous mention of the ways young married people might feel about each other, from the glamour of the proposal, to the common daily life on their first anniversary.

Back to her letters again, she allows herself some musing about time's passage when describing a ball that takes place while she is living at Southampton, on December 9, 1808. She was then thirty-three, and she writes:

“Our ball was rather more amusing than I expected. Martha liked it very much, and I did not gape till the last quarter of an hour. It was past nine before we were sent for and not twelve when we returned. The room was tolerably full, and there were, perhaps, thirty couple of dancers. The melancholy part was, to see so many dozen young women standing by without partners, and each of them with two ugly naked shoulders.”

This leads her to remember another ball, that occurred on an earlier visit to Southampton in 1793, when she was just eighteen years old:

“It was the same room in which we danced fifteen years ago. I thought it all over, and in spite of the shame of being so much older, felt with thankfulness that I was quite as happy now as then. We paid an additional shilling for our tea, which we took as we chose in an adjoining and very comfortable room.”

In a similar remembering vein, three years earlier, she writes to Cassandra from Bath on April 8, 1805:

“This morning we have been to see Miss Chamberlaine look hot on horseback. Seven years and four months ago we went to the same riding-house to see Miss Lefroy’s performance! What a different set we are now moving in! But seven years I suppose are

enough to change every pore of one's skin and every feeling of one's mind."

Jane Austen later uses a similar thought to devastating romantic effect in Persuasion, when she has Anne and Captain Wentworth engage in this dialogue:

"I am not so much changed,' cried Anne, and stopped, fearing she knew not what misconstruction. After waiting a few moments he said, and it was as if it were the result of immediate feeling, 'It is a period, indeed! Eight years and a half is a period.'"

From these thoughts, quotations and recollections it is not unreasonable to surmise that Jane Austen thought of anniversaries and the passage of years with some emotion and solemnity – not at all in a gleeful celebratory "happy birthday" mode that is typical of what we expect people to feel today.

## **End Notes**

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