

*Pride & Prejudice  
& Assassinations*

*Elizabeth Waits*



*A Legacy Short Story by*

*Leo Charles Taylor*

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Chapter 1

Creaking floorboards could be heard by the servants as Elizabeth Darcy paced in an upstairs office. The pacing was not quick, nor was it consistent, but it was persistent. On many days this might be considered a minor annoyance, but on this day it served as a reminder to all those at Pemberly that the lady of the house was anxious. For those servants in the house and on the property who were not within earshot of a creaking board, the news of the lady's distress was kept most up to date.

The front expanse of this wide estate was maintained in beautiful condition with the perennials and annuals always trimmed and weeded. This day found two of the property gardeners tending to very mundane tasks such as pruning bushes and replanting a shrub or two. They, each of them, maintained a jovial spirit and engaged in very animated conversation, often asking the other what they thought about a particular plant or trimming method. The furtive glances they made to the upper windows of the manor were always discrete and most often done with one gardener's back to the manor so the other may address directly, while keeping a close eye on the pacing lady wandering from window to window on the upper floor. For these gardeners, the actions of today were naught but a show; and the grounds of Pemberly were here for nothing more than a stage on which they must play a part, for an audience consisting of one.

As Elizabeth paced the upper floors the men continued their performance allowing a constant flow of movement and action for which her attention could be drawn. These gardeners, like many actors, could not be sure of the reception by the audience, but they performed the roles with the skills they possessed and with well meaning hearts. Buffoonery was not the intention of any movement, and as they passed each other from time to time, handed tools, or worked on a particular plant, the goal was always the same; a distraction for the lady of the house, whose spirit would not allow her to do anything but wait. Within the house the creaking of floors continued.

Pemberly was a large well built Manor, but its age gave way to character, and that character gave way to the revelation of its master's moods. In a quiet study, situated on the main floor,

Mrs. Reynolds stood and brooded over her mistress. She followed the soft creaks from the floor above and could almost envision Elizabeth moving within the room. The pacing was nothing as common as a simple back and forth motion; instead the movement was about the room and about the furniture, almost in an aimless fashion. The creaks were soft and so sporadic that Mrs. Reynolds marveled at the construction methods used to build this fine manor. It spoke to her skill that she was able to follow the path of the individual above her; she could tell, for example, when Mrs. Darcy was near the window. Mrs. Reynolds would then peer out to the gardeners and ensure they were well engaged with their theatrics.

“It would be prudent to engage the Mistress with household matters. It will relieve her mind of the anguish she is feeling.”

Mrs. Reynolds heard the man behind her but made no initial attempt to address him. After a moment longer of listening to her mistress she turned and addressed the room’s new arrival.

“Mr. Seary, you are the master’s steward and when it is he in the above room I will defer to your judgment as I must. But the lady of this manor is my domain. I will kindly ask you to allow me to address her needs as I see fit.”

Mr. Seary eyed Mrs. Reynolds and nodded politely. “I do not wish to interfere. I only wished to offer a course of action which would be beneficial.”

“It is the propensity of many men to see a challenge and immediately rush to a course of action.” She replied in a serious tone “The lady above us, as with many ladies, does not need a job or a task. She needs her husband to return safely. In lieu of that, she will stand with strong resolve and deal with her anxiety with a strength and fortitude most men could not understand. Trust me when I tell you that Mrs. Fitzwilliam Darcy is in very great care.”

Mr. Seary did not reply. He merely nodded politely and turned to leave. Mrs. Reynolds turned back to her room and the soft creaks. As Mr. Seary approached the door she called out to him and arrested his movement.

“Mr. Seary.”

He paused, not turning around.

“The anxieties of the lady above you are not your concern. I trust your knowledge of her feelings will remain personal to you. If Mr. Darcy should learn of her moods by any passage of the information across your lips then I will call in a favor. And trust me Mr. Seary, the servants of this household hold many favors among the Gentry and the Nobility.”

Mr. Seary again apologized for his earlier comments, agreed with her sentiment, and then quit the room. Mrs. Reynolds thought on the lady above her. Since the wedding, Elizabeth Darcy had flourished within these walls and the house of Darcy was indeed blessed when the current master introduced this fine lady. Initially the servants were cordial and kind to their new mistress as they must be. As the weeks passed and Elizabeth treated each of them with kindness and respect, the feelings of the servants became warmer. In many ways Elizabeth was a servant to them and would often give a kind word and gentle smile. It was the little items which pleased Mrs. Reynolds. When a cleaning lady took ill, Elizabeth had the chef make soup, and then chose to deliver it in person. When the stable boy broke his leg, she took the time to address him, and alleviate any concern for his job.

It was not until Elizabeth’s training became serious that the staff learned to love and admire their mistress. More than one night saw a servant attending a bruised and aching Mrs. Darcy. The determination in her eyes, the clenched teeth as ointment was applied, and the strength to continue the next day, served as feats for which the staff marveled. Many a paid soldier would be hard pressed to work as diligently, and Elizabeth performed these duties out of loyalty and

choice. If the master knew of her pains he would surely let up in his teaching methods; but it was early in her training, with blood flowing freely from a small gash, when the lady of the house swore all of her staff to secrecy. The threat Mrs. Reynolds lay before Mr. Seary moments before was little compared to the threats of which Elizabeth swore an oath to inflict on any servant to break her trust.

Within a few minutes of Mr. Seary's departure of the room two more attendants entered and gave their report; still no news of the master. He was a full day late and the last dispatch could not provide any new information. As to the lady above, the servants report was simple. Her tea was now cold and, like her sandwich, untouched. The small woman making her report assured Mrs. Reynolds that the entry into the room was unobtrusive, quick, and to the point. No words were spoken, but Mrs. Darcy was still in deep contemplations. Mrs. Reynolds thanked the young girl and dismissed her; glancing upwards she again thought on her mistress. She wished she could assist this lady in a more beneficial manner, but her inability to do so was not due to a lack of skills, but in an impossibility of nature. Mrs. Darcy must stand resolute and strong, and Mrs. Reynolds would see hell follow anyone choosing to interfere with that attempt.

## Chapter 2

Upstairs Elizabeth gazed out the windows. The sun shone and the wind was blowing the trees ever so slightly. The weather appeared intent on playing with her mental faculties; as if to say all is well with the world. Down below her the gardeners were focused on planting some plant or other in some method for which she assumed there must exist a great deal of planning. She watched as they moved about and pulled one plant this way, and another plant another way. She could not for the life of her determine if there were any rules to the game for which they were so deeply engaged. She gazed about the wide estate before her and could find little for want in the way of gardening. The rules of this game, while elusive to her, seemed to be followed well, and the grounds of Pemberly were indeed magnificent. She made a mental note to thank the gardeners individually for their work.

A small noise behind her drew her attention and she turned to see the door latch quietly. It was a servant which had entered and subsequently left; all unbeknownst to her. Elizabeth thought for a moment on her situation and quietly chided herself for her lapse of awareness. Her mind must well be distraught for her to miss the proximity of another person. She glanced about the room and could find nothing amiss; she then spied the tea pot repositioned and knew its contents had been checked. The servant would now know it was in the exact state it which it was originally left; full and untouched.

Elizabeth wandered over to a small desk and pulled the two letters which were situated thereon. They revealed no new information from the last several times she read them. The first was from her husband claiming the business dealings in town were taking longer than expected and that he would hopefully be home and in her arms not more than a day or two longer than originally believed. The second letter was from Miss Dache and Elizabeth gave this letter more consideration. Only Mrs. Reynolds was privy to its contents and only for reasons of her lifelong closeness with Mr. Darcy; which cast her in many situations as a motherly figure to him.

The letter was simple and socially coded to prevent any prying eyes from determining the real meaning. Dropping the letter from her husband Elizabeth walked about the room and began to reread the second letter.

Dearest Elizabeth,

How I wish you were here in London with me. The weather is lovely and the wind favorable to mitigate the smells of the city. Flowers adorn many windows and the street vendors have many wares for trade. A shopping trip would not go unrewarded should you and I choose to engage in such an activity.

I must tell you I had occasion to interact with your husband these past few days; he is gentlemanly as always. His business dealings do seem to be stressful and for my limited understanding I would classify them as dire indeed. But, the skill of Fitzwilliam Darcy is great enough to be respected by even the grandest of Nobles. I am sure he will prevail in his dealings.

I am to understand he will be longer than expected and while I believe he will conclude business successfully it may take its toll on him. For my part I will aid him in any way feasible, you can be assured of that. I believe you could even be of assistance, but I am sure that prideful man would not hear of his wife travelling to London to assist with trifling matters.

Either way, I would love to see you, and if his business detains him unnecessarily then I shall extend an invitation to you immediately and we shall see what can be done to extricate him. Perhaps the site of two ladies will convince him and his business partners to conclude their dealings and allow for more social engagements. I will keep you abreast, and for the moment wish good day.

As always, your Friend, Marianne Dache

The letter held several meanings for Elizabeth and while she did not wish to dwell on the possibilities she did use the subtext to plan her actions. Even now, within her chambers, a bag was set upon her bed. It was packed and would be retrieved at a moment's notice. Down on the grounds the carriage was readied and the horses were kept unhitched but alert. Should the need arise she would even take a saddled horse.

Elizabeth thought on Miss Dache and thanked heaven she had such a good friend. The ladies initial encounter all those long months ago had led to a mutual respect for each other's abilities, and while Miss Dache was far superior in training, Elizabeth was superior in raw talent and implementation. While the two ladies would now dual from time to time Elizabeth never feared Miss Dache, but she did fear what Miss Dache would do to any opponent that truly crossed her path. If Mr. Darcy was in any real physical harm, and it was prudent to believe he was, then Miss Dache would be a fine choice to assist him. If Mr. Darcy should fall, then Elizabeth knew one thing for certain; Marianne Dache would ride the hounds of hell to avenge him, while inviting Elizabeth to lead the charge.

It was no secret that Marianne loved Darcy and Elizabeth knew of this unspoken emotion as well as she knew the love and friendship Marianne now possessed for her. It was a love of kindness, gentleness, and respect. The same respect which allowed her to dispatch a letter to Pemberly and alert the lady of the manor to be ready.

A flutter of wings and movement of the curtains drew Elizabeth's attention. She cursed herself for being so withdrawn as to miss the arriving messenger pigeon. Had she been at the

window she would have seen its flight and not been taken unawares. She paused for a moment and watched the pigeon on its perch. On its leg was a message which held her news, and her wait would be over; perhaps. She made another mental note to learn the exact appearance of every bird. The manor sported more than one and at this distance she could not tell if this bird was from town, or from another posting.

Resolving her spirit she quick walked to the bird, pulled the message and read the note. She sighed with relief as she held the note. Looking at the bird and then glancing outside she began to admire the day. It was a lovely day and soon her husband would be home. She smiled briefly and became contemplative. Upon marrying Mr. Darcy she was well aware of his duties, much more so than when she first pulled a dagger on him. She smiled at the thought and still felt embarrassment about her actions at Rosings. Mr. Darcy, for his part, still assured her that her actions that day had concerned him, and it had taken great skill on his part to extricate himself from her attack. She knew this was meant as a compliment, but it actually served as a reminder for an embarrassing misunderstanding; however, she was unwilling to reveal to him his error in judgment when he regaled her of this episode.

She moved to the window and knew it would not be long before he arrived. The pigeon she now was able to recognize, and knew it came from a family spotter down the way. It meant the master would arrive soon and the household should be made ready. Elizabeth wondered for a moment if Mr. Darcy was aware of this telltale warning the servants used. She could only conclude that if he was aware, he certainly did not make his awareness known.

After a few more minutes she quit the room and made her way to a corner bedroom in the back of the house. Her husband, as was his habit, would approach from the rear, so as to stable the horse directly. Now in the back of the house she gazed out upon a landscape as beautiful as the front. The gardeners spared no expense on this piece of land and she smiled as she spied flower after flower in perfect beauty. She once asked her husband why he spent so much effort and thought on the back of his manor; after all, most people spent all the energy on the front of their homes to impress others and put their best foot forward.

“Why spend all this time and energy? Pemberly could have a rock hill in the back and no one would know?” She had asked.

He had just turned to her and replied simply. “I would know.”

That was her husband. He was not one for show, but one for depth and character. She now believed this back property was a metaphor for him. Its depth and beauty was not for general show, but was cultivated, and there for those who were allowed to see it.

She looked to the small table to her right. A pot of warm tea was already upon it, and a small plate of biscuits and cucumber sandwiches. She was about to pour a cup but found it unnecessary as it was already full and sweetened to her liking. She took the cup and a biscuit, and waited patiently for her husband.

### Chapter 3

The pigeon which Mrs. Darcy received that day was the second to arrive at the Pemberly

grounds. The first to arrive made its presence known a few minutes before the second. This pigeon was not for the eyes of the lady but for her servants and done with the ladies' ignorance. The message was removed and quickly read and then run to the house proper and passed to Mrs. Reynolds who sighed with relief in a manner similar to that which Mrs. Darcy would perform just a few minutes hence.

Orders were made and the household staff moved; quick, quiet. Up the stairs went maids to prepare to unpack the London bag. Hot tea was made fresh and sandwiches and biscuits prepared. A small boy was sent to the front windows to insure Mrs. Darcy's pigeon arrived and as soon as it did he was to report back. The carriage was ordered unprepared and the horses were to be put out to pasture. Nothing, and absolutely nothing, was to hint to the master that anything other than a normal day had passed at Pemberly.

The boy returned and the pigeon was spied. Mrs. Reynolds was now in the lower office and listened for her mistress's steps. She heard and felt her walk to the perch. It was a moment of anticipation and with the timing of a master conductor Mrs. Reynolds then nodded to a waiting servant at the open door. Throughout the house the staff moved. The master chambers were entered and the London bag unpacked. The corner office was set about with tea, the window opened for air, and the door left opened for easy entry.

Anna was a favorite of Mrs. Darcy, being only two years her junior, and when she was content the tea was to her mistresses' liking she pulled back and made a quick visual inspection of the room. Her final move was to disappear like a ghost; only to reappear behind Elizabeth as she passed in the hall. Anna watched as her mistress entered the corner office and then, continuing in her ghostly ways, she entered the now vacated front room and removed the tea plate. At no time were any of the servant's movements known to Elizabeth, and if they had been, a stern lecture would have been given by Mrs. Reynolds.

Lower in the house the parlor was set and readied for the performance which was about to begin. A book or two were placed and the pillows were set upon. The servants enjoyed this bit and took a moment to enjoy the fine furniture of the manor. They never feared being caught in this pose, and while they would enjoy the fine accoutrements' of Pemberly, they never trespassed upon the good will of the Darcy's.

It was not long before the word spread that the master was spied and would be stabling his horse momentarily. The servants throughout the house made the path from the upstairs to the parlor sparse, and then receded into the house. Mrs. Reynolds made a quick tour as if she were a military general. Pleased with the work of her troops she smiled gently and disappeared as well.

Upstairs Elizabeth watched as the horse bearing her husband made its way to the stables. He is in no hurry she thought; and the last few minutes of his approach seemed almost as unbearable as the wait of the previous day. He was greeted by a stable boy who took the reins, and as her husband dismounted she saw his pain. He was wounded. Not gravely, but she could see the pain from his side and the weight upon one leg more than the other. She now understood his horses' slow gait; it was to lessen any painful jarring. As he walked to the house she assessed this man as she would any opponent that must be addressed. A broken rib perhaps? Or at least a bruised kidney. The limp told of knee damage; it was not a shin by his use of weight distribution. If she were to spar with him now she felt confident in her gaining abilities and training to best him.

She quickly left the room and headed for the parlor. Passing a hallway she spied Mrs. Reynolds glancing quickly in her direction. Elizabeth returned the gaze and mouthed a single word.

"Medicine."

Mrs. Reynolds nodded with understanding and complete agreement, for she herself had seen the master's approach to the house. Elizabeth entered the parlor and sat upon a sofa with her feet up. She picked up the warm cup of tea awaiting her and took a sip. Quitting the tea she took to eating a sandwich and within a single bite she realized how hungry she was; whereupon she ate the remainder in as quick a manner as a lady was allowed. It was in this partial act of nonchalance that the master of the house found her.

"I do hope there will be enough food for dinner? You seem to be quite hungry."

Elizabeth looked up at the man addressing her.

"Ah, Mr. Darcy. I was not expecting you to intrude upon my afternoon tea. I would have expected a gentleman of such refinement as yourself to have dispatched ahead and made your arrival known." She smiled as she teased him.

Mr. Darcy took his wife's good natured jest in stride and continued into the room.

"Yes I was about to dispatch a letter but the matter seemed moot. My arrival would have been merely a few hours afterwards and the whole idea seemed a waste. I imagine you kept yourself quite entertained" He pointed to the books scattered about her seat.

"Ah yes, I believe a gentleman of a past life once told me an accomplished lady must be well read. I have been endeavoring to do just that this very day. Perhaps you would wish to join me. I have a book here on local wildlife you would find particularly boring." She smiled at his quick and well hid disgust. But he rapidly recovered, as he always did from her kind hearted teasing.

"I believe I will refrain from that particular novel if you do not mind, but I will join you."

As he moved to her position his pain was obvious and she commented on it in a kind but unconcerned manner. To which he replied that the pain was nothing and merely soreness from the ride to Pemberly.

"Liar" she thought as she smiled, nodded, and allowed her husband to play his ruse. She moved her feet and he sat down next to her. She turned to him and came in close.

"It is good to see you and I am glad you are home."

Darcy gazed at her and stretched his arms to embrace her. Elizabeth took the embrace and was very careful to avoid his bruised torso. He brushed her hair and stroked her cheek. Bending in, he nuzzled her softly. Elizabeth closed her eyes and enjoyed the closeness.

Glancing up into his eyes she smiled softly. "Welcome home," she whispered "you were missed."

Short Story Finis

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