

Mr Darcy's Diary



MAYA SLATER



PHOENIX

October 12th ~

All day I had G's letter on my mind, yet could not bring myself to dwell on it. It rained heavily; in the forenoon I had them saddle Caesar & out for a gallop in the rain, which failed to clear my thoughts. Later joined in the Library by Miss Caroline, shewing me the slippers she is embroidering for me, & urging me to admire them. Red *gros point* with green lovers' knots! When I protested that I never wear slippers, she informed me that now was the time to start.

Charles rambled on incessantly about tonight's ball. He had heard that numbers of charming young ladies live in the neighbourhood, & mentioned one family with five or six daughters, all said to be lovely – but I could think of nothing but G's letter. I have reread it three or four times, but still can find no solution to her predicament. All I wished for was the leisure to reflect on this: when we foregathered for the cold meats, I said that I would prefer to stay at home. Charles would not hear of this: 'Pooh, Fitz! You can't be such a killjoy. Come to the ball! They say the Assembly Rooms at Meryton are delightful. A couple of *boulangers* or a Dashing White Sergeant will cheer you up in a trice. I won't hear of you languishing here, whilst we all enjoy ourselves. Why, you'd miss the prettiest girls for miles around!'

Miss Caroline, I think, dislikes such allusions to petticoats. She retired to compose her evening's *toilette* with her maid. Her Brother continued to exhort me: 'You want some powders for your blue devils. I'll send for Nicholls, & get her to prepare you one of her fortifying draughts. You'll see.'

Normally I would take pleasure in attending a ball full of pretty young women – but not today. However, I decided that it would be simpler to acquiesce. If only I were my own master, not a guest in Charles's house! Repaired upstairs & called for Peebles. He had already laid out my dress clothes; but tho' he packed at least three

portmanteaux full of useless apparel, he has brought only a skin-tight pair of breeches. There was nothing for it but to squeeze myself into them.

At the ball, things were no better. To my disenchanted eye the ballroom seemed a hall of mean proportions, embellished with stucco pillars & a tinkling chandelier; a quartet of fiddlers scraped their way through the evening; a superfluity of raw young women, uncomfortable in long gloves, eager for dancing-partners, occupied the chairs. No matter: in the offending breeches I could scarcely sit down. Whenever I did approach a chair, all the matrons in the neighbourhood converged on me, seeking my opinion on Netherfield. As for dancing ... I performed the minimum of courtesies with Miss Caroline & Mrs Louisa, since after all they are my hostesses; nothing would have induced me to take part in any further gambolling. Charles attempted to persuade me, crying: 'Come, Darcy! I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better dance.' I did observe that there was one prettyish girl in the room, but she smiled too much; & besides, Charles monopolized her for the whole evening. He would have foisted one of her Sisters on me. I resisted. She seemed tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*.

On the way home, in the carriage, listening distractedly to Charles vaunting the charms of his dancing partner, '*an angel*', I became aware of Miss Caroline's knee, pressed against mine. When the carriage jolted it felt quite uncomfortable. She is not to blame – we want for room in the carriage. Edward Hurst snored throughout the journey.

I retired immediately, intending to reflect further on G's letter; but when I reached my chamber, I decided to write my Diary instead. Peebles has kept me from my bed for the last half-hour, complaining about a splash of candle-wax on the back of my coat. It must have been that confounded chandelier.

October 13th ~

At breakfast this morning, Charles reiterated his admiration for his last night's dancing partner. Her name is Miss Bennet. He accused me of being *distract*. With an effort, I brought my attention back to my

companions, noticing that on three separate occasions Edward Hurst refreshed his coffee from his hip-flask, despite Mrs Louisa's attempts to restrain him. As usual, he made no reply to her exhortations.

Miss Caroline is quite vexed with me: she asked me how I liked her striped silk morning gown. It is red & green; the colours do not suit her reddish hair. I regret that I was less than civil – I merely said, 'I am not fond of stripes.' Miss Caroline flounced out of the breakfast parlour, catching her sleeve on the door-latch.

After church, Miss Caroline challenged me to a game of piquet; but I had already agreed to take a walk with Charles, so she played with her Sister instead. We gentlemen had our punishment, however. The rain came down in sheets. I did not mind it, but my new beaver was much the worse for it. Poor Peebles will be heartbroken – he spent an age brushing it, he told me only this morning.

October 14th ~

I have resolved to go up to Town to purchase a pianoforte for G. I shall set off tomorrow, & take advantage of my stay there to enjoy a bout of sparring at Jackson's. It will do me good.

This morning Miss Caroline and Mrs Louisa received a visit. I was looking out of the Library window when I saw a carriage draw up before the front door, & a bevy of bonnets alight – six or seven in all. Realising that we were about to endure a courtesy call, I warned Charles & Edward Hurst, & we decided to make ourselves scarce. We rode off down the lane to Meryton. In the Lending Library, Edward found an absurd romance by Mrs Radcliffe, & read us extracts on the way home, at which the two of them grew very merry. We arrived just in time for a nuncheon; the visitors had long since departed. It transpired that they were the Bennet ladies. When Miss Caroline informed Charles, he grew quite peevish: 'You might have sent word to me who it was. I should have been happy to renew my acquaintance with the Misses Bennet.'

'You mean, with the eldest Miss Bennet,' retorted Miss Caroline; Mrs Louisa laughed, & Edward poked Charles in the ribs, & murmured something about an '*inamorata*'. I must say, Charles took it all in good part.

Later, I found myself alone in the drawing room with Mrs Louisa. She called me over to the window. The vista was bleak – the gravel drive, the windswept hills, a few lime trees with withered leaves clinging to their black branches – & the tall figure of Miss Caroline, striding energetically up & down, clutching at her bonnet, which constantly threatened to blow away.

‘Do not you think that my Sister walks well?’ enquired Mrs Louisa. But altho’ Miss Caroline possesses an elegant figure, this was not the day to admire her through the window. I replied shortly that in a howling gale no body walked well.

I sat by the fire with Byron’s new book – a cruel satire: I hope he will not seek my good opinion of it. After reading a page or two, I preferred to stare into the fire. It was at least half an hour later when Miss Caroline entered the Library, her hair ruffled, her face still ruddy from the wind. Had she been strolling in the shrubbery all that time? ‘Was not you tempted by the fresh air to join me?’ she enquired. I vouchsafed no reply – it was not clear whether the question had been put to me, or to Edward Hurst, dozing on the sofa.

Later we three gentlemen went out shooting – far too late in the day, but we all felt the need to walk. Bagged three brace of pheasants with Charles. Lurcher put up two more, but I missed them. Charles taunted me on my poor form. Edward resorted to his hip-flask every few minutes – but shot more birds than the two of us put together.

October 15th ~

Drove up to town, accompanied only by Peebles. Miss Caroline & Mrs Louisa had intended to avail themselves of my carriage to make a short visit there also; but I discouraged them, preferring to travel alone. Charles has planned a day’s cub-hunting with the local meet, so he will scarce miss me. Edward I saw making for the green baize door. I suspect that he has an interest below stairs, & had been hoping to take advantage of his Wife’s absence from the house to indulge himself – tho’ Mrs Louisa is a handsome woman, her hair a darker red than Miss Caroline’s, with the same white skin but with fewer freckles.

Arrived in town before dark, with one change of horses. The house

feels chill & empty: I could almost wish that Papa had exchanged the Grosvenor Square mansion for a less ostentatious dwelling. I may take just such a step myself – perhaps next year. Peebles complains that the damp will get to my small-clothes & make them musty. He insists that they build a fire in my bedchamber, altho' it is mild weather – he always will pamper me. I am spending the evening alone in the Library, reading in the newspaper about the Duke's victory at Almeida. The French losses blamed on misjudgment by Masséna.

October 16th —

To Jackson's first thing for a mill. The sport has somewhat improved my spirits. Thence to Great Pulteney Street, Golden Square, to bespeak a pianoforte from Johannes Broadwood. The instruments very fine, of a beautiful tawny colour. An assistant played them for me, as I have not the skill. Chose a superior instrument, & ordered them to build it a marquetry case. Mr Broadwood assures me that I will readily find a tuner capable of doing it justice in Derbyshire. The only difficulty will be the jolting of the cart during transport to Pemberley; but with careful packing of the mechanism, this should be easy to solve. Unfortunately, the instrument will not be ready for some months – he explains that making it will involve much labour.

I have changed my mind about returning to Hertfordshire immediately, & have sent word to the Bingleys that I will be unable to be with them for a few more days. I am awaiting Pargeter's arrival in Town, bringing with him the Pemberley estate ledgers. I am fortunate in Pargeter: he has proved an excellent steward, comparable in merit to old Wickham before him. It is high time I attended more closely to my affairs, tho' I am persuaded that Pargeter is keeping a good eye on the estate in my absence, as his frequent letters have proved. Several letters were awaiting me from him, concerning Tugley Wood. Do we coppice after twenty years, or after forty? And should we plant other species amongst the hornbeams? We will discuss these matters when he arrives. Most important of all, he will have seen G, & can give me news of her. I have not yet replied to her letter.

October 17th ~

This morning, after fencing at Angelo's, I felt that the time had come to write my reply to G; but no sooner did I sit down at my writing-table, than Bolton announced a gentleman caller. I had no time to think whether I wished to see Byron or no: his Lordship immediately entered the room, elbowing Bolton aside.

'How do, Fitz!' cried he. 'I am happy to find you in town. Last time I called, your door-knocker was removed & you away somewhere in deepest Hertfordshire.'

'Yes, on an extended visit . . . What can you want with me, George?' Byron's ulterior motive for paying me a call is never clear to me.

'Always so abrupt,' he murmured; then he called over his shoulder, 'Bring me a brandy. A good one, mind!'

Bolton bowed & hastened to obey.

Byron limped over to the chair opposite me, & made himself comfortable. He has transformed his gait from the dot-&-carry-one of his schooldays to a curious shuffling glide, which resembles a peculiarity rather than a disability. He looks paler & thinner than formerly. I believe he has improved since we came down from Cambridge, where he was somewhat fat. I teased him on his romantic looks, which pleased him, I think. Apparently he sups off little more than vinegar, except when indulging in a drunken orgy. Recalling his excesses at Cambridge, I doubt me not that such occasions arise only too frequently. He bade me admire his white sharkskin pantaloons. He wears them once only, then discards them. He tells me he has purchased eighty pairs. His valet must be in funds, selling the used ones to less fastidious gentlemen. Apparently Byron is not; in his lordly way, he has condescended to relieve me of 50 guineas, to save him a visit to his Banker's. I do not expect to see my money again.

'What's up with you, Fitz? You look wretched,' said he. 'With your advantages of fortune & looks you should be more frolicsome.'

I muttered some evasive remark. Why cannot Byron be more like Charles, who, whatever my mood, is bracing but never prying?

'Still vegetating in Hertfordshire with Bingley, eh? I have half a mind to join you there. Are there any pretty girls? Have those Sisters of Bingley's improved at all?' continued he.

'Miss Louisa is now married to a Mr Hurst; Miss Caroline is much the same as ever,' I replied repressively. Byron & Charles's Sisters – it will not do. If he has not mended his ways since Cambridge, he is scarcely a suitable companion for any lady.

'Forget them for a few days,' said Byron carelessly, helping himself to more brandy. 'Come with me to the fleshpots: you could do with a little sport.'

'I regret that I am not at leisure to attend you,' said I – tho' I admit that part of me was tempted. He then left for an engagement with a 'society lady', saying, with a grin, 'I shall not reveal her name.' 'Twill be all over London, soon enough.'

I have promised to meet him at Brooks's in a day or two.

It was by then too late to write to G.

October 18th —

LETTER

My dearest Sister,

~~I was greatly saddened by your letter. I infer from the tenor of your recent letter that Derbyshire is sadly lacking in diversion! If only you would permit me to succour you! At this distance I am at a loss what to suggest. Do you still consider a visit to London impossible? Now that we are satisfied that your new companion, Mrs Annesley, is trustworthy suitable, you might achieve it with impunity. It would perhaps be indiscreet for you to brave the metropolis; but there must be some pursuits available to you, & moreover, I should be at leisure myself to attend you. Think on it, dear Sister. For a week or two only — surely you could come to no harm!~~

Poor G! I picture her, in the breakfast parlour at Pemberley, gazing out at the leafless trees in the park ... How will she contrive, on a melancholy autumn eve? Her pianoforte, & her singing, & her sketching – of what use are they? If only this new woman, Mrs Annesley, could keep her chearfully occupied! Can any body help her now?

My dear Georgiana, I am aware how lonely Pemberley can seem in the autumn. The house must feel very big & empty to one young lady & her

chaperone. I am preparing a fine surprize for you, which I hope will please you. Dearest Georgiana, if I can do aught to assist you, pray ask ...

G is too young, too young ... She needs a brother's comfort. If she would only permit me to travel down to Pemberley! Why must I be marooned here, so far from my beloved home, my poor Sister?

Should I instead abandon the Bingleys & Netherfield & remain in London? But what would be the use? Besides, at present I derive much benefit from Charles's chearful presence. Let me return to Hertfordshire, for just a little longer.

When I came to copy out my letter, I found it inadequate. I shall not send it.

October 19th —

Sparring at Jackson's. I defeated Edwardes again – he claims that my height gives me an unfair advantage; Jackson himself avers that I have superior strategic powers, which pleases me.

Pargeter has arrived from Pemberley. There the apple harvest continues apace; Mrs Reynolds has enjoined him to keep me informed about the stillroom – I now have every detail of the pears & plums which she has bottled. She is to try preserving medlars – I cannot imagine how.

Apparently old Mountmain is anxious to purchase Tugg's Dell, which marches with his land, & would immeasurably improve his shoot. I am not prepared to part with a substantial acreage of prime land for a mere pecuniary return, & have written proposing that his Lordship exchange it for Puddelcombe Meadow, which conveniently borders my trout stream.

[Omitted: more information about land transactions, yields and receipts for home farm, redecoration of Miss Georgiana's private parlour, and estimates for repairs to three cottages in Pemberley village].

Miss Georgiana seems a little dull & out of sorts, says Pargeter; she mopes around the house for much of the day. The weather has been

so bad that her morning walks have had to take place in the Picture Gallery. Poor G!

That evening I dashed off another letter to her, gave it to Bolton to post before I could change my mind, then went to Brooks's to meet Byron as arranged. Byron in an outlandish black cloak which he said had come from France. How do these fripperies continue to cross the Channel, war or no war! He called it a *rocolo* or some such name. It would not do for Peebles to catch sight of it – he is for ever wishing me to emulate his Lordship's sartorial excesses. Tom Bullivant was there. He tells me there is much disquiet about Perceval's retaining the position of Chancellor as well as Prime Minister. I agree – it is more than any man can handle. Byron was at the gaming tables, & I distinctly saw him hand over my money in exchange for counters. I recognized the purse. He lost heavily, then appeared to bethink himself, borrowed a large sum from the Bank, handed me back my 50*l.*, ordered a fine supper for the three of us, and, having gorged on pickled salmon & brandy, repaired once more to the tables. I felt no inclination to play, but went & sat in the smoking room with Tom. I took much Port Wine, & raised no objection when Byron came to find us & carried us off to meet some '*charming women*' of his acquaintance. I remember little of the evening after that. My bit of muslin was fair & curvaceous, with a loud laugh. She had fine paps to her. Her name, I believe, is Clarabelle.

I am not sure who brought me home.

October 20th ~

Peebles exuded disapproval as he brought in my shaving water. Took myself to church in the forenoon – All Souls, Langham Place. Cold meats, then a quiet session with the Pemberley accounts. Dinner alone. No Port Wine. To bed early. Wrote yesterday's & today's Diary.

The time has come for me to forward the first instalment of moneys to that blackguard Wickham. I will arrange it with Pargeter tomorrow before leaving Town.

October 21st ~

Trafalgar Day! Much celebrating & flag-waving in the street. No body seems to remember that this was also the day the Admiral died. Out & about in Town all day.

October 22nd ~

Yesterday evening Byron came & persuaded me to accompany him to Brooks's again for a Trafalgar Day celebration. I a trifle reluctant to let myself in for more debauchery, but allowed him to prevail without much difficulty. The fellows in festive mood. Cracked several bottles of claret with Colebrooke, Fitchett, & some other old schoolfellows. Byron drank no wine, saying indignantly: 'I never touch liquor!' I cannot fathom him.

They are all talking about His Majesty's violent grief at Her Royal Highness the Princess Amelia's illness. They say she is very poorly indeed. His Majesty is beside Himself, & Colebrooke whispered that he has it on good report that the King acts most strangely, & looks like to lose His reason once more.

Afterwards we all visited the *bordello* together. My charmer is called Esmeralda – I was mistaken as to her name. She has told me artlessly that her ambition is to perform circus tricks like Madame Scacchi, & that she is acting the courtesan to pay for lessons in circus craft. At present she is learning to stand on a horse's back. She showed me the calluses on the inside of her thighs from riding astride, wearing only spangled stockings.

The distractions of this & the previous days have been lively, but I cannot shake off my anxieties. I have decided that London is too hectic for me in my present mood, & have resolved to return to Hertfordshire & Charles. Am writing this as they harness the horses.

Arrived at Netherfield, to find a dinner-party planned: The Lucas family, a Mrs Long, & the Bennet ladies invited. I am sitting in the Library, writing this. Miss Caroline has just come in from the garden, bearing armfuls of chrysanthemums & berries to dress the table. She

has trodden some fallen petals into the carpet, russet & gold. Peebles is upstairs laying out cravats for me to tie an Oriental – wretchedly uncomfortable, & a deal too formal for a country evening’s entertainment, but I am loath to disappoint him.

At dinner, Miss Caroline & Mrs Louisa placed me between them: the former whispered that this was to protect me from the local *riff-raff*. Charles insisted on being seated next to Miss Bennet. She is handsome, & Charles has not been laggardly in furthering the acquaintance: I noted that they greeted each other like long-lost friends. Charles appears to be considerably *épris* – but then he is always falling in love. There is little danger of her fixing his affections: she has but a paltry fortune, I understand. Miss Caroline told me that they have already spent three evenings together – an agreeable rural interlude for Charles – & pointed out the Mother to me. The latter matron directed loud remarks at the person opposite for most of the repast, ignoring her neighbours on both sides: she is indeed a strident lady. She leant forward so far that I began to fear for her ribbons in the soup. Then Miss Caroline indicated another young lady: ‘You remember her, surely.’

I replied that I had never had the pleasure of meeting her.

‘But she was at the ball the other day,’ she protested.

‘I have no recollection of it. Who is she?’

‘Miss Elizabeth Bennet, younger Sister to Charles’s Miss Bennet,’ she whispered. ‘I am told she is rather wild. She answers the gentlemen as an equal, & roams the countryside in a pair of stout boots.’

As I looked at this Miss Elizabeth, she turned her head, & our eyes met. She quickly looked away. She is somewhat undersized, & too thin. It must be all the exercise she takes.

When the ladies left the room, I was regaled by Sir William Lucas with stories of his reception at St James’s. What a prosy old bore! Nor was there anything to interest me when we finally moved to the drawing-room. One of the Bennet girls, a mousy creature named Miss Mary, in an orange gown, insisted on playing & singing. She attempted ‘The Lass with the Delicate Air’, distinctly off-key. I amused myself watching Miss Elizabeth Bennet. She has a bold manner, & always seems to be laughing at something or some

body. Her brownish hair escapes in untidy curls round her face; her unexpectedly dark eyes sparkle with mischief – scarcely befitting a respectable young lady. Her complexion is quite brown – I daresay she is too much in the wind & sun, if, as Miss Caroline suggests, she spends her days roaming the countryside unchaperoned. Whatever the reason, she is positively weatherbeaten. I mentioned as much to Miss Caroline, who laughed heartily, showing her fine white teeth, adhering to one of which was a small fragment of some green vegetable.

October 23rd —

Miss Caroline has just entered the Library, where I have been writing. She enquired about ‘that tattered old moleskin book’ which I carry with me everywhere. I told her it was my Diary. She wished to know if it was a very private diary. When I vouchsafed no reply, she wondered how long I had been keeping it. I told her that it had been my Mother’s idea – then, unbidden, a picture rose in my mind: Mamma, on that last sunny day at Pemberley, when she called me to her & gave me my first Diary. I remember her pale arm, that pearl & gold bracelet of hers – I wonder what became of it ...? Try as I may I cannot clearly recall her face. I was about twelve years old, & I wished she were not so languid, reclining on the day-bed by the window. I scarcely heard what she said: I was listening for the sound of distant doors banging, wondering if it was the under-housemaids playing hide-and-seek in the attics again, & whether this time they would let me join in the fun. Yet at the same time I was aware that this moment had a certain importance. I was too young to know that Mamma was expecting to be confined at any moment – & that within three days my Sister would be born & she – gone.

Keeping my Diary was the last thing she ever asked me to do. She told me gently that I should come to cherish it as a friend. After her death, I tried to be true to her wishes, & ever since have obeyed her injunction to write as frankly & fully as I could.

I believe that it was my last interview with Mamma – tho’ the next day, as I rode past with Crabbe, I glimpsed her smiling at me through the window. That same night she became ill ...

Shew this book to Miss Caroline? Preposterous!

Drove to Meryton today with the ladies, as Mrs Louisa wished to exchange her Library books. She tells me that Mme d'Arblay's new novel is all the rage; but I cannot bring myself to read such flummery. We met one of their new acquaintance – a Mrs Phillips, a vulgar, gossipy person of some years. Miss Caroline, who seems to know everything about the district, whispered in my ear that this Mrs Phillips is Sister to Mrs Bennet, the lady with the numbers of 'eligible' daughters. Indeed, two of the said girls were present: Miss Catriona (or possibly Catherine), a young lady with a plaintive voice, & Miss Elizabeth, whose cheeks were red from the cold. I overheard Mrs Louisa & Miss Caroline jesting about her appearance – 'no better than a bumpkin' – but to some, a rosy complexion may be no less alluring than the Bingley Sisters' freckled pallor. They should take more exercise: I must encourage them to walk round the shrubbery tomorrow.

Before dinner, billiards with Charles. Best of five frames. He good-naturedly annoyed at the fact that I beat him every time.

Still no further word from Georgiana.

October 24 ~

Today I have the 'blue devils' as Charles would have it: still no reply from Georgie – I was sure a letter would come today. It did not help that I have received a letter from James, enquiring anxiously as to her welfare: *'Why does not my Cousin Georgiana leave Pemberley & join you in Town? A lonely house in the wilds of Derbyshire is scarcely a congenial setting for a young lady of her years, particularly in Autumn.'* Why does not she join me, indeed! When I desire nothing better!

A walk outdoors with my two hostesses. Tho' Miss Caroline teased me to converse with them, I scarce heeded a word that they spoke. I found a greater measure of relief in a couple of hours' hard riding. Caesar very nervous today – shied at fallen leaves, & tried to throw me three times.

This evening I have refused to play at cards, ruining Mrs Louisa's hopes of a rubber, for her Husband will never condescend either. Instead, I have been writing this – & reading Hazlitt's *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*.