

FOR BETTER OR WORSE is the fourth in the Liza Marchant series and modern-day writer, Ellie Fuller, continues her research into Liza's life in Victorian times. She hopes that Liza will finally find contentment with the man who has always loved her. Liza's letters and diaries show that her life was never destined to run smoothly.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE: Fourth in the Liza Marchant Series

By Marian L. Jasper

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FOR BETTER OR WORSE



Marian L. Jasper

Fourth in the Liza Marchant Series

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Also by Marian L. Jasper

FOR ALL TIME

First in the Liza Marchant Series

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Second in the Liza Marchant Series

NOW AND FOREVER

Third in the Liza Marchant Series

Chapter 1

Amelia was first into Liza's room on the morning of her marriage to Jamie, followed by April with her breakfast. The three boys staggered in with their breakfasts as they wanted to keep her company and she appreciated their thoughtfulness for her. When they had finished they could be heard banging on Jamie's door as they wanted to give him encouragement also and Liza had to smile and she could only imagine how Jamie was coping with them all and at the same time trying to get ready for the day. She hoped that he would also appreciate their thoughtfulness if not their visit.

Liza had a relaxing time soaking in her bath and then she slowly started getting ready for the day with loving help from Amelia. April was making sure that the boys were in their smart new suits and that they kept them clean.

Amelia went to get ready and Liza was told by her, on the pain of death, not to get her wedding outfit on until she returned, so she sat in front of her mirror and April came to make sure the ribbons in her hair were neat and tidy. She was going to wear a hat when she was in the grounds to keep the sun off, but the ribbons and gold studs which were adorning her hair looked spectacular. She was also going to wear a gold ornamental necklace which would match her cream dress and long jacket all of which were edged and interspersed with gold thread and gold beads.

It was too late for Liza to worry about anything else that day, but she was sure that it would all go according to plan. Liza heard Jamie's door open and then Amelia talking to him as he made his way along the corridor and down the stairs, she then hurried into Liza's room and she and April helped Liza into her dress and jacket, and then stood back and looked at her for some time.

"Liza, I have seen you wear some magnificent outfits, but this really is out of this world. It shimmers as you move; you look like a heavenly apparition. I've also seen Jamie and he looks equally magnificent; you really are a very good-looking couple," said Amelia, "where are your flowers?"

April brought them over, and they also were a mixture of cream and gold.

"Are you ready Liza? If you are, I'll go and fetch Wendell. The ceremony is due to start in ten minutes," said Amelia who was beginning to panic.

"Calm down Amelia. Why don't you go down and get seated and can you make sure the boys are behaving nicely please? I hope Wendell is on his way," said Liza.

"You're right, I'll go down but first I'll send Wendell in. Good luck my darling, I know all will be well and you'll both be very happy," and she shed a tear, kissed Liza and went to find Wendell, who didn't take much finding as he was waiting outside the door.

"Doesn't she look lovely Wendell?" said a very teary-eyed Amelia.

"She always does Amelia, but today she looks even lovelier," said Wendell as he looked her up and down. "Are you ready Liza?"

"I just need a minute to settle my stomach," said Liza.

"It's the first time I've known you suffer from nerves Liza. You are happy with what you are doing aren't you?" asked Wendell.

"Yes, I am Wendell and I think you would be surprised at the number of times I have felt nervous. Well, let us not keep everyone waiting too long," said Liza as she took a deep breath and took a step forward; pushing out of her mind images of when she had been in that situation before.

Wendell kissed her on the head and said, "Come on then Liza, we have a lot to do today." They walked down the stairs and stood for a minute at the door to the ballroom, then started walking towards the Justice of the Peace as a pianist played the wedding march. There were gasps and smiles and Jamie turned and watched Wendell lead her towards him. His eyes showed a mixture of pride, love and happiness, and her's showed the same for him. He really did look superb and Liza gave him one of her most endearing smiles and all he could do was smile back at her.

The ceremony went ahead without a hitch and when they had taken their vows in front of the Justice of the Peace and Jamie had placed the

ring on her finger, the vicar stepped forward and said that it gave him a great deal of pleasure to be able to bless their union and he wished them every happiness and then he carried on with the blessing. Jamie then gently kissed her, and the official side of the wedding was over, and they walked out of the room together and into the drawing room where champagne was to be served.

"You look beautiful Liza," said Jamie, "but you also look a little puzzled."

"It just seemed such a quick ceremony that it doesn't feel real," said Liza.

"Yes, it was rather quick, but I can assure you that it was very real and we are now truly married," said Jamie and he had a triumphant look in his eyes.

After the champagne they all sat down to the wedding breakfast and the sound of the villagers and farmers arriving could be heard. In his role of father of the bride Wendell made a very touching speech saying that although he realised that he was old enough to be Liza's father and would be proud to call her daughter, she was also his greatest friend and business partner and the whole of the Fuller family considered her one of their own. He told Jamie how lucky he was and that he knew how much he had wanted and longed for today to happen. He said many other complementary things and finished by saying that he knew how happy they were both going to be.

Peter's speech as best man praised Jamie to the hilt, but also contained veiled threats that he had better treat Liza well otherwise he would have every member of the Fuller family to answer to. He pointed out that Jamie was not only gaining a wonderful wife but he was also gaining two more sons to run rings around him along with his own offspring, as he was sure that James, Matthew and John had great plans to twist Jamie around their little fingers. He said that he had known both Jamie and Liza for a very long time and he could see how very well suited they both were and they had now finally managed to be together. He felt that this was a union that was made in heaven. He carried on for a while and Liza was surprised that he actually made a few jokes which were really quite funny. Peter had hidden talents which made everyone see him in a different light.

Liza and Jamie then cut the wedding cake, after which a dignified and well-dressed Mrs Lambert came in and proceeded to cut slices for everyone there. When she had finished it was taken to the kitchen to be cut up along with the other cakes so that eventually everyone partying in the grounds could have a piece.

With the wedding breakfast over it was now expected that Liza, Jamie and all the guests would show themselves and join in the party in the grounds and Liza had to toss her wedding bouquet to the crowd. Liza and the boys were looking forward to this part of the day; Jamie was a little reticent as he was only comfortable with those he really knew.

Tables and chairs had been set up on the ground floor balcony and the house guests and the boys moved out of the house and took their seats and were served with wine or coffee, or both. There was a great deal of laughter from both the balcony and the guests in the grounds.

“Aren’t you enjoying yourself Jamie?” asked Liza.

“Yes, I’m very happy Liza, but today is becoming a very long day. I can see that you’re enjoying yourself, so come on let’s go and meet all the people because I know that they want to meet you,” said Jamie.

A cheer went up as Liza and Jamie walked out onto the balcony and Liza thought that such a welcome was only reserved for royalty. A crowd was gathering, and Liza and Jamie stood at the top of the steps leading to the garden watching the villagers and farmers looking up expectantly. Looking around at all the faces staring at her, she could pick out the people that she knew and she was acknowledging them and near the middle of this sea of faces was one that she didn’t recognise, who was standing next to the inn keeper and his wife. As Liza looked at her, she quickly looked away, but Liza instinctively knew who she was and didn’t want to frighten her, so she looked around at everyone gathered in front of her and they seemed to be waiting for her to say something.

Liza looked at Jamie who was totally unaware of who the lady in the crowd was and he said that the villagers seemed to want Liza to speak to them rather than him. Liza nodded and said to the crowd, “I’m so very happy that you have all come here today to join with us in our celebrations and we both want you to enjoy the day as much as we are. Some of you I already know, but some of you I haven’t yet met. Of course I will have the opportunity to meet as many of you as I possibly can this afternoon, and if I miss anyone I do apologise.”

"It is the normal practice of a bride to toss her bouquet into a crowd as she leaves with her new husband on their honeymoon and it is said that the lady who catches it will become the next bride, but today we are not going away so I would like to change that tradition and its meaning slightly so that whoever catches it has all our wishes for good luck, fortune and a happy life ahead."

With that Liza tossed her bouquet and aimed it directly at the woman in the crowd that she knew was Jamie's mother. It was with surprise that the woman caught it and stared at it for a minute and then a broad smile crossed her face as she looked up directly into Liza's eyes and Liza smiled and nodded back to her.

Jamie and everyone else on the balcony except Amelia were totally unaware of what had just happened and Amelia looked quizzically at Liza who was at that moment smiling and nodding to the woman; she would have to ask Liza who she was as something significant had just occurred between the two women.

Jamie's mother clasped the bouquet close to her chest and the inn keeper and his wife were leading her away from the crowd and seemed to be gently talking to her.

"Now that that's over Liza," said Jamie, "what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to get my hat and mingle with everyone," she said brightly, and Jamie looked at her as if she was mad. April was sent upstairs to fetch Liza's hat and she called the boys over to her. "I'm going to meet everyone and see that they are enjoying themselves, do you want to come with me?"

She was greeted with a chorus of "Yes" from the three boys who were now finding the event rather boring and thought it would be good to find others of their own age to talk to and play with.

The afternoon was progressing well with all the villagers enjoying their food and drink and they were especially enjoying Liza chatting to them. The boys had found some children of around their own age and they were talking and playing nicely with them. Liza slowly made her way to the Innkeeper and his wife, who were making it obvious that they were trying to hide Jamie's mother from Liza.

Liza looked directly at his mother and said, "There's no need to hide from me. Are you staying at the Inn?" she asked.

The Innkeeper and his wife were looking decidedly uncomfortable and Liza smiled at them and told them not to worry about anything.

She moved closer to Jamie's mother and all she asked was: "Have you managed to see him on many occasions?"

"I have tried to see him sometimes when he was at school, I couldn't come to the village much as his father may have seen me, but I have been a few times since his father died. Mr and Mrs Rogers from the Inn let me know if anything special is happening and I try to get time off from my employment so that I can come and see him," said Jamie's mother.

"I'm pleased you made it today," smiled Liza, "and I'm also pleased you caught my bouquet."

"Even if I lost my position, I was not going to miss today," she said. "You aimed your bouquet at me on purpose, didn't you?"

"I thought you deserved it. Jamie doesn't realise who you are does he?" said Liza.

"No, and perhaps it's best if he doesn't know. It's a long time ago that I left, and it would probably only upset him. He's done very well without me, so please can we leave it that way?" said Jamie's mother.

"If you truly want it that way, then it's your decision. However, I'm not going to start our marriage by lying to him if the question arises, but I don't expect it to. Have you met your grandson?" asked Liza.

"No, today is the first time that I have seen him," said Miranda Edgeworth.

"Well you should be introduced to him," said Liza who called to Matthew who was nearby.

"Are James and John near?" asked Liza.

When Matthew said that they weren't far she asked him to find them as she wanted to make sure they weren't doing anything silly.

"They're not," said Matthew but he went to find them anyway. They came over and Liza asked them what they were doing and they replied that they had been watching as some people were getting ready to play some music for dancing.

"Oh, I'll look forward to that. Do you all know Mr and Mrs Rogers?" said Liza avoiding pushing Miranda Edgeworth too much to the fore.

They all nodded "and this is their friend Miss Miranda, who has come here specially for today."

Liza introduced Matthew to her, followed by John and then James who she explained was Lord Edgeworth's son. All three were very polite but really wanted to get back to watching the musicians get ready for the dance.

When the boys had left Miranda Edgeworth said, "Thank you. That has meant a great deal to me."

"I wish circumstances were different, but I will respect your wishes and try not to let your son know who you are, although I believe that to be a mistake," said Liza and she smiled at her and moved slowly away towards where the dancing was beginning.

There were a couple of villagers who were violinists, although they were probably called fiddlers, and an accordion player and someone who played the flute, and they were all warming up and sounded rather unusual, but when they started playing properly it sounded lively and it was obvious that everyone had every intention of enjoying the rest of the day.

Liza looked up and saw that all the house guests were making their way to where the music was playing, but Liza couldn't see Jamie and she surmised that he was organising the surprise that he had promised her.

A lively jig was being played and Liza knew most of the steps and when she walked onto the dance area, she looked around at the sea of faces who were wondering what she was going to do. Her eyes alighted on the young assistant to the local tailor who Liza knew had no interest in women and he charmingly agreed to partner her.

There were a few gasps but a great deal of laughter and as the music continued Liza started dancing and as always, she knew how to play to an audience and on several occasions throughout the jig she turned the wrong way and had to be turned back by several helping hands. She danced in and out of the line of people as she should and then started back when she should not have done. By the time she was being swung gently around she bumped into her partner and knocked him sideways, although she was never sure that he hadn't done it on purpose as she had done. Finally, she ended up facing the opposite way to everyone else, much to the great amusement of all those watching.

Whilst Liza was half way through the jig Jamie and Peter wandered over to where all the music and laughter could be heard, and the crowd

parted for them and he caught sight of Liza dancing a jig very badly with a rather overly smart young man much to the amusement of the crowd.

"I wonder why she's always in the middle of something chaotic and is often the instigator of it?" said Jamie to nobody in particular.

John had moved over to where Peter was and he said, "My daddy always used to say that." Jamie looked down on him and said kindly, "I'm sure he did John? And he was right."

Wendell and Amelia moved over to them and they were laughing along with everyone else.

"Don't look so concerned Jamie. You should know that Liza knows every step of that jig, but she didn't want anyone to think that she was above them," said Wendell.

"She's done you a great favour Jamie. The people already liked you both, but now they love you and they'll feel able to approach you without fear and enjoy being part of the Edgeworth estate," said Amelia. "You can rest assured that Liza knows what she's doing."

"I seem to have a lot to learn about my wife," said Jamie.

"You'll really enjoy doing that won't you Jamie," said Amelia. "She's looking for you; she wants to dance with you Jamie and show everyone how good you are together."

Liza caught sight of him and smiled, her dress was shimmering in the lanterns which were now alight. Jamie moved forward and took her in his arms and whisked her around the dance area to the cheers of the onlookers. Joseph and Lily were now dancing, and Edward was leading Nicole onto the floor. Many of the villagers were also joining in. Anthony could be seen trying to persuade a rather shy Diana to dance, which she finally did.

Amelia moved across to where Miranda Edgeworth was standing in the shadows and said, "Liza aimed her bouquet at you, and it took me a little while to guess why she had done that. I saw your smile when you were watching her dancing the jig and you not only looked like young James, but also like Jamie when he smiles. I believe that you are Jamie's mother."

Miranda looked rather frightened and Amelia assured her that she wasn't intending to hurt her in any way.

"I don't know how she knew but she caught sight of me and she somehow recognised who I was," said Miranda. "It was my intention to

see them fleetingly and then leave, but I am still here and I don't know why; I should have gone a long while ago however I am mesmerised by her."

"Many people are; she sees things that others don't, but she will always try to do what is right for everyone," said Amelia. "She is my oldest and greatest friend and is like a daughter to me and whatever she wishes to happen I will abide by. You should not fear her as she will keep her own counsel and try to make life easy for everybody. I'm very glad that we have met and I just want you to know that your son is a fine man and will make Liza a good husband."

"Thank you. I believe she will make him a very good wife; he seems very happy with her," said Miranda and both she and Amelia stood for a moment watching Jamie and Liza dancing.

"Are you getting tired yet Liza?" asked Jamie pointedly.

"I am getting a little tired Jamie, but I'm also rather hot after my efforts at a jig and I think I'd like a bath when we get back. I'll have to organise some water to be taken to my room," said Liza.

"Leave it to me Liza, as I have a few surprises for you, but if you want to soak in a bath, I'm not going to stop you. I might even join you," said Jamie.

Liza smiled up at him and her eyes sparkled at the prospect of him joining her in the bath and whatever surprises he had in store for her.

"I think we had better do the rounds of everyone and leave them all to continue enjoying themselves. I must make sure the boys are behaving properly and April is on hand for them; after that I'm all yours Jamie," said Liza with a cheeky grin.

When the dance had finished Liza went to find April and the boys, and Jamie found Mrs Frances to organise water for the bath in his room. He wanted Liza in with him that night rather than he went to her. He had food and champagne set out in his room and Liza's nightclothes had been brought there. The bed was strewn with rose petals and now they were also going to luxuriate in a comfortable bath. He was looking forward to having her to himself at last and the thought made him smile happily.

He didn't want to make it obvious that he was now going to take Liza to his bed, so he slowly made his way towards his house whilst Liza was talking to April and the boys, who were going to be allowed to stay up very late that night. They also knew not to disturb either Liza or Jamie until

they were seen the next day and Amelia was going to help April with them when it was finally their time to go to bed.

Liza walked into the house and up the stairs and was suddenly lifted off her feet and carried by Jamie into his room. He put her down and locked the door and Liza said that there were things in her room that she needed.

"There's nothing that you need that I haven't already got for you here Liza," said Jamie and she looked around and could see that her nightdress was laid out on the bed and her dressing gown was hanging in his wardrobe.

Jamie popped a champagne cork and poured some into two glasses and handed one to Liza. "I just want us to toast one another now Liza before you get out of all your finery and relax in a bath that is all ready for you. I have been so very proud of you today and you've made me so happy. It's a day that I never thought I would ever see."

"I'm very happy and proud of you also Jamie," and they toasted one another.

Jamie laughed and took Liza's glass from her as she started to take her wedding dress off. Jamie helped her and he gently hung it in his wardrobe while she took the rest of her clothes off and slowly lowered herself into the bath. It was a wonderful feeling as the warm water covered her and she told Jamie how much she was enjoying the relaxation; it had been a day when they had both been constantly in demand and understandably so.

She could hear Jamie moving in his room and then he appeared in his dressing gown. "Is there any room for me in there Liza?" he asked.

Liza moved slightly to one side and Jamie gently eased himself in beside her. "It's not exactly comfortable is it Liza?"

"No, but it's very friendly," laughed Liza. Unfortunately Jamie lost his footing and slipped, completely covering Liza in water as he tried to save himself. They both ended up laughing and decided that this was not a very good idea. Jamie crawled out of the bath and wrapped himself in a towel. He then in turn helped Liza out, opened his towel up and wrapped her in it with him.

"There was a time not so long ago that I never thought I would see you smiling, and certainly not laughing the way you are now," said Liza.

Jamie held her closely and said, "Well, Liza, you made me very unhappy for many years. I know that I was very young and foolish when I first approached you and then you left, and you were never available every time I saw you after that time. It's taken a long while, but I have exactly what I have always wanted now; I hope you are as truly happy with our marriage as I am."

"Of course I am Jamie," said Liza and she smiled up at him and as always it made him feel very confident.

He helped dry them both off and passed her nightdress to her. It was her green silk one which she had worn before. "Jamie, I have new nightwear which I wanted to wear for you. I can just go and get it," said Liza.

"I want you to wear this one; it's the one you wore when you came to me and allowed me to make love to you for the first time. I really want you to show me again how you excited me that time," said Jamie. "First shall we have supper; I know you think you don't want anything, but we have some very nice and tasty small dishes to try, and plenty of champagne to keep us well lubricated."

"Yes, Jamie, it'll be nice to sit and relax with you and talk to you about the lovely day I've had, and all the people who helped make our day so very special," said Liza.

The music was still playing in the grounds and people could be heard singing and laughing and Liza thought that it was a beautiful background to their intimate supper. Jamie had donned a very attractive nightshirt and Liza looked at him with appreciative eyes and they both enjoyed just being alone with one another and talking about the various happenings of the day. They nibbled quite a few of the dishes and Jamie poured another glass of champagne each and by this time they were both eyeing one another with interest.

Liza was looking forward to sleeping with Jamie that night, but she felt like playing a little to start with, so she slowly undid the strings of her silk nightdress and pushed it gently off her shoulders. She picked up her champagne glass and poured some of it on her neck, shoulders and chest. Jamie watched her with surprise and then realised what she was asking him to do and he came over to her and licked all the champagne from her.

Liza stood up and let her nightdress fall from her as she had when she had first gone to Jamie. He in turn removed his nightshirt and pulled her

into his body and held her there for a short time before moving towards the bed and laying her gently on it. Jamie leaned over and picked up the champagne bottle and poured a little on her breasts and stomach and then started to lick it from her again amid giggles from Liza as she squirmed and wriggled against him.

She could see him watching her and she giggled again and slid down the bed and opened her legs for him and he consummated their marriage perfectly, bringing her to a superb climax without any difficulty at all.

They settled down comfortably together in bed still listening to the music, laughter and singing happening in the gardens.

Jamie still could not believe that she was here with him and he hoped that he wouldn't wake up from this dream as he had done so many times in the past. Liza moved nearer to him and said, "We certainly didn't need any practice to achieve that. We are obviously very well suited."

"Hmmm," said Jamie uncertainly.

"What's the matter Jamie?" asked Liza. "You are sounding unsure."

"I don't want to go to sleep because if I do I may wake up and find that it has all been a dream yet again," said Jamie.

"Oh Jamie, I don't know what I can do to convince you that I'm real and so are you," said Liza.

Jamie laughed at his own stupidity and said, "Just keep doing what you always do, which is be happy and make everyone else happy, especially me."

The music had stopped and Liza and Jamie could hear many of the house guests making their way to their rooms. There were noises in the hall outside their door and a frantic whispered voice of April telling the boys to go to their room. Amelia could also be heard quietly calling to them to come to her.

"Yes, we will in a minute," Matthew could be heard saying.

Jamie quickly covered Liza and himself with the bedclothes, but he need not have worried because all each boy wanted to do was say goodnight and firstly Matthew called, "Goodnight Mum and Dad", and John said the same, followed by James.

Both Liza and Jamie called out "Goodnight boys."

"That was nice," said Jamie. "So, we are Mum and Dad now. They wanted to let us know how they felt."

"I believe that having responsibility for three boys will make you realise that perhaps you would like to wake up from that dream," said Liza.

It took a good hour for the house to quieten down, but noises could still be heard in the garden as the servants were making an effort to clear some of the debris from the area.

Liza and Jamie lay in each other's arms and quietly talked of their past and planned their future.

"Who was that woman who caught your flowers?" asked Jamie. "I thought I recognised her from somewhere."

"She was with Mr and Mrs Rogers from the Inn. I think she visits quite regularly," said Liza carefully.

Jamie and Liza dozed on and off throughout the night and made love several times. "I love being in your room Jamie; I feel very comfortable and relaxed in your bed."

"I wanted you in my bed tonight, rather than me being in your bed," said Jamie.

"I can understand that Jamie. You wanted to feel that you were making me yours. But it would have been the same in my room. I hope you will also come into my bed on occasion, after all you changed that room especially for me," said Liza.

In the morning the boys could be heard racing down the stairs to their breakfast despite the fact that they had not gone to bed until very late. Nobody was going to disturb Jamie or Liza, although Liza had arranged for water to be brought up to her room by nine o'clock with breakfast for them both in her room at ten o'clock.

"So, Liza, I arranged last night and you have arranged this morning," said a sleepy Jamie. "It's only eight o'clock. Have you any thoughts on what we might do for the next hour?"

"Oh, I think we might manage to think of something," laughed Liza, and of course they did.

Later that morning, as Liza and Jamie came into the drawing room, the boys rushed up to them shouting "Good morning Mum and Dad," much to the amusement of everyone there, although they could see that it pleased

both Liza and Jamie. They decided to go for a walk with the boys before lunch as the boys seemed so keen to be with them.

After lunch Anthony and Diana said they were going to leave shortly and Liza said that she was sorry to hear that as she had organised a picnic in the grounds for the next day and she would have liked them to stay for that as well as dinner that evening.

“Do you have any particular reason to return today?” asked Jamie.

“No, but we have imposed on you enough already, especially as you were not expecting us,” said Anthony.

“Well, Liza has said that she would like you to stay, and it would be churlish of you to deny her that pleasure,” said Jamie with humour.

Anthony turned to Diana and asked her if she felt well enough to stay for another day or so.

“I would like to stay for a while longer if I may,” said Diana.

Liza smiled at them both and went off to tell Mrs Frances that they would be staying longer than expected.

The boys and men were organising a game of cricket at the next days’ picnic, and Matthew asked if they could invite some of the boys that they had met the day before. Jamie seemed a little unsure whether any of the village boys should be invited.

“James has never mixed with them before,” said Jamie.

“Well, perhaps it’s time he did,” said Liza.

“I’ll leave the decision to you Liza; I’m sure you know best,” said Jamie.

“We’ll quickly have to go and see their parents now,” said Liza to the boys, so she organised that she drove with them into the village that afternoon.

Their first call was on the grocer who had two sons. He was very surprised to see Liza and he mumbled a greeting, tripping over his own feet to come forward. Liza smiled at him and told him the reason for her visit. He called for his wife and when she saw who was visiting, she was just as tongue-tied, luckily their two boys appeared and greeted Matthew, John and James like old friends and eased the situation.

Liza was invited into their back parlour, which was not unlike Kathy and Joe’s in Benson, and she accepted a cup of tea. She asked if there were other boys of a similar age to theirs that she wasn’t aware of as she didn’t want to upset any children.

"Well, there's the baker's son and he also has a daughter," said the grocer's wife, at which all the boys pulled faces which conveyed that they didn't want any girls around.

"Where would you all be without girls?" asked Liza in a way which silenced any arguments. "I'll go and see them when I've finished here. By the way, I wouldn't put your boys in their Sunday best clothes as there will be fun and games and I know that my boys always manage to find the dirtiest place to play, so the older the better."

"There's also Mrs Price's two, but the boy can't walk, he had a terrible accident when he was small; his sister wheels him around mostly," said the grocer.

"Well that shouldn't preclude him from having some fun. Was he there yesterday, I don't think I saw him?" asked Liza.

"No, Mrs Price wouldn't want to embarrass anyone," said the Grocer.

"Why would it embarrass anyone?" asked Liza. "It wouldn't embarrass me or any of my guests. Is the boy the one who is shy? Perhaps he feels that he needs to hide because he may feel that he looks hideous?"

"He doesn't look hideous, in fact he is quite good looking," said the grocer's wife. "I believe his mother doesn't want him to be pitied."

"Well, one thing he won't get is pity from me or my family and friends," said Liza. "Anyway, I'll see what his mother says; obviously the decision will be hers."

Liza arranged the time that she would collect the boys the next day, thanked them for the tea and took the boys to visit the baker.

The baker and his wife were busy in their kitchens and they in turn were surprised to see Liza and the boys. The invitation was extended to their son and daughter and once again Liza told them not to put them in their best clothes as they would probably be returning to them very much the worse for wear after a very strenuous cricket match.

Finally, Liza went to see Mrs Price who shyly invited her and the boys into her front parlour.

"I understand that you have a son and daughter around my boys' age," said Liza. Mrs Price nodded saying that she was correct.

Liza explained that they were having a picnic the following day and it would be nice if her children could join them for the afternoon and that some of the men and children were organising a cricket match.

"I don't think you realise that my son is bound to a wheelchair, so he wouldn't be able to join in, besides he likes to stay mostly out of sight and my daughter looks after him," said Mrs Price.

"I know of your son's condition Mrs Price, but I can pick both your son and daughter up and there is nothing to stop him enjoying the picnic and watching the cricket match. We would watch over him well and your daughter would be there to help if necessary," said Liza. "I can't see that there would be a problem, unless of course you don't really want him to come to us."

"I don't want him to be stared at and made fun of," said Mrs Price.

"People will always look, Mrs Price, but I can guarantee that nobody will make fun of him," said Liza.

"Please can we go mother," said a girl's voice coming from the next room. A very pretty girl came into the room. "I promise I'll look after Derek and you know how he loves cricket."

"We'll look after him too," piped up Matthew and the others nodded.

"Mrs Price, I can assure you that I will not tolerate any untoward comments about Derek whether they were to come from anyone within my household or the children who will be joining us tomorrow," said Liza.

"Well I suppose it would do no harm for him to spend a little time with you all," said Mrs Price.

"Perhaps it would be a good idea to ask him," said Liza, "after all this discussion he may not wish to come to us."

"Yes, I do. I'd like to come please," said Derek who was wheeled into the room by his sister.

Liza smiled and said that she was pleased to meet both Derek and his sister, who was called Susan. She nodded at Mrs Price and told her that nobody was dressing up for the occasion; it was just going to be a fun afternoon.

As they left the house they could see both Derek and Susan smiling broadly, and Liza thought that it may be the first time that they had mixed properly with other children.

On the drive home Liza asked what the boys thought about all the children who would be coming to the picnic the next day. They were pleased about the boys, but the girls were not going to be very interesting. None of them mentioned Derek or his disability.

Liza arrived back in time to see Jamie before they had to dress for dinner. Anthony and Diana were with him in the drawing room along with Wendell and Amelia. Jamie asked her how she had fared with the boys and their new friends.

"They all accepted so we shall see them tomorrow. I also saw a Mrs Price who has a son and daughter and they will also be joining us. Her son had a serious accident some years ago and he is now confined to a wheelchair, but it will do him good to meet with other children," said Liza.

"Do you think that's a good idea Liza? Won't it be difficult taking care of a cripple? I'm not sure I want James to have to face anyone who is not as the rest of us," said Jamie.

All eyes turned to Jamie and then over to Liza and from the look on Liza's face Jamie realised immediately that he had certainly said something wrong.

"Well Jamie, I'm surprised you feel that way. I would hope that should Matthew, John or even James be in a similar situation you would not be pleased if they were ostracised because they could not walk. I would have thought that because of your role as a patron of the children's charity you would have felt more compassion for a child with a disability, but if you really don't want James to catch sight of young Derek then I'm sure arrangements can be made for him to stay in his room for the afternoon," said Liza with a very audible sniff.

Wendell stared into the distance as Amelia looked up at the ceiling. Anthony and Diana said that they would get changed for dinner and Jamie looked at Liza and knew that they were not going to have an argument as he would give in to whatever she wanted and she was right, he would not tolerate any of the boys being left out of any gathering because of a disability, so why would he have thought that it should be the case for young Derek.

Jamie continued looking at Liza and smiled; he loved that determined look on her face. "Well Liza, I'm not going to argue with you and certainly not on the day after our wedding. You are right; I would not allow any of our boys to be hidden away just because they couldn't walk. I apologise for making a very silly and thoughtless comment."

The smile that Liza gave him made it worth their slight disagreement and Wendell and Amelia breathed a sigh of relief. Liza said that she was going to rest for a short while before getting dressed for dinner and Jamie

said that he would also, and they left and could be heard laughing and racing one another up the stairs. There was a shriek as they reached their rooms and a slamming of a door and then silence. Wendell and Amelia looked at one another, "Would you have ever expected Jamie to do that?" said Wendell.

"No, but if anyone was going to achieve that it would be Liza," said Amelia. "It's hard to believe that Jamie once tried to kill her, but you know what I always say . . ."

"Yes, Amelia, I know what you always say; love and hate make strange bedfellows," laughed Wendell.

At dinner both Liza and Jamie had happy smiles on their faces and plans were being made for the following day's picnic and cricket match, although there were not going to be enough people to have a two-sided match, but they would enjoy it anyway. They would just have to count the runs of each batsman to find the winner.

After dinner and when the men had joined the ladies in the drawing room, it was decided by most of them that an early night was in order as they were going to have to prepare themselves for an energetic time the following day.

Once April had helped her out of her dress, Liza told her that she could manage the rest herself and she donned the nightdress and dressing gown that she had wanted to wear for Jamie on their wedding night. It was cream like her wedding outfit and was also edged in gold thread. When she was ready, she picked up her candelabra and opened her door just as Jamie also opened his door. He seemed surprised that she was going to join him rather than the other way around, but he stood to one side and Liza walked past him into his room.

He took the light from her and placed it on a table and then stood and looked at her, "I can see why you wanted to wear that for me last night, but I still like your green one as it gives me such good memories."

She took off her dressing gown and climbed into his bed and snuggled down comfortably. "You like my bed don't you Liza?" he said.

"I like your room Jamie; I feel very welcome and at home here. My room is very comfortable, but I like being here with you and sleeping here," said Liza.

Jamie sat on the side of the bed for a few minutes and realised that Evelyn had never been in his room; he had always instigated their being

together and that wasn't often. He knew that he should not be comparing wives but the contrast between them was startling and he now felt very wanted. He knew that Liza must also feel wanted because that was exactly what he showed to her as he truly wanted her now and it was how he had always felt throughout his adult life.

"You look very tired Liza," said Jamie.

"I'm not too tired for you to love me Jamie," said a sleepy Liza, which gave Jamie a great deal of pleasure.

They were up early the next morning as there was a great deal to organise before Liza went to collect the children from the village. Edward was going to be with her as she needed somebody to help strap on Derek's wheelchair to the back of the large open carriage and lift him into one of the seats.

Derek and his sister Susan were ready and waiting for them; the grocer's sons, Cliff and Arnie, came running over to help with the wheelchair once Edward had lifted Derek into the carriage. The baker's son and daughter, Leo and Jane, saw what was happening and they too came over to see if they could help. Liza looked at them all and realised that nobody had taken any notice of her telling them not to wear their best clothes as they all looked very well dressed and she supposed that their parents had their pride. *Let's hope they don't get too messy;* thought Liza and she could see how excited the children were.

Their parents had been watching from behind net curtains and were surprised to see Liza helping the children into the carriage together with one of His Lordship's guests. They had only expected one of the staff drivers to be sent. They saw Liza turn around and grin at all the children and say something to them and they all seemed to be smiling and nodding and off they went towards Edgeworth House.

Matthew, John and James were waiting for the carriage to arrive and they greeted their friends and helped with Derek's wheelchair and went off towards the picnic area, John having taken charge of Derek. They totally ignored the girls, much to Liza's annoyance, but the girls seemed happy enough to walk with everyone else to the picnic area which had already been laid out in the field that had been identified as the best one

for a cricket match and it would also be near the lake. Luckily the day was very warm and bright.

Everyone was slowly making their way to the picnic site and they could see the boys standing around and talking to one another with Derek being very much the centre of attention. John seemed to be the one to take charge of him and Derek was expounding the rules of cricket to them. The bats were in a pile waiting for the game to start although that was going to be after lunch. One or two of the boys picked up a bat and started practicing their movements amid a great deal of laughter.

The two girls were helping to set the cloths out and arrange the food and drink. April was busy helping Mrs Lambert and Mr Lambert was setting out chairs for those who didn't want to sit on the ground.

The boys moved away, and Liza could hear Matthew boasting the virtues of having a lake in the grounds and Liza was pleased to see that Joseph and Lily were keeping the boys well within their sights by taking a walk around the lake. It seemed that John had taken charge of Derek and he and Leo were pushing the wheelchair. She could see that they were all stopping every now and again to let Derek look at something or touch a plant and Liza thought that children sort out situations by themselves and seemed not to really treat someone with a disability any differently to someone without; they just adapted to whatever the circumstances were.

Liza could see that several of the guests were watching what the boys were doing, not least Jamie who came over to her to tell her that she had been so right to insist that young Derek joined them as he and the boys seemed to be enjoying the occasion.

"You always seem to know the right thing to do," he said to her.

"Oh Jamie, if only you knew how many times I have made the wrong choice, but I think that this is one of my better ones," said Liza.

The boys were called to tell them that the picnic was ready and they ran back pushing Derek ahead of them bumping over uneven ground and he was laughing loudly. His sister, Susan, was watching with some concern, but they all arrived safely.

Food was being handed around and Liza was pleased to see that Diana was making sure that the children were cared for. Susan and Jane seemed happy to stay near April. Liza and Amelia checked that all was well and then they both settled down to enjoying the afternoon.

Once everyone had eaten and rested for a while, Jamie started organising their cricket match. The men were going to start, but the boys would be taking their turn between each man. Derek said that he could try to play if they would let him and there were discussions as to how he could do this and they came up with the idea that somebody could take his runs for him as it was quite possible for him to sit and bat the ball. He would have to sit in a chair without arms and wheels, but that would be easy for him. Next they had to decide who would take his runs for him; the boys didn't want the girls to do it, but Matthew, John and James looked towards Liza, having previously seen her efforts in their games of cricket and so much to her horror she was elected to take his runs and she seemed to have no say in it. Jamie was grinning at her and Edward and Joseph had evil looks in their eyes. Peter, who was to be the bowler, kept a straight face and told her to expect no favours and neither should Derek.

Luckily there were quite a few batsmen before it was Derek's turn and when it was everyone stopped talking and started watching with interest. Derek was set up on a rather precarious chair sideways in front of the wicket and Liza tucked her skirt up which meant that she was showing part of her underwear. She told Derek that she would take the runs regardless of whether he was still sitting in his chair or lying flat on the ground. She took up her position to one side of him, hoping that Peter's aim was good and that she would not be in the line of fire.

Derek was very good at hitting the ball although he hit it with such force that he fell off his chair, but Liza took no notice of that and she was off running and got there, back and there again before the ball was back with Peter. Cheers went up and Edward and Joseph ran over and put Derek unceremoniously back on his chair.

Nobody had realised that naturally Derek had great strength in his arms, so he was skilled in hitting the ball well and Liza was off again, and once again Derek was on the ground with Edward and Joseph running across to pick him up. This time cheers were intermingled with laughter. After half an hour Liza was almost exhausted but Peter finally managed to knock the wicket with his bowling and Edward and Joseph picked Derek up for the final time and placed him in his wheelchair and as they wheeled him off the pitch he was greeted with loud cheers. He had really enjoyed himself regardless of the fact that he was probably covered in bruises and Liza realised that she would undoubtedly have to explain the reason why

to his mother. He was now sitting on the side-lines cheering on all the other players; he had become one of the boys and firm friendships had been made that day.

The afternoon was coming to an end and Liza told all the house guests that they would be having a casual meal that evening and that they were to dress comfortably. Their meal was going to be leftovers from the picnic and several cold meats with salad and as much fresh bread as they could eat. Mrs Lambert had made an enormous sherry trifle for them and there was also fresh fruit and cheese. In fact they were going to help themselves to whatever they fancied; there was also going to be plenty of wine but Liza was insisting that there would be no men drinking port and smoking cigars, everyone was going to treat the evening as a party especially organised for those who would be leaving the next day.

The village children were making their way towards their transport home; Matthew, John and James insisted that they went with them, which meant that the carriage was overcrowded but somehow they managed to all climb aboard. Once again Derek's chair was tied to the back and everyone was surprised to see Jamie climb up and take the reins with Liza by his side. They were all laughing, and the children started singing a song that was unfamiliar to Liza and the boys, but Jamie knew it and joined in.

They drove into the village and stopped outside Mrs Price's house, but the other parents came out of their houses to help 'His Lordship' although they really wanted to make sure that they were really seeing him surrounded by children and helping Derek into his wheelchair. Once again John took charge and pushed him towards his front door and Liza followed knowing that she had to tell Mrs Price that Derek had fallen over several times during his game of cricket.

"Mrs Price," said Liza, "I'm afraid Derek enjoyed joining in the cricket match but each time he hit the ball he fell off his chair. I know no serious damage has been done to him, but you will probably find that he has quite a few bruises. I'm sorry about that, but he did enjoy the game and we enjoyed watching him."

"I did Mum," said Derek, "I really did, and it was worth any bruises I may have."

Liza was suddenly surrounded by all the children and they were chorusing how much Derek had enjoyed the game and how well he had

done. Mrs Price looked slightly confused for a moment and then smiled and thanked Liza for including him.

"He included himself Mrs Price," said Liza, "he did exactly as he wanted, and all the children have accepted him as he is, and they enjoyed his company. I know that they would like to see him again, if they may."

"Any time they will be welcome Lady Edgeworth," said Mrs Price. Matthew and John sniggered, and Liza frowned at them.

"I apologise for my sons Mrs Price, but they are not used to my new name and I have to admit that I'm not either," said Liza.

The villagers waved as they started back to the house and Jamie remarked how successful the afternoon had been.

When they arrived back, the boys went straight to the kitchen as their stomachs were telling them that a while had passed since they had eaten. Liza and Jamie went to their rooms to change and Liza decided on a very pretty afternoon dress for the relaxed evening that she had planned.

They all congregated in the dining room and when everyone was there Edward said that he had an announcement to make, which of course they had all been expecting. He and Nicole were now engaged and were planning to marry in the spring. Jamie ordered champagne to toast them with and Liza knew that this time Edward would be very happy. Annalise and Arthur smiled with pleasure as did Wendell and Amelia. Peter nodded his approval and Joseph and Lily were smiling at them. Liza thought that another announcement from Joseph would probably follow shortly.

It was noticed that Diana was holding a glass of champagne and Anthony was frowning. Liza moved over to her and she said, "Just a sip or two Liza, to wish Edward and Nicole well."

"You have been such a pleasure to have with us Diana; I do hope that you feel that it has all been worthwhile. It does concern me that even one sip may undo all the good that you have done recently, but it is not up to me to tell you how to run your life, however I really do wish you well and hope to see you again soon," said Liza.

Diana looked from Liza to the drink that she had in her hand and put it down on the table and smiled, "you're right; one drink could set me on the wrong road again. I wish I could sit and drink wine with my meal and leave it at that, but I think I will never be able to do that again."

"No, you probably won't be able to, but there are many other drinks that are just as nice and not alcoholic. Soon you may not even think about it," said Liza.

The evening went very well but everyone seemed tired after their day in the fresh air and soon they gradually made their way up to their various bedrooms. It didn't take Liza long to get into her nightdress and dressing gown, but she hadn't heard Jamie's valet leave, so she lay on her bed listening. It wasn't long before she went to sleep.

Jamie was surprised not to find her coming into his room and he waited a short while but then he couldn't resist going into her room, which was where he found her fast asleep on her bed. He was about to get on the bed beside her when he thought that this was not where she really wanted to be, so he quietly opened her door and then moved across the hallway and opened his door, then returned and lifted her and carried her to his bed. He gently removed her dressing gown and then lay her down in his bed and covered her. During all this she did not wake up. Jamie climbed in beside her and blew out the lamp and she did what he remembered her doing in America and that was to move over and put her head on his chest and carried on sleeping. Jamie smiled in the dark and thought how lucky he now was; he had what he had always wanted.

In the early hours of the morning Liza woke and at first wondered where she was; she didn't remember getting into Jamie's bed, but she was quite happy to be there. She moved her head from his chest, and this woke him.

"I don't remember getting here Jamie," said Liza.

"I brought you here Liza; I knew you liked being in my bed," he said.

"Yes, I do Jamie. There's nowhere else I'd rather be right now," said Liza as she moved nearer to him and he thought that he would take advantage of the situation and he lifted her nightdress and spent a great deal of time loving her.

Several of the house guests were leaving the following afternoon. Peter was champing at the bit to get back to work and he would be travelling with Annalise and Arthur which meant that Nicole would also be leaving, so Edward decided to travel with them. First to leave were Anthony and Diana. They extended an invitation for Jamie, Liza and the

boys to visit at any time and it was made clear by Jamie that they were very welcome to return whenever they wished.

The large carriage was brought around to start the journey home for Peter, Annalise, Arthur, Nicole and Edward. They said their farewells and thanks for a wonderful time, and the house was beginning to empty. The boys were quite happy as they would still have their friends in the village, and Wendell and Amelia were remaining for a few days and they considered them grandparents and they always spoiled them. Their Uncle Joseph was also staying for a while as was Aunt Lily and her mother and they always had fun with him.

Liza would miss Amelia as they had spent a great deal of time together and she had been so supportive and helpful in the lead up to her marriage. Amelia had told her how much she had enjoyed acting as the bride's mother and Wendell had been proud to act as her father.

The dinner table that night looked quite depleted and Liza moved up to sit next to Jamie with Wendell next to her and Amelia opposite with Joseph and Lily and Jennifer Armstrong next to Wendell. It all looked and felt very intimate and it was then that Joseph made his announcement that Lily had done him the honour of accepting his proposal of marriage. They hadn't set a date as they wanted Edward and Nicole to organise their wedding first and have the pleasure and excitement just for themselves and then they could have all the fun and excitement of arranging their own wedding.

"That's very thoughtful of you both," said Jamie. "I'm very pleased for you and I can see that you are going to be very happy. We will have to have another toast." He rang for Harper and ordered champagne for them all.

"It's been quite a week for weddings and engagements," said Liza. "Did Edward know that you were going to get engaged?"

"He knew that it was in my mind, but I didn't want to steal his thunder. He's had such a sad and difficult time over the past few years that he deserves to revel in his happiness without our butting in," said Joseph.

Amelia, Wendell and Jennifer were smiling broadly, and it was obvious that they all approved of the situation.

"You and Jamie need to organise some time away alone," said Amelia. "You have both been on duty keeping all your guests happy when you

really should have been getting to know one another. I could stay and make sure the boys are well cared for.”

“Well, it would be better if the boys came to us Amelia,” said Wendell who obviously wanted his wife back home with him and he would put up with three boys disrupting his peaceful household to achieve that.

Jamie and Liza smiled at one another and Jamie said that they would give it some serious thought.

Chapter 2

That night they discussed all that had happened since Liza had arrived at Jamie's house and the changes that had taken place. He admitted that he really hadn't taken much notice of the people in the village; he knew his tenant farmers more but was beginning to realise that the villagers were just as important; they relied on him and to an extent, he relied on them.

"I wonder what happened to young Derek; you said that he'd had an accident and I suppose nothing could be done to help him. He seems a very bright lad though," said Jamie.

"Yes, he does seem quite bright. I suppose he's spent a great deal of time reading. I'll ask Mrs Lambert, she seems to know most things about the village people," said Liza.

Liza took off her dressing gown and climbed into bed and leaned back comfortably as Jamie said, "Perhaps you could also ask her who the woman was who caught your flowers," and Liza realised that he was staring at her closely.

"Hmm," said Liza making no further comment.

Jamie came over and sat on the bed and stared at her again saying nothing for a while.

"I believe I know who she is Liza, and I think you definitely do. It puzzled me for a few days because she seemed familiar to me and then it came to me earlier this evening when James came in to say goodnight and I realised why I seemed to know her; he has her smile and eyes," said Jamie.

"He has your smile and your eyes Jamie," said Liza quietly, "and your mother's nice nature."

"She left me Liza and my childhood would have been very different if she had wanted to stay," said Jamie.

"Having met her I find it difficult to believe that it was her choice to leave you; not only has she made extreme efforts to see you whenever she could, she still is held in high regard by the people around here. They have kept her informed about anything they think she would find important," said Liza.

"Why did she make herself known to you and not me?" asked Jamie.

"She didn't Jamie, I recognised her immediately I caught sight of her. You see I have had the advantage of seeing a great deal of James over the years, I have seen him grow and there was no mistaking the resemblance between him and your mother, but also I have had the pleasure of looking at you and much as in the early days of my knowing you a smile rarely crossed your lips, since we became more closely involved I have loved seeing that wonderful smile that you show to those who you know well," said Liza.

"Have you arranged to see her again?" asked Jamie.

"No, she didn't want you to know how much she has missed you and watched you from afar; she didn't think that it would serve any useful purpose and would be bound to upset you. I told her that as that was her wish I would not tell you, but I wouldn't lie to you if such a conversation occurred," said Liza.

"I thought that we would never keep any secrets from one another Liza," said Jamie.

"There's a difference between a secret and a confidence. I will never break a confidence unless it endangered you and the boys and anyone else that I love and I would have expected you to be the same," said Liza.

"I want you to know that you can tell me anything and it will go no further. I know that up until now you have kept your own counsel, but you no longer need to as you now have me to listen and help with whatever it is that could be worrying you," said Jamie.

"Thank you, Jamie, but there is nothing worrying me at present. I will always have business matters that I wouldn't bother to discuss with you but the promise I gave to your mother was done with the best of intentions on both our parts. What do you want to do about it?" asked Liza.

"I don't know; I'll have to think about it," said Jamie. "You have to appreciate that I have spent my whole life without her; do I need to see her now?"

"And you also have to appreciate that she hasn't spent her whole life without you; she has seen you at every opportunity. She has watched you grow and probably it has broken her heart to be without you, especially when you were so very young," said Liza. "But you are right, you will have to think about it and the choice will be yours alone."

"I wonder why she left; I had heard that she went off with somebody, but my father was a notorious liar," said Jamie.

"She seemed a very nice lady. I'm sorry if I have upset you Jamie, you know I would never do anything to hurt you," said Liza.

"And you know I would forgive you anything and also do nothing to hurt you. I promise you I will think about what I will do," said Jamie.

"I'll ask Mrs Lambert about Derek tomorrow; we may be able to do something to brighten his life and that of his sister while we are here," said Liza.

"Perhaps when you have a minute you could go and see the Innkeeper and his wife as they seem to be close to my mother," said Jamie who found the word 'mother' difficult to say.

"Don't you think that perhaps you should also come with me to see them," said Liza.

"I don't think that they would talk so readily if I were there with you," said Jamie.

"You're probably right," said Liza as she yawned and settled down in bed again. "I wonder if we could take some time away; Wendell didn't seem to want Amelia to stay on any longer and I can understand that."

"We'll see how we feel when everyone has left," said Jamie as he climbed into bed.

Liza was up early the next morning as she wanted to get into the village and attempt to see the Innkeeper and his wife before lunch, but first she wanted to talk to Mrs Lambert about Derek. Harper was in with Jamie in his study and Liza asked him to send Mrs Lambert up to see them; he looked slightly puzzled but went off to find her and deliver Liza's

message. Jamie was sitting in his comfortable chair reading his newspaper when Mrs Lambert came in looking slightly flustered.

"Sit down Mrs Lambert," said Liza and she smiled at Mrs Lambert who was perched uncomfortably on the edge of a chair. "We wanted to ask you if there is anything you could tell us about young Derek's accident. I don't want to embarrass his mother by asking what she may feel is none of our business, but the family seem to have to cope in very difficult circumstances."

Mrs Lambert relaxed a little, "Yes, Mrs Price has not had an easy life. Her husband turned out to be a man of violence especially when he had been drinking; she often could be seen with a black eye and unfortunately one day his violence was turned on young Derek; he was only three or four at the time and from what I have been told he started screaming when his father hit out at his mother again and wouldn't stop, but his father made him stop all right. He picked him up, threw him out of the way and he unfortunately landed on his back across a heavy metal fire grate. He's never been able to walk since."

"What happened to her husband?" asked Liza and Jamie looked up and over the top of his newspaper.

"There is some justice in the world," said Mrs Lambert. "A week later he got drunk again and fell off the cart that he was driving – broke his neck. It's a pity that it hadn't been a week earlier. Since then Mrs Price has worked hard doing anything and everything to keep a roof over her family's head. The people in the village helped as much as they could, especially in the early days before she had work. She takes in washing, she cleans other peoples' homes, she's picked fruit; she has even been known to help behind the bar at the Inn."

"Who owns her house," asked Jamie suddenly.

"I believe you do my Lord," said Mrs Lambert. Jamie raised his eyes to heaven.

"I suppose you don't know what the doctor said about Derek," said Liza.

"I only know that she was advised to take him to a doctor in London, but she couldn't afford to do that. We tried to raise enough money for her, but we just couldn't manage the cost. It was not only for the London doctor; she would have had to hire special transport and of course have

somewhere for them to stay. It was well out of reach of all our pockets,” said Mrs Lambert.

Jamie threw down his newspaper and demanded to know why she hadn’t come to him. “Am I considered such an ogre that nobody thinks I would help in such a case. I am not inhuman; I am quite approachable.” Jamie was showing great annoyance and Mrs Lambert looked quite taken aback.

“Lord Edgeworth is right Mrs Lambert, he would have been quite capable of helping with the doctor and arranging proper transport and accommodation,” said Liza.

“With all due respect to his Lordship, I know that Mrs Price did have the courage to come to you but you were away at the time, I think you had made a sudden trip to America. She saw your former wife who said that she would think about it, but Mrs Price heard nothing from her although she did come to see her again, but Lady Edgeworth had left for Paris I believe,” said Mrs Lambert.

“Oh” was all Liza felt she should say but Jamie was more outgoing. “Do you mean to tell me that for the sake of a few pounds that child may have been able to walk again? I cannot believe that Evelyn would have been so thoughtlessly unkind and selfish,” by this time Jamie was showing great annoyance. Liza went over to him and put a hand on his arm and he looked up at her and his temper started to ease.

“I suppose it’s now too late to do anything for Derek,” said Jamie thoughtfully. “Liza will you go and see Mrs Price and ask her permission for me to talk to the village doctor please.”

“Of course I will,” said Liza and then she turned to Mrs Lambert and thanked her for her time and the information she had given them.

Jamie was still in what could be termed ‘a high dudgeon’, “I’m really annoyed at Evelyn’s coldness towards a needy family,” and then he said nothing for a short while noticing that Liza was not commenting. “I know what you must be thinking and you’re right, I should have known that story. I have spent my time here being aloof from the people around me. All I have ever thought about is me and James and the land that makes me money, but mainly what has always been on my mind is how I could win you over to me. I have not even thought of the villagers and farmers as people and certainly not concerned myself with their welfare. What a terrible landlord I am and having been with you here for just a few weeks I

can see why the people like you. You are quite capable of talking to anybody and you show them that you are genuinely concerned for their welfare. Do you know I believe that my mother may also have had that ability?"

"I don't know what happened to your mother, but I think that whatever it was she was not in control of the way that she had to leave you. I also think that she was cared for by the people of the village when she may not have had anywhere else to go, but you must appreciate that I have no real reason to think that, it is only my own supposition," said Liza.

Amelia and Wendell had been taking a walk around the grounds and came in to see if there were any plans for the day.

"No, I have a couple of calls to make in the village and then I shall be back to be with you all this afternoon and I have planned that we have tea on the terrace as it is such a beautiful day and my time with you both is going to be limited until we come to Belfast for Christmas, which sadly is nearly five months away," said Liza.

Liza's carriage was waiting for her and she firstly gave instruction to stop at Mrs Price's house. Susan answered the door to her and said that her mother was hanging washing out in the garden and that she would fetch her.

"Don't worry Susan, I'll go and find her," said Liza as she made her way to the back of the house and Susan showed her to the door. Mrs Price was shocked to see her and apologised for her appearance and the state of her house.

"Please Mrs Price don't worry about that; I've called unexpectedly and besides I can see very little wrong with your house," said Liza. "Mrs Price, Lord Edgeworth was very impressed by Derek's determination to ignore his disability and join in with everything that the other boys were doing. He had no idea how Derek was hurt in the past and asks if you would have any objection to his talking to your doctor about his condition and if there is anything that can be done to help. He realises that it may be that there is no remedy, but he would like to pursue all possibilities."

"With all due respect to your Ladyship, any remedy is years too late," said Mrs Price.

"I know that you must feel that Mrs Price but Lord Edgeworth is very annoyed that he was not made aware of your request for help years ago and he would now like to see if there is any possibility that it may not be too late. He does not, however, wish to get your hopes up unnecessarily," said Liza.

"I have no objection if he wishes to talk to the doctor, but I truly think that it will be a waste of his Lordships' time," said Mrs Price.

"Good," said Liza. "We'll see what happens."

Liza then made her way to the Inn much to Mr and Mrs Rogers' surprise. They ushered her through to their back parlour and offered her tea and cakes. Liza smiled and thanked them. "I think you must realise why I'm here."

They both shook their heads, but they were not very good liars. Liza sighed and carried on, "I know that Lord Edgeworth's mother was at our wedding. I could immediately see the similarities between them, as could Lord Edgeworth."

Both Mr and Mrs Rogers looked shocked and concerned.

"Lord Edgeworth had always believed that his mother had run away with a man, but he is beginning to think that it was probably untrue. I had the pleasure of talking to the lady and can honestly say that she did not seem the type of person who would have willingly left her son, especially as she has made sure that she knew how he was and what he was doing throughout his life. That is not the sort of woman who would leave her son for the sake of an illicit relationship," said Liza.

"You are right, Miranda Edgeworth did not leave her son, she was forced out, in fact she was literally kicked out of the house and managed to make her way to where we were living at that time. She was in a very bad way and my wife and my mother nursed her for a couple of days but then her husband turned us out of our house and accused me of being her lover," said Mr Rogers.

Liza sat and asked if the accusation was why she had been 'kicked' out of the house in the first place.

Mrs Rogers answered, "The real reason was because Lord Edgeworth had lost once again at the gambling tables, blaming her for his lack of luck and the fact that there was no money left from her dowry to cover his debts. He told her to get out of his sight and when she protested saying that their son needed her, he beat her mercilessly with his walking cane,

opened the front doors and kicked her down the steps. Apparently he shouted at her to go to her lover for comfort."

"He blackened her name and tried to blacken mine, but my wife and her family and my mother knew the truth and there was plenty of room here for us all, including Lady Edgeworth. Prior to all this there had been many times when we had to bathe her cuts and bruises. The whole village and farmers knew the truth and in some ways it was best that it happened to us because losing my job and home was a blow, but we had family to fall back on. If it had been anyone else then it could have been disastrous for them," said Mr Rogers.

"So throughout more than thirty years you have kept in touch with her, and told her whatever you knew was happening to her son," said Liza

"We have done the best we can to keep her informed. We know your cook and gardener quite well and they tell us anything that they think she should know and if she can she comes and stays with us or tries to go to wherever he is. She could not go to Belfast for his first marriage; although I don't think she would have been happy seeing that one. It was common knowledge that he married her on the rebound thinking that you were dead; she knew that too. She was delighted when she heard that he had finally found the person he really wanted and was going to marry you. In her letter to us she said that even if she lost her employment she was going to come here for your wedding," said Mrs Rogers.

"You have no idea how overjoyed she was to be introduced to her grandson; and to catch your flowers, but she was very nervous because you had realised who she was," said Mr Rogers.

"I want to thank you Mr and Mrs Rogers for being so open with me; I'm sure there is a great deal more you could tell me, but I have to digest what you have said before I inform my husband of what occurred all those years ago. He has begun to realise that all was probably not as he had been told. What his reaction will be and what he may want to do with the information I'm afraid I don't yet know, but I should be grateful if you would kindly give me his mother's address just in case he wants to get in touch with her," said Liza and when they had given her that information she left having once again thanked them for their kindness now and over the past years.

Liza was very thoughtful on the way home; she was wondering about the best way to tell Jamie the truth of what he had believed to be his

mothers' desertion of him, after all it was going to blacken his father in all their eyes.

Jamie was out with his overseer when Liza arrived home and Amelia noticed that she was rather distracted but the information that Liza had was for Jamie's ears only. Instead she talked about her visit to Derek's mother and how Jamie was now showing an interest in him. Amelia was not fooled by this, but she knew better than to question her further.

Liza was resting thoughtfully in her room later that day when Jamie came to see her, and she told him how Mrs Price would be pleased for him to talk to the doctor about Derek but how she felt that it was too late to do any good.

"And Liza I can see that there is something else on your mind, so obviously you have managed to talk to the Innkeeper and his wife. Are you going to tell me how you got on?" asked Jamie.

"Yes, I did Jamie," said Liza and then she formed in her mind several ways to start the conversation, but each one she discarded because for once diplomacy eluded her.

Jamie looked at her and smiled, "Come on Liza. Tell me what it is that you found out and don't spare my feelings. I don't like to see you troubled and certainly not on my account. I'll have to see Mr and Mrs Rogers myself if you are having such difficulty talking to me. You must remember that I told you that there is nothing that you cannot talk to me about and what you are holding back from me does concern me."

"Yes, of course Jamie," said Liza and she told him everything that Mr and Mrs Rogers had said and when she had finished, she couldn't bear the tremendous look of sadness in his eyes.

"If what you have told me is true Liza, then my mother must have gone through hell for over thirty years. How very sad she must have felt and how sad I feel now. I am so fortunate to have you and the boys to cheer me up, but she has had no one for so long," said Jamie and he stayed with her for a while and then went to get prepared for afternoon tea saying that he would like to discuss the situation with her later.

Jamie appeared to be his normal self at tea. The boys had joined them and they always made for an entertaining time meaning that Jamie could keep his thoughts to himself and nobody noticed that his mind was elsewhere. After tea Liza had some last-minute arrangements to make for dinner and she also had to make sure that the boys had learned the lesson

that she had set for them earlier, so it was some time before Liza could find Jamie to talk to. He was sitting quietly in his study and staring into space; he looked up as she came in and smiled at her in what appeared to be relief.

“Do you want to see Mr and Mrs Rogers yourself?” Liza asked Jamie.

“Maybe, I’m not sure that they will feel easy in my company,” said Jamie.

“I don’t think you should worry whether they feel easy in your company or not, you should make up your mind if you wish to know more about your mother from them, or if you would prefer to hear it directly from her,” said Liza.

Jamie had always been very decisive about what he wanted, and this was to be no exception. “I want to see and talk to my mother although I think that my turning up on her doorstep would be a mistake for both of us. However, if you were to turn up on her doorstep, I believe it would be the way to go about this situation, especially as you have already spoken to her,” said Jamie. “Would you be prepared to do that for me Liza?”

“If it is the case that she has been very badly mistreated and misunderstood, are you prepared to take her into your care Jamie? Please don’t give her hope and then take it away from her. It would be better to leave well enough alone and not contact her at all,” said Liza.

“When I was a boy, I dreamed that my mother would return and love me again and I thought of nice things that I would do to make her love me as I believed that she cared nothing for me. As I grew older the thought of her left me and I just became used to my father having different women around; some I got on well with, but mostly there were those who ignored me. I was sent to boarding school when I was very young so it wasn’t until I was much older that I came into contact with my father and his women but by that time I cared very little for women and believed that the way my father treated them was the way of the world. When I met you Liza you know that I made the biggest mistake of my life by offering you a life just like my father extended to his women. It was as you were ejecting me from your house that I realised just how much I loved you and wanted you and how much I had missed a mother’s guidance in matters of love,” said Jamie.

"I don't really see your point, Jamie, apart from the fact that you had a rather unloved upbringing which would possibly have been different if your mother had been with you," said Liza.

"My point is that although I did not have my mother's guidance, I did have her love even though I never knew it and that I have very little reason to doubt the appalling way my mother was treated by my father as I saw how he treated some of his women, although he tried not to completely face me with his bad humour, especially when he lost at the gambling tables. I believe that the time has come for my mother to have a change of fortune and if I can do that for her then I think we will all be happy," said Jamie.

"Would you set up the Dower House for her?" asked Liza.

"Yes, that is where she should be and hopefully she would have no further worries, but she may not wish to leave where she is, the choice would be hers," said Jamie.

"I'll set cleaning of the Dower House in motion tomorrow and I'll then go and see your mother and find out what she would really like to do. I do however think that she will realise how much she is wanted if you were also to visit her with me," said Liza.

"I understand what you are saying but I believe that we both need privacy for our first meeting. Also, won't it be a little soon to get the Dower House ready after all she may not wish to live there," said Jamie.

"It should be cleaned and set up correctly regardless of whether she wants it or not. You don't want it to go to rack and ruin which it will do if it's not looked after," said Liza.

At dinner Jamie surprised Liza by announcing that his mother had been found and Liza was going to visit her on his behalf the following day.

When everyone had digested the surprising announcement, Wendell asked why Jamie was not going to accompany Liza on such an important mission.

"My mother is not aware that I know of her whereabouts, or even the fact that she is alive. I believe that my facing her suddenly would not be the right way to get to know her. Liza already knows who she is and has already met her; she has also gained information about the circumstances of her difficult departure from my life. I am astounded by the loyalty that my mother has received from the villagers and farmers here. They have all known of her whereabouts but kept this to themselves for her sake. I am

also impressed by the fact that whenever possible she has watched me from afar. She was at our wedding and she was the woman who caught Liza's bouquet," said Jamie.

"I would like to go with you tomorrow Liza," said Amelia and she surprised even Liza by saying that she knew who Jamie's mother was and had spoken to her at the wedding, but she had respected her wish to remain unknown to Jamie.

"Thank you, Amelia; I would be very grateful if you would accompany me tomorrow. It is not going to be an easy meeting, but I hope that eventually it will be a happy one," said Liza.

Questions were being asked of Liza and Jamie, but there was nothing important that they could answer about his mother as it was such a new situation for them. Amelia, Lily and Jennifer were interested in how the Dower House was going to be arranged and both Lily and Jennifer said that they would look it over whilst Liza and Amelia were going to see Jamie's mother; they seemed quite excited at the prospect.

Wendell and Joseph concerned themselves with how Jamie was going to feel by being confronted with a mother that he didn't know, but who obviously had made it her business to know him. Jamie admitted that he was a little nervous at the prospect, but his mother had every right to live with them and be cared for by them and he felt sure that in return there would be a great deal of affection shown towards them by her.

"Of course we don't know the whole story," said Wendell, "but it does seem as if she was not treated as she should have been, and her life has not been easy. It must also have had an adverse effect on your early life Jamie."

"Who knows how my life may have been if she had been around. All I know is that I am at last perfectly happy, but I may have achieved that earlier if I'd had the advantage of my mother's influence," said Jamie.

That night as Liza was about to move into Jamie's room, her door opened and he told her that he would like to come to her. Liza smiled at him and told him that she wanted to be wherever he was.

"Your room is so very like you Liza; I just feel like sleeping here tonight if you have no objection," said Jamie.

"Of course I have no objection," and she climbed into bed and patted it for him to join her. He laughed and jumped in beside her and all the

concerns of the day disappeared as they spent a great deal of time loving one another.

The morning saw everyone up bright and early. Mrs Frances was organising the cleaning and renovations in the Dower House and Lily and Jennifer offered to help in whatever capacity she felt was needed. Wendell and Joseph also asked what they could do to help and Mrs Frances found a few tasks for them to undertake.

Jamie was going to spend the morning with the village doctor to find out if anything could still be done to help Derek and after that he was going to visit Mrs Price to discuss matters with her.

After breakfast Amelia and Liza got ready for their journey to Miranda Edgeworth, but first they both spent some time with the boys, although they did not tell them what their mission was that day.

Before they left Jamie handed Liza a letter for her to give to his mother and she steeled herself not to ask him the content. He saw the look of concern in her eyes and he said, "I know you will give it to her if you think she would be receptive to it. All it says is that I have been made aware that she has watched over me as much as she has been able to over the years and that I would now be honoured if she would in turn allow me to watch over her from now onwards. I have assured her that I became aware of who she was because I recognised the family resemblance between her and my son at our wedding and that no confidences were broken."

"I will do my best to persuade her Jamie. Are you sure you would not like to come with me? I know it would probably disturb her to start with, but I know she would get over that quickly," said Liza.

"No I believe our first meeting should be private for both our sakes," said Jamie.

They took a large, comfortable carriage with two drivers for their journey which was going to take them at least two hours. Amelia asked her how she intended to handle the meeting with Miranda and her employer.

"I think that once we have introduced ourselves to her employer and made her aware of exactly who Miranda is, I believe that she will no longer be employed," said Liza.

"That's a little harsh of you Liza. She will then have no means of support," said Amelia.

"Exactly, that's what I'm hoping. She'll have no choice but to come with us after that," said Liza.

"That seems a little risky for her," said Amelia.

"Amelia, once we turn up on the doorstep her life will be different anyway. Her employer, a Mrs Peabody, can't ignore who she is. The only alternative is for us to not call and see her at all. Jamie wants to see her and wants to talk to her; if we don't do so I know that he will, and he knows that he will probably make a mess of it. He truly has no idea how they are going to approach one another, which is why they need us to start the proceedings," said Liza.

They finally arrived at the house, which was not too large but had a driveway to the front door. The butler came to their carriage and Liza handed him her calling card, which he immediately took to Mrs Peabody and in no time at all he was back inviting them into the house. One of their drivers assisted them down and the butler escorted them into the drawing room in which a lady of around sixty years of age was waiting to greet them.

She welcomed them to her home and asked the reason why they had honoured her with a visit.

Liza introduced Amelia to her and then said, "I have heard that you have a very good heart Mrs Peabody and that you have been so kind to my mother-in-law over the past few years giving her employment when her family should really have taken responsibility for her welfare. Of course she was too proud to make herself known to us and you kept her confidence even though no doubt you believed she should be where she really belonged."

Mrs Peabody was looking completely confused and Liza butted in before she could ask any questions. "You are the sole of discretion and I can see that you do not want to break the confidence of the Dowager Lady Miranda Edgeworth, and I truly appreciate that, but if you could please send someone to ask her if she is prepared to meet with us again, I should be more than grateful."

Mrs Peabody mumbled "the Dowager Lady Miranda Edgeworth; Miranda Worth?"

"Yes, I understand she does use the name Miranda Worth," said Liza innocently.

"If you don't mind your Ladyship, I'll go and find her myself. Please enjoy your tea and I'll bring her to you shortly," said a very bemused Mrs Peabody as she disappeared through the door.

"Well Liza, we're about to find out whether you have played your hand correctly or not," said Amelia.

"I know, I think I sounded more confident than I felt," said Liza.

They could hear voices coming from somewhere above them, but there was no sound of annoyance and then footsteps could be heard coming down the stairs and a very pale faced Miranda Edgeworth walked into the room, followed closely by Mrs Peabody.

Liza walked over to Miranda and put her arms around her and whispered how very pleased she was to see her again and then for Mrs Peabody's benefit she kissed her on the cheek and said, "Good afternoon Mamma, I am so happy to find you looking so well. Obviously Mrs Peabody has taken very good care of you."

Miranda looked rather nervous and said, "I am surprised to see you both; I had not expected a visit so soon after your wedding."

"I am sorry, but I couldn't resist seeing you again as our meeting was necessarily so very brief due to the number of guests that I had to see and make sure were well catered for. Perhaps Mrs Peabody wouldn't mind us having a little time to talk," said Liza.

Mrs Peabody suddenly stood up and said that of course they should have some privacy, but Liza said that there was nothing that she need not hear or join in with. Liza's ploy worked as Mrs Peabody wouldn't hear of it and said that she had one or two things to organise in the kitchen. Amelia said that she would be interested to see Mrs Peabody's kitchens; in fact she would like to see all her house and grounds, especially as she had noticed one or two plants that she would like some advice on.

When they had left Liza turned to Miranda and said, "Please don't think that I broke my word to you, and neither did Amelia but it took Jamie only a couple of days to work out who you were and I couldn't deny it. In fact I have a letter from him to you, but before you read it I want you to know that he asked me to visit Mr and Mrs Rogers on his behalf as he felt that you may have been maligned in the past and knew that they were more likely to talk to me than to him. Recently, before we married, I told him that you had probably kept a watchful eye on him throughout his life and at first, he just thought that I was being sentimental. The other day his

son came to him as he did every day; it may have been the way the light caught him or for some unknown reason, but he suddenly saw your face in his smile. I can see your face in Jamie's smile. Do you want to read your letter now, or would you prefer to be alone?"

"I don't need to be alone. Do you know the content?" asked Miranda.

"I had no idea that he was going to write to you. He asked me to give it to you just before we left this morning. He briefly told me what he had said, but of course I have not read it," said Liza.

Miranda opened her letter and read it slowly, she put it in her lap and then picked it up again and read it a second time.

"He is saying that he wants to watch over me now," tears were now pouring down Miranda's cheeks, "what does he want me to do?"

"He now understands how much you suffered at the hands of his father and would like you to become part of his family as you rightly should have been over the past very many years. He knows that you both will have to get to know one another, but I don't think that will be very difficult. In fact he wants that to happen so much that the Dower House is already being made ready for you, so that you can have your own house, and staff as you should always have had. In the meantime there is plenty of room in the main house for you as you are well aware," said Liza.

"Liza, I am scared. He may not like me; we may not get on. I don't know if it is a life that I am capable of adjusting to now," said Miranda.

"You and I get on and you have a beautiful grandson and two step grandsons to help you. Don't forget that you also have all your friends in the village to make you feel comfortable. You have a great deal of support from a great many people and at last you also have your son wanting you near him. There is no need to feel scared; change that feeling to excitement because it will be an exciting time for you," said Liza.

"I can't leave Mrs Peabody in the lurch," said Miranda, as neither she nor Liza realised that both Amelia and Mrs Peabody had come into the room.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Mrs Peabody. "You must not give up such a wonderful opportunity to be with your family for my sake. I will eventually find another companion, but you only have one family and you must be with them. I wish I had a family who wanted me around them. I will help you pack, come on Miranda – or should I say, 'Your Ladyship', let's go and

gather up what you want to take with you now. You can always send for anything else at a later date."

"Firstly," said Liza, "we must establish that it is exactly what she wants."

"Of course it is," said Mrs Peabody and then she stopped and asked, "Isn't it?"

"It's what I've dreamed about for so long," and she started crying again.

"I hope that you will find the time to come and visit us Mrs Peabody. I'm sure her Ladyship will be anxious to show you her home when she has settled," said Liza, knowing that this would delight Mrs Peabody and give her something to boast about to all her friends. "Is there anything we can do to help?"

"Good heavens no; we can manage, can't we?" Mrs Peabody said to Miranda who nodded.

When they had left the room Liza looked over to Amelia and asked her how she had managed to achieve winning over Mrs Peabody. "I'll tell you later," said Amelia, "but I think the icing on the cake was your invitation to her on behalf of your mother-in-law."

The butler came in again with more tea and cakes and they both noticed that he had a slight smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes. When he had left Liza and Amelia smiled at one another and Amelia said that he appeared pleased with what was happening.

"Yes, I think that Mrs Peabody has not been completely kind to my mother-in-law, but she's making up for it now. She probably treated her the way many ladies treat companions who have nowhere else to go. I do hope that Miranda will settle in well with us and I hope that Jamie can relax in her company eventually," said Liza.

"She'll be happy enough as you'll make her so and Jamie will come to love her because you will. Don't forget all the boys will be happy that they have a new grandmother which I know will please her," said Amelia.

"You are as much their grandmother as anyone. That's how they think of you, but I don't think of you as a mother, you are my greatest friend and confidante. You were always kind to me Amelia, especially when I was so very young and needed so much guidance. You've seen me through so many traumas; I shall miss you when you go back to Belfast, but we will all

be with you for Christmas as usual and that's something I shall look forward to," said Liza.

By the time they had finished their tea and cakes Mrs Peabody and Miranda had come back into the drawing room. "I've had her bags put into your carriage," said Mrs Peabody. She turned to Miranda saying, "Now my dear, I wish you well in your new home and look forward to being able to visit you and your family when you have settled. I trust you will not forget me after all the years we have spent happily together."

Liza doubted that many of the years had been happily spent together, if indeed any had been, but now was not the time to pass such a comment. With Miranda's bags packed safely at the back of the carriage, they started on their way back home with a very quiet and bemused Miranda. Liza and Amelia carried on a conversation about generalities giving Miranda time to consider all that had happened to her and what her future might hold.

"Will Jamie be there?" asked Miranda.

"Yes, but he's not going to come rushing out to try to sweep you off your feet. He knows that you both must quietly get to know one another. You will probably be confronted by three inquisitive boys, but I'll do my best to not let them overwhelm you," smiled Liza.

"I really appreciated your introducing me to my grandson. His name is also James, isn't it?" asked Miranda.

"Yes, he is known as James, whereas your son is known as Jamie," said Liza.

"I used to call him that and it obviously stuck. I'm surprised as I should have thought that his father would have insisted that he was called James," said Miranda.

"It was probably less confusing to keep him known as Jamie. I find it easier as his son is also James," said Liza.

"You know that Liza won't let anything untoward happen to you. She will protect you and ease any tensions that may occur, although I believe them to be unlikely. We are all very fond of your son, but I think you will have to appreciate that he can appear rather aloof until you get to know him," said Amelia at which Liza frowned at her. "Well, it is true Liza, you have to admit that those who don't know him could accuse him of being pompous; it's only you who have made him show his true character to the outside world."

"You're frightening my mother-in-law Amelia," said Liza. "Please don't worry Miranda; I know he'll be happy when he sees you and when you are safely settled under his roof, and so will I and the boys."

"You are going to have to see what you want done to your house. That's going to be fun for you. Sadly I will have to return to Belfast in a couple of days, so I won't be able to help you with that. I wonder if I should stay on a little longer," said Amelia thoughtfully.

"When you suggested that the other day, Wendell told you in no uncertain terms that he wanted you at home with him. You know he misses you, but that is up to you to sort out with him, just don't ask me to interfere," smiled Liza.

Miranda Edgeworth asked many questions about Liza and her family. She tried to avoid questions about Jamie, but eventually she wanted to know what his life had really been like since she had left. "I have known Jamie since I was seventeen; prior to that I had no knowledge of his life, and there were many extended times that I knew nothing of what he was doing but he always seemed to come to my rescue whenever I needed him."

"I know that you have been married and widowed a couple of times, I also know that Jamie has loved you since he first saw you and I know that sadness brought you to this point, but I can see that you have come through that and you are both now happy. I hope that I can make you and your family pleased to have me with you," said Miranda.

"There's no fear that we won't be pleased. You've read Jamie's letter and there's no doubt that he wants you with him and is looking forward to getting to know you. He knows that you have tried to see what he has done over the years and that has meant a great deal to him," said Liza.

They finally swept up the drive to Edgeworth House and Miranda looked at it cautiously. "There's no need to be intimidated by the house. You were here only the other day; you had the courage to come here then with no invitation; you are here now by invitation from your son. Come on, let's get you inside and settled in your temporary room and when you are ready, I'll bring Jamie to you. You don't have to face him alone if you would prefer my being there with you," said Liza.

As they entered the house it appeared that Jamie was not at home and April came forward and helped with Miranda's bags and went with Liza up to Miranda's room. "I'll help you get organised" said April as she

started unpacking her bags. She pulled out an evening gown which was rather dated but nobody said anything, and Liza thought she would look well enough in that for dinner. She also thought that they were about the same size, although Liza was a little shorter, so by the next day a dress or two could be altered to fit.

There was a slight commotion at the door and of course the first face to appear around it was Matthew's. The boys had been told that there was a likelihood that James' grandmother would be coming to stay with them, and their inquisitiveness had got the better of them, but naturally Matthew was the one who always pushed forward first.

Miranda caught sight of him and smiled and beckoned him into the room. He was immediately followed by John and James. "We thought we'd come and welcome you," said a cheeky looking Matthew and the other two nodded.

"Thank you," said Miranda, "That's very thoughtful of you all." She was talking to all three, but her eyes were only on James.

"I saw you at the wedding. I didn't know you were my grandmother then," said James somewhat puzzled.

"No you didn't then, but you do now, and I'm so happy that we have now met properly," said Miranda. "So I have three grandsons, aren't I lucky?" said Miranda and all three boys nodded their agreement at her words.

"Have you had your supper yet?" asked Liza knowing what the reaction would most probably be.

"No, but it must be ready now. We'll see you later," said Matthew and they could be heard bounding down the stairs on their way to the kitchen. Miranda looked surprised at the speed that they had all disappeared.

"Nothing gets in the way of their supper," said Liza by way of an explanation and Miranda laughed.

"Your two boys look so very different," observed Miranda.

"Yes, one is by birth, but both are by choice," said Liza knowing that eventually they would talk more in detail.

By this time most of Miranda's belongings had been unpacked and put away, she really had very little to bring with her. "Would you like to rest for a while before dinner? April will come and help you get ready and I'll come and escort you down," said Liza.

"There's no need for you to do that Liza, I would like to escort my mother down to dinner," said Jamie who had quietly appeared in the doorway. There was an intake of breath from Miranda which turned into a small sob and the look on Jamie's face revealed that he was also very near to tears. Liza looked from one to the other and decided that neither she nor April were needed there at that moment, so she ushered April out of the room, glanced at both Miranda and Jamie once more and left closing the door behind her.

Liza was feeling a little tired so she made her way to her room, decided on what she would be wearing that evening and realised that she had at least an hour before she had to get ready for dinner. She wondered what was happening between Jamie and his mother and hoped that all was going well. She prayed that Jamie was making it easy for Miranda to relax and was not acting too aloof with her, although she had seen his face as she left, and aloofness did not appear to be part of its makeup.

Surprisingly sleep came to her relatively quickly and when she awoke she found that Jamie was sitting quietly on her bed, deep in thought. "Ah, I'm glad you're awake," he said. "I just wanted you to know that I find that I like my mother very much, but I do find it difficult to think of her as a mother; I think of her as a friend rather like Amelia. I wonder if I will ever be able to feel that she is my mother. I believe that the boys will accept her as a grandmother quite easily."

"Well then Jamie, if you treat her as well as you treat Amelia, then I don't think she will have any reason to complain and perhaps in the fullness of time you will learn to love and appreciate her as a mother. She needs the support of all of us as she is now in a situation which she is not used to, although she should have been here for many years and enjoyed your company during all that time," said Liza.

"You're right; for the moment I'll treat her as a very dear friend and accept her as part of our household," said Jamie and as he noticed Liza's slight disappointment at his words he said, "Don't worry Liza, I will make her feel wanted here and she has a nice enough nature to fit in well with us all, but you can't expect either of us to feel totally at ease with one another after all these years of separation."

"I have a feeling that it won't take too long for you both to feel at ease together," said Liza as she got off her bed and started to get ready for the evening. "It was a very nice gesture of you to want to escort her down to

dinner. I was concerned at how your first meeting would be, but that was a wonderful way for you to break the ice. Well done Jamie."

Suddenly he became the Jamie that she knew and loved asking her which room she wanted them to sleep in that night. "Yours of course Jamie; it's where we are the most comfortable, isn't it?"

"All right, my room it is, but I'm quite comfortable wherever you are," said Jamie and he leaned over and kissed her gently on her head which brought the sparkle to her eyes and a smile to her lips which gave him a promise of things to come.

As he left April came in to help her into her dress and when this was done Liza asked her to see if Jamie's mother needed her assistance.

"I have been into her and she was already dressed for dinner, but I will go back to make sure she is alright," said April who knew that she must feel rather nervous about the evening and said that she would wait with her until His Lordship came to take her down to dinner.

Liza went down to make sure that the dining table was set as she wanted, and that Harper knew where the Dowager Lady Edgeworth would be sitting that evening. She wanted her placed next to Jamie with Wendell on the other side of her. Jamie was as always at the head of the table with Liza next to him and opposite Miranda. Amelia was to be next to Wendell and Jennifer next to her. Liza would have Joseph on her left with Lily at his side. Wendell would be an excellent person to put Miranda at ease, but she knew that everyone would be kind to her, and Liza was looking forward to the evening.

Wendell and Joseph were already in the drawing room when Liza came in. Amelia, Lily and Jennifer soon followed, and they all waited for Jamie and Miranda to arrive. Five minutes passed before the door was opened and Jamie showed Miranda into the room. He was smiling as he introduced her to those who were meeting her for the first time and he did it beautifully, showing such concern for her welfare. *Well done Jamie*, thought Liza for the second time that day. He finally came over with her and stood with Liza, making conversation.

Harper came in to announce that dinner was served, and Jamie immediately took Miranda's arm and then turned and took Liza's also and led them both into the dining room. Harper pulled the chair out for Miranda, whilst Jamie saw Liza seated.

It was not long before Liza could see that Miranda had begun to relax and seemed to be enjoying herself. When they had finished their entrée and main course and the dishes cleared from the table, Jamie signalled to Harper to make sure that all their glasses were full and he then stood and said that he was delighted to welcome his mother to the household and what a shame it was that it had not happened earlier. He wanted them all to raise their glasses to his mother to welcome her to her family and the pleasure it was giving him to see her in her rightful place. This embarrassed her but she managed to thank her son for his kind words and her daughter-in-law for bringing her to her family. They all sat again and carried on with their meal which was now more relaxed with laughter emanating from them all.

Amelia said that she would go with Miranda the next day to see her house. Liza raised an eyebrow to Wendell who said that he knew Amelia would enjoy doing that, but she would also have to organise packing as they were leaving the following day for Belfast, as was Joseph, Lily and Jennifer.

"It's going to seem very strange here without you all," said Liza. "I have got quite used to you all being part of the family. Jamie has promised me and the boys that we will be in Belfast for Christmas, and you know how quickly time passes. Of course Miranda will also be coming with us; I presume you have been to Belfast before Miranda."

"Yes, but it was such a long time ago, it will be interesting to see it again," she said, and Jamie nodded and smiled at her.

The men decided not to drink port and smoke cigars at the end of the meal, so they all went into the drawing room for the rest of the evening. At around midnight they retired to their various bedrooms and Liza went up with Miranda to make sure she had everything that she needed. April was waiting for her and much as she protested that she didn't need help, April helped her out of her dress and hung it up saying that she would now be ready to help Liza.

Liza looked at her and told her how pleased she was that she was there, and she apologised for really creating a situation with Mrs Peabody which meant that she had no option but to come to Edgeworth House that day.

"I'm very happy to be here Liza. It is something that I never expected would happen and much as Jamie and I still must get to know one another,

I know that you and I will always be good friends. Good night Liza, and God Bless you," she said, and she kissed her on the cheek.

When she had returned to her room and been helped out of her dress, April left and immediately Jamie came in to bring her to his room.

"I couldn't wait to get you to myself," he said. "It has been a rather tense day for me, as it must have been for my mother. Dinner went very well I thought, and I believe she eventually enjoyed the evening. Am I expected to be with her all day tomorrow?"

"No Jamie, I think that you should carry on as you normally do, although it is the last day that Amelia and Wendell and the others will be with us. I must spend some time with Wendell just in case there is anything I am needed for. I know Amelia, Lily and Jennifer want to go to the Dower House with your mother and they will probably give her the benefit of their advice over the décor but no doubt she will have her own ideas regarding that and will possibly be too polite to tell them," laughed Liza.

"I understand that you really didn't give her a choice of whether or not she came here, but I think that she is pleased that she's here. I'm sure if you had asked her, she would have been too shy and nervous to agree, but of course you knew that, didn't you?" said Jamie.

"I had an idea that it would be the case and I didn't want you to miss out completely on having a mother," Liza said as she yawned, climbed into Jamie's bed and wriggled into a comfortable position. Jamie looked down at her still finding it difficult to believe that she was now his wife. He climbed in next to her and also wriggled into a comfortable position, but his desires soon got the better of him and Liza giggled as he started playing with her the way they both ended up enjoying.

Liza woke early the next morning and found that Jamie was sitting up in bed staring ahead thoughtfully. "What's the matter Jamie?" she asked.

"Nothing really Liza; it's just that so much has changed over the past few weeks that I am finding it difficult to believe that it's real. I now have a wife who loves me, a son and two extra sons who also love me and it would appear a mother who has always loved me. Getting you to finally agree to be with me has brought all this about," said Jamie.

"I suppose I have been rather bossy, I'm sorry Jamie I don't mean to be so thoughtless," said Liza.

Jamie turned and looked down at her smiling just as his mother smiled. "You are anything but thoughtless, which is why all this is happening. You realise we haven't yet been married a week and much as I like Amelia, Wendell and the rest of our guests, I shall be pleased to have just my family to myself and of course that also includes my mother. I would like to arrange that we go away somewhere alone in a little while."

"Yes, that would be really nice," said Liza as she moved towards Jamie and put her head on his chest and went back to sleep for a short while. Jamie felt very relaxed and comfortable with her in that position and he stroked her head until it was time for them both to get ready for the events of the day.

Following breakfast Jamie took Liza's advice and did what he always did at that time of day and went off to the library, which also doubled as his study, and sat in his favourite chair and opened his newspaper. Liza told Wendell that she would see him later to discuss business, and she too went into Jamie's study and smiled as she saw that he was hiding behind his newspaper waiting for everyone to descend on the room so that he could hear what they were all planning and only drop the top of his paper at something interesting or put it down on his lap if there was a comment he needed to make. Liza went over to him and kissed him on the top of the head and he smiled as she said, "No doubt they'll all soon find their way in here."

She was right; Amelia and Jennifer were first, with Lily guiding Miranda after them. Wendell and Joseph followed discussing an aspect of business. Liza smiled at them and Jamie stayed well behind his newspaper. "So what are the plans for the day," said a smiling Liza.

"I thought we could go with Miranda to the Dower House and see what has to be done there. Does it need new everything Liza?" asked Amelia.

"Virtually everything," said Liza. "It has been scrubbed from top to bottom, so it's clean now, but I wouldn't want to attempt to wash the curtains as I'm sure they would disintegrate. The carpets and rugs are very worn and faded, but some of the furniture is very attractive, now that it has been cleaned and polished. Anyway Miranda will make her choice of what she wants to keep and what doesn't suit her."

"I'm sure I could make do with what's there; it would be so expensive to change it all," said Miranda.

This was the cue for Jamie's newspaper to drop down. "No mother of mine is going to make do with anything. You can have exactly what you want."

The newspaper went back up and Liza smiled. "There you are Miranda; his Lordship has spoken."

The ladies and Joseph looked surprised, but Wendell tried to hide his amusement. It was the way he managed to keep involved in his own household without appearing too interested. Liza caught Wendell's eye and they nodded to one another acknowledging that they knew how this interaction worked.

"Shall we go and see what is needed," said Amelia smiling excitedly at everyone and she received a chorus of "Yes" from Jennifer and Lily. Miranda said that it was a little overwhelming.

"Don't worry" said Jennifer. "We'll help and advise you on what you will probably need."

Miranda looked at Liza who just smiled and winked at her which indicated that they could sort out exactly what she wanted later.

"Don't forget that we are leaving tomorrow Amelia," said Wendell. "You have yet to organise our packing."

"Oh, I have all afternoon to do that," said Amelia.

The newspaper dropped slightly, and Jamie asked Liza if she was also going to the Dower House, although he already knew the answer.

"Not this morning Jamie. In a little while I'll meet with Wendell; we have one or two business matters to discuss. Will you be with us Joseph, or are you going to accompany the ladies?" said Liza.

"I haven't yet seen the Dower House, so I think I'll go with the ladies just to look around it, but I want to be back for the meeting," said Joseph who was not keen to be involved with discussions on décor, carpets, curtains and furniture.

"That will work well as I must set the boys some work for today; I have been sadly lax in that recently," said Liza.

The newspaper went down again. "I think the time has come to bring James' tutor back to let you see if you think he is suitable for all the boys, until they are ready to go to university," said Jamie.

"Yes, they need to have a schoolroom environment. I believe they should now have more than I can give them," said Liza.

"I'll write to him later," said Jamie and the newspaper went up again.

"What do you have in mind for today, Jamie?" asked Liza.

Down came the newspaper again. "I'm going to the village to see young Derek and Mrs Price and back to see the doctor who was called away yesterday," said Jamie.

"That's good," said Liza as she started ushering everyone out of the study to go about their various missions.

The newspaper rustled again, "You can stay here if you like Wendell. I have another newspaper if you would like it," said Jamie and he and Wendell settled down to a quiet half-hours' reading. Liza smiled as she made her way to find the boys and set their lessons for the day. No doubt Miranda would get used to the morning ritual.

Groans came from the boys as Liza started setting their lessons and she commissioned April to make sure that they didn't get up to any tricks. She went to her room to choose a couple of dresses which could be altered for Miranda. All they needed was some material or lace to extend the hems slightly and she called Mrs Frances to organise it.

Jamie was just leaving his room as she was leaving hers. "I'm just off to the village. I know you can't come with me, but it would have been nice if you could have done; it would have given us a little time to ourselves. Never mind, we'll have all the time in the world after tomorrow," said Jamie.

Her meeting with Wendell and Joseph was very constructive. The various aspects of the business were running smoothly, but Wendell wanted to expand the Security Business further and he seemed to think that Mike Decker was the ideal person to organise it. "Where would his headquarters be?" asked Liza and she hoped that she didn't sound negative.

"I think he could still work out of Cork, but he would have to travel to various places to start with," said Wendell.

"I believe he's quite settled in Cork and now has a family to consider," said Liza.

"You appear to be a little reluctant to give him the chance Liza; that's unlike you, especially as you have met him and recommended him for his position in Ireland," said Joseph.

"No, I'm not reluctant, I'm only thinking of his wife and family; which really isn't my concern at all. If he's quite happy with the situation then I'm very pleased for him and wish him well. It will mean a better standard of living for him and of course when he has everything well organised, he can be at home more. Probably he will only travel now and again in the future. But it's up to him to decide to take the position or not," said Liza.

Both Wendell and Joseph looked at her curiously and wondered why she was talking for the sake of talking over the suggestion of Mike Decker. Wendell knew that he was from America and wondered whether he and Liza had known one another there, but he knew better than to ask at that moment.

"Well, we'll put the offer to him and take it from there," said Wendell. "The other matter is the charity Liza. We could do with another boost to strengthen the coffers. Now that you are Lady Edgeworth and Lord Edgeworth is also on the committee, is it possible for you to organise another function to raise some money. We are still running within our budget, but I can see that diminishing because of the number of children who are arriving daily. We really need another residence to accommodate them, perhaps we could open somewhere near Surrey and you could keep an eye on it."

"I don't think that the residents around here would be too happy with an orphanage on their doorsteps, but I'm sure there would be a compromise. Yes, I'm sure we could organise another fund-raising function, but it would have to be towards the end of the summer. Our most successful fundraising is really in New York, so we might organise one here in say the end of September or early October and then next year we could go to New York in early spring. If we do hold one here, will you and the family be able to attend?" asked Liza.

"Yes, we'll make sure as many of us as possible can come. When are you and Lily planning to marry?" Wendell asked Joseph.

"Well, springtime is when Edward and Nicole are planning their wedding and as I said Lily and I don't want to encroach on their plans," said Joseph.

"May I make a suggestion? Why don't you encourage Edward and Nicole to marry early spring and then perhaps just two weeks later you and Lily marry? And another silly suggestion is that the four of you come with Jamie and me to New York and treat it as a honeymoon, although

that may not be so attractive for Edward as it may bring back too many unhappy memories,” said Liza.

“With all due respect Liza, I think that New York also holds some unhappy memories for you,” said Wendell.

“Yes, that’s true, but I have managed to virtually clear my mind of the past and when it comes back to me, as it does on occasion, I push it away and remember how lucky I am not only to have Jamie, but to have also had two very happy marriages prior to the one I have now which is proving to be equally happy,” said Liza.

“Liza you may convince others that you don’t think of Patrick, but I know that you do. I see the sadness quite often in your eyes, but you hide it well and I admire the life you are making for yourself and the happiness that you are bringing to others, especially Jamie. In time you will only think of him and no one else; Jamie loves you very much and I know that you will always be loyal to him and care for him greatly,” said Wendell in a rare moment of sentimentality.

“I can assure you Wendell that I am happy and am now quite settled. I do have duties outside my marriage which may make me appear discontented but really I’m not, so please don’t worry about me; I’m finding life very enjoyable,” said Liza.

“Indeed,” said Wendell, “no doubt you will keep yourself very busy for the rest of your life.”

“It hadn’t occurred to me that you could be unhappy Liza,” said Joseph.

“I’m not unhappy Joseph; I have a very loving husband and family, which is all anybody could wish for,” said Liza and she carried on planning for the charity, making it clear that the conversation about her personal life was over.

Jamie was not home for lunch, which was probably just as well as the ladies talked excitedly about what should be organised for the Dower House. Miranda smiled at all the suggestions and said that she would give them all some serious consideration. She did add that some of the furniture was in very good condition and she would discuss with both Jamie and Liza what she should keep and what should be given away.

Liza spent some time with the boys directing questions at them to make sure that they had been working that morning. April was helping Amelia with her packing and Mrs Frances was helping Jennifer and Lily and

Harper and Roberts were packing for Wendell and Joseph. Miranda was trying on her altered dresses and deciding which one to wear that evening.

It was a hive of activity that Jamie returned to that afternoon when he came looking for Liza. "Have you time to come and discuss young Derek Price?" he asked.

Liza nodded and they went into Jamie's study. "You were right when you said that it may be too late to alter the damage done years ago. I really am so annoyed at Evelyn, she could have helped when it was most needed; it was her duty to do so," said Jamie.

"There's no point in dwelling on it Jamie; unfortunately nothing was done but is there any chance at all that something can be done, no matter how small?" said Liza.

"I'm not terribly well up on all the medical terminology but it seems that his vertebra was damaged, and many nerves trapped, and his pelvis was broken in two places as were the bones at the top of his left leg. His left arm was also broken but that has healed successfully, but the rest needed someone more specialised than the local doctor of the time," said Jamie. "Of course you know that it was out of the reach of Mrs Price to manage to take him to London, although people did rally round in an attempt to give the poor lad a chance."

"Are you saying that nothing can be done at all?" said Liza.

"Nobody knows the answer to that, but I have suggested that we get a specialist to come here and see what may be possible. The doctor is going to write to a doctor who may be able to help, and I have told him that we will cover all costs and that we will be able to accommodate him here with us. I trust you agree with my decision," said Jamie. "I do feel very responsible for Derek not getting the best of treatment when it was within my power to do so all those years ago."

"It was an unfortunate set of circumstances and in fact I must also take some of the blame because you were in America because of me. Perhaps there is something that can be done and at least now we will have tried our best for Derek," said Liza.

"He's a very bright boy, but of course he would be because all he could really do to occupy his mind was read. I wonder if there is anything we can do about that?" said Jamie giving Liza an opening to say what he already had in mind.

"If he can come here every day, and if Mrs Price has no objection, he could be tutored along with our boys. And of course you have no objection also. I know the boys would be quite happy, they like Derek very much, especially John, he made it his responsibility to wheel him around at the picnic," said Liza and she looked sideways at Jamie and said, "Of course, that's what you had in mind wasn't it?"

"Yes, I thought that you would feel the same way. The only difficulty with it would be when we travel with the boys and the tutor would come with us, but it would be better than nothing," said Jamie.

"No doubt he would set him some tasks for while we were away and he can write to him also," said Liza. "But first we have to see what the specialist says. I presume Mrs Price is happy that a specialist will be seeing him."

"Of course she is worried that Derek's hopes could be raised and then nothing can be done, but she feels it's worth the risk," said Jamie.

"So we have to expect a guest in about a week or so," said Liza. Jamie nodded and then they both went up to change for dinner.

Once again Jamie escorted his mother into dinner that evening and there was a mixture of fun and sadness around the table. Liza had become used to having her friends with her, especially Amelia who had been so supportive throughout the past few weeks. There was a great deal of laughter as everyone recounted moments from not just the lead up to the wedding, but from much earlier, even as far back as childhood. There were several events that Liza had enjoyed in her life but most of them were with either James or Patrick and she felt it imprudent to mention them.

Plans for the charity function were also discussed and Amelia was the first to say that she would have to come and help with that. Wendell looked at her and said, "Amelia as it is a Marchant & Fuller charity of course we will both be here for it."

Jennifer, Lily and Joseph discussed whether they could return at that time with the likelihood that it would be possible. "I'll make a list of who I think should be invited," announced Amelia. Liza smiled at her and thanked her with Jamie and Wendell also allowing her to think that her contribution was essential.

Miranda was unaware of the charity and asked what it was for. Liza let the others tell her about it and how it had started. Patrick's name was mentioned as the 'tall American who had started the rescue'. The mention

of his name suddenly hurt Liza and Jamie was watching her closely, but it was obvious to him that it had upset her.

"Who is Patrick," asked Miranda innocently and immediately realised that there was an awkward silence. "Have I said something wrong?"

"Good heavens no Miranda," smiled Liza who had managed to compose herself. "Patrick was my husband and as you heard he rescued the first abused children and others just kept flocking to our door asking for him. The American uniform obviously helped and created a legend."

"You must have been very proud of him," said Miranda.

"We all were," interjected Jamie and the others around the table agreed with him. Liza smiled at him reassuringly, but she felt a little unnerved as this was the second time that day that his name had been mentioned.

The ladies left the men to their port and cigars and went to the drawing room. Miranda sat next to Liza and said, "It's obvious that Patrick's death still has its moments of sadness for you."

"Nobody should die that young and with such violence, but he would be pleased to see that I am settled in such a loving relationship now and that the boys are happy," said Liza and she changed the subject skilfully reverting to the Dower House and what Miranda thought she would like to have there.

Amelia, Jennifer and Lily were looking across at her with concern, but she managed to convey that she was perfectly in control of her emotions.

When the men joined them, they were in detailed discussions regarding the Dower House, but Amelia was busy making a list of all the people she felt should be invited to the charity function.

Later when Liza was ready for bed, Jamie came into her room and found her sitting at her dressing table staring at herself in her mirror, but without really seeing herself.

"I know that was difficult for you Liza, but you will probably hear Patrick's name mentioned quite a number of times because of the charity," said Jamie.

"Yes, I realise that Jamie and I have no idea why it affected me this evening because I am very happy with you, perhaps I'm just tired. We have had a very busy few weeks," said Liza.

"Do you want to come to bed with me tonight Liza?" asked Jamie.

Liza turned her brightest smile on him, and the cheeky sparkle came into her eyes. He bent down and whispered to her, "I didn't really need to ask you that. I can tell from your eyes what you want."

He lifted her up and carried her over to her bed whilst carefully removing her nightdress and his dressing gown. His lovemaking was as always very caring of her, but that night as she had almost reached her climax he stopped and was about to ask her a question.

"Oh Jamie, please don't stop, you can't leave me this way," she gasped to him and he carried on because she had answered his unasked question.

A short while later as they were lying in one another's arms Liza said, "You know, Jamie, I have never thought or dreamed of you as anyone other than yourself. Only you are ever in my mind and in my body when we make love."

She felt his arms stiffen around her and all he said was that it made him very happy. Luckily, he hadn't asked her who was in her heart because at that moment she would have been unable to give him an honest answer.

The house was in total turmoil the next morning. There were bags and trunks all over the hallway, but Liza and Jamie rounded everyone up and led them into the dining room for one last breakfast together until they all met up again either for the charity function or the Christmas festivities. Amelia was rather tearful, and Wendell told her to pull herself together as it would only be two or three months before she was back here again. Liza knew how she felt because she had really been dreading Amelia leaving as she had been so supportive throughout the last few weeks and so instrumental in helping to solve some of the problems which had initially come about.

Miranda was also saddened to see all the people who had accepted and befriended her as she came back into her son's life getting ready to leave. She felt that Liza was the best daughter-in-law that she could have, but she knew that she would have duties to perform so she could not be with her at all times. She contented herself with the knowledge that the three boys accepted her as their grandmother and they had informed her that they were going to help her organise her new home.

Just before lunchtime they were all climbing into the two carriages which were taking them to London where they would stay overnight at a company hotel. Another cart was following with their luggage. The next

day they would take the train on the newly opened line to just outside Birmingham, and from there by carriage to Liverpool with another night in the company hotel. The next day they would be crossing the Irish Sea and then finally they would be home. Mrs Lambert had packed food for them for the first part of their journey as they may not have the chance to stop on the way.

Tears were trickling down Liza's cheeks as she waved goodbye to them; Jamie put his arm around her and consoled her with the fact that she would see them all again in the autumn. The boys were still shouting goodbye even though the carriages had disappeared from sight. They walked back into the house and Mrs Lambert sent word that their lunch was ready and the boys were going to join them in the dining room.

Even with the boys at the table, it seemed a very quiet mealtime. Jamie asked what she had planned for the next few days.

"I think that your mother and I should finally decide what needs to be done and bought for her new home. I'm sure she has received a great deal of advice from Amelia, Jennifer and Lily, but I'm sure she really knows how she would like her house to look," said Liza as she turned to Miranda for confirmation.

"They were very well meaning, but I was receiving so much advice from all directions that it all became very confusing and I would like us to go and assess calmly what is needed," said Miranda. "I still feel that it is going to be too expensive for you."

Jamie became very imperious, "I have told you that you can have exactly what you want. It is no more than you deserve, so I don't want to hear you argue cost again."

The boys who were listening, sniggered and Jamie frowned as he looked at them. "And what is amusing the three of you?" he asked.

"You're telling your mother off; it should be the other way around," said Matthew, and they sniggered again.

Jamie had to smile. "I'm not really telling her off; I'm just trying to make it clear that she should have nice things around her and that she must stop worrying about the cost."

"We're going to help her organise her home," said James.

"That should be an experience for you, Mother," said Jamie with his tongue in his cheek. Liza just smiled sweetly, as did Miranda.

With lunch over, Liza set some tasks for the boys to complete, although they had said that they felt that they should help their grandmother, but Liza assured them that they could go to the Dower House when the painting had been completed.

Liza and Miranda walked over to the Dower House where the walls were in the process of being painted. They were using a light cream colour which would blend with anything, but later other colours would highlight certain areas. They worked through all the furniture which was there and gave instructions to take away what was too old to be useful. Miranda would need couches and beds, but the dining table and sideboards were in very good order and seemed ageless. The kitchen needed modernising and Mrs Lambert would be advising on what was wanted to make it usable. Mrs Frances had been to the house and attempted to remove the curtains, but they had fallen to pieces, so a curtain maker was calling the next day with patterns for Miranda to choose for each room.

"Liza, will you help me with the pattern books tomorrow. It's such a long time since I had anything to do with furnishings," said Miranda.

"Of course I'll help you, but you must remember that it is to be your home and you are the one who is going to live with the choices," said Liza.

"I believe I know what I like, I just need a little moral support," said Miranda.

"We must also think about the staff that you are going to need, but we can leave that for a couple of weeks as the house won't be ready to live in for a while," said Liza.

"That's a little daunting," said Miranda.

"Don't worry I'll help you with all that and I know we'll find people who you will feel happy having around you," smiled Liza reassuringly. "Mrs Frances can see anyone first."

Jamie was walking in the grounds with three boys in tow. They were all listening enthralled to what he was saying.

"Shall we join them?" asked Miranda.

"That would be nice, but I believe this is his time with the boys. They seem to be very happy in his company and they'll probably think that it's good to be 'all men together'," said Liza.

"They are going to gang up on you Liza," stated Miranda with a smile.

"And on you most likely," laughed Liza.

Over the next ten days the tutor for the boys was rehired. He was a man in his early thirties and had taught James for a couple of years. His name was Adam Reece and he was at present unattached. He had no problems with the fact that it could be necessary for him to travel with them, although the boys hadn't thought that that was such a good idea. He returned to the room that he had previously used but noted that it had been redecorated. Liza sought his advice on whether the schoolroom was adequate, and he made a few suggestions to make it a friendly environment. He was also to obtain whatever he felt necessary to further the boys' education and he appreciated that in some ways Liza was a better teacher than he was. He was looking forward to discussing with her all that he would like to teach to the boys as he recognised that each had his own educational strengths.

Also during that time Jamie heard from the local doctor and the specialist had accepted their offer of accommodation and would be arriving shortly. Jamie went off to the village to inform Mrs Price that Derek would be examined in the next few days. She looked worried but Jamie reassured her that whatever could be done for Derek would be his pleasure to undertake and that she was not to concern herself with anything other than getting Derek ready for the specialist. "Will your wife be there?" she asked, and Jamie said that if Mrs Price wanted her there, then of course she would be.

The painting was finished at the Dower House and new furniture was arriving daily. The curtains were still in the process of being made, although some were ready and had been hung and so the business of finding a housekeeper for Miranda was under way. There were several applicants, but none seemed suitable. What she needed was one who was also able to cook, and Miranda would also employ a bright kitchen maid and house maid as her eating requirements would not be vast as she would dine at the main house most days. A butler would also be required in the fullness of time. A kitchen maid and house maid would be easy to employ from the village, but the housekeeper seemed to be creating quite a problem.

One morning when this was being discussed as Jamie was going through his newspaper ritual, he dropped his newspaper and asked if it was better to have a housekeeper and a cook.

"Well Jamie," said Miranda. "I will have such little need of a cook that it is such a waste not only of money but also it would mean someone sitting around doing nothing for a good part of each day."

"If that is the case then why don't you do what Liza normally does and that is take somebody inexperienced as a cook and as long as they can boil an egg and make toast and maybe one or two other delicacies then you should be well accommodated," said Jamie and his newspaper went up again.

"So what you need are two bright girls, one who would be capable of being a housekeeper and the other a cook and they'll gain a great deal of experience and then of course they'll leave you and move on to greater things," said Liza sadly.

The newspaper went down again, "Have any of the people you have given a chance to left you Liza?" asked Jamie.

"Well no, they haven't," said Liza.

"There you are then," said Jamie as his newspaper returned to the front of his face.

Liza and Miranda looked at one another and nodded, "So we'll try to recruit from the village and farms first. It would be good to keep it within the area," said Miranda and she and Liza went off to discuss it with Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert.

Jamie dropped his newspaper a little and watched them both leave the room and he shook his head and smiled. It takes a man to solve some problems, he thought.

With the new ideas on Miranda's household, both Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert had a few suggestions on who would be suitable, and they said that they would make some enquiries on the Dowager Lady Edgeworth's behalf.

"It seems only right that I should have somebody from the village as they have all been so good to me," said Miranda.

Chapter 3

Liza now had to concentrate on the charity function and discuss with Jamie the date that it could take place. Wendell had left it to her to finalise when it would be as he and Amelia were keeping most of the autumn free, as were the rest of the Fuller family and friends.

Miranda was helping Liza with the list and writing invitations leaving the date open. "Do you think that Mrs Peabody would be someone who would want to contribute to the charity?" asked Liza.

"Well she'd want to come to the ball, but whether she is in a position to contribute I really don't know," said Miranda. "One or two of the people she tries to call friends are wealthy enough to make a serious contribution."

"If you know their addresses, I suppose we could invite them independently of Mrs Peabody, and then invite her also. It would give you the opportunity to show her where you now live," grinned Liza and Miranda responded with a raised eyebrow and a sly smile.

"Do you think she would be a nuisance to our other guests?" asked Liza.

"No, I think she would be in awe of them and become rather shy, as will I be," said Miranda.

"I'm sure you'll rise to the occasion. Do you want me to invite her then?" asked Liza.

"Yes, I think I'd like her to come and I shall ask her to stay the night. My house will be ready by then and having somebody that I know well at the event will help me," said Miranda.

"What you must remember is that it is your house and we are your family, so you mustn't let her treat you like her companion. You are no longer in her employ," said Liza.

"No, but I was and I'm sure it will take us both a little while to come to terms with the difference," said Miranda.

"If you are sure you would like Mrs Peabody, I'll write the invitation and you can put a letter with it inviting her to stay with you. I presume she would bring a maid and her butler," said Liza.

"She would probably just bring her maid; she would presume that I already had a butler," said Miranda.

Liza wrote the invitation and handed it to Miranda saying that it was up to her if she sent it or not. Apart from the villagers, Mrs Peabody seemed to be the only friend that she had, so Liza appreciated why she wanted to show her what was now happening in her life.

"So, we will have to get you well organised before you have a visit from Mrs Peabody," said Liza. "Well, most of your furniture is now there and the curtains will soon be in place, all we have to concentrate on is your staff. How is the dressmaker getting on with your dresses?"

"They'll soon be ready. She has two ladies working on your ball gown and then she'll start on mine. My day dresses are to be delivered tomorrow. I really can't believe what is happening; it's all so different to the life I was living," said Miranda.

"I trust you don't regret the change," said Liza.

"Good heavens no, and Jamie just accepts me being around as if I had been with him for the whole of his life. The boys include me in many of their conversations, also as if I had been part of their lives for a long time. I still feel a little nervous about the whole situation but that is probably understandable. I know there's no point in thanking you again because you always say that you did nothing," said Miranda.

"I didn't do anything special; you were the one who had the courage to come to your son's wedding," said Liza and she carried on looking at her list of guests and writing invitations. "I must ask Jamie who he wants added to the list." Miranda knew that Liza didn't want to continue being thanked.

She left Miranda to write her letter and went to find Jamie who was going through some paperwork in his study. He smiled broadly as she came in, "I think this is the first time I have seen you alone other than at

night." She came over and sat on his knee and gave him a loving kiss. "What can I do for you Liza?" he asked.

"I need you to go over my list of people to be invited to the charity ball. I'd hate to leave anyone out," she said as she handed him the list. He looked at it and added a few names.

"We really should invite the Duke of Norfolk," said Jamie and Liza looked at him with surprise.

"Surely you are joking?" said Liza.

"No I'm not and the Prime Minister and one or two Members of Parliament," said Jamie quite seriously.

"Oh," was all Liza could say.

Jamie could see her surprise and he said, "What's the matter Liza, did you think you were the only person with influential friends? I am a member of the House of Lords you know."

"Of course you are, I hadn't realised what a powerful man I had married," said Liza. "What date shall we settle on?"

They decided that the first Saturday in October would be ideal as it was before the House sat after the summer recess.

"That gives us over two months to prepare, I'll make sure Harper, Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert will be able to arrange it all for that date and then I'll finalise the invitations. It will give all those invited ample time to clear their diaries. Your mother is thinking of asking Mrs Peabody to join us and stay with her overnight," said Liza.

"She wants to show off what she considers her good fortune doesn't she?" smiled Jamie.

"Yes of course she does but apparently Mrs Peabody has some influential friends who could put their hands in their pockets for a considerable amount for the charity. So it would do us all some good and please both your mother and Mrs Peabody. Your mother will be able to show off her surroundings and Mrs Peabody can at last feel part of the higher echelons of the society that she craves to be accepted in," said Liza.

Liza moved from his lap and he pulled her back down. "Much as I enjoy sitting with you, I do have a great deal to do Jamie," said Liza.

"Just a little while longer Liza," said Jamie.

"Are you truly happy with me Jamie because sometimes I wonder? I seem to have taken over your life and it concerns me," said Liza.

Jamie held her even more closely and said, "Of course I'm happy Liza. You know that having you with me is what I have dreamed about for so many years."

"I have heard that the chase is often more exciting than the capture," said Liza.

"Oh no Liza, you are far more exciting than anything I dreamed about. I must admit that I now have more time on my hands as my days were filled with plans on how I was going to get you in my home and in my bed. I now only have to plan how soon I can get you in my bed," laughed Jamie.

"I know you were testing me the other night. There was no need," said Liza.

"I apologise for that Liza. Even in the midst of love making you are still very astute," said Jamie.

"It wasn't in the midst of our love making. It took me a while to realise what you had done. It was only when we were resting afterwards that I understood why you had stopped; you thought that I may call out a name other than yours, didn't you?" said Liza.

"I can only apologise again but you reassured me that night and you have reassured me even more so now that I know that you only realised after we had made love. It has obviously stayed in your mind and I'm glad that we can talk about such things," said Jamie. "Are you annoyed at me?"

"Good heavens no Jamie," exclaimed Liza. "I can understand your doubts, especially that night as Patrick's name had been mentioned several times that day. I know that you made the mistake of calling out my name when you were with Evelyn and that is why she doesn't think of James as her son. You are my husband and I only think of you and your welfare now Jamie, and certainly when we are in bed and spend our time loving one another. I enjoy sleeping with you; in fact I enjoy everything we do together. I do love you Jamie, I just don't know why it took me so long to realise it."

He smiled at her and kissed her saying that she had better go and see Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert now and he would see her later.

"When I've seen them, shall we go for a stroll around the grounds; it's a really beautiful afternoon," said Liza and Jamie agreed that it was a splendid idea.

Liza didn't realise that April and the boys had the same idea, so when she and Jamie set out on their stroll, they became accompanied by three

exuberant boys and April. They both just smiled, and Jamie commented that he had been right that they had very little time alone through the day. Miranda suddenly appeared having also had the same idea and expecting to have a solitary stroll. "Quite a family affair," said Jamie still smiling. He put his arm out and strolled with Liza on one side and his mother on the other. It had only been a few weeks since his mother had arrived, but he seemed quite contented with her and concerned for her welfare.

"Have you solved the problem of your housekeeper and cook Mother?" asked Jamie. He still hesitated before he used the expression 'mother', but he was beginning to get used to it.

"Yes, Liza and I have seen a suitable young woman from one of your farms; she has helped with the feeding of a rather large family for a number of years, but now some of her younger siblings have 'flown the nest' and her mother can cope quite well by herself. It's a shame that by looking after her family she may have missed out on having a family of her own, but she is quite enthusiastic and she understands that my needs in the kitchen will be limited and is prepared to help with any other task," said Miranda.

"Mrs Lambert feels that she is very suitable, and you can't get a better recommendation than from our own cook," said Liza.

"Good," said Jamie, although Liza realised that he was not overly interested in the domestic side of his household. "And a housekeeper?" he asked.

"That also has been solved; I have a really nice young lady who has been an efficient helper to Mr and Mrs Rogers and one or two other friends in the village and really needed a permanent position. She also recognises that it is not really a position as housekeeper but realises that my needs will not be large and is prepared to undertake any task," said Miranda. "Really she will be more of a companion to me than a housekeeper."

"Good," uttered Jamie again.

"They will also be very helpful to us with the upcoming charity ball," said Liza.

"Good," Jamie said once again, and Liza and Miranda smiled at one another.

"I'll be moving in next week," said Miranda. "It will be very strange having a house of my own. I've never really had that before."

"I trust that once you've settled, I'll be invited to visit," said Jamie.

"Jamie, you know you won't ever need an invitation," smiled Miranda.

"Your mother will be joining us most evenings for dinner, won't you Miranda?" said Liza.

"If I may; I always feel that dining alone can be a very sad occasion, but there will be times when you will want to be alone and I'm sure there will be times when I want the peace and quiet of being by myself; it's one luxury that I have been denied for some while," said Miranda and both Liza and Jamie nodded their agreement.

During the course of the following week the Dower House was completed and Florence, the housekeeper and Brenda, the cook moved in and between them organised all the rooms efficiently. They had to discourage Miranda from undertaking any heavy work as she was their employer and they were meant to be looking after her. Liza smiled at their concern and felt that they had chosen her servants correctly.

Liza, April and the boys went with Miranda on the day that she moved in and it seemed that the whole house was in uproar, but it was only the boys being allowed to explore throughout and of course Brenda had been prepared for them as there was cake waiting for them as they reached the kitchen and at last silence prevailed.

"Do not ever feel that you can't come to the main house whenever you want to Miranda. Just because you now have your own home doesn't mean that you have to shut yourself away. Will you be dining with us tonight as usual?" asked Liza.

"If you don't mind, I think that I would like to stay and eat here tonight. I may go down to the kitchen for that, but I do have so much that I want to get used to and settle," said Miranda.

"Well, I'll gather up the boys in a short while and leave you in peace and come and see you tomorrow," said Liza.

When Liza, April and the boys were leaving, Jamie appeared and said that he wanted to see his mother to make sure she was settling in well and Liza realised that he wanted some time alone with his mother, so she ushered the boys back to the main house.

The day after Miranda's move, as Liza was strolling back from visiting her and having found out that she had slept exceptionally well considering she was in strange surroundings, she was met by a small carriage driven by Mr Rogers who had a stranger with him.

Mr Rogers stopped the carriage and he could see that she was mystified, and he introduced Dr Claude Phillips to her. "Were you not expecting me Lady Edgeworth?" he asked.

"I was Dr Phillips, but I didn't know when you would be arriving," said Liza.

"Oh dear, I'm afraid that my letter hasn't reached you before I have. I was surprised that there was nobody to meet me from the stagecoach," said Dr Phillips.

"It isn't a problem doctor; it will not take very long to get your room ready. I'm very pleased to meet you. Perhaps I could come up next to you and we'll reach the main house together," smiled Liza and once again here was another man who became mesmerised by Liza's bright green eyes. She was helped up and off they drove to the house and Jamie was surprised to see his wife riding with a stranger on Mr Rogers' small carriage.

Harper came rushing down the steps followed by a footman and he helped Liza down; she introduced Dr Phillips and explained that his letter had not arrived and asked that Mrs Frances come into the drawing room as soon as possible. Liza turned and thanked Mr Rogers and offered him refreshment, but he said he had to get back. Liza mentioned to him that Miranda had moved into her house and he said that he would call on her on his way home. "No doubt you'll get a warm welcome and tea and cakes to help you on your journey home," smiled Liza.

Dr Phillips bag was whisked away, and Mrs Frances joined them in the drawing room where she was given instruction to organise a bedroom for the doctor, arrange for some refreshments and tell Mrs Lambert that there would be one extra for dinner. Jamie came in and expressed surprise that the doctor had arrived but welcomed him and would see him later when he was settled.

Liza said that probably the doctor would like to be shown to his room and wash away the dust from his journey. He said that he would like to wash and rest for a short while before discussing the patient with Lord

Edgeworth. Harper showed him to his room as water was being taken up. Liza then went to find Jamie.

"I didn't know he was arriving today," said Jamie.

"No, apparently his letter has yet to arrive. I wonder whether Mrs Price and Derek know that he is here and our own good doctor of course," said Liza. "I suppose they do because Mr Rogers brought him out to us."

"I'll see how he wants to conduct his examination and then send word to Mrs Price," said Jamie. "Have you seen my mother this morning?"

"Yes, she slept well, and we will see her later," said Liza.

After the doctor had rested and they had enjoyed a light lunch Jamie drove the doctor to see Derek Price.

With her afternoon free Liza decided to see Mr Lambert and talk to him about the flowers and general decorations for the forthcoming event and he said that there would be ample greenery and of course the roses would still be in full bloom.

Jamie and Dr Phillips arrived back later that afternoon they both looked a little dejected and Liza asked how the examination had gone.

"I'm afraid there is very little I can do about how his bones have healed. If it had just been his legs, I could have re-broken them and attempted to set them better, but his pelvis is a different matter. His nerves have been trapped for a long while, however with an amount of manipulation and massage I believe we could get him walking in a fashion. I am going to see him again at your village doctor's surgery tomorrow and it is going to be painful for him, but I think I could start to help him and show his mother how to manipulate his right leg. His left leg is not as bad but only time will tell if we are successful," said the doctor.

"I am so annoyed that we didn't get to him sooner," said Jamie and he purposely didn't mention Evelyn's lack of concern for the boy.

"Yes, if I had seen him soon after the accident happened, I could have done something more positive for him. It's a sad case; he's a very intelligent boy. If we can get him to have a little more independence, I'm sure he will respond well and make something of his life," said Dr Phillips.

"We'll do whatever we can for him," said Liza. "We're going to ask his mother to allow him to be tutored with our boys. Going to the school isn't practical for either him or the teacher there."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to stay for about a week so that I can be sure that his mother is carrying out the manipulation and massage as it should be done," said Dr Phillips.

"You are saying that you may be able to get him walking but it won't be as other boys walk. Have you mentioned that to him and his mother?" said Liza.

"Yes, and they are both willing to accept whatever will happen. Young Derek feels that walking, no matter how it may look, is worth any pain he may experience," said Dr Phillips.

"He's a very brave boy," said Jamie, "and very bright and we mustn't let that intelligence go to waste."

Over the course of the week Dr Phillips worked on Derek's back and legs and although initially it was very painful, after a short while it was uncomfortable for him but not as difficult as it had first been. There was however no voluntary movement in his limbs. The doctor was convinced that given time he would improve and to expect an immediate response was not logical.

Liza went with him on a couple of occasions and she marvelled at Derek's positive attitude and both Mrs Price and his sister had now been well schooled in how to massage and manipulate. Liza suggested to Mrs Price that Derek be allowed to take advantage of the opportunity to join her boys in their classroom each day. "How would I get him there?" asked Mrs Price.

"Don't worry about that, we'll work something out for him," said Liza.

"Well it would mean that I could find more work which would help us, and my daughter could now attend school. She has always wanted to join the village children at their lessons," said Mrs Price.

"Good, that will all work out well for everyone. You know that both your children are very bright Mrs Price and given the opportunity I'm sure that they will map out fine careers for themselves," said Liza.

"Well, we'll see your Ladyship; I don't want them to aim higher than is available to them," said Mrs Price.

"I understand how you feel, but let's see what happens and I promise I won't put great ideas in their heads. Any such ideas should come from them," said Liza.

Dr Phillips eventually left saying that he would keep in touch and hoped that they would let him know how they are progressing. He would also update them on any new ideas he has which could be of further help.

In the first week of September Adam Reece was ready to take on the task of tutoring not three but four boys and each day Mr Rogers brought Derek to his lessons and each afternoon one of the grounds staff took him home and by the time he returned, his sister was home from school and his mother followed from one of her jobs shortly after. It was all working out well and all the boys enjoyed Derek's company. Adam Reece commented that he was a very willing student.

Chapter 4

All the invitations had been sent out for the Charity Fundraising Ball and replies were being received daily. So far there had been no refusals. Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert were showing very confident faces to Liza, but she sensed that they were naturally concerned that it was their responsibility for it to be a success.

Mrs Peabody was overjoyed that she would be attending and that she had been invited to stay with the Dowager Lady Edgeworth and also she knew that some of her friends and acquaintances would be at the event. She was really going to become a popular member of society now.

The Duke of Norfolk and the Prime Minister, Viscount Palmerston, and their wives had accepted and presumed it was possible for them to stay the night and when Liza received their response, she went rushing off to find Jamie.

“Jamie,” she cried, “the Prime Minister and the Duke of Norfolk want to stay the night. Where are we going to put them?”

“We have plenty of bedrooms Liza, why are you panicking?” asked Jamie.

“Because it’s one thing to entertain them at a function but quite another to look after them for breakfast, dinner and tea,” said Liza.

“Liza, I seem to recollect that in New York you entertained the American President, members of the American Government as well as top army personnel; why are you worrying about our own Prime Minister and a few Dukes and Lords?” asked Jamie.

“They didn’t stay the night,” said Liza.

“Well they lived in or around New York. I’m afraid that our guests could be travelling quite some distance,” said Jamie. “Don’t worry Liza you’ll carry it off beautifully.”

“Hmmm,” said Liza not very confidently and her mind was now whirling trying to plan what she would give them for breakfast, lunch or dinner or perhaps all three. She went off to see Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert and wondered how she was going to break the news to them without frightening them. They also would have to rearrange the sleeping arrangements. She would have to put the Prime Minister in Amelia and Wendell’s room as it was the best guest room. She would have to move in with Jamie and let Amelia and Wendell have her room.

The next best room was the one that Nicole and Lily used, so she would have to move them into the one which had been used by Jennifer and Jennifer would have to move into the Dower House with Miranda and Mrs Peabody. Henry and Myra were travelling from New York and she had already allocated them their room.

Anthony and Diana had their usual room, as did Edward and Joseph. Peter was quite happy to be in with Adam Reece who had agreed to give up his privacy for a couple of nights.

Another of Jamie’s friends had asked to stay. He was Lord Redfern, otherwise known as Binky Redfern. Liza had yet to meet him, but from what she had heard he seemed to enjoy all the worst activities. Miranda said that she knew his late father and he used to gamble with Jamie’s father whilst drinking too much. He could however afford to lose, unlike Jamie’s father.

Anne and David Benedict were travelling with Wendell and Amelia, although they would not be staying as long.

Most of the other rooms would be occupied by Jamie’s friends and various members of Parliament, and Liza realised that if another person wanted to stay, they would probably have to sleep in Jamie’s study or in the boys’ schoolroom, although she still had two small rooms in the east wing which had not been allocated and did not have the most attractive of décor. Miranda had the last spare bedroom in her house and Liza wanted to keep it that way. There were therefore three rooms available just in case there were any surprise guests.

Mr and Mrs Rogers had already taken several bookings for overnight stays and their Inn was now fully booked.

Great discussions were taking place regarding the food and the amount they would need. Crockery and cutlery were not a problem as the house was well stocked, but Liza was hoping that most of the food was just finger and bite sized. Most of the villagers and farmers had been recruited either to help serving on the day or cooking various small pies or sausage rolls as well as making bread and rolls which could be easily transported to the house. Mrs Lambert would be roasting lamb, beef, chicken and pork which would all be sliced thinly. Various hams and sausages were also coming from one of Jamie's farms which had been set up with a smokehouse a few years ago, and smoked and poached salmon and trout were classed as a supreme addition to the banqueting table, but the piece de resistance would be a roast suckling pig at the table's centre. They were hiring a girl to concentrate totally on various fillings for vol-au-vents. Mr Lambert had ample supplies for salads and fruit for trifles and other dishes. Untold numbers of cheeses with biscuits would be available for those who still needed to fill their stomachs.

Mr Rogers was liaising with Harper and Liza over the drink which would be needed for the occasion. There would be some spirits if they were called for, red and white wine and champagne, alcoholic and non-alcoholic punch and copious amounts of lemonade. Liza asked if any beer would be needed, but Harper did not think that any of the gentlemen would want to be seen drinking beer during the evening.

"It is slightly different to the drinking habits in America," commented Liza.

Liza was now concerned as she was going to have to stretch Mrs Lambert even further because there were now going to be many more house guests who would have to be catered for. At least she would have the support of Miranda's staff.

Three days before the event Wendell, Amelia, Jennifer, Lily and Nicole arrived as well as Anne and David Benedict. Unfortunately Annalise and Arthur were not able to attend. Liza explained the sleeping arrangements for everyone, and Amelia was delighted to be sleeping in the luxury of Liza's room, Liza having already moved many of her clothes into Jamie's room. Jennifer was quite happy to be occupying a room in the Dower House and couldn't wait to see it. Lily and Nicole understood that they were necessarily in a smaller room. As they all sat down to dinner that

night, it didn't seem possible that three months had passed since they were all last around the table.

The next day the Fuller boys arrived along with Anthony and Diana Ffoulks. Mrs Peabody was next to arrive and was immediately brought into the main house, Liza rushed over to greet her as she seemed a little overwhelmed and Miranda had yet to see her. She was introduced all around and Miranda espied her and came over to put her at ease. After light refreshments Liza suggested that Miranda take Mrs Peabody to her house with her maid and make sure she had everything she needed before bringing her back for lunch. Jennifer said that she would go with them and see them in a short while.

The stagecoach was due later that afternoon and Wendell and Edward were taking the carriage to meet it and bring Myra and Henry back. Liza was greatly looking forward to seeing them again.

Everyone assembled for lunch, which was a buffet, and unlike a formal gathering there was a great deal of chatter going on. Jamie was in his element surrounded by so many gentlemen, he had been in the company of women for many weeks now.

Miranda, Mrs Peabody, Jennifer and Diana seemed to bond together well.

"Mrs Peabody," asked Liza, "may I ask what your Christian name is?"

"Of course you may," she said. "It's Lucinda."

"That is a beautiful name," exclaimed Liza.

"Thank you, Lady Edgeworth," she said.

Liza smiled and said, "We are all friends here Lucinda; my name is Liza and my husband's is Jamie. We will probably have to be respectful to some of the guests who will be arriving tomorrow, but we are all on first name terms here."

Lucinda Peabody looked slightly taken aback but smiled and said, "I'll remember that Liza."

With lunch finished Wendell and Edward got ready to take the carriage to the stage stop for Myra and Henry. Liza went to find the boys who were all in their schoolroom. Liza said that she didn't want to interrupt any lessons, but she hadn't had a chance to see much of them either the previous day or that day. Derek was there and looking very happy and positive and really seemed to be getting on well with the other boys.

She asked Adam Reece if he was prepared for the function the following day. He looked surprised. "I'm a member of staff Lady Edgeworth."

"Well that shouldn't stop you from attending. I presume you have appropriate evening dress," said Liza.

"Yes I have, but I wouldn't have thought that it was my place to attend," said Adam.

"Why not, you are intelligent enough to hold a conversation with the best of them," said Liza.

"Thank you, I believe I would enjoy that," said Adam.

She spent a little while with the boys and then went to find April and asked her what she would be wearing for the function.

"I'll be looking after the boys. I can't go to the function," said April.

"Yes you can, but I would expect you to keep checking on the boys regularly. You had a nice dress made when we went to Italy," said Liza.

"I won't know what to say to anybody," said April.

"Well, you stick with Adam Reece and you'll be fine. Just let me see you before you go down," said Liza.

The carriage could be heard arriving, so Liza rushed down the stairs to greet Myra and Henry. Jamie had also heard it and was making his way to the door. A footman opened the door to Myra, followed by Henry and to Liza's surprise and delight he was followed in by Charles Enderby. Jamie smiled welcomingly but that smile stayed on his lips and didn't reach his eyes.

"Look who we've found on our way here," said a smiling Edward.

"Charles, what a wonderful surprise and welcome," said Liza who was now lifted off her feet and swung around.

"Yes, welcome," said a rather stiff Jamie who seemed to forget that he had often greeted Liza that way in order to make Patrick jealous.

When he had put her down, she turned and apologised to Myra and Henry for not greeting them properly. "I am so pleased to see you both."

"You're looking so well Liza," said Myra and Henry nodded in agreement. "Charles was visiting us when we were getting ready to leave to come here and he cancelled all his appointments and came with us. I hope you don't mind, but you know that Charles is very much leading the way with arranging bond servants in the correct manner."

"Indeed," said Liza with a sly twinkle in her eyes. "We haven't a very salubrious room available for you but when many of our overnight guests have left, we will move you into better surroundings. Oh I am so pleased to see you. Well, I'm pleased to see you all of course."

"I'd sleep on a stone floor just to be near you Liza," smiled Charles and Liza just raised her eyes to heaven but revelled in the sound of his Southern drawl.

Wendell whispered to Amelia that he didn't think that Jamie was too pleased to see Charles, but that he had nothing to fear in that quarter.

The boys had heard the voices and when they peeped down into the hall and saw Myra and Henry, Matthew and John ran down and straight into their arms shouting their greetings. James followed slowly as he didn't know who they were. Matthew turned and saw Charles and said, "Good day Mr Enderby, I trust you are well."

A smile hovered on everyone's lips and Charles answered, "Yes thank you Matthew, I am quite well and how are you and John?"

"We are quite well, thank you," replied Matthew and John in unison.

They all moved into the drawing room and Mrs Frances organised refreshments whilst one of the small spare rooms was made ready for Charles. Matthew did his duty and introduced James to Myra, Henry and Charles before the boys returned to Adam Reece and Derek in the school room, with the promise that they would see them all later.

After refreshments Liza suggested that the travellers go to their rooms to rest, wash and change before dinner, which after their long journey was a welcome suggestion. Liza once again said how happy she was to see them, and they were shown to their rooms by Mrs Frances.

This left just Liza, Jamie, Wendell and Amelia together for a short while. "Well," said Wendell, "That was a surprise. I would never have thought that Charles Enderby would make such a trip. He doesn't really like leaving South Carolina to go to New York, let alone the long journey across the ocean to be here." Amelia thought that he could have chosen his words slightly better having seen the black look on Jamie's face. Liza appeared not to notice but Amelia knew her well enough to realise that she could hide behind an unconcerned façade quite easily.

"I'll have to make sure that all the drivers are going to be well looked after whilst they are here," said Liza. One of the outer buildings had been made into a dormitory for them.

“Liza you’ve been running around all day; you need to get off your feet for a while. I’ll go and see that everything is in order; I’ll see if Miranda is around to help me. Go on, off you go. You too Jamie, go and get some rest,” said Amelia firmly, which was her way of letting Liza and Jamie have some time to themselves.

Liza made her way up to Jamie’s room and stretched out on the bed. It wasn’t long before Jamie came to join her. He kicked off his shoes and joined her on the bed. She had her eyes closed but could feel him staring at her.

“What’s the matter Jamie? Has something upset you?” she asked smiling across at him.

“I think that man has a nerve coming uninvited and the way he talked to you was not what should have been said to a married woman,” said Jamie grumpily.

Liza opened her eyes and moved to prop her head up on her arm and stared at Jamie smiling. “Jamie Edgeworth, you’re jealous,” she exclaimed. “Tell me Jamie, what was it you used to do and say to me in the past?”

“Of course I’m not jealous,” said Jamie and then he thought about it for a second and said, “yes I am and you’re right, I did used to act just that way with you and it never turned your head.”

“Exactly,” said Liza and she rested her cheek on his chest and he put his arm around her and held her closely, staying that way for a while.

Dinner was organised early that evening as the kitchen staff would be working late into the night. The boys were allowed to join them at the table as were Adam Reece and April. It was a very jovial mealtime and Liza and Jamie were very proud of the way their boys conducted themselves at dinner. It was necessarily a very simple meal starting with vegetable soup, followed by various cold meats, salad but hot boiled and buttered potatoes. Apple pies with cream or custard were for dessert and finally cheese and fruit were available if required. Red wine, white wine and lemonade for those who wanted to keep a clear head for the next day.

Liza hoped that the men wouldn’t object to taking their port and cigars on the outside terrace as Mrs Frances and Harper needed to organise the room for the function. Coffee was being served in the drawing room.

"I hope nobody minds but it has been necessary to keep breakfast to a minimum in the morning. The boys' school room will be organised for porridge and bacon, eggs and cooked tomatoes with plenty of bread and an urn for hot water so that you can choose tea or coffee and I am assuming that the gentlemen will take advantage of that. Ladies if you are unable to show yourselves in the school room, April and I will bring you whatever you need. You will appreciate that Mrs Frances and the staff will be working in the dining room most of the day. A light lunch will also be served that way. I believe that Mrs Lambert has excelled herself with three very large meat pies for lunch and as much bread as is needed. You may all rest assured that we will not starve, we will just have to sit and eat wherever there is room," said Liza.

"Don't worry Liza, we'll all help tomorrow and stay out of the way as much as possible," said Miranda.

"I'll help at breakfast and lunchtime," said Lucinda and Wendell commented that if they knew where the food was everyone would be quite capable of helping themselves.

"What time are your other house guests arriving?" asked Diana.

Jamie answered that several were meeting early the next morning somewhere in London and travelling down in convoy but wouldn't be reaching them until early afternoon. He believed that the Prime Minister and the Duke of Norfolk were also travelling together with their wives, but it was doubtful that they would arrive until mid-afternoon.

"All their rooms are already set for them just in case they arrive early," said Liza. "Do you know when your friend Binky is coming?" Liza asked Jamie.

"I'm afraid Binky is a law unto himself. I did tell him to get here at around lunchtime, but he'll arrive when he's ready," said Jamie.

"Oh, that's unfortunate, but we'll manage I'm sure," said Liza.

The evening was coming to an end and Wendell and Peter escorted Miranda, Jennifer and Lucinda to the Dower House and the others, apart from Amelia, drifted towards their rooms. Liza collected up the used cups and Jamie looked surprised.

"We can't expect the kitchen staff to run around after us this evening. I think they'll be lucky if they get any sleep tonight," said Liza and Jamie nodded and started helping her and they both carried them down to the kitchen much to the surprise of those working there.

"Are you coming to bed now Liza," asked Jamie.

"I have one or two things to check on with Amelia's help, but I want to be with you as soon as possible as tomorrow is going to be a very busy day. You go on Jamie and keep my side of the bed warm for me," she smiled up at him.

He went on his way and Liza joined Amelia in the dining room where Harper and Mrs Frances were supervising the staff. The main large table had been moved to the side of the room with the large sideboard still in its place at the far end. Other tables had been placed at the other side of the room, giving usable surfaces on three sides for food.

The dining room opened onto the drawing room which in turn had double doors leading to the ballroom. There was a small room on the opposite side of the hall next to Jamie's study which would accommodate the liquid refreshment. There was a cloakroom near the front door, and somebody would be on duty there all evening.

Baskets of roses and greenery were being arranged in the conservatory and candles and lamps were being arranged around all the rooms. It would appear that all was in hand and Mrs Frances told Liza that there was absolutely nothing that she needed to do that night and it would be best if she got a good night's sleep so that she was fresh for the next day.

"Thank you, Mrs Frances, you really are doing a wonderful job. Do you think you will be able to rest tonight?" said Liza.

"I'm sure I will be able to, but don't you worry about that; you will be having a more difficult job tomorrow. You will be on duty all day and all evening," said Mrs Frances.

"Please tell all the staff, and especially Mrs Lambert, how much both Lord Edgeworth and I appreciate all they are doing to make this a success. Their efforts will be helping to gain funds for children who are in appalling situations. Good night Mrs Frances," said Liza.

With one last look around the rooms, Liza and Amelia finally went off to bed.

Jamie was already in bed, but he got out and helped Liza out of her dress, which she appreciated. She laughed as he continued taking her clothes off. She could see that he was in a playful mood but no matter how tired she felt it was obvious that she was not too tired for him. He

realised how tired she felt but he could see that it didn't matter because she was showing him how much she loved him and wanted him.

Soon after dawn Liza roused and lay back trying to bring her mind into focus. She listed in her head all she had to do before lunch because soon after lunch the Prime Minister and the Duke of Norfolk and their wives should be arriving for the weekend and she would have to look presentable by that time. She still had no idea when Binky Redfern would be arriving and Jamie had commented that he wished he hadn't invited him, but as most of his friends within the same circle had been invited, he felt that Binky could not be left out. Liza had questioned why he was not at their wedding, but he was apparently in France at the time.

Jamie was still asleep when hot water was brought in by one of the maids and Liza washed and dressed ready to do her duty towards her guests by being on breakfast duty in the schoolroom. Miranda and Lucinda were going to take the boys for the day to their house, bringing them back after teatime so that they could meet all the guests before their bedtime. Liza knew that they would probably be peeping down the stairs for a little while as the other guests were arriving.

Two of the maids brought porridge and other breakfast items up to the schoolroom and they were kept on special trays heated by candles. Water was also in a heated urn for tea or coffee.

Peter and Adam were the first to arrive and they helped themselves to whatever they wanted, and Liza thought that this was going to work well. Edward and Joseph were next followed shortly by Jamie who Liza thought looked quite handsome that morning. He helped himself to breakfast and then proceeded to organise others. Wendell appeared and Liza took some breakfast to Amelia in her room.

Miranda, Lucinda and Jennifer would be breakfasting at the Dower House, which took a little pressure off Liza.

April appeared and was handed a tray to take to Lily and Nicole and when she returned Liza told her to stay and eat something as well before she sorted the boys out for the day, but it was too late as the boys must have smelled food and all three appeared in their dressing gowns. Liza told them that for once they could eat some breakfast in company in their dressing gowns but must get ready to go to the Dower House as soon as they had finished.

Trays were then organised for Myra, Anne and Diana, which once again were taken by April and Liza. Henry, Charles, Anthony and David made their way to the schoolroom and enjoyed all that was on offer.

Once breakfast was finished Liza and Jamie gathered up all the dishes and started carrying them down to the kitchen, much to everyone's surprise, but as Liza said the kitchen staff had enough to do without worrying about collecting up dirty dishes. Others offered to help but Liza said that the kitchen staff would be disturbed too much by those they didn't know. Water was going to remain there for most of the day should anyone want tea or coffee. Liza had already explained that lunch would be served in the same way and wouldn't they all be relieved when they could get back to civilised eating arrangements the following day.

The morning was passing very quickly. The dining room was looking very attractive and all food that didn't need to be kept cool was already set out. The refreshment room had all the red wine in place and the ingredients for both the alcoholic and non-alcoholic punches were waiting to be mixed in the appropriate large receptacles. The ballroom was now decorated in beautiful arrangements of flowers and together with all the candelabra and lamps each room was beginning to look quite spectacular.

Carriages were regularly arriving at the house from the farms and village bringing the various dishes that they had made.

Most of the house guests went for walks in the grounds finding it better to stay away from the bustle but lunchtime soon arrived and they all gradually made their way back to the schoolroom. Three large pies had arrived in the room together with several salads and bread and once again they all helped themselves and they were quite enjoying the experience. Wine was also there for anyone who wanted it.

"This is like having an indoor picnic," said Edward with his mouth full and being looked at disapprovingly by both his mother and father.

"Yes, you're right" said Liza. "Perhaps we should eat like this more often."

"Certainly not," said Jamie who liked his comforts. This seemed to amuse everyone.

This time April helped Liza, Nicole and Lily carry the dirty dishes down to the kitchen. All the other ladies made sure that everyone had eaten enough, and Amelia suggested that they all go to their rooms and rest for

a while as she knew that Liza and Jamie needed the space to greet their next guests who were due shortly.

However, Edward and Joseph suggested that they stay for a while in the schoolroom with Nicole and Lily and they would stay on duty just in case any more tea or coffee was required. This brought smiles to many faces as tea and coffee duty was not really on their minds.

Both Liza and Jamie went to their room to make sure that they looked presentable for their next guests and it wasn't long before carriages could be heard coming up the drive. Liza hoped that Binky would not be arriving at exactly the same time as the Prime Minister and the Duke of Norfolk. Jamie glanced out of the window saying that it wasn't Binky and they both seemed relieved and then went down the stairs to greet their special guests.

Jamie already knew the men, but this was the first time he had met their wives; he then introduced them all to Liza who was pleased to see that they all appeared friendly. Liza had instructed that at the sound of the carriages hot water was to be taken to their rooms as she was sure they would feel grimy after their long journey, so with the greetings over they were shown to their rooms with the promise of refreshments to be brought to them shortly. Their maids and valets had already started organising their luggage. She apologised for the fact that the house was in some disorder but hoped they understood why this was. When they were refreshed perhaps they would like to join them in the conservatory as this, apart from the school room, was the only place where order had been restored.

They all smiled, and the Prime Minister said that with such a large function that evening it was all very understandable and he hoped that they were not putting them to too much trouble.

"Certainly not," said Liza, "we are so delighted to be able to entertain you not only this evening, but for the rest of the weekend and I hope your stay with us will be comfortable. We have several house guests and hope that before the function starts we will be able to introduce you to everyone."

With that they were shown to their rooms by Harper and Mrs Frances and they said that they would be relieved to rest for a short while now.

When they had disappeared up to their rooms, Jamie leaned over and whispered in Liza's ear, "You handled that very well Liza, considering you said you would be so nervous meeting them. Well done."

Another carriage could now be heard coming up the drive and Liza and Jamie assumed that at last Binky Redfern had arrived. "Our last house guest I hope Liza," said Jamie as he moved towards the door. He stopped and groaned, and that sound gave Liza a sinking feeling and it wasn't long before she too groaned. Amelia and Wendell could be heard moving quickly towards them obviously knowing that they would need all the support they could get at that moment.

Up through the front doors came Evelyn followed by Binky Redfern. Before Jamie could say anything, Binky said, "Hope you don't mind old boy, but the lady was kicking her heels this weekend and I thought where's the harm in having one more to help with the fund raising." He seemed totally oblivious of the fact that they were already creating a very uncomfortable atmosphere.

"Binky have you totally lost your senses, and you Evelyn should have had more common sense than to plant yourself where you know you are not wanted," said a very angry Jamie.

Wendell and Amelia were standing with their lips pursed as if they were guarding Liza with their lives. Liza counted to ten and then put her best smile on and said, "Jamie, I take it that this is your good friend Binky, and of course I already know Evelyn. How are you Evelyn? It's a while since I've seen you."

Jamie took his lead from Liza and introduced Binky to her. "Oh, absolutely charmed to meet Jamie's new wife. You are as beautiful as everyone says," he said as he kissed her hand.

Liza gave Jamie a glance which told him to keep calm and she would handle the situation.

"I'm pleased that you are both here, and Evelyn you will be able to catch up with your son. It does however create a small problem but nothing that can't be solved. I'm afraid we only have one small room left Evelyn and it is not in the best of situations, so it's either that or there is a much better room at the Dower House. The choice is yours. I don't want you to feel that we are treating you badly and if you are staying longer than the weekend then a better room will be available then," said Liza.

Jamie, Wendell and Amelia were marvelling at Liza's calmness. "I think I would rather stay in the main house thank you Liza and as you say it would only be for a couple of nights."

"Is the room you have allocated to me any better?" asked Binky.

"Well yes, it is. It's larger and is in the more attractive and warmer west wing," said Liza.

"Problem solved then; I'll take the smaller room and Evelyn can have mine," and Binky beamed at everyone. "Can't have the little lady freezing to death, don't cha know."

Harper appeared as if from nowhere and showed Binky's valet the way to the small room and Mrs Frances organised Evelyn's bags to go to what was to have been Binky's room.

"Do you have a maid with you Evelyn?" asked Liza thinking that she would also have to find accommodation if she had.

"No, I thought I could borrow one of yours for the duration of my stay," she said, and Liza looked at her remembering a similar conversation that they had had years before on the subject of servants.

"No doubt I'll find someone who can help you into your dress for the evening," said Liza with a sigh.

The look on Jamie's face was something to behold and Liza thought that if it were possible, steam would be coming out of his ears. Wendell and Amelia moved away, and no doubt wanted to say what they thought, but realised that Liza was making this not the right time.

"Mrs Frances," Liza said to her as she descended the stairs, "can you find someone to help Lady Evelyn later and I presume you have arranged hot water for our guests and perhaps a tray with some refreshments."

"Of course, Your Ladyship," she said with the emphasis on the 'Ladyship'.

"Most of our guests are now resting before getting ready for the evening, so I presume you would like to do the same once you have washed the dust from your journey off," smiled Liza.

"Good idea," smiled Binky. "I say, you have the most stunning eyes Liza."

"Thank you, Lord Redfern," said Liza as she noticed Evelyn scowling at him.

"Binky, please Liza. Everyone calls me that," he said appearing completely oblivious to Evelyn's unhappy countenance.

"Would you like to see James when he gets back from his grandmother's house," asked Liza.

"No, that's alright Liza, I can see him tomorrow if necessary," said Evelyn and all Liza said was "Oh."

When they had both gone to their respective rooms, Liza turned to Jamie and said, "Are you really sure that he's a friend of yours? I've had enemies who have acted better than that."

Wendell and Amelia came across to them as Jamie said that he had his doubts. Amelia commented that she would have thought that Evelyn would have known better.

"I believe I've said it before that for someone who appears to have a good brain, she doesn't use it all that well on occasion," said Liza. "Oh well, I'm going to check around that all is in order and then I'm going to put my feet up for an hour before I have to get ready."

"I'll come with you," said Amelia. "You two had better also go and rest," she said referring to Jamie and Wendell.

All was well in hand and Liza and Amelia made their way to their rooms to rest for a while. Jamie's fury had not eased when she came into the room.

"I was going to turn their carriage around and put them back on the road to their homes," said a fuming Jamie. "She always tries to spoil things; she always has, and she always will."

"Please calm down Jamie. It will all work out for the best I'm sure. Is there anything I can do to ease your temper?" she asked cheekily.

"How long have we got?" he asked.

"About an hour," she answered.

"Hmm, yes, I can think of something," he said as he lifted her skirt and pulled at her underwear. "Sorry, I haven't got time for pleasantries," he grinned as he quickly made love to her.

When he had finished, he said, "I owe you one," and she answered that yes indeed he did and they both laughed and he realised that Evelyn could do her worst, it really didn't matter.

A short while later hot water was brought in for the bath and Liza jumped in first and when she had dried off, she donned her dressing gown and made her way to her own room where she and Amelia were going to get into their finery. Wendell and Jamie were going to dress in Jamie's room.

"I thought April would have been here by now," said Liza, "but I did tell her to dress for the evening first, so I suppose it's taking her a little longer. I did hear the boys return a while ago, so she could be busy with them. Never mind, we're quite capable of helping each other."

April appeared suddenly out of breath and apologetic. She had on the dress that had been made for her the year before and both Liza and Amelia stared at it.

"My goodness, you've grown," said Amelia. Liza nodded thoughtfully and went to her wardrobe and pulled out a very pretty shot silk pink gown and although rather low cut it had an attractive matching bolero which would cover her nicely.

"That should fit you," said Liza and April stared at it open mouthed. She stammered a thank you and Liza said she could change there when she had finished helping them and they would make sure she looked alright.

Amelia was dressed first and finally Liza was helped into her gown which was silver and the four tiers on the skirt were edged in the most exquisite thick red lace, as was the off-the-shoulder bodice. The fashion was that skirts were overly full, and her knickerbockers were of matching silver silk edged in the same red lace as were her evening gloves. Both Amelia and April stood back and drew in their breath with Amelia nodding approval.

"You certainly know how to dress Liza, and of course you still have the body for it," said Amelia. "Let's get April into her dress now."

Liza nodded and said that she would have to put her jewellery on next and then she would be ready. They helped April, and Liza pulled her hair up on the top of her head allowing ringlets to fall around her ears and neck. "You look lovely April," said Liza. "Go along and show yourself to the boys and then find Adam to escort you."

There was a knock at the door and both Wendell and Jamie stood there in their evening suits. "What a handsome pair you are," said Liza. They both stared at April as she left the room and told her how very pretty she looked. She blushed as she went off to the boys' room.

"I'm nearly ready," said Liza. "I just have to put my jewellery on."

"I'll help you with that Liza," said Jamie.

"We'll go down to the conservatory; we're all meeting there aren't we?" said Wendell as he ushered Amelia out of the room.

Liza went to get her diamonds, but Jamie stopped her and pulled from behind his back a large jewellery box. She looked at him questioningly.

"These are some of the Edgeworth family jewels Liza and I should be honoured if you would wear them tonight," he said and he opened the box which contained a ruby and diamond necklace, bracelet, earrings and ring, but the main jewel was a magnificent tiara.

Liza gasped, "They're magnificent Jamie. I had no idea that you had such things. They'll match what I'm wearing beautifully."

"Yes, I know. I saw what you were planning to wear and knew that the time had come for you to have them," said Jamie and he started to fasten the necklace and then the bracelet. He let her put the earrings on herself but placed the ring on the finger of her right hand on top of her eternity ring.

"I'll let you put the tiara in place yourself," he smiled, and she settled it comfortably on her head pulling some of her curls attractively in place. She turned and looked at him for his approval and all he said was "Beautiful".

"Thank you, Jamie, I'll look after them for you and for the lady that young James finally marries," said Liza.

"I'm lucky to still have them, I'm afraid they were in and out of pawn shops during my father's time. He always managed to borrow enough to redeem them. I finally paid off his debts which were quite considerable, thanks to your help, so you deserve to have them," said Jamie.

Liza looked at him and smiled and her eyes sparkled and he saw the seventeen-year-old again that he had always loved. He took her arm and escorted her along to the boys' room where she was greeted with squeals of delight and affection, but they refrained from clasping her as they didn't want to 'mess her up' as Matthew said.

They then went down the stairs and into the conservatory where most people were gathered and there were gasps of approval as they walked in. Lord Palmerston and the Duke of Norfolk followed them in with their wives and Jamie introduced them to the assembly. Liza excused herself and went to check that all was in order and as she left the music began playing and the refreshment room and dining room were completed. The ballroom looked delightful and Liza mapped out where she, Jamie, Wendell and Amelia would stand to greet all their guests.

Harper and Mrs Frances came over to her and wanted her to know that neither the staff nor the additional servants were taking any money for the evening, and they had asked that whatever they would have earned be put towards the charity. Liza looked at them and found it hard not to cry. "I really don't know what to say. That means so much to me and it will do to the children that it will eventually help. Thank you for telling me, I will personally thank everyone later."

Liza went back to the conservatory and said that everything was ready for the guests to arrive so Jamie, Wendell and Amelia should come with her so that Harper could announce them all. She said that she realised it may seem foolish announcing all the house guests, but Harper was a stickler for protocol, and she smiled as Jamie led her into the ballroom.

Of course, Lord and Lady Palmerston were first to be announced followed by the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk; Myra and Henry were next with Charles Enderby. Carriages were now drawing up and so the house guests were interspersed with others and the champagne was handed out after they had been introduced. It was an hour and a half before they felt that they could leave their greeting position although there might be a few stragglers, but Liza and Jamie felt that the dancing should begin and so they went onto the dance floor to the strains of a waltz which was the cue for others to join them.

The evening was going well; even Evelyn seemed to be enjoying the event. The drink was flowing nicely and the only person that it was felt could have a problem was Binky who seemed glued to the refreshment room, or more accurately, a wine bottle. Diana was happy with the non-alcoholic punch and she said it looked as if she was joining in.

Small tables had been set up all around the dance floor and when the guests were informed that the dining room was now open and they were invited to choose whatever they liked, members of the staff would assist them to their tables with their choices.

It seemed that most of the guests had not eaten for a week before the function as very few held back and it was good to see how much the food was appreciated; there would be some left, but not a great deal. Desserts were served and cheese, biscuits and fruit were available to those whose appetites still felt the need of a little more.

Members of the staff were making sure that everyone had what they wanted including drinks and it seemed time for Liza to make her speech.

During all this time the orchestra had continued quietly playing and now there was a drum roll which quietened the guests. Tables had been set up in the hall and these were going to be used to collect money or take names for pledges under the guidance of Miranda, Lucinda, Jennifer and Myra.

The room quietened expectantly, and Liza stood on a dais and looked around the room. She had known how she was going to start her speech but now she had changed her mind.

"This evening I have been humbled; I was going to go straight into what the charity needs but instead I want to start with something that our butler told me just before all our guests arrived and that is that none of our staff tonight are going to take any wages for their work, they have asked that anything due to them is given to the charity. You will all appreciate that this is an extremely generous gift and personally I am very touched by what they are doing."

There were many nods and murmurs of agreement to this statement. Liza continued.

"As many of you already know, our charity was started a few years ago when we became aware of the vast number of children who were being abused both physically and sexually in and around the Belfast area. We were shocked to find that such abuses were taking place across many other parts of Ireland and England, as well as some in America and possibly other countries worldwide. Each day children find their way to us asking for help and we cannot refuse them."

"Our company does what it can, but it is not enough. We need funds to ensure that we can provide adequate food, medical help and accommodation, as well as training so that they can be placed in suitable situations and become useful members of our society."

"These children take great risks to get to us; we have no idea how many are caught and punished and possibly even killed, but they are willing to take that risk to get away from the life that others have dictated for them. Often there is an older child who takes the responsibility to bring little ones to safety. We are also finding that we receive threats daily and need to have at least one security guard on duty at each of our Homes. Of course, a pretty child, be it a girl or a boy, is worth a great deal of money to these unscrupulous people, so we have to be very careful."

"Our Homes have become overcrowded, but we are managing to place the older ones in suitable employment or arrange for them to travel as bond servants to America. The younger ones are candidates for adoption, and we do ensure that they are placed in respectable homes. We are desperate for further premises and of course such places need to be staffed."

"We have with us tonight Mr Charles Enderby from South Carolina, who has been instrumental in ensuring that any bond servants are correctly and legally safeguarded. He has undertaken this role now for a number of years," Liza looked across at him and smiled knowingly. "If you have any questions about bond servants, I'm sure he would be happy to answer any queries."

"I am delighted that so many guests are here tonight. Apart from the fact that my husband and I are pleased to see you all and enjoy your company, I know that you were under no illusions about the motive behind this evening's event and would ask that you follow the example of our staff members and do what you can to help with this very important charity."

"My mother-in-law, Lady Miranda Edgeworth, our friends Mrs Lucinda Peabody, Mrs Jennifer Armstrong and Mrs Myra Mahoney will be taking whatever donations you can make, or pledges for regular payments and they can tell you more about adoptions, employing servants or organising bond servants. Of course, Mr and Mrs Wendell Fuller and their sons can also answer any questions you may have, as can both my husband and I."

"Thank you all for listening and please carry on enjoying yourselves."

She received a hearty round of applause but before anyone could move to the tables the Prime Minister came up to the dais and called everyone back to attention. Liza frowned not knowing what was about to happen and she stepped down and stood next to Jamie. He looked at her and indicated that he had no idea what was going to be said.

"Lady Liza Edgeworth has said that she has been humbled by the generosity of those working here tonight. This evening, before I joined you all, I can honestly say that I was humbled by a visit from a young person. It took great courage to knock on my door and ask to speak to me, but she felt that she must do so because she needed to get her message across to the one person she considered able to stamp out the disgusting trade that has been touched on this evening."

"This young person had, since before she could remember, been in the hands of those who sold her each day to those who used and abused her. She saw little ones brought to the house on numerous occasions and they were used to such an extent that some died. One day three little ones came, and she was told to get them ready; she couldn't do it and she took advantage of an opportunity to escape with them. That courage was given to her by the story of the tall American soldier who rescued children such as her and the little ones and she made her way to where she had been told his house was. She was very frightened, but she was willing to take the chance for herself and the little ones. She was bright enough to know that if she didn't get away her future would be one of disease and death, so what did she have to lose?"

"Today she begged me to do all that is within my power to stamp out this trade and she wanted me to know that without this charity she and those little children would still be used in that deplorable manner or probably dead. She now has a future to look forward to, although she also feels that it will never be one that others enjoy, but she has found happiness and she wants that for all others like her."

"Yes, I too feel very humbled and until today did not realise the scale of this problem and I will do whatever it takes to stamp it out. I believe I know who the tall American was who unfortunately is no longer with us, but the children don't know that, and he has given them an aiming point and become a legend. Please everyone think about what I have told you and help in whatever way you can. I shall do what I can through Parliament and legislation. I'll leave you to ponder how you can help."

There was a marked silence as everyone seemed to be digesting what Lord Palmerston had said, and Liza looked around, but April was nowhere to be seen. She would find her once she had the party underway again.

Jamie then took it upon himself to thank everyone and jokingly said that the ladies at the tables were becoming anxious to take their money from them and he signalled for the music to start again and looked around for Liza, but she was nowhere to be found. He moved towards Amelia and said, "The Prime Minister was talking about April, wasn't he?"

"I believe so, Liza never mentioned her past. You know that she believes that if others don't know then someone who has been abused will be accepted normally and not talked about or pitied. I think she has gone to find April to make sure she is alright," said Amelia.

"Will you and Wendell look after our guests for a short while because I must make sure Liza is alright? I saw her face when the 'tall American soldier' was mentioned; she did not appear happy to be reminded," said Jamie.

"You have nothing to fear Jamie. It was a shock for me to hear it also, as it probably was for you. But Lord Palmerston is right, Patrick has now become a legend and if it helps countless children, then so be it," said Wendell and Jamie nodded and made his way upstairs.

He found her sitting in the school room with April, who was sobbing but when she saw him, she tried to hide her face.

"There is no need for you to hide from me April or anyone else," said Jamie kindly. "Nobody knows it was you who the Prime Minister was talking about, some may have guessed and if they have they will only think how brave you were to get those children out of that situation and how brave you were to face Lord Palmerston to tell him how important you felt the charity was. You have achieved what you set out to do in both cases; you and those children are safe, and the Prime Minister is going to do all he can to stop this appalling trade. Well done April; I'm very proud to have you within our household and protecting our children."

This unfortunately brought further tears from April and Liza leaned over and wiped her eyes. "You are needed downstairs April; Adam has been looking for you and so have others. Dry your eyes and walk down with us. We will be proud to escort you back to the party."

They waited a little while with her and generally chatted about how the evening was going and she became composed.

"Are you ready?" asked Jamie and April nodded. He looked at Liza whose face was looking strained, but she looked up at him and suddenly it seemed as if the sun had come out as she smiled, and her eyes once again sparkled at him. He breathed a sigh of relief as he thought that the mention of 'the tall American soldier' had brought back too many memories, but even if they had she still showed him that she had eyes only for him and again his heart missed a beat.

Jamie walked down the stairs with a lady on each arm. "With those huge skirts it's just as well that our staircase is wide," he casually commented and both Liza and April smiled. He escorted Liza over to Wendell and Amelia and took April over to where Adam was standing

looking concerned. Jamie noted the look of relief when he saw her, *I wonder*, he thought, *perhaps something is stirring between those two*.

People were dancing but many were in the hallway talking to the ladies at the tables. Charles could be heard extolling the virtues of bond servants in his distinctive Southern drawl and Henry was saying how a number of children had gone to America for adoption and others had successfully been placed as domestic servants and tradesmen.

Lord Palmerston and the Duke of Norfolk were calling Wendell to them, and then beckoned to Jamie and they became in deep conversation with them both. The outcome being that neither Wendell nor Jamie would commit to anything without Liza's approval. The Duke said that it was a little unusual for a woman to be consulted on matters of policy but both Wendell and Jamie told him in no uncertain terms that Liza was the driving force behind not only the charity but also the two companies that she was involved in.

"We are here tomorrow, so we won't disturb her this evening," said Lord Palmerston. "You're a very lucky man Lord Edgeworth; you seem to have the perfect wife."

"Thank you, Sir, I think she's perfect, but I know she would say otherwise," laughed Jamie proudly he excused himself and went to find Liza.

She was standing in the refreshment room scowling at both Evelyn and Binky. "Have neither of you any sense whatsoever?" he heard her say. Diana was standing nearby looking very upset.

"Do you think it's funny to try to undo all the good that Diana has done over the past months, and the encouragement that she has received from everyone. Anthony is going to be furious. It would be best if he isn't told this evening, but he will have to be as he is the one who has to put up with the consequences of Diana's drinking," hissed a furious Liza.

"What on earth has happened?" asked Jamie but he was ignored as Liza carried on her tirade.

"I thought you were her friends, and so did she, but friends don't try to make fools of people. I hope, Evelyn, you weren't the instigator of this, and I hope Binky that you didn't realise the consequences of such a foolish act," hissed Liza once again.

A tear was edging its way down Diana's cheek and Liza turned to her and said. "It's alright Diana. Nothing is your fault. Would you like us to fetch Anthony for you?" asked Liza.

"No, it's best if he doesn't know tonight. I'll just go up to my room for a while. If he asks, please just say I needed a rest," said Diana and she left the room.

Jamie turned to Binky. "You gave her alcohol, didn't you? You had to be aware that she mustn't drink, it's dangerous for her. You knew that didn't you and if you didn't, I know that Evelyn did. You two really are just about the worst friends that anyone could have."

Liza and Jamie left them standing but those who were serving the drinks had heard what was said and knew what had happened. They had heard both Binky and Evelyn planning to enjoy getting Diana drunk as they knew what she was capable of when she was in that state. The staff chatted amongst themselves and decided that they would make sure that nobody served Diana other than themselves and her husband.

Evelyn seethed with annoyance and said to Binky, "She really is the most appalling goody two shoes. She needs to be taken down a peg or two. I have an idea how to do it; it will take a while, but I'm prepared to wait."

Both Evelyn and Binky had never learned that servants not only had ears but they also had loyalties; all that had to be done was work out a way to get the warning across to Lord and Lady Edgeworth and after a short discussion they decided to enlist the help of Harper and Roberts.

Jamie looked at Liza as they walked back into the ballroom and he said, "Another disaster avoided I'm pleased to say. How did you know what they were doing?"

"I didn't really, but when I walked in, they were sniggering just after Binky handed Diana what she had thought was the non-alcoholic punch. She was about to drink it when I grabbed it from her and tried it myself. It was definitely the alcoholic one; it does look slightly different if you knew what you were looking for. The staff confirmed it too. I do despair with your friend Binky. He is making this evening hard work as we have to keep our eyes on him all the time," said Liza.

"Lord Palmerston and the Duke of Norfolk want to see you tomorrow, Liza. They wanted to talk to Wendell and myself and were surprised that

all decisions have to go through you; a mere woman," he said as he smiled down at her.

"You and Wendell don't have to defer to me over the charity. Your hearts are in the right place and what we need is money. There's nothing difficult in that," said Liza.

"I think business also wants to be discussed, especially as you have American guests from both the North and South of the country and once again there seems to be controversy between both ends of that country," said Jamie. "Bradley & Company have a great many assets in America as do Marchant & Fuller, so you probably know what's going on more than most."

"Yes, if they do go to war with one another, it could set business back quite considerably, but I'm not going to worry about that tonight. I'm going to dance with my husband as much as possible and hope that he holds me closely because I love the feel of him," said Liza happily.

Mrs Frances and Harper tidied up the dining room and moved all the food on to one table and they were surprised to see that the guests were coming back to see if anything was left that they liked. There was a great deal of laughter which always seemed to be where Liza and Jamie were. The ladies in the hallway were also in high spirits as they had received many pledges and money. Some of the ladies sought Amelia out to see if she thought that there may be some children who could add to their staff. Two ladies asked to speak to Liza, and they felt that they could give good homes to some of the little children. Liza made a note of their names, firstly having established that their husbands would be in total agreement. Charles had explained so many times how the bond servant system worked and he appreciated that his worth was more from America than in England, but he was surprised by the interest shown and also he had several people who said they would cover any costs so that the children could be guaranteed a suitable and happy place to work.

The orchestra were playing gently, and Liza asked them to call the function to order as she wanted to make an announcement.

"I just wanted to say that this evening is a resounding success. We have already received in excess of £3,000 in cash and numerous pledges of regular sums and offers to give employment as well as a few who are interested in adoption. We are very grateful for all your support; it is going to make such a difference to what we are trying to achieve. The evening is

certainly not over, and we have a great deal more eating, drinking and dancing to enjoy, but I wanted you all to know how wonderful you all are in supporting the charity.”

She jumped off the dais and went to Jamie dragging him onto the dance floor. He smiled down at her as if she was the seventeen-year-old girl again and needed pampering. It did not go unnoticed to Evelyn how happy Jamie looked; he had never looked that happy before and although Liza had helped her on numerous occasions, she hated her at that moment and was determined to ruin their happiness.

A few of the guests began leaving at around midnight but the evening seemed to be continuing. Mr and Mrs Rogers sent a message that they would be leaving as they had to make sure that they were on duty at the Inn to receive those who were staying with them that night.

At one o'clock the party was still going strong and Jamie felt that he had a permanent fixed smile on his face, but each time he looked at Liza she seemed quite awake and acting the perfect hostess. He noticed the look of jealousy on Evelyn's face and then embarrassment when Binky whispered something in her ear and tried to guide her towards the stairs. She pulled away and appeared to say something curt to him and he wandered off unsteadily towards the refreshment room yet again.

Lord Palmerston and his wife came to bid Jamie and Liza goodnight saying that they were too old to stay any longer. Harper was miraculous in somehow getting their servants into their room without being seen. Next was the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk and they too said that they would see everyone during the course of the next day.

Wendell and Amelia were reluctant to leave but they were extremely tired now and Liza told them that nobody would mind if they quietly disappeared to their bed.

Harper made arrangements to have Miranda, Lucinda and Jennifer escorted to the Dower House and finally at around three o'clock the only people who were left with Jamie and Liza were Henry, Myra, Charles, Peter, Edward and Nicole, Joseph and Lily. The ladies sat down at last and kicked off their shoes, the men wished that they could do the same but being able to put their feet up was a great relief. Mrs Frances brought coffee for them all and Liza was concerned that she and the rest of the staff must be exhausted but Mrs Frances told her not to worry.

"I think all that went very well," said Charles with his distinctive Southern accent and everyone agreed.

"I hadn't expected the Prime Minister to make a speech," said Edward. "It was quite powerful and made everyone think. I presume he was talking about April. It was very brave of her to go to him. I bet she was nervous."

Liza and Jamie didn't comment, but everyone else agreed with him.

"I suppose you'll all look at April differently from now onwards," said a rather unhappy Liza.

"Well, that was the price she was prepared to pay for trying to help but of course you have always been right, once people know they will look differently at her," said Joseph.

"Well I'm not going to look at her differently; she's been very brave and probably by doing what she did she boosted the charity's coffers quite considerably and the Prime Minister is going to do something about that disgusting trade," said Lily and the others agreed with her.

Finally, everyone made their way up to their bedrooms. Jamie helped Liza out of her dress. "Do you know Liza that until we came together I had never helped undress a woman. I have to say that it can be interesting but often rather complicated. I dare say that Binky helped Evelyn out of her dress, and I wouldn't be surprised if his bed won't be slept in tonight."

"Surely not Jamie; surely they won't do that under your roof," said Liza.

Jamie looked at her and shook his head, "At times Liza, you really are the most naive of people."

She climbed into bed and commented that it had been said before. Her head touched the pillow and she was immediately asleep. Jamie carefully picked up the Edgeworth jewellery from the dressing table, put it into its case and replaced it in his safe. Nobody had worn it since his grandmother; he had not let Evelyn wear it as he didn't think she deserved it, but Liza did. She had proudly worn it that night and promised that she would treat it with care and respect. She didn't know that there were other pieces of jewellery in his safe, but when all their visitors had left, he would show it all to her and he knew she would be delighted to wear it and that would greatly please him.

Her dress was neatly lying over a chair and he went over and touched it. It was beautifully soft, and it smelled of her, turning he could see she was fast asleep, and this didn't disappoint him because he was quite

happy to climb into bed next to her and put his arm around her. She snuggled into him which was her way of getting comfortable. He smiled and gently drifted off to sleep with the only woman he had ever wanted.

Liza was still asleep when Jamie woke. He gently slid out of bed and quickly washed and dressed before the maid or Roberts could disturb Liza. She deserved to sleep as long as possible and he went down to the dining room which had now been restored to order. He asked Mrs Frances to let Liza sleep for another hour before sending her breakfast and hot water up to his room.

All the gentlemen were gradually appearing at the breakfast table. Edward said that they were all probably looking forward to a day of rest and Jamie commented that he didn't think that Liza had planned anything strenuous for them, but no doubt the dinner that night would be friendly and entertaining and he had no idea if and when lunch would be served, however he was sure that Liza had it all in hand.

The boys had decided that they would like to join the gentlemen for breakfast and April had made sure that they were smartly dressed for the occasion. She had managed to stop them rushing in to see Liza who she knew would still be very tired. Jamie looked up and beckoned them in and the three chose their breakfast in a very adult manner, which amused many there although the boys didn't realise that they were being watched.

They sat together and conducted themselves like adults and Jamie watched over them proudly and allowed them to join in some conversations. Lord Palmerston and the Duke of Norfolk congratulated Jamie on their excellent behaviour for which he thanked them, and the boys beamed up at him.

"Have you seen your mother yet James," asked Jamie.

"Which one do you mean?" he asked.

"You know who I mean," said Jamie quietly.

"No not yet; she's been too busy to see me," said James who was totally unconcerned.

"Well make sure you see her before she leaves," said Jamie although he knew that the onus was on Evelyn to see her son.

Jamie went up with the boys to see Liza. He looked in on her and asked if she was able to see the boys, which she was. She was sitting up in

bed attempting to eat her breakfast. A smudge of butter was on her chin and she was trying to clean marmalade from the front of her nightdress. Jamie sighed and took her serviette, wiped her chin and then the front of her nightdress. The boys giggled with Matthew saying that she always did that when she tried to eat in bed.

"Have you seen your mother James?" asked Liza.

"Dad has already asked me that. No not yet," he answered.

"I don't know when she's leaving, but you must see her before she goes," said Liza.

Liza finished her breakfast and lay back listening to everything the boys were planning for the day. Jamie was sitting in a chair watching them and with the door open Amelia looked in to see how they all were. She was sure that the last thing Liza really wanted was three boys bouncing on her bed, but she seemed to take it all in her stride.

Everyone was ushered out of the room as the hot water arrived for Liza's bath but she knew that she didn't have too much time to soak and relax as she had a house full of guests and she needed to make sure that they were all looked after well.

She came running down the stairs and was pleased to see that the house was virtually back in order. Miranda, Lucinda and Jennifer were already there, and Amelia was chatting happily with Myra. Where Edward and Joseph were was anyone's guess, but Liza presumed that they were with Lily and Nicole somewhere in the grounds. Wendell and Peter were deep in conversation in Jamie's study. David and Anthony were in the drawing room waiting for their wives to appear and Charles and Henry were with them. Jamie was walking towards the stairs as Lord Palmerston and the Duke of Norfolk were descending; their wives had yet to appear as had Binky and Evelyn, but nobody was commenting on their absence.

Harper was on duty to make sure that tea or coffee was available to anyone who wanted it; Liza smiled at him and whispered to him what a wonderful job he had done and was still doing. His face almost smiled at her.

The Duke and the Prime Minister gravitated with Jamie towards his study where Wendell and Peter were. Liza hadn't noticed the gathering but when she looked up, she was surprised to see the study door closed but she carried on making sure that everyone had what they needed. The door opened and Jamie beckoned to her. Miranda noticed that Liza was

needed and instantly took over the role as hostess with the support of Amelia who whispered that something was going on.

In the study Liza saw a sea of faces. Jamie opened the discussion with the fact that this was really concerning business more than the charity. "I am a patron of the children's charity, but my involvement with Marchant & Fuller is non-existent and Bradley & Company rents some of my land and assists in the farming of other parts. I therefore feel that it would be an intrusion for me to join in this meeting."

"Surely you are now part of both companies since your marriage Lord Edgeworth," said the Duke of Norfolk.

"Certainly not Sir; my wife has total control of her shares in Marchant & Fuller and Bradley & Company. I have relinquished any rights over what Liza owns," said Jamie.

"That's very unusual," said the Duke.

"I have no need of either her money or her property and I know that her contribution to the management and expansion of both companies is immeasurable. If you wish to discuss something about the charity, then yes I am very much involved in that, but if it is purely business then I will leave you in the very capable hands of those who run both Marchant & Fuller and Bradley & Company," said Jamie.

"I have no objection to you staying Jamie; does anyone else?" said Wendell and everyone agreed that he could stay.

"Thank you all, but unless I can make some significant contribution it would be better if I look after our other house guests," said Jamie and he bowed, turned and kissed Liza on the head and made a move to leave the room.

"That's very commendable of you Lord Edgeworth," said Lord Palmerston.

"He wouldn't have it any other way, and neither would we," said Wendell.

"I see," said the Duke. "However, what we wanted to discuss does not directly concern business, apart from the fact that your companies have interests in America. It is the current American situation that we felt you could give us an insight into."

Liza could see that Peter was getting unsettled as he always felt that meetings were a waste of time.

"Your company travels the world and sees and hears much of what is happening. We are at present getting increasingly concerned by the possibility of a division between the Northern and some of the Southern States in America and the affect it could have on our country. We have people who tell us how it will affect politicians and the rich but few who can judge the effect on the workers in our country," said Lord Palmerston.

"You are asking us to look into a crystal ball. Such a civil war has been talked about on and off for some time now," said Liza. "As you are probably aware I have lived in America over the course of many years and the thoughts and fears of the American people come to the fore periodically and then they try to push it all out of their minds and often succeed in doing so."

"Which side do you think will win if it comes to it?" asked the Prime Minister.

"The North will win. They will have more manpower and weapons, and they have a regular army instead of the militia that the South would rely upon. The North is desperate to abolish slavery, although they will probably treat freed slaves as second-class citizens. Those in the North are also determined that the slave trade doesn't reach the newly opened up western states but the real reason why the North will win is because the South won't have the funds to carry on," said Liza.

"There are a lot of rich people in the South; much richer than many of those that we consider rich in this country," said the Duke.

Liza looked around for someone else to answer, but nobody seemed to want to contribute.

"They are rich because their lands are rich. They are rich because they own so many slaves which are considered wealth and they are rich because their main products are cotton, tobacco and sugar. Take their slaves away from them and their wealth is cut vastly. They will then have nobody to pick their crops and even if they do manage to get a crop picked, there is no way that the North will allow it to be shipped to the factories either in the North or across to our factories in the north of England and the Midlands. Their rich land will be useless and gradually it will fall into rack and ruin," said Liza. "They will have to factor in the cost of workers rather than slaves and by the time they realise that, it will be too late."

"So, what you are saying is that it will have a detrimental effect on our factories and the workers," said Lord Palmerston.

"Yes, but you certainly didn't need me to tell you that; it's an obvious conclusion to come to," said Liza. "On the other hand, of course, is the fact that both sides will need weapons, and our country is quite capable of undertaking that in vast amounts. Officially all we have to do is work out which side we wish to be on, but I would think that our country would support the North and they will be able to pay for that service. It is rumoured that the Queen would prefer to support the South, but they would once again be restricted because of the number of sea patrols they would have to avoid and of course, if captured, any guns would be confiscated leaving them out of pocket and without weapons. England will, however, probably attempt to stay neutral but of course France would side with the South, but it would be difficult for them as they tried to avoid whatever blockades there might be."

"I would think that both your companies could be badly affected by any conflict," said the Duke.

"Well, I'll give somebody else a chance to answer. Wendell for Marchant & Fuller and Peter for Bradley & Company," said Liza who was beginning to realise that they were all allowing her to take the lead in this discussion and she wanted to hear what others had to say.

"Certain outlets will be closed to us," said Wendell, "but I can honestly see that others will open up. We trade throughout the world so I don't think we will lose too much, although losing cotton, tobacco and sugar from the South will mean that we will have to look for other products to make up that deficit. I hope that it won't come to war, but we are in business to make money and keep people employed, so I suppose we will deal in weapons. Liza won't like that, none of us will but we'll do what's necessary."

"Yes, we really would like to just carry out the nice side of business, but as Wendell says, we do what's necessary, although we have drawn the line at the slave trade," said Liza.

"As far as Bradley & Company is concerned, we may lose crops and animals, but we won't lose the land and hopefully not premises, and we can afford to ride the storm. We have more farms and premises in countries other than America, in fact most of our land is this side of the Atlantic," said Peter.

"Why are you so interested in how an American Civil war will affect our companies? There must be many other companies who you must know and who will also be affected," said Liza.

"You are just confirming what some of my advisers are telling me, but there are others who want us to believe that any conflict in America will affect nothing in our country. There are also those who would want us to ally ourselves with the South. Also your companies are a good indication of how others will be affected as you are the largest shipping company dealing in America," said the Prime Minister and he continued, "we are enjoying a time of some economic strength at present and want to be prepared for any downturn in that economy."

"Well, such economic strength should be used to make sure that our factories have enough raw materials to ease any future inability to purchase," said Liza pointedly. "We may also have an exodus to America from Britain and mainly from Ireland. Since the potato famine of the 1840s many Irish now live in America, but they have many relatives still over here and they will go to fight for what they see are the rights of their families and friends and that will be mainly for the North."

"I've noticed that you have a North American manager here with you and also that you have a Southern friend who helps you with your charity, you are going to have very divided loyalties," said the Duke.

"I won't have divided loyalties. Charles Enderby employs bond servants mainly from Ireland, I believe he has a couple of house servants who were once family slaves, but they have been free for many years. They have been with the family so long that they wouldn't know where else to go. He would, however, have just as many difficulties as his slave owning neighbours," said Liza. "It is all very well that those in the North wish to free all slaves and it is indeed the right thing to do, but most of them are uneducated and unskilled and would be in a worse situation than they are at the moment, however time will tell."

"I know that you have known two American Presidents, Lady Edgeworth and presumably you have had discussions with them as we are now having, can you tell me what they think the possibilities of civil war are and what the consequences could be?" asked Lord Palmerston.

"I have no idea what anyone in this room will tell others, but as far as I am concerned we have had a private conversation with you both today and it will remain that way, so you can't expect me to talk about any

discussions I may have had with the American Presidents, but if you were to ask me what my opinion is about the possibility of an American Civil war then I have to say that yes I believe it will happen, unfortunately, and the consequences for that country will be disastrous in the short term, but in the long term it will unify a nation which seems to be pulling apart at present and to be honest I believe it could eventually become one of the most powerful nations in the world,” said Liza.

Jamie was looking slightly shocked at Liza, as were Wendell and Peter. She had just told two of the most powerful men in England to mind their own business in the most charming of terms. They both realised it but smiled knowingly at her. “So,” said Lord Palmerston, “we will have to concentrate our efforts on perfecting the manufacture of armaments and the like.”

“And unfortunately, bandages, dressings and surgical implements and possibly uniforms, but for which side only you will know,” said Liza sadly and they all nodded in agreement.

“Thank you,” said Lord Palmerston, “it has given us an insight into what is happening across the Atlantic.”

“It can’t have been that helpful and you must have surmised a great deal already, but nobody is ready to commit to war yet, thank God. However a great many runaway slaves are making their way to New York and other northern cities and the South are demanding their return, so how that will be resolved I have no idea, but it has not as yet become a major confrontation I’m pleased to say,” said Liza. “However, I would think that your concerns would be levelled towards what is happening in the Crimea which involves our country on a very large scale. Any war in America is hopefully far away, whereas that in the Crimea is on our doorstep. If you will excuse me gentlemen, I must now return to my other guests; they will think I have deserted them.”

The men stood as she moved to leave the room, with Jamie opening the door for her and he excused himself and followed her out. Lord Palmerston then asked, “Does she still have very close ties to America?”

Peter answered, “She has property in New York and several in a town called Benson and others in Harris Town. She owns one or two farms near those towns and businesses also within the towns. She has a newspaper in Benson and was instrumental in arranging all the M & F Banks in America and they span both the North and the South, which is something that we

will have to look very closely at should war break out. She also instigated our security company there. She has also opened schools in both towns and undertaken numerous other charitable works there, most of which we know nothing of, but her closest link, which will never be broken, is that she has buried a husband and daughter in the graveyard at Benson. So, I presume the answer to your question is yes, she does still have close ties to that country,” said Peter.

“I would like to emphasise that although it seems that she may have concentrated her influence solely across the Atlantic, she has far more investment in Britain than anywhere else, although she does now have a very large undertaking in Italy. I only add this because I didn’t want you to think that she puts nothing back into our country, it is what is foremost in her business ventures,” said Wendell.

“Lord Edgeworth has ensured his future no matter what he has signed,” said the Duke and his comment rankled both Wendell and Peter.

“Jamie has loved her since she was a very young girl and had nothing; circumstances kept them apart until now and with all due respect it would be better if your comment was not repeated,” said Wendell risking the wrath of the powerful Duke.

“My apologies, it was an unworthy observation and I am pleased that no one else was here to hear it,” said the Duke.

Lord Palmerston smiled and thought that both Lord and Lady Edgeworth had true champions in the Fuller family.

As Jamie and Liza moved to join their guests, most of whom were enjoying the warmth in the conservatory, Evelyn could be heard saying “Well, as Liza has left her guests to fend for themselves I suppose I had better step in to make sure they are all well catered for.”

Liza and Jamie stood back with amusement to see what Amelia had to say about that. “That will not be necessary Evelyn as the Dowager Lady Edgeworth and I were put in charge by Liza whilst she was summoned by the Prime Minister and the Duke of Norfolk for a private conversation, no doubt about the state of the country, if not the world. She has much influence on political aspects of our country you know, as does Jamie.”

Liza and Jamie looked at one another. “I didn’t know we had that much influence, did you Jamie?” whispered Liza.

“No, but it’s good to find out,” whispered Jamie back to her.

Miranda had a smile hovering on her lips as they came into the conservatory and Amelia caught sight of them. "I presume your political insights were well received," Amelia said to both Liza and Jamie.

"Absolutely," said Jamie, "the country will run much better now."

In all the years that Amelia had known Jamie, this was the first time that she had seen and heard that he had a sense of humour, but it was probably also the first time that he had been truly happy.

Liza was telling everyone that lunch would be served in around an hour's time and when they heard the gong they could make their way to the dining room as this would be an informal affair and they were to sit where they pleased. She told them that there was plenty of salad and cold meats served with rolls and butter, all to be washed down with wine, lemonade or water and that this was to stave off any pangs of hunger which they might have before their dinner that evening. The boys would be joining them for lunch and so Liza made sure that April had them washed and scrubbed for the occasion.

The hour soon passed, and the gong sounded. There was a mass movement towards the dining room and Liza observed how excited everyone seemed to be at the prospect of food. Both she and Jamie made sure that nobody had been left behind and they then also made their way into the dining room only to be confronted by the sight of Binky sitting in Jamie's place at the head of the table and Evelyn sitting at the foot opposite him. There were one or two disapproving glances most notably from the Duchess and Lady Palmerston, but Jamie handled it well; he just stood and stared at Binky until he had no option but to say, "I say old boy, am I in your seat? I thought we could sit where we liked."

"Yes, you can Binky, but not at the head of my table," said Jamie.

Evelyn looked at Liza defiantly and was about to say something, but Liza pre-empted her by saying, "That's alright Evelyn; I like to sit next to my husband on informal occasions. This evening will however be a different matter and you will be escorted to your place then."

It was all very friendly with even the Prime Minister standing and choosing what he wanted before going to a seat and having what he had chosen placed in front of him. As the Duke was about to sit next to him, to Liza's and Jamie's horror the face of Matthew appeared there, and he had carried his plateful of food and placed it carefully next to Lord Palmerston and the Duke was obliged to move down a seat.

"I thought I'd come and keep you company," said Matthew to the Prime Minister.

"That's very good of you," said Lord Palmerston with a smile, he conveyed to both Liza and Jamie that it was perfectly alright for Matthew to be there and even the Duke was smiling as Matthew made himself comfortable between them.

"Nobody can doubt who your mother is young man," said Lord Palmerston.

"Yes, people say that I have her eyes, but I have been told that I have my father's hair. I didn't know him," said Matthew and Liza and Jamie groaned. "I knew my daddy though and he was really nice, just as nice as my father is now."

The Prime Minister looked confused and Liza and Jamie just smiled at him, wondering if the conversation was going to give away any more secrets, not that any of it was a secret anyway. It was too late to undo whatever had been said and so Liza and Jamie just let it all happen.

John was sitting closely to Peter and they were having a conversation, but Jamie wondered why Binky kept staring at them; he was probably getting over a hangover Jamie thought.

James came over to Liza and asked where he should sit, and Liza suggested that he sat next to his mother. "But there's no room next to you," came James' reply.

"Oh James, you know what I mean," said a tired Liza.

"Oh alright, I'll see if she wants me there," said James and he walked away with his lunch towards his mother, whose first words were, "Don't spill that on me." James sat next to her and ate his lunch in silence and when he had finished, he came back to Liza and said, "Well, I did as you said. I think I'll go and sit next to Uncle Joseph now." Liza just nodded as mealtimes were meant to be happy times not awkward and stilted. Jamie just shrugged and raised his eyes. "Well you tried Liza," was all he said.

Matthew was still regaling the Prime Minister with tales of his past life and Liza tried to intervene but was told that he was finding it all very interesting and informative and Liza groaned again and looked appealingly at Jamie, who just smiled and said that there was nothing in her past life that she need be ashamed of.

The Duchess and Lady Palmerston were now listening intently to Matthew and Jamie tried to tell him to stop bothering people, but the

Duke brushed aside his intervention and the four of them carried on listening. Liza could hear words such as “and my Indian name is . . .”, and “my friend Si . . .”, and “my daddy . . .”, also “she wouldn’t want us to live like that . . .” Liza was getting increasingly upset by what Matthew was saying as it was reminding her of how much she missed her friends in Benson. Jamie noticed this and moved to Matthew and whispered something to him and he got up and excused himself from his seat and went to see John who appeared to be rather on edge and needed his brother with him as well as his beloved Uncle Peter.

“What’s wrong with John?” asked Jamie.

“I don’t know, but he seems unnerved by Evelyn and Binky. We’ll probably find that one of them has said something to upset him. I’ll see him when lunch is over and make sure he’s feeling well,” said Liza.

It was a beautiful early autumn afternoon and most of the guests decided to take walks around the grounds. Liza decided to go to the kitchen to see Mrs Lambert who she really had not had a chance to thank for all her hard work. The kitchen staff appreciated her visit and she told them that the next day would be a little easier as many of the guests were leaving.

Liza then went to find John who was with Peter but had a look of relief when he saw her. “I don’t know what’s wrong with John, but he seems very upset. I know that he can be very serious, but something seems to be bothering him and he won’t say what it is,” said Peter.

“I’m going to have a rest, would you like to come with me,” Liza asked John and he nodded vehemently, and they went up to Jamie’s room and lay on the bed with John snuggling up to her. “What’s the matter John, has somebody said something nasty to you?”

“No,” was all John would say.

“Do you feel unwell?” asked Liza.

“No,” said John.

“Is there anything you want to tell me? Or are you just tired?” said Liza.

“I’m tired,” said John.

“Well, you just rest and perhaps you can get some sleep,” said Liza but she wasn’t sure that somebody hadn’t upset him. He lay in her arms and went to sleep, and she also nodded off.

Later Jamie found them like that, and he had James and Matthew with him as it was time to go to the kitchen for supper.

John woke up and said that he wasn't hungry. "Doesn't matter," said Matthew, "You don't have to eat anything, but Mrs Lambert will be upset if she doesn't see you, so come on let's go."

He reluctantly climbed off the bed ready for them to lead him down to the kitchen with Liza telling both Matthew and James to stick closely to John because something had upset him. "It's probably that Binky person; he keeps staring at us all," said James.

"I know you all look after one another; you're good boys," said Liza and Jamie frowned looking a little worried.

"How long is Binky staying with us?" asked Jamie

"I don't know Jamie; you invited him, I thought he would have told you," said Liza.

"Well, I didn't expect him to bring Evelyn with him and I had assumed that he would leave either today or early tomorrow, but I'm beginning to wonder if he'll be staying for months," said Jamie. "He seems to be quite comfortable here."

"I suppose he said something thoughtless that John took to heart; he can be very sensitive at times. He'll probably be better when the place isn't so crowded," said Liza.

Before she went down to dinner, Liza called in to see the boys and John looked much better. April was reading to them and all three looked so comfortable in their beds. They had their own bedside cupboards and wardrobes which made each area have its own individuality. There was a fourth bed there which John and Matthew had said was for when Si came to visit, and James said that he was anxious to meet him.

At dinner the Duchess of Norfolk leaned across the table towards Liza and said, "Your son kept us quite entertained at lunchtime today Liza."

"Yes, that was what I was worried about," smiled Liza.

"Don't worry he didn't tell us anything that need worry you. In fact, he sung your praises and told us how brave you had been," said the Duchess.

"I suppose to small boys anything normal appears bigger than it is," said Liza.

"I think you're being a little modest, but I can see that I'm embarrassing you," said the Duchess. "Are you staying here for a while or will you be travelling to one of your other houses soon?"

"We'll be spending Christmas in Belfast; which is what we normally do each year," said Liza.

"I think I'd like to have James with me this Christmas," said Evelyn out of the blue.

The Duchess turned and stared at Evelyn with contempt and Liza said, "Well Evelyn that's something that you will have to sort out with Jamie."

"That would be a shame as he seems so happy with the other boys, but as you say Liza, that's something for your husband to sort out," said the Duchess who was well aware that Evelyn had not been invited and never missed an opportunity to create a problem.

Dinner was another successful event, and everyone went to bed well fed. Liza went in to see John and the boys before she went to her bed and Jamie also came to check on him. John was awake but seemed to relax with them there and he was soon fast asleep.

Lord and Lady Palmerston and the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk left soon after breakfast the next day. Just before lunchtime Anthony, Diana, Anne and David bade farewell and said that they would all be in Belfast for Christmas.

It wasn't until three o'clock that Evelyn appeared, and Binky arrived a few minutes later. Liza tried not to show how annoyed she was as they were sleeping together in Jamie's house and all the remaining guests were well aware of it.

Jamie called them both into his study and Liza felt it prudent to encourage the house guests either to take advantage of the good weather, or rest in their rooms for a while. Miranda invited Lily and Nicole for afternoon tea, Joseph, Peter and Edward took the boys for a game of bat and ball. Wendell and Amelia decided that they would stay so that Liza would not be alone at a difficult time. They were also there to give Jamie some support should he need it. Liza really knew that Amelia wanted to be the first to know the outcome of Jamie's meeting.

Liza, Wendell and Amelia stayed in the conservatory until they heard Jamie approach them. All he said was that Evelyn and Binky would be leaving the next morning. Liza did wonder why they were not going until the following day but thought better of asking.

Evelyn decided that she would have her meal in her room that evening, but Binky was going to brazen it out and joined everyone for

dinner. It was an informal affair that evening with Liza sitting next to Jamie and everyone finding where they wanted to sit.

It was the last evening that they would see the Fuller boys and Nicole, Lily and Jennifer until Christmas as they were also leaving the next morning. Wendell and Amelia were staying for at least another week as were Henry, Myra and Charles and Liza would rearrange their bedrooms the next day. She would be pleased to get her room back, although she always wanted to sleep in Jamie's bed.

Lucinda seemed to be enjoying her stay with Miranda and didn't appear to be anxious to leave for her home, but Miranda was quite happy to have her company.

When they got into bed that night, they both were exhausted but Liza still asked Jamie what he had said to Evelyn and Binky. "I just told them to leave my house as soon as possible as it was insulting of them to use it as a brothel. I also told Evelyn that she stood no chance of having James with her at Christmas."

"That's a relief," said Liza as she tried to keep her eyes open. She looked at Jamie and he was in the same condition, so they just settled down and were asleep within minutes.

They were woken in the early hours of the morning by piercing screams, interspersed with cries of 'mummy'. Liza was up and running towards the boy's room. April was also pushing her way in. Jamie was running down the corridor as it had taken him a minute or two to realise where the sound was coming from. Liza was confronted by James and Matthew hitting out at someone who was rolling on the floor, but her main concern was John who was screaming uncontrollably in his bed and his nightshirt was partially over his head.

"I'm here John," cried Liza, "I'm here my darling," and she clasped him to her and he clung to her tightly, so much so that he was hurting her, but she didn't care as it was what he needed to do.

Jamie was trying to pull the boys from the person who was cowering on the floor; they were hitting him and kicking him. Peter came rushing in, took in the scene and attempted to help Jamie get the boys away from the man. John was still screaming but not quite so loudly and Liza was gradually calming him down. She pulled John's nightshirt down and picked him up and carried him out of the room and down to Jamie's room, telling April as she went to bring Matthew and James into her.

John was now crying pitifully, and Liza knew that somebody had tried to sexually assault him, and she prayed that they had not succeeded. She got to the room and Amelia followed her in. Wendell had gone down to where the commotion was. Liza was now crying along with John who was still clinging tightly to her. Adam and April came along with Matthew and James who both were now also crying because their brother had been hurt. Liza told them to get into the bed to keep warm and she asked April to find her an extra blanket as John was now so cold. She was rocking him backwards and forwards as if he was a baby and it seemed to comfort him.

Peter came in to see if there was anything he could do to help as he knew that John trusted him completely, and John put his hand out to him. Peter took it and patted it and told him that he was safe now with his mummy and that she would look after him. Liza looked up at him and asked a question with her eyes and all he said was "Binky". Liza nodded and just closed her eyes in despair and suddenly her tears wouldn't stop.

"I promised him that he would always be safe with us and I haven't kept that promise. I should have realised when I saw the way that man was looking at the boys but his association with Evelyn clouded by judgement. How could I have been so blind?" said Liza between sobs.

"It isn't your fault Liza," said Peter.

"No of course it isn't," said Jamie from the doorway. "None of us would have believed that such a thing could happen."

"Where is that man?" asked Amelia.

"We've locked him in his room and he's nursing a great many wounds, none of them serious. Thank goodness our boys sleep together otherwise it could have been a good deal worse. How is he Liza?" asked Jamie.

"Oh Jamie, I promised him when we first had him that nothing like this would ever happen to him again, how can he trust anyone again?" cried Liza and she clasped him even closer to her and carried on rocking him backwards and forwards.

"That man kept calling him his prince," said Matthew and a cold shiver went up Liza's spine. No wonder Binky kept looking at him, he must have recognised him from the past and he had the cheek to be here pretending that he was supporting the charity which was trying to stamp out that disgusting trade.

Wendell put his head around the door to see how the boys were and said that everyone was milling around in shock, especially Evelyn. Jamie's

face went cold and he stormed off to where he thought she would be and the tirade that came from his mouth sent Lily and Nicole immediately back into their room and Edward and Joseph stood by to give moral support to Jamie. Myra, Henry and Charles disappeared into one room, no doubt to discuss the situation. April was hovering in the room not knowing how to help and she was showing that she was in a state of shock and horror as she had lived through attacks like that many times in her young life. Amelia took her hand and led her back to her room and Adam slowly followed them and he looked furious and Jamie came back and he had a face like thunder.

Peter and Jamie were now just left in the room with them and Peter was still holding John's hand which seemed to calm him.

"I was going to leave tomorrow Liza, but if you don't mind, I think I'll stay for a few days longer," said Peter.

John looked up at him and nodded and Liza said, "You really are the kindest of people Peter, but I know you wouldn't want anyone to know that. Thank you it will make John very happy."

Peter patted John's hand again and said, "I must write some letters for Edward to take back for me. I will have to get my assistant to reorganise some meetings and also he will be able to deal with a few of the contacts that I have, so if you don't mind Jamie I'd like to use your study for a while."

"Of course, Peter, you know you really are welcome to whatever you need," said Jamie.

Peter got up and looked down at John and smiled at him saying that he would see him in a few hours and that he would spend every moment he could with him.

Matthew and James were virtually asleep, and nobody was going to disturb them. Liza gently lifted her legs into the bed trying not to move John too much and she settled down with him still leaning on her and holding tightly onto her. There was a couch in Jamie's room, and he took a blanket and stretched out on it hoping to get some rest. The lamps were left alight so that John could see as Liza didn't think that he would want to be in the dark.

Jamie looked across at Liza who was sitting in bed and leaning back on her pillows. "I am so sorry Liza," he said quietly. "You really have had some

difficult times since you came here, and this really is the worst thing that could happen to our family."

"It is, isn't it Jamie, but as we are a family, we will give one another the help and support to get through this. You had better try to get some sleep as you have some decisions to make tomorrow," said Liza equally quietly.

"We both do Liza," said Jamie and Liza nodded in agreement.

Jamie was awake early. He had hardly slept that night. He quietly washed and dressed and leaned over and kissed Liza on the head, whispering that he was going to see who was already up. He hoped that Wendell would be awake as he felt the need of his advice.

Matthew and James were rousing and shortly April came and took them to get ready for the day. John was still resting on her and she hoped that he was beginning to feel safe and secure again.

Mrs Frances knocked and entered bringing a breakfast tray containing food for both Liza and John. "We thought that the young master would like to have his breakfast with you this morning," she said. John looked up and a slight smile crossed his face.

Mrs Frances plumped up the pillows and at last John stopped holding onto Liza and sat up in bed with a tray in front of him and he gave her a watery smile and took a mouthful of porridge and then another and another. He then enjoyed some bread and marmalade and a cup of tea; he seemed to enjoy the pampering, but Liza was a little worried as he had said nothing since he had stopped screaming.

As usual Liza had a drip of coffee on her chin and Jamie came in followed by Peter. He looked at her and just naturally took her serviette and cleaned her chin. Peter watched this with slight amusement as Liza was known to have problems with eating in bed.

"I've come to take you to get ready John," said Peter. "Will you come with me?"

"Yes," said John and he climbed out of bed and off he went with Peter. They could hear Matthew and James asking him if he had really had breakfast in bed with their mummy and how lucky he was. Jamie smiled and commented how resilient children were.

"Liza, we need to make a decision about Binky. I know what Wendell thinks but whatever we do it should be your decision and I'd like you to tell me your thoughts before I tell you mine and Wendell's," said Jamie.

"I have had a while to think about it and much as I would like Binky to be hung, drawn and quartered, if we report him it will mean that John would have to give evidence and I can't put him through that. His life has been so heart-breaking already that I just don't want him to suffer any more. I know that he has never forgotten what happened to him when he was younger, but it was easing, and he was acting like a normal boy of his age. Binky has brought it all back to him and all the love and effort that everyone has made to make him feel like everyone else has been wiped out in just a few minutes," said Liza and she was now crying.

"Binky must be stopped but I don't know how that can be done. I know you'll never allow him in your house or near our children again, but it doesn't seem enough for what he's done, so I'm afraid I have no answers," said Liza.

"I can assure you that Binky will not be worrying young boys or girls for some time to come. Adam saw to that. I knocked him down, but Adam came at him with a cricket bat and it wasn't across his head," said Jamie meaningfully.

"Oh," said Liza. "Is he permanently damaged?"

"I doubt it, but he won't sit comfortably for a few weeks," said Jamie. "He threatened to call the authorities and Adam told him to do it and see what they say about the reasons why he attacked him. That quietened him I'm pleased to say. It's amazing how that affected way that he speaks has disappeared."

"What did Wendell think?" asked Liza.

"Really the same as you have said. He thinks it could be detrimental to John's permanent recovery if he has to relive it all again in a court room. He and Amelia will make sure that he will never be at any functions that they are attending. They can do that quite easily without saying why, and I can do the same here and if I do come across him I can cut him dead, others will notice and follow my lead and that will be a true punishment for him," said Jamie.

"It seems very little for the damage he has caused. What about Evelyn? I presume she will be leaving with him," said Liza.

"No, she has refused to have anything to do with him, so she will be leaving later by herself. She realises that what he tried to do was quite despicable. I'll organise a carriage for her this afternoon," said Jamie.

As Liza was dressing she heard a carriage draw up and when she looked out she saw four men escorting Binky out of the house and into the carriage, his bags were tied on and away he went and all Liza could think was *good riddance* and now they all had to bring John back to how he was before the attack.

Liza could hear noises coming from the boys' room and when she went along to them Peter, April and Mrs Frances were moving all John's possessions to the area that was reserved for Si. Matthew and James were doing their best to help, and John was sitting on the bed directing operations, but nobody was complaining.

"He didn't want to go back to his own bed," whispered Mrs Frances who obviously knew what had happened to John.

"That's a good idea; let's hope he'll settle there," said Liza. "But if his Uncle Peter tells him that it's a good idea, he won't argue."

Jamie came running up the stairs and along to the boys' room. "Well, that's one down and just one to go. This hasn't been as happy a time as it should have been because of those two. I see John is moving to another bed, that's a good idea. I suppose Peter suggested it," said Jamie and Liza nodded.

Miranda and Lucinda came over with Jennifer who was leaving that morning. They had heard that there had been a commotion during the night and that Binky had been the instigator of an attack on one of the children. They were all shocked and disgusted, especially as it had been perpetrated by a guest in the house.

Lunch was necessarily early because of the guests who were leaving. The boys came rushing down to join them; they liked these lunchtimes where they could help themselves and sit where they liked. Of course, John sat next to Peter. Evelyn did not appear and did not ask for any refreshments in her room.

They all stood on the steps to wave them off. Wendell had given explicit instructions to Edward and Joseph concerning business and Peter gave them his letters for his assistant and when they had driven away the boys went over to the Dower House for afternoon tea, and Peter went with them.

Amelia, Wendell, Henry, Myra and Charles were enjoying some relaxation in the conservatory and Liza had joined Jamie in his study.

Evelyn knocked and entered, "I'm packed and ready to leave if you could organise a carriage for me please Jamie," she said.

"I would have thought that you would have apologised to Liza for all the trouble you and that idiot of a partner of yours have caused," said Jamie.

"Yes, of course, I'm sorry but what Binky did was nothing to do with me," said Evelyn.

"Wasn't it Evelyn?" said Jamie. "I thought you felt that you had to take Liza down a peg or two, or so I have heard."

Evelyn looked very flustered. "I don't know what you mean."

Liza was sitting and looking puzzled as this was the first she had heard whatever it was Jamie was referring to.

"What you must appreciate and what you have never learned, is that members of staff aren't deaf, and they do have loyalties. I find it despicable that you took out your jealousy on a child in the most disgusting way," said Jamie.

Liza continued to look puzzled and surprised.

"No, Jamie you're wrong; I did not instigate any of what happened last night, please believe me, no matter what else I may do, I most certainly would not take any revenge on a child. It could have been James that he chose; you can't think that I would condone that. No Jamie, I promise you that what happened yesterday was nothing to do with me," said a distraught Evelyn.

Jamie sat and looked at her for a while and then said, "Alright, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. Does that mean that we may expect some other jealous attempt to hurt Liza?"

Evelyn gulped and said, "That was just said in the heat of the moment when Liza had made both Binky and I feel rather stupid and I apologise for that. We hadn't realised how serious alcohol was for Diana, we knew that it would probably make her say and do something silly and foolishly we thought that would be funny. I can only apologise again and hope that you will put it down to the fact that we also had consumed too much wine."

Liza looked away; she didn't like listening to this conversation. She just wanted Evelyn to leave so that she could enjoy the company of Jamie, her boys and close friends and try to forget the havoc that had been caused by Binky and Evelyn.

Jamie rang for Harper to organise Evelyn's departure and he informed her that her baggage was already in the carriage.

"Goodbye Evelyn," was all Liza said as Jamie escorted her from the study and out to her carriage. Unfortunately for Jamie and Liza, Evelyn seethed on her way home and came up with several plans which could be disastrous for them both.

When Jamie returned, Liza said, "I gather that I really upset Evelyn and I suppose I meant to. She and Binky were acting very foolishly as far as Diana was concerned and presumably they wanted Diana to do something that would upset both of us. Anyway, they've both gone now so shall we get back to our good friends before the boys get back from your mother's."

In the conservatory Henry and Charles were having discussions on the differences between Northern and Southern America and how any conflict between them would affect each side. They weren't arguing as neither thought that war was the answer to the differences.

Myra and Amelia were talking about planning a charity function in New York; neither of them thought to ask Liza if it could be held at her house, it was a foregone conclusion that it would be as far as they were concerned.

Wendell was reading a newspaper and not contributing to either conversation. He looked up as Liza and Jamie came in and said, "Has the troublesome Evelyn left?"

"Yes, we are at last free of our irritants," said Jamie.

"You will never be free of that irritant Jamie," said Wendell. "I would be very cautious as I feel that there is so much truth in the saying that 'hell hath no fury like a woman scorned'. Yes, both of you must be very careful. I don't think she will take a knife to you, but she can create a great deal of trouble for you."

Jamie and Liza looked at one another and knew that Wendell was right; they would watch out and look after one another and their family well.

Matthew and James ran into the conservatory, followed by Peter and John. They regaled everyone with the wonderful tea they had had at the Dower House and then went rushing off to the kitchen for their supper. Peter frowned and said, "How can they eat supper after what they had this afternoon? John seemed to relax a little."

"It's good of you to spend the time with him Peter," said Jamie.

"It's the least I can do. It was a terrible thing to happen to him. I know that Liza has never mentioned his past, but I believe none of us were under any illusions over what he had gone through in his short life. It's so annoying that all the love and care that he's received from us all to help him forget could have been wiped out by that evil man," said Peter.

All the remaining guests had been moved into more comfortable bedrooms and Liza now had her bedroom back and she left the conservatory with the others so that they could rest before dinner.

John knocked at her door and came in; Liza put out her arms to him and he came to her and she engulfed him warmly. "I remembered that man when he arrived; I thought that he had forgotten me," he said.

"You should have told me, and we would have got rid of him immediately. He's gone now and he will never be back and if you ever see anyone like that again, you must promise me that you will tell me because I can deal with it right away and save you from being hurt again," said Liza.

"I promise, but I'm alright now because I have you and dad, Uncle Peter and my brothers and you all look after me. My brothers protected me last night; they hit him and kicked him and got him off me. My dad punched him, and I heard that Mr Reece hit him hard and you cuddled me all night. I had breakfast in bed with you and that was nice, but that man was really horrible," said John.

Liza thought that it was one of the longest speeches that John had ever made.

"Are you going to be happy in your new bed tonight?" asked Liza.

"Yes, I'll be quite happy there; I think it's a better place than my old one. It will be nice when we go to Belfast though. Will we be in your house or in dad's?" asked John.

"I presume we'll be in your father's now. It should be ready for us by the time we get there," said Liza.

"Good," he said. "I'll tell the others, good night Mummy."

"Do you want me to take you to your room?" asked Liza.

"No thank you; there's nobody here now who will hurt me," said John and Liza breathed a sigh of relief that he was back to normal, all she had to deal with was the fact that everyone now knew of his past and she hoped that nobody would treat him differently because of it.

It was a much more relaxed dinner that evening. Charles and Henry still argued the merits of the North versus the South with good humour. Amelia and Myra carried on planning Liza's charity New York party. Miranda and Lucinda talked about how much they enjoyed one another's company. Wendell and Peter discussed business and Liza and Jamie just sat and breathed sighs of relief that they were now with uncomplicated friends.

Both Liza and Jamie carefully checked on the boys that night before they got ready for bed. Liza went to her room, but it wasn't long before Jamie could hear her padding across the hall to his room. She opened the door and smiled at him and he pulled back the bedclothes inviting her to join him.

"You can relax a little now Liza," he said as he held her tightly.

In the morning Jamie, Wendell and Peter were in the study, each behind a newspaper. Liza smiled broadly as she came in and wondered if they all would lower their papers at the same time.

"Good morning gentlemen," she said, and they all lowered them in unison and said, "Good morning Liza."

Liza laughed and they each looked at her questioningly, which made her laugh even more, but before she could tell them what had amused her Miranda and Lucinda came in.

"We wanted to talk to you about an idea that we've had," said Miranda to nobody in particular.

"Is it something private?" asked Liza.

"No, not really," said Miranda. "As you must realise Lucinda and I get on really well together and we thought it might be a good idea if she moved in with me on a permanent basis."

Three newspapers were lowered, and three pairs of eyes stared at Lucinda.

"How do you think that would work Miranda? Lucinda has a home of her own; what would happen to that?" asked Liza.

All the newspapers were now completely lowered.

"Eventually I would try to sell it or perhaps rent it out, but initially I would just close it up. I am quite confident that there would be no

problems, but just in case it would be foolhardy for me to have nowhere to return to should it be necessary," said Lucinda.

Liza could see the irony of the suggestion, "so what you would like to do is become a companion to Miranda. That's a role reversal."

"Do you feel the need of a companion Mother?" asked Jamie.

"No Jamie, but I do enjoy the company of a friend and it does seem foolish for us to have two houses when one would be sufficient," said Miranda.

"I suppose it would be equally foolish for you to move in with Lucinda when you now have such a lovely home here," said Wendell who felt that he was making an important point.

"Well of course, I am now with my son and his family and I wouldn't want to give that up for all the money in the world," said Miranda.

Two newspapers went back up, but Jamie smiled at his mother and continued to look at her.

"This is Jamie's house," said Liza, "so it's up to him to say what he thinks, but I would just like to pass one comment and it's not designed to upset anyone. The Dower House is Miranda's home and any decisions regarding staff and any other arrangements should be hers and hers alone. Your roles are now reversed and it may be difficult for both of you to adjust to your new circumstances."

"I appreciate what you are saying Liza," said Lucinda, "and there may be occasions when I forget myself, but I am hoping that Miranda will put me right over that."

"Do you have no family?" asked Jamie.

"No, there is nobody left now," said Lucinda.

"I have no objections as long as you are both truly sure that it is what you want," said Jamie.

"What about your current staff Lucinda?" said Liza.

"My maid would come with me, but my cook and housekeeper are both due to retire so I would make sure they are well provided for. I understand that a butler is needed at the Dower House so if it is acceptable to you, I could ask my butler if he would be interested in the position," said Lucinda.

"That seems sensible," said Jamie, "but will he be able to take orders from my mother instead of you?"

"We would all have to make some adjustments, but it's nothing that's insurmountable," said Miranda.

"Your two members of staff will become Edgeworth employees; you don't see a problem with that, do you?" asked Jamie.

"That hardly seems fair on you," said Lucinda.

"No Lucinda it's perfectly fair as Miranda needed a butler and your maid can assist you both, which will leave the housekeeper with more time for other duties," said Liza.

"Well, we'll see how it all works out, really you have nothing to lose, especially if you are keeping your house until you both see how you get on," said Jamie.

"What will you do about your furniture?" asked Liza.

"There are just one or two pieces that are important to me and there is room at the Dower House to easily accommodate them," said Lucinda.

"We'll go today to your house then Lucinda," said Miranda rather excitedly.

"Hmmm," said Jamie and he went back behind his newspaper and Miranda and Lucinda went off happily to organise their transport.

"You handled that very well Jamie," smiled Liza as she left the room and all three newspapers dropped and the men watched her leave.

Over the course of the next week Liza had many meetings with Wendell and Peter and on occasion Henry was included.

John seemed to settle well, and Adam started the boys' lessons again, with Derek joining them.

Lucinda moved in with Miranda and their butler, Stewart, who seemed extremely happy to be in Miranda's employ, realising that all his orders now had to come from the Dowager Lady Edgeworth.

Then the day arrived when Wendell, Amelia and Peter were to leave, and Liza and the boys felt sad at their departure, but it would only be a couple of months before they would be in Belfast for Christmas.

Myra, Henry and Charles were staying for another week before they went on their long journey to New York and then Charles on to his Southern home. The differences between the North and South were discussed frequently around the dinner table and it was difficult to believe that there may be war between them if Henry and Charles were anything to go by.

The day before they were due to leave Liza asked if they felt that their trip had been worthwhile.

"It's the first time I have been to England and it's a very beautiful country. I'm pleased I made the trip and I'm pleased to see you looking so well Liza. I'm saddened that you married whilst my back was turned, but it seems to suit you," said Charles.

Liza laughed, "It was such a surprise to see you Charles, but I was so pleased that you came. Is there no Mrs Enderby on the horizon?"

"No not yet. I'm going to have to find someone like you and you are a very hard act to follow," said Charles.

"It's kind of you to say Charles, but I'm sure there are plenty of Southern Belles who you would find very attractive and would find you equally attractive," said Liza.

"Yes, I hope you're right," said Charles.

"When are you thinking of holding the charity ball in New York?" asked Myra.

"Probably after Easter, but no doubt you will be informing people that it will be happening at the end of May or June," said Liza.

"We'll make arrangements for all of us to travel to New York then," said Jamie. "We'll take the boys and Adam and April. Who will you and Lucinda need with you mother?"

"Just our maid Jamie, but really I didn't for a minute think that you would be taking us also," said Miranda.

"You're part of our household. You'll be coming to Belfast with us also at Christmas," said Jamie.

"Oh," said Lucinda.

"Yes, you too Lucinda. Unless of course you don't wish to," said Jamie.

"That will be wonderful," said Lucinda. "Thank you, Jamie."

"Well, I don't know that we'll be up to the trip to New York, but Christmas in Belfast will be wonderful," said Miranda.

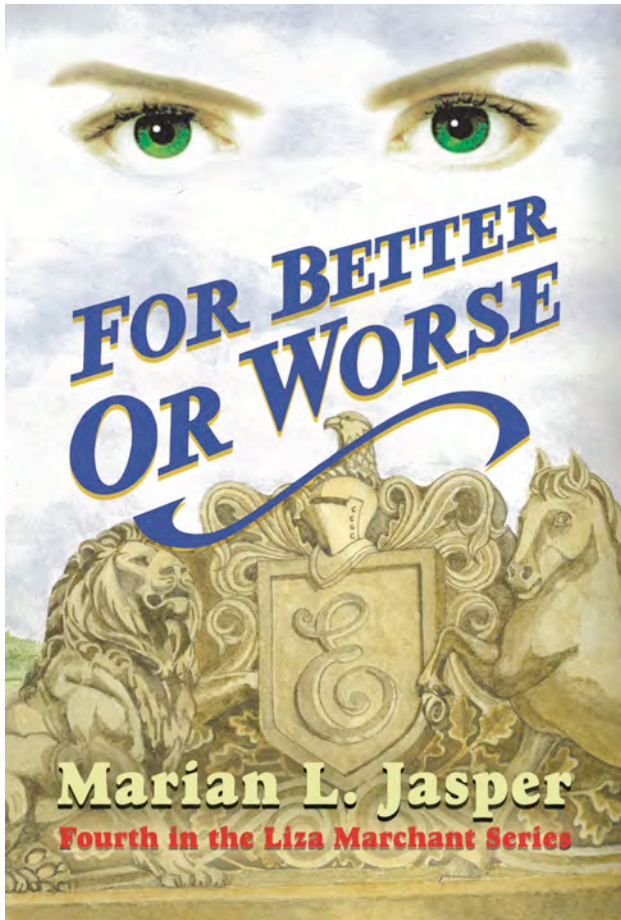
The next morning their American guests took their leave saying that they would see them again next year in May or June, and then the house seemed to fall quiet. It seemed to have been such a long while since the house had only had family within it and Liza and Jamie could now relax. The boys missed all their aunts and uncles and would much rather not have had lessons but knew that they only had to wait a few weeks and then it would be the exciting Christmas time in Belfast.

Nothing had been heard of Evelyn or Binky; they both seemed to be hiding away from society, although Evelyn had no need to feel ashamed. They presumed that Binky was at his country house as he had not been seen on the London circuit since his visit.

Anthony and Diana visited on a few occasions and the difference in Diana was remarkable and they had the wonderful news that she was pregnant. Liza was delighted but a little envious and they wanted both she and Jamie to be godparents. It was due in July and Liza said that they would come back from New York as soon as they could so that the Christening could be arranged.

Liza asked Miranda if she was disappointed that she would not be spending Christmas in her comfortable home.

“No, we’re quite happy to be coming with you, but we would be happy wherever you and the boys were. Christmas is a family time, and this will be the first time for thirty years that I will be with my family. I’m quite excited at the prospect and I’ll probably be acting like a child myself,” said Miranda.



FOR BETTER OR WORSE is the fourth in the Liza Marchant series and modern-day writer, Ellie Fuller, continues her research into Liza's life in Victorian times. She hopes that Liza will finally find contentment with the man who has always loved her. Liza's letters and diaries show that her life was never destined to run smoothly.

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FOR BETTER OR WORSE



Marian L. Jasper

Fourth in the Liza Marchant Series

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Also by Marian L. Jasper

FOR ALL TIME

First in the Liza Marchant Series

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Second in the Liza Marchant Series

NOW AND FOREVER

Third in the Liza Marchant Series

Chapter 1

Amelia was first into Liza's room on the morning of her marriage to Jamie, followed by April with her breakfast. The three boys staggered in with their breakfasts as they wanted to keep her company and she appreciated their thoughtfulness for her. When they had finished they could be heard banging on Jamie's door as they wanted to give him encouragement also and Liza had to smile and she could only imagine how Jamie was coping with them all and at the same time trying to get ready for the day. She hoped that he would also appreciate their thoughtfulness if not their visit.

Liza had a relaxing time soaking in her bath and then she slowly started getting ready for the day with loving help from Amelia. April was making sure that the boys were in their smart new suits and that they kept them clean.

Amelia went to get ready and Liza was told by her, on the pain of death, not to get her wedding outfit on until she returned, so she sat in front of her mirror and April came to make sure the ribbons in her hair were neat and tidy. She was going to wear a hat when she was in the grounds to keep the sun off, but the ribbons and gold studs which were adorning her hair looked spectacular. She was also going to wear a gold ornamental necklace which would match her cream dress and long jacket all of which were edged and interspersed with gold thread and gold beads.

It was too late for Liza to worry about anything else that day, but she was sure that it would all go according to plan. Liza heard Jamie's door open and then Amelia talking to him as he made his way along the corridor and down the stairs, she then hurried into Liza's room and she and April helped Liza into her dress and jacket, and then stood back and looked at her for some time.

“Liza, I have seen you wear some magnificent outfits, but this really is out of this world. It shimmers as you move; you look like a heavenly apparition. I’ve also seen Jamie and he looks equally magnificent; you really are a very good-looking couple,” said Amelia, “where are your flowers?”

April brought them over, and they also were a mixture of cream and gold.

“Are you ready Liza? If you are, I’ll go and fetch Wendell. The ceremony is due to start in ten minutes,” said Amelia who was beginning to panic.

“Calm down Amelia. Why don’t you go down and get seated and can you make sure the boys are behaving nicely please? I hope Wendell is on his way,” said Liza.

“You’re right, I’ll go down but first I’ll send Wendell in. Good luck my darling, I know all will be well and you’ll both be very happy,” and she shed a tear, kissed Liza and went to find Wendell, who didn’t take much finding as he was waiting outside the door.

“Doesn’t she look lovely Wendell?” said a very teary-eyed Amelia.

“She always does Amelia, but today she looks even lovelier,” said Wendell as he looked her up and down. “Are you ready Liza?”

“I just need a minute to settle my stomach,” said Liza.

“It’s the first time I’ve known you suffer from nerves Liza. You are happy with what you are doing aren’t you?” asked Wendell.

“Yes, I am Wendell and I think you would be surprised at the number of times I have felt nervous. Well, let us not keep everyone waiting too long,” said Liza as she took a deep breath and took a step forward; pushing out of her mind images of when she had been in that situation before.

Wendell kissed her on the head and said, “Come on then Liza, we have a lot to do today.” They walked down the stairs and stood for a minute at the door to the ballroom, then started walking towards the Justice of the Peace as a pianist played the wedding march. There were gasps and smiles and Jamie turned and watched Wendell lead her towards him. His eyes showed a mixture of pride, love and happiness, and her’s showed the same for him. He really did look superb and Liza gave him one of her most endearing smiles and all he could do was smile back at her.

The ceremony went ahead without a hitch and when they had taken their vows in front of the Justice of the Peace and Jamie had placed the

ring on her finger, the vicar stepped forward and said that it gave him a great deal of pleasure to be able to bless their union and he wished them every happiness and then he carried on with the blessing. Jamie then gently kissed her, and the official side of the wedding was over, and they walked out of the room together and into the drawing room where champagne was to be served.

"You look beautiful Liza," said Jamie, "but you also look a little puzzled."

"It just seemed such a quick ceremony that it doesn't feel real," said Liza.

"Yes, it was rather quick, but I can assure you that it was very real and we are now truly married," said Jamie and he had a triumphant look in his eyes.

After the champagne they all sat down to the wedding breakfast and the sound of the villagers and farmers arriving could be heard. In his role of father of the bride Wendell made a very touching speech saying that although he realised that he was old enough to be Liza's father and would be proud to call her daughter, she was also his greatest friend and business partner and the whole of the Fuller family considered her one of their own. He told Jamie how lucky he was and that he knew how much he had wanted and longed for today to happen. He said many other complementary things and finished by saying that he knew how happy they were both going to be.

Peter's speech as best man praised Jamie to the hilt, but also contained veiled threats that he had better treat Liza well otherwise he would have every member of the Fuller family to answer to. He pointed out that Jamie was not only gaining a wonderful wife but he was also gaining two more sons to run rings around him along with his own offspring, as he was sure that James, Matthew and John had great plans to twist Jamie around their little fingers. He said that he had known both Jamie and Liza for a very long time and he could see how very well suited they both were and they had now finally managed to be together. He felt that this was a union that was made in heaven. He carried on for a while and Liza was surprised that he actually made a few jokes which were really quite funny. Peter had hidden talents which made everyone see him in a different light.

Liza and Jamie then cut the wedding cake, after which a dignified and well-dressed Mrs Lambert came in and proceeded to cut slices for everyone there. When she had finished it was taken to the kitchen to be cut up along with the other cakes so that eventually everyone partying in the grounds could have a piece.

With the wedding breakfast over it was now expected that Liza, Jamie and all the guests would show themselves and join in the party in the grounds and Liza had to toss her wedding bouquet to the crowd. Liza and the boys were looking forward to this part of the day; Jamie was a little reticent as he was only comfortable with those he really knew.

Tables and chairs had been set up on the ground floor balcony and the house guests and the boys moved out of the house and took their seats and were served with wine or coffee, or both. There was a great deal of laughter from both the balcony and the guests in the grounds.

“Aren’t you enjoying yourself Jamie?” asked Liza.

“Yes, I’m very happy Liza, but today is becoming a very long day. I can see that you’re enjoying yourself, so come on let’s go and meet all the people because I know that they want to meet you,” said Jamie.

A cheer went up as Liza and Jamie walked out onto the balcony and Liza thought that such a welcome was only reserved for royalty. A crowd was gathering, and Liza and Jamie stood at the top of the steps leading to the garden watching the villagers and farmers looking up expectantly. Looking around at all the faces staring at her, she could pick out the people that she knew and she was acknowledging them and near the middle of this sea of faces was one that she didn’t recognise, who was standing next to the inn keeper and his wife. As Liza looked at her, she quickly looked away, but Liza instinctively knew who she was and didn’t want to frighten her, so she looked around at everyone gathered in front of her and they seemed to be waiting for her to say something.

Liza looked at Jamie who was totally unaware of who the lady in the crowd was and he said that the villagers seemed to want Liza to speak to them rather than him. Liza nodded and said to the crowd, “I’m so very happy that you have all come here today to join with us in our celebrations and we both want you to enjoy the day as much as we are. Some of you I already know, but some of you I haven’t yet met. Of course I will have the opportunity to meet as many of you as I possibly can this afternoon, and if I miss anyone I do apologise.”

"It is the normal practice of a bride to toss her bouquet into a crowd as she leaves with her new husband on their honeymoon and it is said that the lady who catches it will become the next bride, but today we are not going away so I would like to change that tradition and its meaning slightly so that whoever catches it has all our wishes for good luck, fortune and a happy life ahead."

With that Liza tossed her bouquet and aimed it directly at the woman in the crowd that she knew was Jamie's mother. It was with surprise that the woman caught it and stared at it for a minute and then a broad smile crossed her face as she looked up directly into Liza's eyes and Liza smiled and nodded back to her.

Jamie and everyone else on the balcony except Amelia were totally unaware of what had just happened and Amelia looked quizzically at Liza who was at that moment smiling and nodding to the woman; she would have to ask Liza who she was as something significant had just occurred between the two women.

Jamie's mother clasped the bouquet close to her chest and the inn keeper and his wife were leading her away from the crowd and seemed to be gently talking to her.

"Now that that's over Liza," said Jamie, "what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to get my hat and mingle with everyone," she said brightly, and Jamie looked at her as if she was mad. April was sent upstairs to fetch Liza's hat and she called the boys over to her. "I'm going to meet everyone and see that they are enjoying themselves, do you want to come with me?"

She was greeted with a chorus of "Yes" from the three boys who were now finding the event rather boring and thought it would be good to find others of their own age to talk to and play with.

The afternoon was progressing well with all the villagers enjoying their food and drink and they were especially enjoying Liza chatting to them. The boys had found some children of around their own age and they were talking and playing nicely with them. Liza slowly made her way to the Innkeeper and his wife, who were making it obvious that they were trying to hide Jamie's mother from Liza.

Liza looked directly at his mother and said, "There's no need to hide from me. Are you staying at the Inn?" she asked.

The Innkeeper and his wife were looking decidedly uncomfortable and Liza smiled at them and told them not to worry about anything.

She moved closer to Jamie's mother and all she asked was: "Have you managed to see him on many occasions?"

"I have tried to see him sometimes when he was at school, I couldn't come to the village much as his father may have seen me, but I have been a few times since his father died. Mr and Mrs Rogers from the Inn let me know if anything special is happening and I try to get time off from my employment so that I can come and see him," said Jamie's mother.

"I'm pleased you made it today," smiled Liza, "and I'm also pleased you caught my bouquet."

"Even if I lost my position, I was not going to miss today," she said. "You aimed your bouquet at me on purpose, didn't you?"

"I thought you deserved it. Jamie doesn't realise who you are does he?" said Liza.

"No, and perhaps it's best if he doesn't know. It's a long time ago that I left, and it would probably only upset him. He's done very well without me, so please can we leave it that way?" said Jamie's mother.

"If you truly want it that way, then it's your decision. However, I'm not going to start our marriage by lying to him if the question arises, but I don't expect it to. Have you met your grandson?" asked Liza.

"No, today is the first time that I have seen him," said Miranda Edgeworth.

"Well you should be introduced to him," said Liza who called to Matthew who was nearby.

"Are James and John near?" asked Liza.

When Matthew said that they weren't far she asked him to find them as she wanted to make sure they weren't doing anything silly.

"They're not," said Matthew but he went to find them anyway. They came over and Liza asked them what they were doing and they replied that they had been watching as some people were getting ready to play some music for dancing.

"Oh, I'll look forward to that. Do you all know Mr and Mrs Rogers?" said Liza avoiding pushing Miranda Edgeworth too much to the fore.

They all nodded "and this is their friend Miss Miranda, who has come here specially for today."

Liza introduced Matthew to her, followed by John and then James who she explained was Lord Edgeworth's son. All three were very polite but really wanted to get back to watching the musicians get ready for the dance.

When the boys had left Miranda Edgeworth said, "Thank you. That has meant a great deal to me."

"I wish circumstances were different, but I will respect your wishes and try not to let your son know who you are, although I believe that to be a mistake," said Liza and she smiled at her and moved slowly away towards where the dancing was beginning.

There were a couple of villagers who were violinists, although they were probably called fiddlers, and an accordion player and someone who played the flute, and they were all warming up and sounded rather unusual, but when they started playing properly it sounded lively and it was obvious that everyone had every intention of enjoying the rest of the day.

Liza looked up and saw that all the house guests were making their way to where the music was playing, but Liza couldn't see Jamie and she surmised that he was organising the surprise that he had promised her.

A lively jig was being played and Liza knew most of the steps and when she walked onto the dance area, she looked around at the sea of faces who were wondering what she was going to do. Her eyes alighted on the young assistant to the local tailor who Liza knew had no interest in women and he charmingly agreed to partner her.

There were a few gasps but a great deal of laughter and as the music continued Liza started dancing and as always, she knew how to play to an audience and on several occasions throughout the jig she turned the wrong way and had to be turned back by several helping hands. She danced in and out of the line of people as she should and then started back when she should not have done. By the time she was being swung gently around she bumped into her partner and knocked him sideways, although she was never sure that he hadn't done it on purpose as she had done. Finally, she ended up facing the opposite way to everyone else, much to the great amusement of all those watching.

Whilst Liza was half way through the jig Jamie and Peter wandered over to where all the music and laughter could be heard, and the crowd

parted for them and he caught sight of Liza dancing a jig very badly with a rather overly smart young man much to the amusement of the crowd.

"I wonder why she's always in the middle of something chaotic and is often the instigator of it?" said Jamie to nobody in particular.

John had moved over to where Peter was and he said, "My daddy always used to say that." Jamie looked down on him and said kindly, "I'm sure he did John? And he was right."

Wendell and Amelia moved over to them and they were laughing along with everyone else.

"Don't look so concerned Jamie. You should know that Liza knows every step of that jig, but she didn't want anyone to think that she was above them," said Wendell.

"She's done you a great favour Jamie. The people already liked you both, but now they love you and they'll feel able to approach you without fear and enjoy being part of the Edgeworth estate," said Amelia. "You can rest assured that Liza knows what she's doing."

"I seem to have a lot to learn about my wife," said Jamie.

"You'll really enjoy doing that won't you Jamie," said Amelia. "She's looking for you; she wants to dance with you Jamie and show everyone how good you are together."

Liza caught sight of him and smiled, her dress was shimmering in the lanterns which were now alight. Jamie moved forward and took her in his arms and whisked her around the dance area to the cheers of the onlookers. Joseph and Lily were now dancing, and Edward was leading Nicole onto the floor. Many of the villagers were also joining in. Anthony could be seen trying to persuade a rather shy Diana to dance, which she finally did.

Amelia moved across to where Miranda Edgeworth was standing in the shadows and said, "Liza aimed her bouquet at you, and it took me a little while to guess why she had done that. I saw your smile when you were watching her dancing the jig and you not only looked like young James, but also like Jamie when he smiles. I believe that you are Jamie's mother."

Miranda looked rather frightened and Amelia assured her that she wasn't intending to hurt her in any way.

"I don't know how she knew but she caught sight of me and she somehow recognised who I was," said Miranda. "It was my intention to

see them fleetingly and then leave, but I am still here and I don't know why; I should have gone a long while ago however I am mesmerised by her."

"Many people are; she sees things that others don't, but she will always try to do what is right for everyone," said Amelia. "She is my oldest and greatest friend and is like a daughter to me and whatever she wishes to happen I will abide by. You should not fear her as she will keep her own counsel and try to make life easy for everybody. I'm very glad that we have met and I just want you to know that your son is a fine man and will make Liza a good husband."

"Thank you. I believe she will make him a very good wife; he seems very happy with her," said Miranda and both she and Amelia stood for a moment watching Jamie and Liza dancing.

"Are you getting tired yet Liza?" asked Jamie pointedly.

"I am getting a little tired Jamie, but I'm also rather hot after my efforts at a jig and I think I'd like a bath when we get back. I'll have to organise some water to be taken to my room," said Liza.

"Leave it to me Liza, as I have a few surprises for you, but if you want to soak in a bath, I'm not going to stop you. I might even join you," said Jamie.

Liza smiled up at him and her eyes sparkled at the prospect of him joining her in the bath and whatever surprises he had in store for her.

"I think we had better do the rounds of everyone and leave them all to continue enjoying themselves. I must make sure the boys are behaving properly and April is on hand for them; after that I'm all yours Jamie," said Liza with a cheeky grin.

When the dance had finished Liza went to find April and the boys, and Jamie found Mrs Frances to organise water for the bath in his room. He wanted Liza in with him that night rather than he went to her. He had food and champagne set out in his room and Liza's nightclothes had been brought there. The bed was strewn with rose petals and now they were also going to luxuriate in a comfortable bath. He was looking forward to having her to himself at last and the thought made him smile happily.

He didn't want to make it obvious that he was now going to take Liza to his bed, so he slowly made his way towards his house whilst Liza was talking to April and the boys, who were going to be allowed to stay up very late that night. They also knew not to disturb either Liza or Jamie until

they were seen the next day and Amelia was going to help April with them when it was finally their time to go to bed.

Liza walked into the house and up the stairs and was suddenly lifted off her feet and carried by Jamie into his room. He put her down and locked the door and Liza said that there were things in her room that she needed.

"There's nothing that you need that I haven't already got for you here Liza," said Jamie and she looked around and could see that her nightdress was laid out on the bed and her dressing gown was hanging in his wardrobe.

Jamie popped a champagne cork and poured some into two glasses and handed one to Liza. "I just want us to toast one another now Liza before you get out of all your finery and relax in a bath that is all ready for you. I have been so very proud of you today and you've made me so happy. It's a day that I never thought I would ever see."

"I'm very happy and proud of you also Jamie," and they toasted one another.

Jamie laughed and took Liza's glass from her as she started to take her wedding dress off. Jamie helped her and he gently hung it in his wardrobe while she took the rest of her clothes off and slowly lowered herself into the bath. It was a wonderful feeling as the warm water covered her and she told Jamie how much she was enjoying the relaxation; it had been a day when they had both been constantly in demand and understandably so.

She could hear Jamie moving in his room and then he appeared in his dressing gown. "Is there any room for me in there Liza?" he asked.

Liza moved slightly to one side and Jamie gently eased himself in beside her. "It's not exactly comfortable is it Liza?"

"No, but it's very friendly," laughed Liza. Unfortunately Jamie lost his footing and slipped, completely covering Liza in water as he tried to save himself. They both ended up laughing and decided that this was not a very good idea. Jamie crawled out of the bath and wrapped himself in a towel. He then in turn helped Liza out, opened his towel up and wrapped her in it with him.

"There was a time not so long ago that I never thought I would see you smiling, and certainly not laughing the way you are now," said Liza.

Jamie held her closely and said, "Well, Liza, you made me very unhappy for many years. I know that I was very young and foolish when I first approached you and then you left, and you were never available every time I saw you after that time. It's taken a long while, but I have exactly what I have always wanted now; I hope you are as truly happy with our marriage as I am."

"Of course I am Jamie," said Liza and she smiled up at him and as always it made him feel very confident.

He helped dry them both off and passed her nightdress to her. It was her green silk one which she had worn before. "Jamie, I have new nightwear which I wanted to wear for you. I can just go and get it," said Liza.

"I want you to wear this one; it's the one you wore when you came to me and allowed me to make love to you for the first time. I really want you to show me again how you excited me that time," said Jamie. "First shall we have supper; I know you think you don't want anything, but we have some very nice and tasty small dishes to try, and plenty of champagne to keep us well lubricated."

"Yes, Jamie, it'll be nice to sit and relax with you and talk to you about the lovely day I've had, and all the people who helped make our day so very special," said Liza.

The music was still playing in the grounds and people could be heard singing and laughing and Liza thought that it was a beautiful background to their intimate supper. Jamie had donned a very attractive nightshirt and Liza looked at him with appreciative eyes and they both enjoyed just being alone with one another and talking about the various happenings of the day. They nibbled quite a few of the dishes and Jamie poured another glass of champagne each and by this time they were both eyeing one another with interest.

Liza was looking forward to sleeping with Jamie that night, but she felt like playing a little to start with, so she slowly undid the strings of her silk nightdress and pushed it gently off her shoulders. She picked up her champagne glass and poured some of it on her neck, shoulders and chest. Jamie watched her with surprise and then realised what she was asking him to do and he came over to her and licked all the champagne from her.

Liza stood up and let her nightdress fall from her as she had when she had first gone to Jamie. He in turn removed his nightshirt and pulled her

into his body and held her there for a short time before moving towards the bed and laying her gently on it. Jamie leaned over and picked up the champagne bottle and poured a little on her breasts and stomach and then started to lick it from her again amid giggles from Liza as she squirmed and wriggled against him.

She could see him watching her and she giggled again and slid down the bed and opened her legs for him and he consummated their marriage perfectly, bringing her to a superb climax without any difficulty at all.

They settled down comfortably together in bed still listening to the music, laughter and singing happening in the gardens.

Jamie still could not believe that she was here with him and he hoped that he wouldn't wake up from this dream as he had done so many times in the past. Liza moved nearer to him and said, "We certainly didn't need any practice to achieve that. We are obviously very well suited."

"Hmmm," said Jamie uncertainly.

"What's the matter Jamie?" asked Liza. "You are sounding unsure."

"I don't want to go to sleep because if I do I may wake up and find that it has all been a dream yet again," said Jamie.

"Oh Jamie, I don't know what I can do to convince you that I'm real and so are you," said Liza.

Jamie laughed at his own stupidity and said, "Just keep doing what you always do, which is be happy and make everyone else happy, especially me."

The music had stopped and Liza and Jamie could hear many of the house guests making their way to their rooms. There were noises in the hall outside their door and a frantic whispered voice of April telling the boys to go to their room. Amelia could also be heard quietly calling to them to come to her.

"Yes, we will in a minute," Matthew could be heard saying.

Jamie quickly covered Liza and himself with the bedclothes, but he need not have worried because all each boy wanted to do was say goodnight and firstly Matthew called, "Goodnight Mum and Dad", and John said the same, followed by James.

Both Liza and Jamie called out "Goodnight boys."

"That was nice," said Jamie. "So, we are Mum and Dad now. They wanted to let us know how they felt."

"I believe that having responsibility for three boys will make you realise that perhaps you would like to wake up from that dream," said Liza.

It took a good hour for the house to quieten down, but noises could still be heard in the garden as the servants were making an effort to clear some of the debris from the area.

Liza and Jamie lay in each other's arms and quietly talked of their past and planned their future.

"Who was that woman who caught your flowers?" asked Jamie. "I thought I recognised her from somewhere."

"She was with Mr and Mrs Rogers from the Inn. I think she visits quite regularly," said Liza carefully.

Jamie and Liza dozed on and off throughout the night and made love several times. "I love being in your room Jamie; I feel very comfortable and relaxed in your bed."

"I wanted you in my bed tonight, rather than me being in your bed," said Jamie.

"I can understand that Jamie. You wanted to feel that you were making me yours. But it would have been the same in my room. I hope you will also come into my bed on occasion, after all you changed that room especially for me," said Liza.

In the morning the boys could be heard racing down the stairs to their breakfast despite the fact that they had not gone to bed until very late. Nobody was going to disturb Jamie or Liza, although Liza had arranged for water to be brought up to her room by nine o'clock with breakfast for them both in her room at ten o'clock.

"So, Liza, I arranged last night and you have arranged this morning," said a sleepy Jamie. "It's only eight o'clock. Have you any thoughts on what we might do for the next hour?"

"Oh, I think we might manage to think of something," laughed Liza, and of course they did.

Later that morning, as Liza and Jamie came into the drawing room, the boys rushed up to them shouting "Good morning Mum and Dad," much to the amusement of everyone there, although they could see that it pleased

both Liza and Jamie. They decided to go for a walk with the boys before lunch as the boys seemed so keen to be with them.

After lunch Anthony and Diana said they were going to leave shortly and Liza said that she was sorry to hear that as she had organised a picnic in the grounds for the next day and she would have liked them to stay for that as well as dinner that evening.

“Do you have any particular reason to return today?” asked Jamie.

“No, but we have imposed on you enough already, especially as you were not expecting us,” said Anthony.

“Well, Liza has said that she would like you to stay, and it would be churlish of you to deny her that pleasure,” said Jamie with humour.

Anthony turned to Diana and asked her if she felt well enough to stay for another day or so.

“I would like to stay for a while longer if I may,” said Diana.

Liza smiled at them both and went off to tell Mrs Frances that they would be staying longer than expected.

The boys and men were organising a game of cricket at the next days’ picnic, and Matthew asked if they could invite some of the boys that they had met the day before. Jamie seemed a little unsure whether any of the village boys should be invited.

“James has never mixed with them before,” said Jamie.

“Well, perhaps it’s time he did,” said Liza.

“I’ll leave the decision to you Liza; I’m sure you know best,” said Jamie.

“We’ll quickly have to go and see their parents now,” said Liza to the boys, so she organised that she drove with them into the village that afternoon.

Their first call was on the grocer who had two sons. He was very surprised to see Liza and he mumbled a greeting, tripping over his own feet to come forward. Liza smiled at him and told him the reason for her visit. He called for his wife and when she saw who was visiting, she was just as tongue-tied, luckily their two boys appeared and greeted Matthew, John and James like old friends and eased the situation.

Liza was invited into their back parlour, which was not unlike Kathy and Joe’s in Benson, and she accepted a cup of tea. She asked if there were other boys of a similar age to theirs that she wasn’t aware of as she didn’t want to upset any children.

"Well, there's the baker's son and he also has a daughter," said the grocer's wife, at which all the boys pulled faces which conveyed that they didn't want any girls around.

"Where would you all be without girls?" asked Liza in a way which silenced any arguments. "I'll go and see them when I've finished here. By the way, I wouldn't put your boys in their Sunday best clothes as there will be fun and games and I know that my boys always manage to find the dirtiest place to play, so the older the better."

"There's also Mrs Price's two, but the boy can't walk, he had a terrible accident when he was small; his sister wheels him around mostly," said the grocer.

"Well that shouldn't preclude him from having some fun. Was he there yesterday, I don't think I saw him?" asked Liza.

"No, Mrs Price wouldn't want to embarrass anyone," said the Grocer.

"Why would it embarrass anyone?" asked Liza. "It wouldn't embarrass me or any of my guests. Is the boy the one who is shy? Perhaps he feels that he needs to hide because he may feel that he looks hideous?"

"He doesn't look hideous, in fact he is quite good looking," said the grocer's wife. "I believe his mother doesn't want him to be pitied."

"Well, one thing he won't get is pity from me or my family and friends," said Liza. "Anyway, I'll see what his mother says; obviously the decision will be hers."

Liza arranged the time that she would collect the boys the next day, thanked them for the tea and took the boys to visit the baker.

The baker and his wife were busy in their kitchens and they in turn were surprised to see Liza and the boys. The invitation was extended to their son and daughter and once again Liza told them not to put them in their best clothes as they would probably be returning to them very much the worse for wear after a very strenuous cricket match.

Finally, Liza went to see Mrs Price who shyly invited her and the boys into her front parlour.

"I understand that you have a son and daughter around my boys' age," said Liza. Mrs Price nodded saying that she was correct.

Liza explained that they were having a picnic the following day and it would be nice if her children could join them for the afternoon and that some of the men and children were organising a cricket match.

"I don't think you realise that my son is bound to a wheelchair, so he wouldn't be able to join in, besides he likes to stay mostly out of sight and my daughter looks after him," said Mrs Price.

"I know of your son's condition Mrs Price, but I can pick both your son and daughter up and there is nothing to stop him enjoying the picnic and watching the cricket match. We would watch over him well and your daughter would be there to help if necessary," said Liza. "I can't see that there would be a problem, unless of course you don't really want him to come to us."

"I don't want him to be stared at and made fun of," said Mrs Price.

"People will always look, Mrs Price, but I can guarantee that nobody will make fun of him," said Liza.

"Please can we go mother," said a girl's voice coming from the next room. A very pretty girl came into the room. "I promise I'll look after Derek and you know how he loves cricket."

"We'll look after him too," piped up Matthew and the others nodded.

"Mrs Price, I can assure you that I will not tolerate any untoward comments about Derek whether they were to come from anyone within my household or the children who will be joining us tomorrow," said Liza.

"Well I suppose it would do no harm for him to spend a little time with you all," said Mrs Price.

"Perhaps it would be a good idea to ask him," said Liza, "after all this discussion he may not wish to come to us."

"Yes, I do. I'd like to come please," said Derek who was wheeled into the room by his sister.

Liza smiled and said that she was pleased to meet both Derek and his sister, who was called Susan. She nodded at Mrs Price and told her that nobody was dressing up for the occasion; it was just going to be a fun afternoon.

As they left the house they could see both Derek and Susan smiling broadly, and Liza thought that it may be the first time that they had mixed properly with other children.

On the drive home Liza asked what the boys thought about all the children who would be coming to the picnic the next day. They were pleased about the boys, but the girls were not going to be very interesting. None of them mentioned Derek or his disability.

Liza arrived back in time to see Jamie before they had to dress for dinner. Anthony and Diana were with him in the drawing room along with Wendell and Amelia. Jamie asked her how she had fared with the boys and their new friends.

"They all accepted so we shall see them tomorrow. I also saw a Mrs Price who has a son and daughter and they will also be joining us. Her son had a serious accident some years ago and he is now confined to a wheelchair, but it will do him good to meet with other children," said Liza.

"Do you think that's a good idea Liza? Won't it be difficult taking care of a cripple? I'm not sure I want James to have to face anyone who is not as the rest of us," said Jamie.

All eyes turned to Jamie and then over to Liza and from the look on Liza's face Jamie realised immediately that he had certainly said something wrong.

"Well Jamie, I'm surprised you feel that way. I would hope that should Matthew, John or even James be in a similar situation you would not be pleased if they were ostracised because they could not walk. I would have thought that because of your role as a patron of the children's charity you would have felt more compassion for a child with a disability, but if you really don't want James to catch sight of young Derek then I'm sure arrangements can be made for him to stay in his room for the afternoon," said Liza with a very audible sniff.

Wendell stared into the distance as Amelia looked up at the ceiling. Anthony and Diana said that they would get changed for dinner and Jamie looked at Liza and knew that they were not going to have an argument as he would give in to whatever she wanted and she was right, he would not tolerate any of the boys being left out of any gathering because of a disability, so why would he have thought that it should be the case for young Derek.

Jamie continued looking at Liza and smiled; he loved that determined look on her face. "Well Liza, I'm not going to argue with you and certainly not on the day after our wedding. You are right; I would not allow any of our boys to be hidden away just because they couldn't walk. I apologise for making a very silly and thoughtless comment."

The smile that Liza gave him made it worth their slight disagreement and Wendell and Amelia breathed a sigh of relief. Liza said that she was going to rest for a short while before getting dressed for dinner and Jamie

said that he would also, and they left and could be heard laughing and racing one another up the stairs. There was a shriek as they reached their rooms and a slamming of a door and then silence. Wendell and Amelia looked at one another, "Would you have ever expected Jamie to do that?" said Wendell.

"No, but if anyone was going to achieve that it would be Liza," said Amelia. "It's hard to believe that Jamie once tried to kill her, but you know what I always say . . ."

"Yes, Amelia, I know what you always say; love and hate make strange bedfellows," laughed Wendell.

At dinner both Liza and Jamie had happy smiles on their faces and plans were being made for the following day's picnic and cricket match, although there were not going to be enough people to have a two-sided match, but they would enjoy it anyway. They would just have to count the runs of each batsman to find the winner.

After dinner and when the men had joined the ladies in the drawing room, it was decided by most of them that an early night was in order as they were going to have to prepare themselves for an energetic time the following day.

Once April had helped her out of her dress, Liza told her that she could manage the rest herself and she donned the nightdress and dressing gown that she had wanted to wear for Jamie on their wedding night. It was cream like her wedding outfit and was also edged in gold thread. When she was ready, she picked up her candelabra and opened her door just as Jamie also opened his door. He seemed surprised that she was going to join him rather than the other way around, but he stood to one side and Liza walked past him into his room.

He took the light from her and placed it on a table and then stood and looked at her, "I can see why you wanted to wear that for me last night, but I still like your green one as it gives me such good memories."

She took off her dressing gown and climbed into his bed and snuggled down comfortably. "You like my bed don't you Liza?" he said.

"I like your room Jamie; I feel very welcome and at home here. My room is very comfortable, but I like being here with you and sleeping here," said Liza.

Jamie sat on the side of the bed for a few minutes and realised that Evelyn had never been in his room; he had always instigated their being

together and that wasn't often. He knew that he should not be comparing wives but the contrast between them was startling and he now felt very wanted. He knew that Liza must also feel wanted because that was exactly what he showed to her as he truly wanted her now and it was how he had always felt throughout his adult life.

"You look very tired Liza," said Jamie.

"I'm not too tired for you to love me Jamie," said a sleepy Liza, which gave Jamie a great deal of pleasure.

They were up early the next morning as there was a great deal to organise before Liza went to collect the children from the village. Edward was going to be with her as she needed somebody to help strap on Derek's wheelchair to the back of the large open carriage and lift him into one of the seats.

Derek and his sister Susan were ready and waiting for them; the grocer's sons, Cliff and Arnie, came running over to help with the wheelchair once Edward had lifted Derek into the carriage. The baker's son and daughter, Leo and Jane, saw what was happening and they too came over to see if they could help. Liza looked at them all and realised that nobody had taken any notice of her telling them not to wear their best clothes as they all looked very well dressed and she supposed that their parents had their pride. *Let's hope they don't get too messy;* thought Liza and she could see how excited the children were.

Their parents had been watching from behind net curtains and were surprised to see Liza helping the children into the carriage together with one of His Lordship's guests. They had only expected one of the staff drivers to be sent. They saw Liza turn around and grin at all the children and say something to them and they all seemed to be smiling and nodding and off they went towards Edgeworth House.

Matthew, John and James were waiting for the carriage to arrive and they greeted their friends and helped with Derek's wheelchair and went off towards the picnic area, John having taken charge of Derek. They totally ignored the girls, much to Liza's annoyance, but the girls seemed happy enough to walk with everyone else to the picnic area which had already been laid out in the field that had been identified as the best one

for a cricket match and it would also be near the lake. Luckily the day was very warm and bright.

Everyone was slowly making their way to the picnic site and they could see the boys standing around and talking to one another with Derek being very much the centre of attention. John seemed to be the one to take charge of him and Derek was expounding the rules of cricket to them. The bats were in a pile waiting for the game to start although that was going to be after lunch. One or two of the boys picked up a bat and started practicing their movements amid a great deal of laughter.

The two girls were helping to set the cloths out and arrange the food and drink. April was busy helping Mrs Lambert and Mr Lambert was setting out chairs for those who didn't want to sit on the ground.

The boys moved away, and Liza could hear Matthew boasting the virtues of having a lake in the grounds and Liza was pleased to see that Joseph and Lily were keeping the boys well within their sights by taking a walk around the lake. It seemed that John had taken charge of Derek and he and Leo were pushing the wheelchair. She could see that they were all stopping every now and again to let Derek look at something or touch a plant and Liza thought that children sort out situations by themselves and seemed not to really treat someone with a disability any differently to someone without; they just adapted to whatever the circumstances were.

Liza could see that several of the guests were watching what the boys were doing, not least Jamie who came over to her to tell her that she had been so right to insist that young Derek joined them as he and the boys seemed to be enjoying the occasion.

"You always seem to know the right thing to do," he said to her.

"Oh Jamie, if only you knew how many times I have made the wrong choice, but I think that this is one of my better ones," said Liza.

The boys were called to tell them that the picnic was ready and they ran back pushing Derek ahead of them bumping over uneven ground and he was laughing loudly. His sister, Susan, was watching with some concern, but they all arrived safely.

Food was being handed around and Liza was pleased to see that Diana was making sure that the children were cared for. Susan and Jane seemed happy to stay near April. Liza and Amelia checked that all was well and then they both settled down to enjoying the afternoon.

Once everyone had eaten and rested for a while, Jamie started organising their cricket match. The men were going to start, but the boys would be taking their turn between each man. Derek said that he could try to play if they would let him and there were discussions as to how he could do this and they came up with the idea that somebody could take his runs for him as it was quite possible for him to sit and bat the ball. He would have to sit in a chair without arms and wheels, but that would be easy for him. Next they had to decide who would take his runs for him; the boys didn't want the girls to do it, but Matthew, John and James looked towards Liza, having previously seen her efforts in their games of cricket and so much to her horror she was elected to take his runs and she seemed to have no say in it. Jamie was grinning at her and Edward and Joseph had evil looks in their eyes. Peter, who was to be the bowler, kept a straight face and told her to expect no favours and neither should Derek.

Luckily there were quite a few batsmen before it was Derek's turn and when it was everyone stopped talking and started watching with interest. Derek was set up on a rather precarious chair sideways in front of the wicket and Liza tucked her skirt up which meant that she was showing part of her underwear. She told Derek that she would take the runs regardless of whether he was still sitting in his chair or lying flat on the ground. She took up her position to one side of him, hoping that Peter's aim was good and that she would not be in the line of fire.

Derek was very good at hitting the ball although he hit it with such force that he fell off his chair, but Liza took no notice of that and she was off running and got there, back and there again before the ball was back with Peter. Cheers went up and Edward and Joseph ran over and put Derek unceremoniously back on his chair.

Nobody had realised that naturally Derek had great strength in his arms, so he was skilled in hitting the ball well and Liza was off again, and once again Derek was on the ground with Edward and Joseph running across to pick him up. This time cheers were intermingled with laughter. After half an hour Liza was almost exhausted but Peter finally managed to knock the wicket with his bowling and Edward and Joseph picked Derek up for the final time and placed him in his wheelchair and as they wheeled him off the pitch he was greeted with loud cheers. He had really enjoyed himself regardless of the fact that he was probably covered in bruises and Liza realised that she would undoubtedly have to explain the reason why

to his mother. He was now sitting on the side-lines cheering on all the other players; he had become one of the boys and firm friendships had been made that day.

The afternoon was coming to an end and Liza told all the house guests that they would be having a casual meal that evening and that they were to dress comfortably. Their meal was going to be leftovers from the picnic and several cold meats with salad and as much fresh bread as they could eat. Mrs Lambert had made an enormous sherry trifle for them and there was also fresh fruit and cheese. In fact they were going to help themselves to whatever they fancied; there was also going to be plenty of wine but Liza was insisting that there would be no men drinking port and smoking cigars, everyone was going to treat the evening as a party especially organised for those who would be leaving the next day.

The village children were making their way towards their transport home; Matthew, John and James insisted that they went with them, which meant that the carriage was overcrowded but somehow they managed to all climb aboard. Once again Derek's chair was tied to the back and everyone was surprised to see Jamie climb up and take the reins with Liza by his side. They were all laughing, and the children started singing a song that was unfamiliar to Liza and the boys, but Jamie knew it and joined in.

They drove into the village and stopped outside Mrs Price's house, but the other parents came out of their houses to help 'His Lordship' although they really wanted to make sure that they were really seeing him surrounded by children and helping Derek into his wheelchair. Once again John took charge and pushed him towards his front door and Liza followed knowing that she had to tell Mrs Price that Derek had fallen over several times during his game of cricket.

"Mrs Price," said Liza, "I'm afraid Derek enjoyed joining in the cricket match but each time he hit the ball he fell off his chair. I know no serious damage has been done to him, but you will probably find that he has quite a few bruises. I'm sorry about that, but he did enjoy the game and we enjoyed watching him."

"I did Mum," said Derek, "I really did, and it was worth any bruises I may have."

Liza was suddenly surrounded by all the children and they were chorusing how much Derek had enjoyed the game and how well he had

done. Mrs Price looked slightly confused for a moment and then smiled and thanked Liza for including him.

"He included himself Mrs Price," said Liza, "he did exactly as he wanted, and all the children have accepted him as he is, and they enjoyed his company. I know that they would like to see him again, if they may."

"Any time they will be welcome Lady Edgeworth," said Mrs Price. Matthew and John sniggered, and Liza frowned at them.

"I apologise for my sons Mrs Price, but they are not used to my new name and I have to admit that I'm not either," said Liza.

The villagers waved as they started back to the house and Jamie remarked how successful the afternoon had been.

When they arrived back, the boys went straight to the kitchen as their stomachs were telling them that a while had passed since they had eaten. Liza and Jamie went to their rooms to change and Liza decided on a very pretty afternoon dress for the relaxed evening that she had planned.

They all congregated in the dining room and when everyone was there Edward said that he had an announcement to make, which of course they had all been expecting. He and Nicole were now engaged and were planning to marry in the spring. Jamie ordered champagne to toast them with and Liza knew that this time Edward would be very happy. Annalise and Arthur smiled with pleasure as did Wendell and Amelia. Peter nodded his approval and Joseph and Lily were smiling at them. Liza thought that another announcement from Joseph would probably follow shortly.

It was noticed that Diana was holding a glass of champagne and Anthony was frowning. Liza moved over to her and she said, "Just a sip or two Liza, to wish Edward and Nicole well."

"You have been such a pleasure to have with us Diana; I do hope that you feel that it has all been worthwhile. It does concern me that even one sip may undo all the good that you have done recently, but it is not up to me to tell you how to run your life, however I really do wish you well and hope to see you again soon," said Liza.

Diana looked from Liza to the drink that she had in her hand and put it down on the table and smiled, "you're right; one drink could set me on the wrong road again. I wish I could sit and drink wine with my meal and leave it at that, but I think I will never be able to do that again."

"No, you probably won't be able to, but there are many other drinks that are just as nice and not alcoholic. Soon you may not even think about it," said Liza.

The evening went very well but everyone seemed tired after their day in the fresh air and soon they gradually made their way up to their various bedrooms. It didn't take Liza long to get into her nightdress and dressing gown, but she hadn't heard Jamie's valet leave, so she lay on her bed listening. It wasn't long before she went to sleep.

Jamie was surprised not to find her coming into his room and he waited a short while but then he couldn't resist going into her room, which was where he found her fast asleep on her bed. He was about to get on the bed beside her when he thought that this was not where she really wanted to be, so he quietly opened her door and then moved across the hallway and opened his door, then returned and lifted her and carried her to his bed. He gently removed her dressing gown and then lay her down in his bed and covered her. During all this she did not wake up. Jamie climbed in beside her and blew out the lamp and she did what he remembered her doing in America and that was to move over and put her head on his chest and carried on sleeping. Jamie smiled in the dark and thought how lucky he now was; he had what he had always wanted.

In the early hours of the morning Liza woke and at first wondered where she was; she didn't remember getting into Jamie's bed, but she was quite happy to be there. She moved her head from his chest, and this woke him.

"I don't remember getting here Jamie," said Liza.

"I brought you here Liza; I knew you liked being in my bed," he said.

"Yes, I do Jamie. There's nowhere else I'd rather be right now," said Liza as she moved nearer to him and he thought that he would take advantage of the situation and he lifted her nightdress and spent a great deal of time loving her.

Several of the house guests were leaving the following afternoon. Peter was champing at the bit to get back to work and he would be travelling with Annalise and Arthur which meant that Nicole would also be leaving, so Edward decided to travel with them. First to leave were Anthony and Diana. They extended an invitation for Jamie, Liza and the

boys to visit at any time and it was made clear by Jamie that they were very welcome to return whenever they wished.

The large carriage was brought around to start the journey home for Peter, Annalise, Arthur, Nicole and Edward. They said their farewells and thanks for a wonderful time, and the house was beginning to empty. The boys were quite happy as they would still have their friends in the village, and Wendell and Amelia were remaining for a few days and they considered them grandparents and they always spoiled them. Their Uncle Joseph was also staying for a while as was Aunt Lily and her mother and they always had fun with him.

Liza would miss Amelia as they had spent a great deal of time together and she had been so supportive and helpful in the lead up to her marriage. Amelia had told her how much she had enjoyed acting as the bride's mother and Wendell had been proud to act as her father.

The dinner table that night looked quite depleted and Liza moved up to sit next to Jamie with Wendell next to her and Amelia opposite with Joseph and Lily and Jennifer Armstrong next to Wendell. It all looked and felt very intimate and it was then that Joseph made his announcement that Lily had done him the honour of accepting his proposal of marriage. They hadn't set a date as they wanted Edward and Nicole to organise their wedding first and have the pleasure and excitement just for themselves and then they could have all the fun and excitement of arranging their own wedding.

"That's very thoughtful of you both," said Jamie. "I'm very pleased for you and I can see that you are going to be very happy. We will have to have another toast." He rang for Harper and ordered champagne for them all.

"It's been quite a week for weddings and engagements," said Liza. "Did Edward know that you were going to get engaged?"

"He knew that it was in my mind, but I didn't want to steal his thunder. He's had such a sad and difficult time over the past few years that he deserves to revel in his happiness without our butting in," said Joseph.

Amelia, Wendell and Jennifer were smiling broadly, and it was obvious that they all approved of the situation.

"You and Jamie need to organise some time away alone," said Amelia. "You have both been on duty keeping all your guests happy when you

really should have been getting to know one another. I could stay and make sure the boys are well cared for.”

“Well, it would be better if the boys came to us Amelia,” said Wendell who obviously wanted his wife back home with him and he would put up with three boys disrupting his peaceful household to achieve that.

Jamie and Liza smiled at one another and Jamie said that they would give it some serious thought.

Chapter 2

That night they discussed all that had happened since Liza had arrived at Jamie's house and the changes that had taken place. He admitted that he really hadn't taken much notice of the people in the village; he knew his tenant farmers more but was beginning to realise that the villagers were just as important; they relied on him and to an extent, he relied on them.

"I wonder what happened to young Derek; you said that he'd had an accident and I suppose nothing could be done to help him. He seems a very bright lad though," said Jamie.

"Yes, he does seem quite bright. I suppose he's spent a great deal of time reading. I'll ask Mrs Lambert, she seems to know most things about the village people," said Liza.

Liza took off her dressing gown and climbed into bed and leaned back comfortably as Jamie said, "Perhaps you could also ask her who the woman was who caught your flowers," and Liza realised that he was staring at her closely.

"Hmm," said Liza making no further comment.

Jamie came over and sat on the bed and stared at her again saying nothing for a while.

"I believe I know who she is Liza, and I think you definitely do. It puzzled me for a few days because she seemed familiar to me and then it came to me earlier this evening when James came in to say goodnight and I realised why I seemed to know her; he has her smile and eyes," said Jamie.

"He has your smile and your eyes Jamie," said Liza quietly, "and your mother's nice nature."

"She left me Liza and my childhood would have been very different if she had wanted to stay," said Jamie.

"Having met her I find it difficult to believe that it was her choice to leave you; not only has she made extreme efforts to see you whenever she could, she still is held in high regard by the people around here. They have kept her informed about anything they think she would find important," said Liza.

"Why did she make herself known to you and not me?" asked Jamie.

"She didn't Jamie, I recognised her immediately I caught sight of her. You see I have had the advantage of seeing a great deal of James over the years, I have seen him grow and there was no mistaking the resemblance between him and your mother, but also I have had the pleasure of looking at you and much as in the early days of my knowing you a smile rarely crossed your lips, since we became more closely involved I have loved seeing that wonderful smile that you show to those who you know well," said Liza.

"Have you arranged to see her again?" asked Jamie.

"No, she didn't want you to know how much she has missed you and watched you from afar; she didn't think that it would serve any useful purpose and would be bound to upset you. I told her that as that was her wish I would not tell you, but I wouldn't lie to you if such a conversation occurred," said Liza.

"I thought that we would never keep any secrets from one another Liza," said Jamie.

"There's a difference between a secret and a confidence. I will never break a confidence unless it endangered you and the boys and anyone else that I love and I would have expected you to be the same," said Liza.

"I want you to know that you can tell me anything and it will go no further. I know that up until now you have kept your own counsel, but you no longer need to as you now have me to listen and help with whatever it is that could be worrying you," said Jamie.

"Thank you, Jamie, but there is nothing worrying me at present. I will always have business matters that I wouldn't bother to discuss with you but the promise I gave to your mother was done with the best of intentions on both our parts. What do you want to do about it?" asked Liza.

"I don't know; I'll have to think about it," said Jamie. "You have to appreciate that I have spent my whole life without her; do I need to see her now?"

"And you also have to appreciate that she hasn't spent her whole life without you; she has seen you at every opportunity. She has watched you grow and probably it has broken her heart to be without you, especially when you were so very young," said Liza. "But you are right, you will have to think about it and the choice will be yours alone."

"I wonder why she left; I had heard that she went off with somebody, but my father was a notorious liar," said Jamie.

"She seemed a very nice lady. I'm sorry if I have upset you Jamie, you know I would never do anything to hurt you," said Liza.

"And you know I would forgive you anything and also do nothing to hurt you. I promise you I will think about what I will do," said Jamie.

"I'll ask Mrs Lambert about Derek tomorrow; we may be able to do something to brighten his life and that of his sister while we are here," said Liza.

"Perhaps when you have a minute you could go and see the Innkeeper and his wife as they seem to be close to my mother," said Jamie who found the word 'mother' difficult to say.

"Don't you think that perhaps you should also come with me to see them," said Liza.

"I don't think that they would talk so readily if I were there with you," said Jamie.

"You're probably right," said Liza as she yawned and settled down in bed again. "I wonder if we could take some time away; Wendell didn't seem to want Amelia to stay on any longer and I can understand that."

"We'll see how we feel when everyone has left," said Jamie as he climbed into bed.

Liza was up early the next morning as she wanted to get into the village and attempt to see the Innkeeper and his wife before lunch, but first she wanted to talk to Mrs Lambert about Derek. Harper was in with Jamie in his study and Liza asked him to send Mrs Lambert up to see them; he looked slightly puzzled but went off to find her and deliver Liza's

message. Jamie was sitting in his comfortable chair reading his newspaper when Mrs Lambert came in looking slightly flustered.

"Sit down Mrs Lambert," said Liza and she smiled at Mrs Lambert who was perched uncomfortably on the edge of a chair. "We wanted to ask you if there is anything you could tell us about young Derek's accident. I don't want to embarrass his mother by asking what she may feel is none of our business, but the family seem to have to cope in very difficult circumstances."

Mrs Lambert relaxed a little, "Yes, Mrs Price has not had an easy life. Her husband turned out to be a man of violence especially when he had been drinking; she often could be seen with a black eye and unfortunately one day his violence was turned on young Derek; he was only three or four at the time and from what I have been told he started screaming when his father hit out at his mother again and wouldn't stop, but his father made him stop all right. He picked him up, threw him out of the way and he unfortunately landed on his back across a heavy metal fire grate. He's never been able to walk since."

"What happened to her husband?" asked Liza and Jamie looked up and over the top of his newspaper.

"There is some justice in the world," said Mrs Lambert. "A week later he got drunk again and fell off the cart that he was driving – broke his neck. It's a pity that it hadn't been a week earlier. Since then Mrs Price has worked hard doing anything and everything to keep a roof over her family's head. The people in the village helped as much as they could, especially in the early days before she had work. She takes in washing, she cleans other peoples' homes, she's picked fruit; she has even been known to help behind the bar at the Inn."

"Who owns her house," asked Jamie suddenly.

"I believe you do my Lord," said Mrs Lambert. Jamie raised his eyes to heaven.

"I suppose you don't know what the doctor said about Derek," said Liza.

"I only know that she was advised to take him to a doctor in London, but she couldn't afford to do that. We tried to raise enough money for her, but we just couldn't manage the cost. It was not only for the London doctor; she would have had to hire special transport and of course have

somewhere for them to stay. It was well out of reach of all our pockets,” said Mrs Lambert.

Jamie threw down his newspaper and demanded to know why she hadn’t come to him. “Am I considered such an ogre that nobody thinks I would help in such a case. I am not inhuman; I am quite approachable.” Jamie was showing great annoyance and Mrs Lambert looked quite taken aback.

“Lord Edgeworth is right Mrs Lambert, he would have been quite capable of helping with the doctor and arranging proper transport and accommodation,” said Liza.

“With all due respect to his Lordship, I know that Mrs Price did have the courage to come to you but you were away at the time, I think you had made a sudden trip to America. She saw your former wife who said that she would think about it, but Mrs Price heard nothing from her although she did come to see her again, but Lady Edgeworth had left for Paris I believe,” said Mrs Lambert.

“Oh” was all Liza felt she should say but Jamie was more outgoing. “Do you mean to tell me that for the sake of a few pounds that child may have been able to walk again? I cannot believe that Evelyn would have been so thoughtlessly unkind and selfish,” by this time Jamie was showing great annoyance. Liza went over to him and put a hand on his arm and he looked up at her and his temper started to ease.

“I suppose it’s now too late to do anything for Derek,” said Jamie thoughtfully. “Liza will you go and see Mrs Price and ask her permission for me to talk to the village doctor please.”

“Of course I will,” said Liza and then she turned to Mrs Lambert and thanked her for her time and the information she had given them.

Jamie was still in what could be termed ‘a high dudgeon’, “I’m really annoyed at Evelyn’s coldness towards a needy family,” and then he said nothing for a short while noticing that Liza was not commenting. “I know what you must be thinking and you’re right, I should have known that story. I have spent my time here being aloof from the people around me. All I have ever thought about is me and James and the land that makes me money, but mainly what has always been on my mind is how I could win you over to me. I have not even thought of the villagers and farmers as people and certainly not concerned myself with their welfare. What a terrible landlord I am and having been with you here for just a few weeks I

can see why the people like you. You are quite capable of talking to anybody and you show them that you are genuinely concerned for their welfare. Do you know I believe that my mother may also have had that ability?"

"I don't know what happened to your mother, but I think that whatever it was she was not in control of the way that she had to leave you. I also think that she was cared for by the people of the village when she may not have had anywhere else to go, but you must appreciate that I have no real reason to think that, it is only my own supposition," said Liza.

Amelia and Wendell had been taking a walk around the grounds and came in to see if there were any plans for the day.

"No, I have a couple of calls to make in the village and then I shall be back to be with you all this afternoon and I have planned that we have tea on the terrace as it is such a beautiful day and my time with you both is going to be limited until we come to Belfast for Christmas, which sadly is nearly five months away," said Liza.

Liza's carriage was waiting for her and she firstly gave instruction to stop at Mrs Price's house. Susan answered the door to her and said that her mother was hanging washing out in the garden and that she would fetch her.

"Don't worry Susan, I'll go and find her," said Liza as she made her way to the back of the house and Susan showed her to the door. Mrs Price was shocked to see her and apologised for her appearance and the state of her house.

"Please Mrs Price don't worry about that; I've called unexpectedly and besides I can see very little wrong with your house," said Liza. "Mrs Price, Lord Edgeworth was very impressed by Derek's determination to ignore his disability and join in with everything that the other boys were doing. He had no idea how Derek was hurt in the past and asks if you would have any objection to his talking to your doctor about his condition and if there is anything that can be done to help. He realises that it may be that there is no remedy, but he would like to pursue all possibilities."

"With all due respect to your Ladyship, any remedy is years too late," said Mrs Price.

"I know that you must feel that Mrs Price but Lord Edgeworth is very annoyed that he was not made aware of your request for help years ago and he would now like to see if there is any possibility that it may not be too late. He does not, however, wish to get your hopes up unnecessarily," said Liza.

"I have no objection if he wishes to talk to the doctor, but I truly think that it will be a waste of his Lordships' time," said Mrs Price.

"Good," said Liza. "We'll see what happens."

Liza then made her way to the Inn much to Mr and Mrs Rogers' surprise. They ushered her through to their back parlour and offered her tea and cakes. Liza smiled and thanked them. "I think you must realise why I'm here."

They both shook their heads, but they were not very good liars. Liza sighed and carried on, "I know that Lord Edgeworth's mother was at our wedding. I could immediately see the similarities between them, as could Lord Edgeworth."

Both Mr and Mrs Rogers looked shocked and concerned.

"Lord Edgeworth had always believed that his mother had run away with a man, but he is beginning to think that it was probably untrue. I had the pleasure of talking to the lady and can honestly say that she did not seem the type of person who would have willingly left her son, especially as she has made sure that she knew how he was and what he was doing throughout his life. That is not the sort of woman who would leave her son for the sake of an illicit relationship," said Liza.

"You are right, Miranda Edgeworth did not leave her son, she was forced out, in fact she was literally kicked out of the house and managed to make her way to where we were living at that time. She was in a very bad way and my wife and my mother nursed her for a couple of days but then her husband turned us out of our house and accused me of being her lover," said Mr Rogers.

Liza sat and asked if the accusation was why she had been 'kicked' out of the house in the first place.

Mrs Rogers answered, "The real reason was because Lord Edgeworth had lost once again at the gambling tables, blaming her for his lack of luck and the fact that there was no money left from her dowry to cover his debts. He told her to get out of his sight and when she protested saying that their son needed her, he beat her mercilessly with his walking cane,

opened the front doors and kicked her down the steps. Apparently he shouted at her to go to her lover for comfort."

"He blackened her name and tried to blacken mine, but my wife and her family and my mother knew the truth and there was plenty of room here for us all, including Lady Edgeworth. Prior to all this there had been many times when we had to bathe her cuts and bruises. The whole village and farmers knew the truth and in some ways it was best that it happened to us because losing my job and home was a blow, but we had family to fall back on. If it had been anyone else then it could have been disastrous for them," said Mr Rogers.

"So throughout more than thirty years you have kept in touch with her, and told her whatever you knew was happening to her son," said Liza

"We have done the best we can to keep her informed. We know your cook and gardener quite well and they tell us anything that they think she should know and if she can she comes and stays with us or tries to go to wherever he is. She could not go to Belfast for his first marriage; although I don't think she would have been happy seeing that one. It was common knowledge that he married her on the rebound thinking that you were dead; she knew that too. She was delighted when she heard that he had finally found the person he really wanted and was going to marry you. In her letter to us she said that even if she lost her employment she was going to come here for your wedding," said Mrs Rogers.

"You have no idea how overjoyed she was to be introduced to her grandson; and to catch your flowers, but she was very nervous because you had realised who she was," said Mr Rogers.

"I want to thank you Mr and Mrs Rogers for being so open with me; I'm sure there is a great deal more you could tell me, but I have to digest what you have said before I inform my husband of what occurred all those years ago. He has begun to realise that all was probably not as he had been told. What his reaction will be and what he may want to do with the information I'm afraid I don't yet know, but I should be grateful if you would kindly give me his mother's address just in case he wants to get in touch with her," said Liza and when they had given her that information she left having once again thanked them for their kindness now and over the past years.

Liza was very thoughtful on the way home; she was wondering about the best way to tell Jamie the truth of what he had believed to be his

mothers' desertion of him, after all it was going to blacken his father in all their eyes.

Jamie was out with his overseer when Liza arrived home and Amelia noticed that she was rather distracted but the information that Liza had was for Jamie's ears only. Instead she talked about her visit to Derek's mother and how Jamie was now showing an interest in him. Amelia was not fooled by this, but she knew better than to question her further.

Liza was resting thoughtfully in her room later that day when Jamie came to see her, and she told him how Mrs Price would be pleased for him to talk to the doctor about Derek but how she felt that it was too late to do any good.

"And Liza I can see that there is something else on your mind, so obviously you have managed to talk to the Innkeeper and his wife. Are you going to tell me how you got on?" asked Jamie.

"Yes, I did Jamie," said Liza and then she formed in her mind several ways to start the conversation, but each one she discarded because for once diplomacy eluded her.

Jamie looked at her and smiled, "Come on Liza. Tell me what it is that you found out and don't spare my feelings. I don't like to see you troubled and certainly not on my account. I'll have to see Mr and Mrs Rogers myself if you are having such difficulty talking to me. You must remember that I told you that there is nothing that you cannot talk to me about and what you are holding back from me does concern me."

"Yes, of course Jamie," said Liza and she told him everything that Mr and Mrs Rogers had said and when she had finished, she couldn't bear the tremendous look of sadness in his eyes.

"If what you have told me is true Liza, then my mother must have gone through hell for over thirty years. How very sad she must have felt and how sad I feel now. I am so fortunate to have you and the boys to cheer me up, but she has had no one for so long," said Jamie and he stayed with her for a while and then went to get prepared for afternoon tea saying that he would like to discuss the situation with her later.

Jamie appeared to be his normal self at tea. The boys had joined them and they always made for an entertaining time meaning that Jamie could keep his thoughts to himself and nobody noticed that his mind was elsewhere. After tea Liza had some last-minute arrangements to make for dinner and she also had to make sure that the boys had learned the lesson

that she had set for them earlier, so it was some time before Liza could find Jamie to talk to. He was sitting quietly in his study and staring into space; he looked up as she came in and smiled at her in what appeared to be relief.

“Do you want to see Mr and Mrs Rogers yourself?” Liza asked Jamie.

“Maybe, I’m not sure that they will feel easy in my company,” said Jamie.

“I don’t think you should worry whether they feel easy in your company or not, you should make up your mind if you wish to know more about your mother from them, or if you would prefer to hear it directly from her,” said Liza.

Jamie had always been very decisive about what he wanted, and this was to be no exception. “I want to see and talk to my mother although I think that my turning up on her doorstep would be a mistake for both of us. However, if you were to turn up on her doorstep, I believe it would be the way to go about this situation, especially as you have already spoken to her,” said Jamie. “Would you be prepared to do that for me Liza?”

“If it is the case that she has been very badly mistreated and misunderstood, are you prepared to take her into your care Jamie? Please don’t give her hope and then take it away from her. It would be better to leave well enough alone and not contact her at all,” said Liza.

“When I was a boy, I dreamed that my mother would return and love me again and I thought of nice things that I would do to make her love me as I believed that she cared nothing for me. As I grew older the thought of her left me and I just became used to my father having different women around; some I got on well with, but mostly there were those who ignored me. I was sent to boarding school when I was very young so it wasn’t until I was much older that I came into contact with my father and his women but by that time I cared very little for women and believed that the way my father treated them was the way of the world. When I met you Liza you know that I made the biggest mistake of my life by offering you a life just like my father extended to his women. It was as you were ejecting me from your house that I realised just how much I loved you and wanted you and how much I had missed a mother’s guidance in matters of love,” said Jamie.

"I don't really see your point, Jamie, apart from the fact that you had a rather unloved upbringing which would possibly have been different if your mother had been with you," said Liza.

"My point is that although I did not have my mother's guidance, I did have her love even though I never knew it and that I have very little reason to doubt the appalling way my mother was treated by my father as I saw how he treated some of his women, although he tried not to completely face me with his bad humour, especially when he lost at the gambling tables. I believe that the time has come for my mother to have a change of fortune and if I can do that for her then I think we will all be happy," said Jamie.

"Would you set up the Dower House for her?" asked Liza.

"Yes, that is where she should be and hopefully she would have no further worries, but she may not wish to leave where she is, the choice would be hers," said Jamie.

"I'll set cleaning of the Dower House in motion tomorrow and I'll then go and see your mother and find out what she would really like to do. I do however think that she will realise how much she is wanted if you were also to visit her with me," said Liza.

"I understand what you are saying but I believe that we both need privacy for our first meeting. Also, won't it be a little soon to get the Dower House ready after all she may not wish to live there," said Jamie.

"It should be cleaned and set up correctly regardless of whether she wants it or not. You don't want it to go to rack and ruin which it will do if it's not looked after," said Liza.

At dinner Jamie surprised Liza by announcing that his mother had been found and Liza was going to visit her on his behalf the following day.

When everyone had digested the surprising announcement, Wendell asked why Jamie was not going to accompany Liza on such an important mission.

"My mother is not aware that I know of her whereabouts, or even the fact that she is alive. I believe that my facing her suddenly would not be the right way to get to know her. Liza already knows who she is and has already met her; she has also gained information about the circumstances of her difficult departure from my life. I am astounded by the loyalty that my mother has received from the villagers and farmers here. They have all known of her whereabouts but kept this to themselves for her sake. I am

also impressed by the fact that whenever possible she has watched me from afar. She was at our wedding and she was the woman who caught Liza's bouquet," said Jamie.

"I would like to go with you tomorrow Liza," said Amelia and she surprised even Liza by saying that she knew who Jamie's mother was and had spoken to her at the wedding, but she had respected her wish to remain unknown to Jamie.

"Thank you, Amelia; I would be very grateful if you would accompany me tomorrow. It is not going to be an easy meeting, but I hope that eventually it will be a happy one," said Liza.

Questions were being asked of Liza and Jamie, but there was nothing important that they could answer about his mother as it was such a new situation for them. Amelia, Lily and Jennifer were interested in how the Dower House was going to be arranged and both Lily and Jennifer said that they would look it over whilst Liza and Amelia were going to see Jamie's mother; they seemed quite excited at the prospect.

Wendell and Joseph concerned themselves with how Jamie was going to feel by being confronted with a mother that he didn't know, but who obviously had made it her business to know him. Jamie admitted that he was a little nervous at the prospect, but his mother had every right to live with them and be cared for by them and he felt sure that in return there would be a great deal of affection shown towards them by her.

"Of course we don't know the whole story," said Wendell, "but it does seem as if she was not treated as she should have been, and her life has not been easy. It must also have had an adverse effect on your early life Jamie."

"Who knows how my life may have been if she had been around. All I know is that I am at last perfectly happy, but I may have achieved that earlier if I'd had the advantage of my mother's influence," said Jamie.

That night as Liza was about to move into Jamie's room, her door opened and he told her that he would like to come to her. Liza smiled at him and told him that she wanted to be wherever he was.

"Your room is so very like you Liza; I just feel like sleeping here tonight if you have no objection," said Jamie.

"Of course I have no objection," and she climbed into bed and patted it for him to join her. He laughed and jumped in beside her and all the

concerns of the day disappeared as they spent a great deal of time loving one another.

The morning saw everyone up bright and early. Mrs Frances was organising the cleaning and renovations in the Dower House and Lily and Jennifer offered to help in whatever capacity she felt was needed. Wendell and Joseph also asked what they could do to help and Mrs Frances found a few tasks for them to undertake.

Jamie was going to spend the morning with the village doctor to find out if anything could still be done to help Derek and after that he was going to visit Mrs Price to discuss matters with her.

After breakfast Amelia and Liza got ready for their journey to Miranda Edgeworth, but first they both spent some time with the boys, although they did not tell them what their mission was that day.

Before they left Jamie handed Liza a letter for her to give to his mother and she steeled herself not to ask him the content. He saw the look of concern in her eyes and he said, "I know you will give it to her if you think she would be receptive to it. All it says is that I have been made aware that she has watched over me as much as she has been able to over the years and that I would now be honoured if she would in turn allow me to watch over her from now onwards. I have assured her that I became aware of who she was because I recognised the family resemblance between her and my son at our wedding and that no confidences were broken."

"I will do my best to persuade her Jamie. Are you sure you would not like to come with me? I know it would probably disturb her to start with, but I know she would get over that quickly," said Liza.

"No I believe our first meeting should be private for both our sakes," said Jamie.

They took a large, comfortable carriage with two drivers for their journey which was going to take them at least two hours. Amelia asked her how she intended to handle the meeting with Miranda and her employer.

"I think that once we have introduced ourselves to her employer and made her aware of exactly who Miranda is, I believe that she will no longer be employed," said Liza.

"That's a little harsh of you Liza. She will then have no means of support," said Amelia.

“Exactly, that’s what I’m hoping. She’ll have no choice but to come with us after that,” said Liza.

“That seems a little risky for her,” said Amelia.

“Amelia, once we turn up on the doorstep her life will be different anyway. Her employer, a Mrs Peabody, can’t ignore who she is. The only alternative is for us to not call and see her at all. Jamie wants to see her and wants to talk to her; if we don’t do so I know that he will, and he knows that he will probably make a mess of it. He truly has no idea how they are going to approach one another, which is why they need us to start the proceedings,” said Liza.

They finally arrived at the house, which was not too large but had a driveway to the front door. The butler came to their carriage and Liza handed him her calling card, which he immediately took to Mrs Peabody and in no time at all he was back inviting them into the house. One of their drivers assisted them down and the butler escorted them into the drawing room in which a lady of around sixty years of age was waiting to greet them.

She welcomed them to her home and asked the reason why they had honoured her with a visit.

Liza introduced Amelia to her and then said, “I have heard that you have a very good heart Mrs Peabody and that you have been so kind to my mother-in-law over the past few years giving her employment when her family should really have taken responsibility for her welfare. Of course she was too proud to make herself known to us and you kept her confidence even though no doubt you believed she should be where she really belonged.”

Mrs Peabody was looking completely confused and Liza butted in before she could ask any questions. “You are the sole of discretion and I can see that you do not want to break the confidence of the Dowager Lady Miranda Edgeworth, and I truly appreciate that, but if you could please send someone to ask her if she is prepared to meet with us again, I should be more than grateful.”

Mrs Peabody mumbled “the Dowager Lady Miranda Edgeworth; Miranda Worth?”

“Yes, I understand she does use the name Miranda Worth,” said Liza innocently.

"If you don't mind your Ladyship, I'll go and find her myself. Please enjoy your tea and I'll bring her to you shortly," said a very bemused Mrs Peabody as she disappeared through the door.

"Well Liza, we're about to find out whether you have played your hand correctly or not," said Amelia.

"I know, I think I sounded more confident than I felt," said Liza.

They could hear voices coming from somewhere above them, but there was no sound of annoyance and then footsteps could be heard coming down the stairs and a very pale faced Miranda Edgeworth walked into the room, followed closely by Mrs Peabody.

Liza walked over to Miranda and put her arms around her and whispered how very pleased she was to see her again and then for Mrs Peabody's benefit she kissed her on the cheek and said, "Good afternoon Mamma, I am so happy to find you looking so well. Obviously Mrs Peabody has taken very good care of you."

Miranda looked rather nervous and said, "I am surprised to see you both; I had not expected a visit so soon after your wedding."

"I am sorry, but I couldn't resist seeing you again as our meeting was necessarily so very brief due to the number of guests that I had to see and make sure were well catered for. Perhaps Mrs Peabody wouldn't mind us having a little time to talk," said Liza.

Mrs Peabody suddenly stood up and said that of course they should have some privacy, but Liza said that there was nothing that she need not hear or join in with. Liza's ploy worked as Mrs Peabody wouldn't hear of it and said that she had one or two things to organise in the kitchen. Amelia said that she would be interested to see Mrs Peabody's kitchens; in fact she would like to see all her house and grounds, especially as she had noticed one or two plants that she would like some advice on.

When they had left Liza turned to Miranda and said, "Please don't think that I broke my word to you, and neither did Amelia but it took Jamie only a couple of days to work out who you were and I couldn't deny it. In fact I have a letter from him to you, but before you read it I want you to know that he asked me to visit Mr and Mrs Rogers on his behalf as he felt that you may have been maligned in the past and knew that they were more likely to talk to me than to him. Recently, before we married, I told him that you had probably kept a watchful eye on him throughout his life and at first, he just thought that I was being sentimental. The other day his

son came to him as he did every day; it may have been the way the light caught him or for some unknown reason, but he suddenly saw your face in his smile. I can see your face in Jamie's smile. Do you want to read your letter now, or would you prefer to be alone?"

"I don't need to be alone. Do you know the content?" asked Miranda.

"I had no idea that he was going to write to you. He asked me to give it to you just before we left this morning. He briefly told me what he had said, but of course I have not read it," said Liza.

Miranda opened her letter and read it slowly, she put it in her lap and then picked it up again and read it a second time.

"He is saying that he wants to watch over me now," tears were now pouring down Miranda's cheeks, "what does he want me to do?"

"He now understands how much you suffered at the hands of his father and would like you to become part of his family as you rightly should have been over the past very many years. He knows that you both will have to get to know one another, but I don't think that will be very difficult. In fact he wants that to happen so much that the Dower House is already being made ready for you, so that you can have your own house, and staff as you should always have had. In the meantime there is plenty of room in the main house for you as you are well aware," said Liza.

"Liza, I am scared. He may not like me; we may not get on. I don't know if it is a life that I am capable of adjusting to now," said Miranda.

"You and I get on and you have a beautiful grandson and two step grandsons to help you. Don't forget that you also have all your friends in the village to make you feel comfortable. You have a great deal of support from a great many people and at last you also have your son wanting you near him. There is no need to feel scared; change that feeling to excitement because it will be an exciting time for you," said Liza.

"I can't leave Mrs Peabody in the lurch," said Miranda, as neither she nor Liza realised that both Amelia and Mrs Peabody had come into the room.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Mrs Peabody. "You must not give up such a wonderful opportunity to be with your family for my sake. I will eventually find another companion, but you only have one family and you must be with them. I wish I had a family who wanted me around them. I will help you pack, come on Miranda – or should I say, 'Your Ladyship', let's go and

gather up what you want to take with you now. You can always send for anything else at a later date."

"Firstly," said Liza, "we must establish that it is exactly what she wants."

"Of course it is," said Mrs Peabody and then she stopped and asked, "Isn't it?"

"It's what I've dreamed about for so long," and she started crying again.

"I hope that you will find the time to come and visit us Mrs Peabody. I'm sure her Ladyship will be anxious to show you her home when she has settled," said Liza, knowing that this would delight Mrs Peabody and give her something to boast about to all her friends. "Is there anything we can do to help?"

"Good heavens no; we can manage, can't we?" Mrs Peabody said to Miranda who nodded.

When they had left the room Liza looked over to Amelia and asked her how she had managed to achieve winning over Mrs Peabody. "I'll tell you later," said Amelia, "but I think the icing on the cake was your invitation to her on behalf of your mother-in-law."

The butler came in again with more tea and cakes and they both noticed that he had a slight smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes. When he had left Liza and Amelia smiled at one another and Amelia said that he appeared pleased with what was happening.

"Yes, I think that Mrs Peabody has not been completely kind to my mother-in-law, but she's making up for it now. She probably treated her the way many ladies treat companions who have nowhere else to go. I do hope that Miranda will settle in well with us and I hope that Jamie can relax in her company eventually," said Liza.

"She'll be happy enough as you'll make her so and Jamie will come to love her because you will. Don't forget all the boys will be happy that they have a new grandmother which I know will please her," said Amelia.

"You are as much their grandmother as anyone. That's how they think of you, but I don't think of you as a mother, you are my greatest friend and confidante. You were always kind to me Amelia, especially when I was so very young and needed so much guidance. You've seen me through so many traumas; I shall miss you when you go back to Belfast, but we will all

be with you for Christmas as usual and that's something I shall look forward to," said Liza.

By the time they had finished their tea and cakes Mrs Peabody and Miranda had come back into the drawing room. "I've had her bags put into your carriage," said Mrs Peabody. She turned to Miranda saying, "Now my dear, I wish you well in your new home and look forward to being able to visit you and your family when you have settled. I trust you will not forget me after all the years we have spent happily together."

Liza doubted that many of the years had been happily spent together, if indeed any had been, but now was not the time to pass such a comment. With Miranda's bags packed safely at the back of the carriage, they started on their way back home with a very quiet and bemused Miranda. Liza and Amelia carried on a conversation about generalities giving Miranda time to consider all that had happened to her and what her future might hold.

"Will Jamie be there?" asked Miranda.

"Yes, but he's not going to come rushing out to try to sweep you off your feet. He knows that you both must quietly get to know one another. You will probably be confronted by three inquisitive boys, but I'll do my best to not let them overwhelm you," smiled Liza.

"I really appreciated your introducing me to my grandson. His name is also James, isn't it?" asked Miranda.

"Yes, he is known as James, whereas your son is known as Jamie," said Liza.

"I used to call him that and it obviously stuck. I'm surprised as I should have thought that his father would have insisted that he was called James," said Miranda.

"It was probably less confusing to keep him known as Jamie. I find it easier as his son is also James," said Liza.

"You know that Liza won't let anything untoward happen to you. She will protect you and ease any tensions that may occur, although I believe them to be unlikely. We are all very fond of your son, but I think you will have to appreciate that he can appear rather aloof until you get to know him," said Amelia at which Liza frowned at her. "Well, it is true Liza, you have to admit that those who don't know him could accuse him of being pompous; it's only you who have made him show his true character to the outside world."

"You're frightening my mother-in-law Amelia," said Liza. "Please don't worry Miranda; I know he'll be happy when he sees you and when you are safely settled under his roof, and so will I and the boys."

"You are going to have to see what you want done to your house. That's going to be fun for you. Sadly I will have to return to Belfast in a couple of days, so I won't be able to help you with that. I wonder if I should stay on a little longer," said Amelia thoughtfully.

"When you suggested that the other day, Wendell told you in no uncertain terms that he wanted you at home with him. You know he misses you, but that is up to you to sort out with him, just don't ask me to interfere," smiled Liza.

Miranda Edgeworth asked many questions about Liza and her family. She tried to avoid questions about Jamie, but eventually she wanted to know what his life had really been like since she had left. "I have known Jamie since I was seventeen; prior to that I had no knowledge of his life, and there were many extended times that I knew nothing of what he was doing but he always seemed to come to my rescue whenever I needed him."

"I know that you have been married and widowed a couple of times, I also know that Jamie has loved you since he first saw you and I know that sadness brought you to this point, but I can see that you have come through that and you are both now happy. I hope that I can make you and your family pleased to have me with you," said Miranda.

"There's no fear that we won't be pleased. You've read Jamie's letter and there's no doubt that he wants you with him and is looking forward to getting to know you. He knows that you have tried to see what he has done over the years and that has meant a great deal to him," said Liza.

They finally swept up the drive to Edgeworth House and Miranda looked at it cautiously. "There's no need to be intimidated by the house. You were here only the other day; you had the courage to come here then with no invitation; you are here now by invitation from your son. Come on, let's get you inside and settled in your temporary room and when you are ready, I'll bring Jamie to you. You don't have to face him alone if you would prefer my being there with you," said Liza.

As they entered the house it appeared that Jamie was not at home and April came forward and helped with Miranda's bags and went with Liza up to Miranda's room. "I'll help you get organised" said April as she

started unpacking her bags. She pulled out an evening gown which was rather dated but nobody said anything, and Liza thought she would look well enough in that for dinner. She also thought that they were about the same size, although Liza was a little shorter, so by the next day a dress or two could be altered to fit.

There was a slight commotion at the door and of course the first face to appear around it was Matthew's. The boys had been told that there was a likelihood that James' grandmother would be coming to stay with them, and their inquisitiveness had got the better of them, but naturally Matthew was the one who always pushed forward first.

Miranda caught sight of him and smiled and beckoned him into the room. He was immediately followed by John and James. "We thought we'd come and welcome you," said a cheeky looking Matthew and the other two nodded.

"Thank you," said Miranda, "That's very thoughtful of you all." She was talking to all three, but her eyes were only on James.

"I saw you at the wedding. I didn't know you were my grandmother then," said James somewhat puzzled.

"No you didn't then, but you do now, and I'm so happy that we have now met properly," said Miranda. "So I have three grandsons, aren't I lucky?" said Miranda and all three boys nodded their agreement at her words.

"Have you had your supper yet?" asked Liza knowing what the reaction would most probably be.

"No, but it must be ready now. We'll see you later," said Matthew and they could be heard bounding down the stairs on their way to the kitchen. Miranda looked surprised at the speed that they had all disappeared.

"Nothing gets in the way of their supper," said Liza by way of an explanation and Miranda laughed.

"Your two boys look so very different," observed Miranda.

"Yes, one is by birth, but both are by choice," said Liza knowing that eventually they would talk more in detail.

By this time most of Miranda's belongings had been unpacked and put away, she really had very little to bring with her. "Would you like to rest for a while before dinner? April will come and help you get ready and I'll come and escort you down," said Liza.

"There's no need for you to do that Liza, I would like to escort my mother down to dinner," said Jamie who had quietly appeared in the doorway. There was an intake of breath from Miranda which turned into a small sob and the look on Jamie's face revealed that he was also very near to tears. Liza looked from one to the other and decided that neither she nor April were needed there at that moment, so she ushered April out of the room, glanced at both Miranda and Jamie once more and left closing the door behind her.

Liza was feeling a little tired so she made her way to her room, decided on what she would be wearing that evening and realised that she had at least an hour before she had to get ready for dinner. She wondered what was happening between Jamie and his mother and hoped that all was going well. She prayed that Jamie was making it easy for Miranda to relax and was not acting too aloof with her, although she had seen his face as she left, and aloofness did not appear to be part of its makeup.

Surprisingly sleep came to her relatively quickly and when she awoke she found that Jamie was sitting quietly on her bed, deep in thought. "Ah, I'm glad you're awake," he said. "I just wanted you to know that I find that I like my mother very much, but I do find it difficult to think of her as a mother; I think of her as a friend rather like Amelia. I wonder if I will ever be able to feel that she is my mother. I believe that the boys will accept her as a grandmother quite easily."

"Well then Jamie, if you treat her as well as you treat Amelia, then I don't think she will have any reason to complain and perhaps in the fullness of time you will learn to love and appreciate her as a mother. She needs the support of all of us as she is now in a situation which she is not used to, although she should have been here for many years and enjoyed your company during all that time," said Liza.

"You're right; for the moment I'll treat her as a very dear friend and accept her as part of our household," said Jamie and as he noticed Liza's slight disappointment at his words he said, "Don't worry Liza, I will make her feel wanted here and she has a nice enough nature to fit in well with us all, but you can't expect either of us to feel totally at ease with one another after all these years of separation."

"I have a feeling that it won't take too long for you both to feel at ease together," said Liza as she got off her bed and started to get ready for the evening. "It was a very nice gesture of you to want to escort her down to

dinner. I was concerned at how your first meeting would be, but that was a wonderful way for you to break the ice. Well done Jamie."

Suddenly he became the Jamie that she knew and loved asking her which room she wanted them to sleep in that night. "Yours of course Jamie; it's where we are the most comfortable, isn't it?"

"All right, my room it is, but I'm quite comfortable wherever you are," said Jamie and he leaned over and kissed her gently on her head which brought the sparkle to her eyes and a smile to her lips which gave him a promise of things to come.

As he left April came in to help her into her dress and when this was done Liza asked her to see if Jamie's mother needed her assistance.

"I have been into her and she was already dressed for dinner, but I will go back to make sure she is alright," said April who knew that she must feel rather nervous about the evening and said that she would wait with her until His Lordship came to take her down to dinner.

Liza went down to make sure that the dining table was set as she wanted, and that Harper knew where the Dowager Lady Edgeworth would be sitting that evening. She wanted her placed next to Jamie with Wendell on the other side of her. Jamie was as always at the head of the table with Liza next to him and opposite Miranda. Amelia was to be next to Wendell and Jennifer next to her. Liza would have Joseph on her left with Lily at his side. Wendell would be an excellent person to put Miranda at ease, but she knew that everyone would be kind to her, and Liza was looking forward to the evening.

Wendell and Joseph were already in the drawing room when Liza came in. Amelia, Lily and Jennifer soon followed, and they all waited for Jamie and Miranda to arrive. Five minutes passed before the door was opened and Jamie showed Miranda into the room. He was smiling as he introduced her to those who were meeting her for the first time and he did it beautifully, showing such concern for her welfare. *Well done Jamie*, thought Liza for the second time that day. He finally came over with her and stood with Liza, making conversation.

Harper came in to announce that dinner was served, and Jamie immediately took Miranda's arm and then turned and took Liza's also and led them both into the dining room. Harper pulled the chair out for Miranda, whilst Jamie saw Liza seated.

It was not long before Liza could see that Miranda had begun to relax and seemed to be enjoying herself. When they had finished their entrée and main course and the dishes cleared from the table, Jamie signalled to Harper to make sure that all their glasses were full and he then stood and said that he was delighted to welcome his mother to the household and what a shame it was that it had not happened earlier. He wanted them all to raise their glasses to his mother to welcome her to her family and the pleasure it was giving him to see her in her rightful place. This embarrassed her but she managed to thank her son for his kind words and her daughter-in-law for bringing her to her family. They all sat again and carried on with their meal which was now more relaxed with laughter emanating from them all.

Amelia said that she would go with Miranda the next day to see her house. Liza raised an eyebrow to Wendell who said that he knew Amelia would enjoy doing that, but she would also have to organise packing as they were leaving the following day for Belfast, as was Joseph, Lily and Jennifer.

"It's going to seem very strange here without you all," said Liza. "I have got quite used to you all being part of the family. Jamie has promised me and the boys that we will be in Belfast for Christmas, and you know how quickly time passes. Of course Miranda will also be coming with us; I presume you have been to Belfast before Miranda."

"Yes, but it was such a long time ago, it will be interesting to see it again," she said, and Jamie nodded and smiled at her.

The men decided not to drink port and smoke cigars at the end of the meal, so they all went into the drawing room for the rest of the evening. At around midnight they retired to their various bedrooms and Liza went up with Miranda to make sure she had everything that she needed. April was waiting for her and much as she protested that she didn't need help, April helped her out of her dress and hung it up saying that she would now be ready to help Liza.

Liza looked at her and told her how pleased she was that she was there, and she apologised for really creating a situation with Mrs Peabody which meant that she had no option but to come to Edgeworth House that day.

"I'm very happy to be here Liza. It is something that I never expected would happen and much as Jamie and I still must get to know one another,

I know that you and I will always be good friends. Good night Liza, and God Bless you," she said, and she kissed her on the cheek.

When she had returned to her room and been helped out of her dress, April left and immediately Jamie came in to bring her to his room.

"I couldn't wait to get you to myself," he said. "It has been a rather tense day for me, as it must have been for my mother. Dinner went very well I thought, and I believe she eventually enjoyed the evening. Am I expected to be with her all day tomorrow?"

"No Jamie, I think that you should carry on as you normally do, although it is the last day that Amelia and Wendell and the others will be with us. I must spend some time with Wendell just in case there is anything I am needed for. I know Amelia, Lily and Jennifer want to go to the Dower House with your mother and they will probably give her the benefit of their advice over the décor but no doubt she will have her own ideas regarding that and will possibly be too polite to tell them," laughed Liza.

"I understand that you really didn't give her a choice of whether or not she came here, but I think that she is pleased that she's here. I'm sure if you had asked her, she would have been too shy and nervous to agree, but of course you knew that, didn't you?" said Jamie.

"I had an idea that it would be the case and I didn't want you to miss out completely on having a mother," Liza said as she yawned, climbed into Jamie's bed and wriggled into a comfortable position. Jamie looked down at her still finding it difficult to believe that she was now his wife. He climbed in next to her and also wriggled into a comfortable position, but his desires soon got the better of him and Liza giggled as he started playing with her the way they both ended up enjoying.

Liza woke early the next morning and found that Jamie was sitting up in bed staring ahead thoughtfully. "What's the matter Jamie?" she asked.

"Nothing really Liza; it's just that so much has changed over the past few weeks that I am finding it difficult to believe that it's real. I now have a wife who loves me, a son and two extra sons who also love me and it would appear a mother who has always loved me. Getting you to finally agree to be with me has brought all this about," said Jamie.

"I suppose I have been rather bossy, I'm sorry Jamie I don't mean to be so thoughtless," said Liza.

Jamie turned and looked down at her smiling just as his mother smiled. "You are anything but thoughtless, which is why all this is happening. You realise we haven't yet been married a week and much as I like Amelia, Wendell and the rest of our guests, I shall be pleased to have just my family to myself and of course that also includes my mother. I would like to arrange that we go away somewhere alone in a little while."

"Yes, that would be really nice," said Liza as she moved towards Jamie and put her head on his chest and went back to sleep for a short while. Jamie felt very relaxed and comfortable with her in that position and he stroked her head until it was time for them both to get ready for the events of the day.

Following breakfast Jamie took Liza's advice and did what he always did at that time of day and went off to the library, which also doubled as his study, and sat in his favourite chair and opened his newspaper. Liza told Wendell that she would see him later to discuss business, and she too went into Jamie's study and smiled as she saw that he was hiding behind his newspaper waiting for everyone to descend on the room so that he could hear what they were all planning and only drop the top of his paper at something interesting or put it down on his lap if there was a comment he needed to make. Liza went over to him and kissed him on the top of the head and he smiled as she said, "No doubt they'll all soon find their way in here."

She was right; Amelia and Jennifer were first, with Lily guiding Miranda after them. Wendell and Joseph followed discussing an aspect of business. Liza smiled at them and Jamie stayed well behind his newspaper. "So what are the plans for the day," said a smiling Liza.

"I thought we could go with Miranda to the Dower House and see what has to be done there. Does it need new everything Liza?" asked Amelia.

"Virtually everything," said Liza. "It has been scrubbed from top to bottom, so it's clean now, but I wouldn't want to attempt to wash the curtains as I'm sure they would disintegrate. The carpets and rugs are very worn and faded, but some of the furniture is very attractive, now that it has been cleaned and polished. Anyway Miranda will make her choice of what she wants to keep and what doesn't suit her."

"I'm sure I could make do with what's there; it would be so expensive to change it all," said Miranda.

This was the cue for Jamie's newspaper to drop down. "No mother of mine is going to make do with anything. You can have exactly what you want."

The newspaper went back up and Liza smiled. "There you are Miranda; his Lordship has spoken."

The ladies and Joseph looked surprised, but Wendell tried to hide his amusement. It was the way he managed to keep involved in his own household without appearing too interested. Liza caught Wendell's eye and they nodded to one another acknowledging that they knew how this interaction worked.

"Shall we go and see what is needed," said Amelia smiling excitedly at everyone and she received a chorus of "Yes" from Jennifer and Lily. Miranda said that it was a little overwhelming.

"Don't worry" said Jennifer. "We'll help and advise you on what you will probably need."

Miranda looked at Liza who just smiled and winked at her which indicated that they could sort out exactly what she wanted later.

"Don't forget that we are leaving tomorrow Amelia," said Wendell. "You have yet to organise our packing."

"Oh, I have all afternoon to do that," said Amelia.

The newspaper dropped slightly, and Jamie asked Liza if she was also going to the Dower House, although he already knew the answer.

"Not this morning Jamie. In a little while I'll meet with Wendell; we have one or two business matters to discuss. Will you be with us Joseph, or are you going to accompany the ladies?" said Liza.

"I haven't yet seen the Dower House, so I think I'll go with the ladies just to look around it, but I want to be back for the meeting," said Joseph who was not keen to be involved with discussions on décor, carpets, curtains and furniture.

"That will work well as I must set the boys some work for today; I have been sadly lax in that recently," said Liza.

The newspaper went down again. "I think the time has come to bring James' tutor back to let you see if you think he is suitable for all the boys, until they are ready to go to university," said Jamie.

"Yes, they need to have a schoolroom environment. I believe they should now have more than I can give them," said Liza.

"I'll write to him later," said Jamie and the newspaper went up again.

"What do you have in mind for today, Jamie?" asked Liza.

Down came the newspaper again. "I'm going to the village to see young Derek and Mrs Price and back to see the doctor who was called away yesterday," said Jamie.

"That's good," said Liza as she started ushering everyone out of the study to go about their various missions.

The newspaper rustled again, "You can stay here if you like Wendell. I have another newspaper if you would like it," said Jamie and he and Wendell settled down to a quiet half-hours' reading. Liza smiled as she made her way to find the boys and set their lessons for the day. No doubt Miranda would get used to the morning ritual.

Groans came from the boys as Liza started setting their lessons and she commissioned April to make sure that they didn't get up to any tricks. She went to her room to choose a couple of dresses which could be altered for Miranda. All they needed was some material or lace to extend the hems slightly and she called Mrs Frances to organise it.

Jamie was just leaving his room as she was leaving hers. "I'm just off to the village. I know you can't come with me, but it would have been nice if you could have done; it would have given us a little time to ourselves. Never mind, we'll have all the time in the world after tomorrow," said Jamie.

Her meeting with Wendell and Joseph was very constructive. The various aspects of the business were running smoothly, but Wendell wanted to expand the Security Business further and he seemed to think that Mike Decker was the ideal person to organise it. "Where would his headquarters be?" asked Liza and she hoped that she didn't sound negative.

"I think he could still work out of Cork, but he would have to travel to various places to start with," said Wendell.

"I believe he's quite settled in Cork and now has a family to consider," said Liza.

"You appear to be a little reluctant to give him the chance Liza; that's unlike you, especially as you have met him and recommended him for his position in Ireland," said Joseph.

"No, I'm not reluctant, I'm only thinking of his wife and family; which really isn't my concern at all. If he's quite happy with the situation then I'm very pleased for him and wish him well. It will mean a better standard of living for him and of course when he has everything well organised, he can be at home more. Probably he will only travel now and again in the future. But it's up to him to decide to take the position or not," said Liza.

Both Wendell and Joseph looked at her curiously and wondered why she was talking for the sake of talking over the suggestion of Mike Decker. Wendell knew that he was from America and wondered whether he and Liza had known one another there, but he knew better than to ask at that moment.

"Well, we'll put the offer to him and take it from there," said Wendell. "The other matter is the charity Liza. We could do with another boost to strengthen the coffers. Now that you are Lady Edgeworth and Lord Edgeworth is also on the committee, is it possible for you to organise another function to raise some money. We are still running within our budget, but I can see that diminishing because of the number of children who are arriving daily. We really need another residence to accommodate them, perhaps we could open somewhere near Surrey and you could keep an eye on it."

"I don't think that the residents around here would be too happy with an orphanage on their doorsteps, but I'm sure there would be a compromise. Yes, I'm sure we could organise another fund-raising function, but it would have to be towards the end of the summer. Our most successful fundraising is really in New York, so we might organise one here in say the end of September or early October and then next year we could go to New York in early spring. If we do hold one here, will you and the family be able to attend?" asked Liza.

"Yes, we'll make sure as many of us as possible can come. When are you and Lily planning to marry?" Wendell asked Joseph.

"Well, springtime is when Edward and Nicole are planning their wedding and as I said Lily and I don't want to encroach on their plans," said Joseph.

"May I make a suggestion? Why don't you encourage Edward and Nicole to marry early spring and then perhaps just two weeks later you and Lily marry? And another silly suggestion is that the four of you come with Jamie and me to New York and treat it as a honeymoon, although

that may not be so attractive for Edward as it may bring back too many unhappy memories,” said Liza.

“With all due respect Liza, I think that New York also holds some unhappy memories for you,” said Wendell.

“Yes, that’s true, but I have managed to virtually clear my mind of the past and when it comes back to me, as it does on occasion, I push it away and remember how lucky I am not only to have Jamie, but to have also had two very happy marriages prior to the one I have now which is proving to be equally happy,” said Liza.

“Liza you may convince others that you don’t think of Patrick, but I know that you do. I see the sadness quite often in your eyes, but you hide it well and I admire the life you are making for yourself and the happiness that you are bringing to others, especially Jamie. In time you will only think of him and no one else; Jamie loves you very much and I know that you will always be loyal to him and care for him greatly,” said Wendell in a rare moment of sentimentality.

“I can assure you Wendell that I am happy and am now quite settled. I do have duties outside my marriage which may make me appear discontented but really I’m not, so please don’t worry about me; I’m finding life very enjoyable,” said Liza.

“Indeed,” said Wendell, “no doubt you will keep yourself very busy for the rest of your life.”

“It hadn’t occurred to me that you could be unhappy Liza,” said Joseph.

“I’m not unhappy Joseph; I have a very loving husband and family, which is all anybody could wish for,” said Liza and she carried on planning for the charity, making it clear that the conversation about her personal life was over.

Jamie was not home for lunch, which was probably just as well as the ladies talked excitedly about what should be organised for the Dower House. Miranda smiled at all the suggestions and said that she would give them all some serious consideration. She did add that some of the furniture was in very good condition and she would discuss with both Jamie and Liza what she should keep and what should be given away.

Liza spent some time with the boys directing questions at them to make sure that they had been working that morning. April was helping Amelia with her packing and Mrs Frances was helping Jennifer and Lily and

Harper and Roberts were packing for Wendell and Joseph. Miranda was trying on her altered dresses and deciding which one to wear that evening.

It was a hive of activity that Jamie returned to that afternoon when he came looking for Liza. "Have you time to come and discuss young Derek Price?" he asked.

Liza nodded and they went into Jamie's study. "You were right when you said that it may be too late to alter the damage done years ago. I really am so annoyed at Evelyn, she could have helped when it was most needed; it was her duty to do so," said Jamie.

"There's no point in dwelling on it Jamie; unfortunately nothing was done but is there any chance at all that something can be done, no matter how small?" said Liza.

"I'm not terribly well up on all the medical terminology but it seems that his vertebra was damaged, and many nerves trapped, and his pelvis was broken in two places as were the bones at the top of his left leg. His left arm was also broken but that has healed successfully, but the rest needed someone more specialised than the local doctor of the time," said Jamie. "Of course you know that it was out of the reach of Mrs Price to manage to take him to London, although people did rally round in an attempt to give the poor lad a chance."

"Are you saying that nothing can be done at all?" said Liza.

"Nobody knows the answer to that, but I have suggested that we get a specialist to come here and see what may be possible. The doctor is going to write to a doctor who may be able to help, and I have told him that we will cover all costs and that we will be able to accommodate him here with us. I trust you agree with my decision," said Jamie. "I do feel very responsible for Derek not getting the best of treatment when it was within my power to do so all those years ago."

"It was an unfortunate set of circumstances and in fact I must also take some of the blame because you were in America because of me. Perhaps there is something that can be done and at least now we will have tried our best for Derek," said Liza.

"He's a very bright boy, but of course he would be because all he could really do to occupy his mind was read. I wonder if there is anything we can do about that?" said Jamie giving Liza an opening to say what he already had in mind.

"If he can come here every day, and if Mrs Price has no objection, he could be tutored along with our boys. And of course you have no objection also. I know the boys would be quite happy, they like Derek very much, especially John, he made it his responsibility to wheel him around at the picnic," said Liza and she looked sideways at Jamie and said, "Of course, that's what you had in mind wasn't it?"

"Yes, I thought that you would feel the same way. The only difficulty with it would be when we travel with the boys and the tutor would come with us, but it would be better than nothing," said Jamie.

"No doubt he would set him some tasks for while we were away and he can write to him also," said Liza. "But first we have to see what the specialist says. I presume Mrs Price is happy that a specialist will be seeing him."

"Of course she is worried that Derek's hopes could be raised and then nothing can be done, but she feels it's worth the risk," said Jamie.

"So we have to expect a guest in about a week or so," said Liza. Jamie nodded and then they both went up to change for dinner.

Once again Jamie escorted his mother into dinner that evening and there was a mixture of fun and sadness around the table. Liza had become used to having her friends with her, especially Amelia who had been so supportive throughout the past few weeks. There was a great deal of laughter as everyone recounted moments from not just the lead up to the wedding, but from much earlier, even as far back as childhood. There were several events that Liza had enjoyed in her life but most of them were with either James or Patrick and she felt it imprudent to mention them.

Plans for the charity function were also discussed and Amelia was the first to say that she would have to come and help with that. Wendell looked at her and said, "Amelia as it is a Marchant & Fuller charity of course we will both be here for it."

Jennifer, Lily and Joseph discussed whether they could return at that time with the likelihood that it would be possible. "I'll make a list of who I think should be invited," announced Amelia. Liza smiled at her and thanked her with Jamie and Wendell also allowing her to think that her contribution was essential.

Miranda was unaware of the charity and asked what it was for. Liza let the others tell her about it and how it had started. Patrick's name was mentioned as the 'tall American who had started the rescue'. The mention

of his name suddenly hurt Liza and Jamie was watching her closely, but it was obvious to him that it had upset her.

"Who is Patrick," asked Miranda innocently and immediately realised that there was an awkward silence. "Have I said something wrong?"

"Good heavens no Miranda," smiled Liza who had managed to compose herself. "Patrick was my husband and as you heard he rescued the first abused children and others just kept flocking to our door asking for him. The American uniform obviously helped and created a legend."

"You must have been very proud of him," said Miranda.

"We all were," interjected Jamie and the others around the table agreed with him. Liza smiled at him reassuringly, but she felt a little unnerved as this was the second time that day that his name had been mentioned.

The ladies left the men to their port and cigars and went to the drawing room. Miranda sat next to Liza and said, "It's obvious that Patrick's death still has its moments of sadness for you."

"Nobody should die that young and with such violence, but he would be pleased to see that I am settled in such a loving relationship now and that the boys are happy," said Liza and she changed the subject skilfully reverting to the Dower House and what Miranda thought she would like to have there.

Amelia, Jennifer and Lily were looking across at her with concern, but she managed to convey that she was perfectly in control of her emotions.

When the men joined them, they were in detailed discussions regarding the Dower House, but Amelia was busy making a list of all the people she felt should be invited to the charity function.

Later when Liza was ready for bed, Jamie came into her room and found her sitting at her dressing table staring at herself in her mirror, but without really seeing herself.

"I know that was difficult for you Liza, but you will probably hear Patrick's name mentioned quite a number of times because of the charity," said Jamie.

"Yes, I realise that Jamie and I have no idea why it affected me this evening because I am very happy with you, perhaps I'm just tired. We have had a very busy few weeks," said Liza.

"Do you want to come to bed with me tonight Liza?" asked Jamie.

Liza turned her brightest smile on him, and the cheeky sparkle came into her eyes. He bent down and whispered to her, "I didn't really need to ask you that. I can tell from your eyes what you want."

He lifted her up and carried her over to her bed whilst carefully removing her nightdress and his dressing gown. His lovemaking was as always very caring of her, but that night as she had almost reached her climax he stopped and was about to ask her a question.

"Oh Jamie, please don't stop, you can't leave me this way," she gasped to him and he carried on because she had answered his unasked question.

A short while later as they were lying in one another's arms Liza said, "You know, Jamie, I have never thought or dreamed of you as anyone other than yourself. Only you are ever in my mind and in my body when we make love."

She felt his arms stiffen around her and all he said was that it made him very happy. Luckily, he hadn't asked her who was in her heart because at that moment she would have been unable to give him an honest answer.

The house was in total turmoil the next morning. There were bags and trunks all over the hallway, but Liza and Jamie rounded everyone up and led them into the dining room for one last breakfast together until they all met up again either for the charity function or the Christmas festivities. Amelia was rather tearful, and Wendell told her to pull herself together as it would only be two or three months before she was back here again. Liza knew how she felt because she had really been dreading Amelia leaving as she had been so supportive throughout the last few weeks and so instrumental in helping to solve some of the problems which had initially come about.

Miranda was also saddened to see all the people who had accepted and befriended her as she came back into her son's life getting ready to leave. She felt that Liza was the best daughter-in-law that she could have, but she knew that she would have duties to perform so she could not be with her at all times. She contented herself with the knowledge that the three boys accepted her as their grandmother and they had informed her that they were going to help her organise her new home.

Just before lunchtime they were all climbing into the two carriages which were taking them to London where they would stay overnight at a company hotel. Another cart was following with their luggage. The next

day they would take the train on the newly opened line to just outside Birmingham, and from there by carriage to Liverpool with another night in the company hotel. The next day they would be crossing the Irish Sea and then finally they would be home. Mrs Lambert had packed food for them for the first part of their journey as they may not have the chance to stop on the way.

Tears were trickling down Liza's cheeks as she waved goodbye to them; Jamie put his arm around her and consoled her with the fact that she would see them all again in the autumn. The boys were still shouting goodbye even though the carriages had disappeared from sight. They walked back into the house and Mrs Lambert sent word that their lunch was ready and the boys were going to join them in the dining room.

Even with the boys at the table, it seemed a very quiet mealtime. Jamie asked what she had planned for the next few days.

"I think that your mother and I should finally decide what needs to be done and bought for her new home. I'm sure she has received a great deal of advice from Amelia, Jennifer and Lily, but I'm sure she really knows how she would like her house to look," said Liza as she turned to Miranda for confirmation.

"They were very well meaning, but I was receiving so much advice from all directions that it all became very confusing and I would like us to go and assess calmly what is needed," said Miranda. "I still feel that it is going to be too expensive for you."

Jamie became very imperious, "I have told you that you can have exactly what you want. It is no more than you deserve, so I don't want to hear you argue cost again."

The boys who were listening, sniggered and Jamie frowned as he looked at them. "And what is amusing the three of you?" he asked.

"You're telling your mother off; it should be the other way around," said Matthew, and they sniggered again.

Jamie had to smile. "I'm not really telling her off; I'm just trying to make it clear that she should have nice things around her and that she must stop worrying about the cost."

"We're going to help her organise her home," said James.

"That should be an experience for you, Mother," said Jamie with his tongue in his cheek. Liza just smiled sweetly, as did Miranda.

With lunch over, Liza set some tasks for the boys to complete, although they had said that they felt that they should help their grandmother, but Liza assured them that they could go to the Dower House when the painting had been completed.

Liza and Miranda walked over to the Dower House where the walls were in the process of being painted. They were using a light cream colour which would blend with anything, but later other colours would highlight certain areas. They worked through all the furniture which was there and gave instructions to take away what was too old to be useful. Miranda would need couches and beds, but the dining table and sideboards were in very good order and seemed ageless. The kitchen needed modernising and Mrs Lambert would be advising on what was wanted to make it usable. Mrs Frances had been to the house and attempted to remove the curtains, but they had fallen to pieces, so a curtain maker was calling the next day with patterns for Miranda to choose for each room.

"Liza, will you help me with the pattern books tomorrow. It's such a long time since I had anything to do with furnishings," said Miranda.

"Of course I'll help you, but you must remember that it is to be your home and you are the one who is going to live with the choices," said Liza.

"I believe I know what I like, I just need a little moral support," said Miranda.

"We must also think about the staff that you are going to need, but we can leave that for a couple of weeks as the house won't be ready to live in for a while," said Liza.

"That's a little daunting," said Miranda.

"Don't worry I'll help you with all that and I know we'll find people who you will feel happy having around you," smiled Liza reassuringly. "Mrs Frances can see anyone first."

Jamie was walking in the grounds with three boys in tow. They were all listening enthralled to what he was saying.

"Shall we join them?" asked Miranda.

"That would be nice, but I believe this is his time with the boys. They seem to be very happy in his company and they'll probably think that it's good to be 'all men together'," said Liza.

"They are going to gang up on you Liza," stated Miranda with a smile.

"And on you most likely," laughed Liza.

Over the next ten days the tutor for the boys was rehired. He was a man in his early thirties and had taught James for a couple of years. His name was Adam Reece and he was at present unattached. He had no problems with the fact that it could be necessary for him to travel with them, although the boys hadn't thought that that was such a good idea. He returned to the room that he had previously used but noted that it had been redecorated. Liza sought his advice on whether the schoolroom was adequate, and he made a few suggestions to make it a friendly environment. He was also to obtain whatever he felt necessary to further the boys' education and he appreciated that in some ways Liza was a better teacher than he was. He was looking forward to discussing with her all that he would like to teach to the boys as he recognised that each had his own educational strengths.

Also during that time Jamie heard from the local doctor and the specialist had accepted their offer of accommodation and would be arriving shortly. Jamie went off to the village to inform Mrs Price that Derek would be examined in the next few days. She looked worried but Jamie reassured her that whatever could be done for Derek would be his pleasure to undertake and that she was not to concern herself with anything other than getting Derek ready for the specialist. "Will your wife be there?" she asked, and Jamie said that if Mrs Price wanted her there, then of course she would be.

The painting was finished at the Dower House and new furniture was arriving daily. The curtains were still in the process of being made, although some were ready and had been hung and so the business of finding a housekeeper for Miranda was under way. There were several applicants, but none seemed suitable. What she needed was one who was also able to cook, and Miranda would also employ a bright kitchen maid and house maid as her eating requirements would not be vast as she would dine at the main house most days. A butler would also be required in the fullness of time. A kitchen maid and house maid would be easy to employ from the village, but the housekeeper seemed to be creating quite a problem.

One morning when this was being discussed as Jamie was going through his newspaper ritual, he dropped his newspaper and asked if it was better to have a housekeeper and a cook.

"Well Jamie," said Miranda. "I will have such little need of a cook that it is such a waste not only of money but also it would mean someone sitting around doing nothing for a good part of each day."

"If that is the case then why don't you do what Liza normally does and that is take somebody inexperienced as a cook and as long as they can boil an egg and make toast and maybe one or two other delicacies then you should be well accommodated," said Jamie and his newspaper went up again.

"So what you need are two bright girls, one who would be capable of being a housekeeper and the other a cook and they'll gain a great deal of experience and then of course they'll leave you and move on to greater things," said Liza sadly.

The newspaper went down again, "Have any of the people you have given a chance to left you Liza?" asked Jamie.

"Well no, they haven't," said Liza.

"There you are then," said Jamie as his newspaper returned to the front of his face.

Liza and Miranda looked at one another and nodded, "So we'll try to recruit from the village and farms first. It would be good to keep it within the area," said Miranda and she and Liza went off to discuss it with Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert.

Jamie dropped his newspaper a little and watched them both leave the room and he shook his head and smiled. It takes a man to solve some problems, he thought.

With the new ideas on Miranda's household, both Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert had a few suggestions on who would be suitable, and they said that they would make some enquiries on the Dowager Lady Edgeworth's behalf.

"It seems only right that I should have somebody from the village as they have all been so good to me," said Miranda.

Chapter 3

Liza now had to concentrate on the charity function and discuss with Jamie the date that it could take place. Wendell had left it to her to finalise when it would be as he and Amelia were keeping most of the autumn free, as were the rest of the Fuller family and friends.

Miranda was helping Liza with the list and writing invitations leaving the date open. "Do you think that Mrs Peabody would be someone who would want to contribute to the charity?" asked Liza.

"Well she'd want to come to the ball, but whether she is in a position to contribute I really don't know," said Miranda. "One or two of the people she tries to call friends are wealthy enough to make a serious contribution."

"If you know their addresses, I suppose we could invite them independently of Mrs Peabody, and then invite her also. It would give you the opportunity to show her where you now live," grinned Liza and Miranda responded with a raised eyebrow and a sly smile.

"Do you think she would be a nuisance to our other guests?" asked Liza.

"No, I think she would be in awe of them and become rather shy, as will I be," said Miranda.

"I'm sure you'll rise to the occasion. Do you want me to invite her then?" asked Liza.

"Yes, I think I'd like her to come and I shall ask her to stay the night. My house will be ready by then and having somebody that I know well at the event will help me," said Miranda.

"What you must remember is that it is your house and we are your family, so you mustn't let her treat you like her companion. You are no longer in her employ," said Liza.

"No, but I was and I'm sure it will take us both a little while to come to terms with the difference," said Miranda.

"If you are sure you would like Mrs Peabody, I'll write the invitation and you can put a letter with it inviting her to stay with you. I presume she would bring a maid and her butler," said Liza.

"She would probably just bring her maid; she would presume that I already had a butler," said Miranda.

Liza wrote the invitation and handed it to Miranda saying that it was up to her if she sent it or not. Apart from the villagers, Mrs Peabody seemed to be the only friend that she had, so Liza appreciated why she wanted to show her what was now happening in her life.

"So, we will have to get you well organised before you have a visit from Mrs Peabody," said Liza. "Well, most of your furniture is now there and the curtains will soon be in place, all we have to concentrate on is your staff. How is the dressmaker getting on with your dresses?"

"They'll soon be ready. She has two ladies working on your ball gown and then she'll start on mine. My day dresses are to be delivered tomorrow. I really can't believe what is happening; it's all so different to the life I was living," said Miranda.

"I trust you don't regret the change," said Liza.

"Good heavens no, and Jamie just accepts me being around as if I had been with him for the whole of his life. The boys include me in many of their conversations, also as if I had been part of their lives for a long time. I still feel a little nervous about the whole situation but that is probably understandable. I know there's no point in thanking you again because you always say that you did nothing," said Miranda.

"I didn't do anything special; you were the one who had the courage to come to your son's wedding," said Liza and she carried on looking at her list of guests and writing invitations. "I must ask Jamie who he wants added to the list." Miranda knew that Liza didn't want to continue being thanked.

She left Miranda to write her letter and went to find Jamie who was going through some paperwork in his study. He smiled broadly as she came in, "I think this is the first time I have seen you alone other than at

night." She came over and sat on his knee and gave him a loving kiss. "What can I do for you Liza?" he asked.

"I need you to go over my list of people to be invited to the charity ball. I'd hate to leave anyone out," she said as she handed him the list. He looked at it and added a few names.

"We really should invite the Duke of Norfolk," said Jamie and Liza looked at him with surprise.

"Surely you are joking?" said Liza.

"No I'm not and the Prime Minister and one or two Members of Parliament," said Jamie quite seriously.

"Oh," was all Liza could say.

Jamie could see her surprise and he said, "What's the matter Liza, did you think you were the only person with influential friends? I am a member of the House of Lords you know."

"Of course you are, I hadn't realised what a powerful man I had married," said Liza. "What date shall we settle on?"

They decided that the first Saturday in October would be ideal as it was before the House sat after the summer recess.

"That gives us over two months to prepare, I'll make sure Harper, Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert will be able to arrange it all for that date and then I'll finalise the invitations. It will give all those invited ample time to clear their diaries. Your mother is thinking of asking Mrs Peabody to join us and stay with her overnight," said Liza.

"She wants to show off what she considers her good fortune doesn't she?" smiled Jamie.

"Yes of course she does but apparently Mrs Peabody has some influential friends who could put their hands in their pockets for a considerable amount for the charity. So it would do us all some good and please both your mother and Mrs Peabody. Your mother will be able to show off her surroundings and Mrs Peabody can at last feel part of the higher echelons of the society that she craves to be accepted in," said Liza.

Liza moved from his lap and he pulled her back down. "Much as I enjoy sitting with you, I do have a great deal to do Jamie," said Liza.

"Just a little while longer Liza," said Jamie.

"Are you truly happy with me Jamie because sometimes I wonder? I seem to have taken over your life and it concerns me," said Liza.

Jamie held her even more closely and said, "Of course I'm happy Liza. You know that having you with me is what I have dreamed about for so many years."

"I have heard that the chase is often more exciting than the capture," said Liza.

"Oh no Liza, you are far more exciting than anything I dreamed about. I must admit that I now have more time on my hands as my days were filled with plans on how I was going to get you in my home and in my bed. I now only have to plan how soon I can get you in my bed," laughed Jamie.

"I know you were testing me the other night. There was no need," said Liza.

"I apologise for that Liza. Even in the midst of love making you are still very astute," said Jamie.

"It wasn't in the midst of our love making. It took me a while to realise what you had done. It was only when we were resting afterwards that I understood why you had stopped; you thought that I may call out a name other than yours, didn't you?" said Liza.

"I can only apologise again but you reassured me that night and you have reassured me even more so now that I know that you only realised after we had made love. It has obviously stayed in your mind and I'm glad that we can talk about such things," said Jamie. "Are you annoyed at me?"

"Good heavens no Jamie," exclaimed Liza. "I can understand your doubts, especially that night as Patrick's name had been mentioned several times that day. I know that you made the mistake of calling out my name when you were with Evelyn and that is why she doesn't think of James as her son. You are my husband and I only think of you and your welfare now Jamie, and certainly when we are in bed and spend our time loving one another. I enjoy sleeping with you; in fact I enjoy everything we do together. I do love you Jamie, I just don't know why it took me so long to realise it."

He smiled at her and kissed her saying that she had better go and see Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert now and he would see her later.

"When I've seen them, shall we go for a stroll around the grounds; it's a really beautiful afternoon," said Liza and Jamie agreed that it was a splendid idea.

Liza didn't realise that April and the boys had the same idea, so when she and Jamie set out on their stroll, they became accompanied by three

exuberant boys and April. They both just smiled, and Jamie commented that he had been right that they had very little time alone through the day. Miranda suddenly appeared having also had the same idea and expecting to have a solitary stroll. "Quite a family affair," said Jamie still smiling. He put his arm out and strolled with Liza on one side and his mother on the other. It had only been a few weeks since his mother had arrived, but he seemed quite contented with her and concerned for her welfare.

"Have you solved the problem of your housekeeper and cook Mother?" asked Jamie. He still hesitated before he used the expression 'mother', but he was beginning to get used to it.

"Yes, Liza and I have seen a suitable young woman from one of your farms; she has helped with the feeding of a rather large family for a number of years, but now some of her younger siblings have 'flown the nest' and her mother can cope quite well by herself. It's a shame that by looking after her family she may have missed out on having a family of her own, but she is quite enthusiastic and she understands that my needs in the kitchen will be limited and is prepared to help with any other task," said Miranda.

"Mrs Lambert feels that she is very suitable, and you can't get a better recommendation than from our own cook," said Liza.

"Good," said Jamie, although Liza realised that he was not overly interested in the domestic side of his household. "And a housekeeper?" he asked.

"That also has been solved; I have a really nice young lady who has been an efficient helper to Mr and Mrs Rogers and one or two other friends in the village and really needed a permanent position. She also recognises that it is not really a position as housekeeper but realises that my needs will not be large and is prepared to undertake any task," said Miranda. "Really she will be more of a companion to me than a housekeeper."

"Good," uttered Jamie again.

"They will also be very helpful to us with the upcoming charity ball," said Liza.

"Good," Jamie said once again, and Liza and Miranda smiled at one another.

"I'll be moving in next week," said Miranda. "It will be very strange having a house of my own. I've never really had that before."

"I trust that once you've settled, I'll be invited to visit," said Jamie.

"Jamie, you know you won't ever need an invitation," smiled Miranda.

"Your mother will be joining us most evenings for dinner, won't you Miranda?" said Liza.

"If I may; I always feel that dining alone can be a very sad occasion, but there will be times when you will want to be alone and I'm sure there will be times when I want the peace and quiet of being by myself; it's one luxury that I have been denied for some while," said Miranda and both Liza and Jamie nodded their agreement.

During the course of the following week the Dower House was completed and Florence, the housekeeper and Brenda, the cook moved in and between them organised all the rooms efficiently. They had to discourage Miranda from undertaking any heavy work as she was their employer and they were meant to be looking after her. Liza smiled at their concern and felt that they had chosen her servants correctly.

Liza, April and the boys went with Miranda on the day that she moved in and it seemed that the whole house was in uproar, but it was only the boys being allowed to explore throughout and of course Brenda had been prepared for them as there was cake waiting for them as they reached the kitchen and at last silence prevailed.

"Do not ever feel that you can't come to the main house whenever you want to Miranda. Just because you now have your own home doesn't mean that you have to shut yourself away. Will you be dining with us tonight as usual?" asked Liza.

"If you don't mind, I think that I would like to stay and eat here tonight. I may go down to the kitchen for that, but I do have so much that I want to get used to and settle," said Miranda.

"Well, I'll gather up the boys in a short while and leave you in peace and come and see you tomorrow," said Liza.

When Liza, April and the boys were leaving, Jamie appeared and said that he wanted to see his mother to make sure she was settling in well and Liza realised that he wanted some time alone with his mother, so she ushered the boys back to the main house.

The day after Miranda's move, as Liza was strolling back from visiting her and having found out that she had slept exceptionally well considering she was in strange surroundings, she was met by a small carriage driven by Mr Rogers who had a stranger with him.

Mr Rogers stopped the carriage and he could see that she was mystified, and he introduced Dr Claude Phillips to her. "Were you not expecting me Lady Edgeworth?" he asked.

"I was Dr Phillips, but I didn't know when you would be arriving," said Liza.

"Oh dear, I'm afraid that my letter hasn't reached you before I have. I was surprised that there was nobody to meet me from the stagecoach," said Dr Phillips.

"It isn't a problem doctor; it will not take very long to get your room ready. I'm very pleased to meet you. Perhaps I could come up next to you and we'll reach the main house together," smiled Liza and once again here was another man who became mesmerised by Liza's bright green eyes. She was helped up and off they drove to the house and Jamie was surprised to see his wife riding with a stranger on Mr Rogers' small carriage.

Harper came rushing down the steps followed by a footman and he helped Liza down; she introduced Dr Phillips and explained that his letter had not arrived and asked that Mrs Frances come into the drawing room as soon as possible. Liza turned and thanked Mr Rogers and offered him refreshment, but he said he had to get back. Liza mentioned to him that Miranda had moved into her house and he said that he would call on her on his way home. "No doubt you'll get a warm welcome and tea and cakes to help you on your journey home," smiled Liza.

Dr Phillips bag was whisked away, and Mrs Frances joined them in the drawing room where she was given instruction to organise a bedroom for the doctor, arrange for some refreshments and tell Mrs Lambert that there would be one extra for dinner. Jamie came in and expressed surprise that the doctor had arrived but welcomed him and would see him later when he was settled.

Liza said that probably the doctor would like to be shown to his room and wash away the dust from his journey. He said that he would like to wash and rest for a short while before discussing the patient with Lord

Edgeworth. Harper showed him to his room as water was being taken up. Liza then went to find Jamie.

"I didn't know he was arriving today," said Jamie.

"No, apparently his letter has yet to arrive. I wonder whether Mrs Price and Derek know that he is here and our own good doctor of course," said Liza. "I suppose they do because Mr Rogers brought him out to us."

"I'll see how he wants to conduct his examination and then send word to Mrs Price," said Jamie. "Have you seen my mother this morning?"

"Yes, she slept well, and we will see her later," said Liza.

After the doctor had rested and they had enjoyed a light lunch Jamie drove the doctor to see Derek Price.

With her afternoon free Liza decided to see Mr Lambert and talk to him about the flowers and general decorations for the forthcoming event and he said that there would be ample greenery and of course the roses would still be in full bloom.

Jamie and Dr Phillips arrived back later that afternoon they both looked a little dejected and Liza asked how the examination had gone.

"I'm afraid there is very little I can do about how his bones have healed. If it had just been his legs, I could have re-broken them and attempted to set them better, but his pelvis is a different matter. His nerves have been trapped for a long while, however with an amount of manipulation and massage I believe we could get him walking in a fashion. I am going to see him again at your village doctor's surgery tomorrow and it is going to be painful for him, but I think I could start to help him and show his mother how to manipulate his right leg. His left leg is not as bad but only time will tell if we are successful," said the doctor.

"I am so annoyed that we didn't get to him sooner," said Jamie and he purposely didn't mention Evelyn's lack of concern for the boy.

"Yes, if I had seen him soon after the accident happened, I could have done something more positive for him. It's a sad case; he's a very intelligent boy. If we can get him to have a little more independence, I'm sure he will respond well and make something of his life," said Dr Phillips.

"We'll do whatever we can for him," said Liza. "We're going to ask his mother to allow him to be tutored with our boys. Going to the school isn't practical for either him or the teacher there."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to stay for about a week so that I can be sure that his mother is carrying out the manipulation and massage as it should be done," said Dr Phillips.

"You are saying that you may be able to get him walking but it won't be as other boys walk. Have you mentioned that to him and his mother?" said Liza.

"Yes, and they are both willing to accept whatever will happen. Young Derek feels that walking, no matter how it may look, is worth any pain he may experience," said Dr Phillips.

"He's a very brave boy," said Jamie, "and very bright and we mustn't let that intelligence go to waste."

Over the course of the week Dr Phillips worked on Derek's back and legs and although initially it was very painful, after a short while it was uncomfortable for him but not as difficult as it had first been. There was however no voluntary movement in his limbs. The doctor was convinced that given time he would improve and to expect an immediate response was not logical.

Liza went with him on a couple of occasions and she marvelled at Derek's positive attitude and both Mrs Price and his sister had now been well schooled in how to massage and manipulate. Liza suggested to Mrs Price that Derek be allowed to take advantage of the opportunity to join her boys in their classroom each day. "How would I get him there?" asked Mrs Price.

"Don't worry about that, we'll work something out for him," said Liza.

"Well it would mean that I could find more work which would help us, and my daughter could now attend school. She has always wanted to join the village children at their lessons," said Mrs Price.

"Good, that will all work out well for everyone. You know that both your children are very bright Mrs Price and given the opportunity I'm sure that they will map out fine careers for themselves," said Liza.

"Well, we'll see your Ladyship; I don't want them to aim higher than is available to them," said Mrs Price.

"I understand how you feel, but let's see what happens and I promise I won't put great ideas in their heads. Any such ideas should come from them," said Liza.

Dr Phillips eventually left saying that he would keep in touch and hoped that they would let him know how they are progressing. He would also update them on any new ideas he has which could be of further help.

In the first week of September Adam Reece was ready to take on the task of tutoring not three but four boys and each day Mr Rogers brought Derek to his lessons and each afternoon one of the grounds staff took him home and by the time he returned, his sister was home from school and his mother followed from one of her jobs shortly after. It was all working out well and all the boys enjoyed Derek's company. Adam Reece commented that he was a very willing student.

Chapter 4

All the invitations had been sent out for the Charity Fundraising Ball and replies were being received daily. So far there had been no refusals. Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert were showing very confident faces to Liza, but she sensed that they were naturally concerned that it was their responsibility for it to be a success.

Mrs Peabody was overjoyed that she would be attending and that she had been invited to stay with the Dowager Lady Edgeworth and also she knew that some of her friends and acquaintances would be at the event. She was really going to become a popular member of society now.

The Duke of Norfolk and the Prime Minister, Viscount Palmerston, and their wives had accepted and presumed it was possible for them to stay the night and when Liza received their response, she went rushing off to find Jamie.

“Jamie,” she cried, “the Prime Minister and the Duke of Norfolk want to stay the night. Where are we going to put them?”

“We have plenty of bedrooms Liza, why are you panicking?” asked Jamie.

“Because it’s one thing to entertain them at a function but quite another to look after them for breakfast, dinner and tea,” said Liza.

“Liza, I seem to recollect that in New York you entertained the American President, members of the American Government as well as top army personnel; why are you worrying about our own Prime Minister and a few Dukes and Lords?” asked Jamie.

“They didn’t stay the night,” said Liza.

“Well they lived in or around New York. I’m afraid that our guests could be travelling quite some distance,” said Jamie. “Don’t worry Liza you’ll carry it off beautifully.”

“Hmmm,” said Liza not very confidently and her mind was now whirling trying to plan what she would give them for breakfast, lunch or dinner or perhaps all three. She went off to see Mrs Frances and Mrs Lambert and wondered how she was going to break the news to them without frightening them. They also would have to rearrange the sleeping arrangements. She would have to put the Prime Minister in Amelia and Wendell’s room as it was the best guest room. She would have to move in with Jamie and let Amelia and Wendell have her room.

The next best room was the one that Nicole and Lily used, so she would have to move them into the one which had been used by Jennifer and Jennifer would have to move into the Dower House with Miranda and Mrs Peabody. Henry and Myra were travelling from New York and she had already allocated them their room.

Anthony and Diana had their usual room, as did Edward and Joseph. Peter was quite happy to be in with Adam Reece who had agreed to give up his privacy for a couple of nights.

Another of Jamie’s friends had asked to stay. He was Lord Redfern, otherwise known as Binky Redfern. Liza had yet to meet him, but from what she had heard he seemed to enjoy all the worst activities. Miranda said that she knew his late father and he used to gamble with Jamie’s father whilst drinking too much. He could however afford to lose, unlike Jamie’s father.

Anne and David Benedict were travelling with Wendell and Amelia, although they would not be staying as long.

Most of the other rooms would be occupied by Jamie’s friends and various members of Parliament, and Liza realised that if another person wanted to stay, they would probably have to sleep in Jamie’s study or in the boys’ schoolroom, although she still had two small rooms in the east wing which had not been allocated and did not have the most attractive of décor. Miranda had the last spare bedroom in her house and Liza wanted to keep it that way. There were therefore three rooms available just in case there were any surprise guests.

Mr and Mrs Rogers had already taken several bookings for overnight stays and their Inn was now fully booked.

Great discussions were taking place regarding the food and the amount they would need. Crockery and cutlery were not a problem as the house was well stocked, but Liza was hoping that most of the food was just finger and bite sized. Most of the villagers and farmers had been recruited either to help serving on the day or cooking various small pies or sausage rolls as well as making bread and rolls which could be easily transported to the house. Mrs Lambert would be roasting lamb, beef, chicken and pork which would all be sliced thinly. Various hams and sausages were also coming from one of Jamie's farms which had been set up with a smokehouse a few years ago, and smoked and poached salmon and trout were classed as a supreme addition to the banqueting table, but the piece de resistance would be a roast suckling pig at the table's centre. They were hiring a girl to concentrate totally on various fillings for vol-au-vents. Mr Lambert had ample supplies for salads and fruit for trifles and other dishes. Untold numbers of cheeses with biscuits would be available for those who still needed to fill their stomachs.

Mr Rogers was liaising with Harper and Liza over the drink which would be needed for the occasion. There would be some spirits if they were called for, red and white wine and champagne, alcoholic and non-alcoholic punch and copious amounts of lemonade. Liza asked if any beer would be needed, but Harper did not think that any of the gentlemen would want to be seen drinking beer during the evening.

"It is slightly different to the drinking habits in America," commented Liza.

Liza was now concerned as she was going to have to stretch Mrs Lambert even further because there were now going to be many more house guests who would have to be catered for. At least she would have the support of Miranda's staff.

Three days before the event Wendell, Amelia, Jennifer, Lily and Nicole arrived as well as Anne and David Benedict. Unfortunately Annalise and Arthur were not able to attend. Liza explained the sleeping arrangements for everyone, and Amelia was delighted to be sleeping in the luxury of Liza's room, Liza having already moved many of her clothes into Jamie's room. Jennifer was quite happy to be occupying a room in the Dower House and couldn't wait to see it. Lily and Nicole understood that they were necessarily in a smaller room. As they all sat down to dinner that

night, it didn't seem possible that three months had passed since they were all last around the table.

The next day the Fuller boys arrived along with Anthony and Diana Ffoulks. Mrs Peabody was next to arrive and was immediately brought into the main house, Liza rushed over to greet her as she seemed a little overwhelmed and Miranda had yet to see her. She was introduced all around and Miranda espied her and came over to put her at ease. After light refreshments Liza suggested that Miranda take Mrs Peabody to her house with her maid and make sure she had everything she needed before bringing her back for lunch. Jennifer said that she would go with them and see them in a short while.

The stagecoach was due later that afternoon and Wendell and Edward were taking the carriage to meet it and bring Myra and Henry back. Liza was greatly looking forward to seeing them again.

Everyone assembled for lunch, which was a buffet, and unlike a formal gathering there was a great deal of chatter going on. Jamie was in his element surrounded by so many gentlemen, he had been in the company of women for many weeks now.

Miranda, Mrs Peabody, Jennifer and Diana seemed to bond together well.

"Mrs Peabody," asked Liza, "may I ask what your Christian name is?"

"Of course you may," she said. "It's Lucinda."

"That is a beautiful name," exclaimed Liza.

"Thank you, Lady Edgeworth," she said.

Liza smiled and said, "We are all friends here Lucinda; my name is Liza and my husband's is Jamie. We will probably have to be respectful to some of the guests who will be arriving tomorrow, but we are all on first name terms here."

Lucinda Peabody looked slightly taken aback but smiled and said, "I'll remember that Liza."

With lunch finished Wendell and Edward got ready to take the carriage to the stage stop for Myra and Henry. Liza went to find the boys who were all in their schoolroom. Liza said that she didn't want to interrupt any lessons, but she hadn't had a chance to see much of them either the previous day or that day. Derek was there and looking very happy and positive and really seemed to be getting on well with the other boys.

She asked Adam Reece if he was prepared for the function the following day. He looked surprised. "I'm a member of staff Lady Edgeworth."

"Well that shouldn't stop you from attending. I presume you have appropriate evening dress," said Liza.

"Yes I have, but I wouldn't have thought that it was my place to attend," said Adam.

"Why not, you are intelligent enough to hold a conversation with the best of them," said Liza.

"Thank you, I believe I would enjoy that," said Adam.

She spent a little while with the boys and then went to find April and asked her what she would be wearing for the function.

"I'll be looking after the boys. I can't go to the function," said April.

"Yes you can, but I would expect you to keep checking on the boys regularly. You had a nice dress made when we went to Italy," said Liza.

"I won't know what to say to anybody," said April.

"Well, you stick with Adam Reece and you'll be fine. Just let me see you before you go down," said Liza.

The carriage could be heard arriving, so Liza rushed down the stairs to greet Myra and Henry. Jamie had also heard it and was making his way to the door. A footman opened the door to Myra, followed by Henry and to Liza's surprise and delight he was followed in by Charles Enderby. Jamie smiled welcomingly but that smile stayed on his lips and didn't reach his eyes.

"Look who we've found on our way here," said a smiling Edward.

"Charles, what a wonderful surprise and welcome," said Liza who was now lifted off her feet and swung around.

"Yes, welcome," said a rather stiff Jamie who seemed to forget that he had often greeted Liza that way in order to make Patrick jealous.

When he had put her down, she turned and apologised to Myra and Henry for not greeting them properly. "I am so pleased to see you both."

"You're looking so well Liza," said Myra and Henry nodded in agreement. "Charles was visiting us when we were getting ready to leave to come here and he cancelled all his appointments and came with us. I hope you don't mind, but you know that Charles is very much leading the way with arranging bond servants in the correct manner."

"Indeed," said Liza with a sly twinkle in her eyes. "We haven't a very salubrious room available for you but when many of our overnight guests have left, we will move you into better surroundings. Oh I am so pleased to see you. Well, I'm pleased to see you all of course."

"I'd sleep on a stone floor just to be near you Liza," smiled Charles and Liza just raised her eyes to heaven but revelled in the sound of his Southern drawl.

Wendell whispered to Amelia that he didn't think that Jamie was too pleased to see Charles, but that he had nothing to fear in that quarter.

The boys had heard the voices and when they peeped down into the hall and saw Myra and Henry, Matthew and John ran down and straight into their arms shouting their greetings. James followed slowly as he didn't know who they were. Matthew turned and saw Charles and said, "Good day Mr Enderby, I trust you are well."

A smile hovered on everyone's lips and Charles answered, "Yes thank you Matthew, I am quite well and how are you and John?"

"We are quite well, thank you," replied Matthew and John in unison.

They all moved into the drawing room and Mrs Frances organised refreshments whilst one of the small spare rooms was made ready for Charles. Matthew did his duty and introduced James to Myra, Henry and Charles before the boys returned to Adam Reece and Derek in the school room, with the promise that they would see them all later.

After refreshments Liza suggested that the travellers go to their rooms to rest, wash and change before dinner, which after their long journey was a welcome suggestion. Liza once again said how happy she was to see them, and they were shown to their rooms by Mrs Frances.

This left just Liza, Jamie, Wendell and Amelia together for a short while. "Well," said Wendell, "That was a surprise. I would never have thought that Charles Enderby would make such a trip. He doesn't really like leaving South Carolina to go to New York, let alone the long journey across the ocean to be here." Amelia thought that he could have chosen his words slightly better having seen the black look on Jamie's face. Liza appeared not to notice but Amelia knew her well enough to realise that she could hide behind an unconcerned façade quite easily.

"I'll have to make sure that all the drivers are going to be well looked after whilst they are here," said Liza. One of the outer buildings had been made into a dormitory for them.

“Liza you’ve been running around all day; you need to get off your feet for a while. I’ll go and see that everything is in order; I’ll see if Miranda is around to help me. Go on, off you go. You too Jamie, go and get some rest,” said Amelia firmly, which was her way of letting Liza and Jamie have some time to themselves.

Liza made her way up to Jamie’s room and stretched out on the bed. It wasn’t long before Jamie came to join her. He kicked off his shoes and joined her on the bed. She had her eyes closed but could feel him staring at her.

“What’s the matter Jamie? Has something upset you?” she asked smiling across at him.

“I think that man has a nerve coming uninvited and the way he talked to you was not what should have been said to a married woman,” said Jamie grumpily.

Liza opened her eyes and moved to prop her head up on her arm and stared at Jamie smiling. “Jamie Edgeworth, you’re jealous,” she exclaimed. “Tell me Jamie, what was it you used to do and say to me in the past?”

“Of course I’m not jealous,” said Jamie and then he thought about it for a second and said, “yes I am and you’re right, I did used to act just that way with you and it never turned your head.”

“Exactly,” said Liza and she rested her cheek on his chest and he put his arm around her and held her closely, staying that way for a while.

Dinner was organised early that evening as the kitchen staff would be working late into the night. The boys were allowed to join them at the table as were Adam Reece and April. It was a very jovial mealtime and Liza and Jamie were very proud of the way their boys conducted themselves at dinner. It was necessarily a very simple meal starting with vegetable soup, followed by various cold meats, salad but hot boiled and buttered potatoes. Apple pies with cream or custard were for dessert and finally cheese and fruit were available if required. Red wine, white wine and lemonade for those who wanted to keep a clear head for the next day.

Liza hoped that the men wouldn’t object to taking their port and cigars on the outside terrace as Mrs Frances and Harper needed to organise the room for the function. Coffee was being served in the drawing room.

"I hope nobody minds but it has been necessary to keep breakfast to a minimum in the morning. The boys' school room will be organised for porridge and bacon, eggs and cooked tomatoes with plenty of bread and an urn for hot water so that you can choose tea or coffee and I am assuming that the gentlemen will take advantage of that. Ladies if you are unable to show yourselves in the school room, April and I will bring you whatever you need. You will appreciate that Mrs Frances and the staff will be working in the dining room most of the day. A light lunch will also be served that way. I believe that Mrs Lambert has excelled herself with three very large meat pies for lunch and as much bread as is needed. You may all rest assured that we will not starve, we will just have to sit and eat wherever there is room," said Liza.

"Don't worry Liza, we'll all help tomorrow and stay out of the way as much as possible," said Miranda.

"I'll help at breakfast and lunchtime," said Lucinda and Wendell commented that if they knew where the food was everyone would be quite capable of helping themselves.

"What time are your other house guests arriving?" asked Diana.

Jamie answered that several were meeting early the next morning somewhere in London and travelling down in convoy but wouldn't be reaching them until early afternoon. He believed that the Prime Minister and the Duke of Norfolk were also travelling together with their wives, but it was doubtful that they would arrive until mid-afternoon.

"All their rooms are already set for them just in case they arrive early," said Liza. "Do you know when your friend Binky is coming?" Liza asked Jamie.

"I'm afraid Binky is a law unto himself. I did tell him to get here at around lunchtime, but he'll arrive when he's ready," said Jamie.

"Oh, that's unfortunate, but we'll manage I'm sure," said Liza.

The evening was coming to an end and Wendell and Peter escorted Miranda, Jennifer and Lucinda to the Dower House and the others, apart from Amelia, drifted towards their rooms. Liza collected up the used cups and Jamie looked surprised.

"We can't expect the kitchen staff to run around after us this evening. I think they'll be lucky if they get any sleep tonight," said Liza and Jamie nodded and started helping her and they both carried them down to the kitchen much to the surprise of those working there.

"Are you coming to bed now Liza," asked Jamie.

"I have one or two things to check on with Amelia's help, but I want to be with you as soon as possible as tomorrow is going to be a very busy day. You go on Jamie and keep my side of the bed warm for me," she smiled up at him.

He went on his way and Liza joined Amelia in the dining room where Harper and Mrs Frances were supervising the staff. The main large table had been moved to the side of the room with the large sideboard still in its place at the far end. Other tables had been placed at the other side of the room, giving usable surfaces on three sides for food.

The dining room opened onto the drawing room which in turn had double doors leading to the ballroom. There was a small room on the opposite side of the hall next to Jamie's study which would accommodate the liquid refreshment. There was a cloakroom near the front door, and somebody would be on duty there all evening.

Baskets of roses and greenery were being arranged in the conservatory and candles and lamps were being arranged around all the rooms. It would appear that all was in hand and Mrs Frances told Liza that there was absolutely nothing that she needed to do that night and it would be best if she got a good night's sleep so that she was fresh for the next day.

"Thank you, Mrs Frances, you really are doing a wonderful job. Do you think you will be able to rest tonight?" said Liza.

"I'm sure I will be able to, but don't you worry about that; you will be having a more difficult job tomorrow. You will be on duty all day and all evening," said Mrs Frances.

"Please tell all the staff, and especially Mrs Lambert, how much both Lord Edgeworth and I appreciate all they are doing to make this a success. Their efforts will be helping to gain funds for children who are in appalling situations. Good night Mrs Frances," said Liza.

With one last look around the rooms, Liza and Amelia finally went off to bed.

Jamie was already in bed, but he got out and helped Liza out of her dress, which she appreciated. She laughed as he continued taking her clothes off. She could see that he was in a playful mood but no matter how tired she felt it was obvious that she was not too tired for him. He

realised how tired she felt but he could see that it didn't matter because she was showing him how much she loved him and wanted him.

Soon after dawn Liza roused and lay back trying to bring her mind into focus. She listed in her head all she had to do before lunch because soon after lunch the Prime Minister and the Duke of Norfolk and their wives should be arriving for the weekend and she would have to look presentable by that time. She still had no idea when Binky Redfern would be arriving and Jamie had commented that he wished he hadn't invited him, but as most of his friends within the same circle had been invited, he felt that Binky could not be left out. Liza had questioned why he was not at their wedding, but he was apparently in France at the time.

Jamie was still asleep when hot water was brought in by one of the maids and Liza washed and dressed ready to do her duty towards her guests by being on breakfast duty in the schoolroom. Miranda and Lucinda were going to take the boys for the day to their house, bringing them back after teatime so that they could meet all the guests before their bedtime. Liza knew that they would probably be peeping down the stairs for a little while as the other guests were arriving.

Two of the maids brought porridge and other breakfast items up to the schoolroom and they were kept on special trays heated by candles. Water was also in a heated urn for tea or coffee.

Peter and Adam were the first to arrive and they helped themselves to whatever they wanted, and Liza thought that this was going to work well. Edward and Joseph were next followed shortly by Jamie who Liza thought looked quite handsome that morning. He helped himself to breakfast and then proceeded to organise others. Wendell appeared and Liza took some breakfast to Amelia in her room.

Miranda, Lucinda and Jennifer would be breakfasting at the Dower House, which took a little pressure off Liza.

April appeared and was handed a tray to take to Lily and Nicole and when she returned Liza told her to stay and eat something as well before she sorted the boys out for the day, but it was too late as the boys must have smelled food and all three appeared in their dressing gowns. Liza told them that for once they could eat some breakfast in company in their dressing gowns but must get ready to go to the Dower House as soon as they had finished.

Trays were then organised for Myra, Anne and Diana, which once again were taken by April and Liza. Henry, Charles, Anthony and David made their way to the schoolroom and enjoyed all that was on offer.

Once breakfast was finished Liza and Jamie gathered up all the dishes and started carrying them down to the kitchen, much to everyone's surprise, but as Liza said the kitchen staff had enough to do without worrying about collecting up dirty dishes. Others offered to help but Liza said that the kitchen staff would be disturbed too much by those they didn't know. Water was going to remain there for most of the day should anyone want tea or coffee. Liza had already explained that lunch would be served in the same way and wouldn't they all be relieved when they could get back to civilised eating arrangements the following day.

The morning was passing very quickly. The dining room was looking very attractive and all food that didn't need to be kept cool was already set out. The refreshment room had all the red wine in place and the ingredients for both the alcoholic and non-alcoholic punches were waiting to be mixed in the appropriate large receptacles. The ballroom was now decorated in beautiful arrangements of flowers and together with all the candelabra and lamps each room was beginning to look quite spectacular.

Carriages were regularly arriving at the house from the farms and village bringing the various dishes that they had made.

Most of the house guests went for walks in the grounds finding it better to stay away from the bustle but lunchtime soon arrived and they all gradually made their way back to the schoolroom. Three large pies had arrived in the room together with several salads and bread and once again they all helped themselves and they were quite enjoying the experience. Wine was also there for anyone who wanted it.

"This is like having an indoor picnic," said Edward with his mouth full and being looked at disapprovingly by both his mother and father.

"Yes, you're right" said Liza. "Perhaps we should eat like this more often."

"Certainly not," said Jamie who liked his comforts. This seemed to amuse everyone.

This time April helped Liza, Nicole and Lily carry the dirty dishes down to the kitchen. All the other ladies made sure that everyone had eaten enough, and Amelia suggested that they all go to their rooms and rest for

a while as she knew that Liza and Jamie needed the space to greet their next guests who were due shortly.

However, Edward and Joseph suggested that they stay for a while in the schoolroom with Nicole and Lily and they would stay on duty just in case any more tea or coffee was required. This brought smiles to many faces as tea and coffee duty was not really on their minds.

Both Liza and Jamie went to their room to make sure that they looked presentable for their next guests and it wasn't long before carriages could be heard coming up the drive. Liza hoped that Binky would not be arriving at exactly the same time as the Prime Minister and the Duke of Norfolk. Jamie glanced out of the window saying that it wasn't Binky and they both seemed relieved and then went down the stairs to greet their special guests.

Jamie already knew the men, but this was the first time he had met their wives; he then introduced them all to Liza who was pleased to see that they all appeared friendly. Liza had instructed that at the sound of the carriages hot water was to be taken to their rooms as she was sure they would feel grimy after their long journey, so with the greetings over they were shown to their rooms with the promise of refreshments to be brought to them shortly. Their maids and valets had already started organising their luggage. She apologised for the fact that the house was in some disorder but hoped they understood why this was. When they were refreshed perhaps they would like to join them in the conservatory as this, apart from the school room, was the only place where order had been restored.

They all smiled, and the Prime Minister said that with such a large function that evening it was all very understandable and he hoped that they were not putting them to too much trouble.

"Certainly not," said Liza, "we are so delighted to be able to entertain you not only this evening, but for the rest of the weekend and I hope your stay with us will be comfortable. We have several house guests and hope that before the function starts we will be able to introduce you to everyone."

With that they were shown to their rooms by Harper and Mrs Frances and they said that they would be relieved to rest for a short while now.

When they had disappeared up to their rooms, Jamie leaned over and whispered in Liza's ear, "You handled that very well Liza, considering you said you would be so nervous meeting them. Well done."

Another carriage could now be heard coming up the drive and Liza and Jamie assumed that at last Binky Redfern had arrived. "Our last house guest I hope Liza," said Jamie as he moved towards the door. He stopped and groaned, and that sound gave Liza a sinking feeling and it wasn't long before she too groaned. Amelia and Wendell could be heard moving quickly towards them obviously knowing that they would need all the support they could get at that moment.

Up through the front doors came Evelyn followed by Binky Redfern. Before Jamie could say anything, Binky said, "Hope you don't mind old boy, but the lady was kicking her heels this weekend and I thought where's the harm in having one more to help with the fund raising." He seemed totally oblivious of the fact that they were already creating a very uncomfortable atmosphere.

"Binky have you totally lost your senses, and you Evelyn should have had more common sense than to plant yourself where you know you are not wanted," said a very angry Jamie.

Wendell and Amelia were standing with their lips pursed as if they were guarding Liza with their lives. Liza counted to ten and then put her best smile on and said, "Jamie, I take it that this is your good friend Binky, and of course I already know Evelyn. How are you Evelyn? It's a while since I've seen you."

Jamie took his lead from Liza and introduced Binky to her. "Oh, absolutely charmed to meet Jamie's new wife. You are as beautiful as everyone says," he said as he kissed her hand.

Liza gave Jamie a glance which told him to keep calm and she would handle the situation.

"I'm pleased that you are both here, and Evelyn you will be able to catch up with your son. It does however create a small problem but nothing that can't be solved. I'm afraid we only have one small room left Evelyn and it is not in the best of situations, so it's either that or there is a much better room at the Dower House. The choice is yours. I don't want you to feel that we are treating you badly and if you are staying longer than the weekend then a better room will be available then," said Liza.

Jamie, Wendell and Amelia were marvelling at Liza's calmness. "I think I would rather stay in the main house thank you Liza and as you say it would only be for a couple of nights."

"Is the room you have allocated to me any better?" asked Binky.

"Well yes, it is. It's larger and is in the more attractive and warmer west wing," said Liza.

"Problem solved then; I'll take the smaller room and Evelyn can have mine," and Binky beamed at everyone. "Can't have the little lady freezing to death, don't cha know."

Harper appeared as if from nowhere and showed Binky's valet the way to the small room and Mrs Frances organised Evelyn's bags to go to what was to have been Binky's room.

"Do you have a maid with you Evelyn?" asked Liza thinking that she would also have to find accommodation if she had.

"No, I thought I could borrow one of yours for the duration of my stay," she said, and Liza looked at her remembering a similar conversation that they had had years before on the subject of servants.

"No doubt I'll find someone who can help you into your dress for the evening," said Liza with a sigh.

The look on Jamie's face was something to behold and Liza thought that if it were possible, steam would be coming out of his ears. Wendell and Amelia moved away, and no doubt wanted to say what they thought, but realised that Liza was making this not the right time.

"Mrs Frances," Liza said to her as she descended the stairs, "can you find someone to help Lady Evelyn later and I presume you have arranged hot water for our guests and perhaps a tray with some refreshments."

"Of course, Your Ladyship," she said with the emphasis on the 'Ladyship'.

"Most of our guests are now resting before getting ready for the evening, so I presume you would like to do the same once you have washed the dust from your journey off," smiled Liza.

"Good idea," smiled Binky. "I say, you have the most stunning eyes Liza."

"Thank you, Lord Redfern," said Liza as she noticed Evelyn scowling at him.

"Binky, please Liza. Everyone calls me that," he said appearing completely oblivious to Evelyn's unhappy countenance.

"Would you like to see James when he gets back from his grandmother's house," asked Liza.

"No, that's alright Liza, I can see him tomorrow if necessary," said Evelyn and all Liza said was "Oh."

When they had both gone to their respective rooms, Liza turned to Jamie and said, "Are you really sure that he's a friend of yours? I've had enemies who have acted better than that."

Wendell and Amelia came across to them as Jamie said that he had his doubts. Amelia commented that she would have thought that Evelyn would have known better.

"I believe I've said it before that for someone who appears to have a good brain, she doesn't use it all that well on occasion," said Liza. "Oh well, I'm going to check around that all is in order and then I'm going to put my feet up for an hour before I have to get ready."

"I'll come with you," said Amelia. "You two had better also go and rest," she said referring to Jamie and Wendell.

All was well in hand and Liza and Amelia made their way to their rooms to rest for a while. Jamie's fury had not eased when she came into the room.

"I was going to turn their carriage around and put them back on the road to their homes," said a fuming Jamie. "She always tries to spoil things; she always has, and she always will."

"Please calm down Jamie. It will all work out for the best I'm sure. Is there anything I can do to ease your temper?" she asked cheekily.

"How long have we got?" he asked.

"About an hour," she answered.

"Hmm, yes, I can think of something," he said as he lifted her skirt and pulled at her underwear. "Sorry, I haven't got time for pleasantries," he grinned as he quickly made love to her.

When he had finished, he said, "I owe you one," and she answered that yes indeed he did and they both laughed and he realised that Evelyn could do her worst, it really didn't matter.

A short while later hot water was brought in for the bath and Liza jumped in first and when she had dried off, she donned her dressing gown and made her way to her own room where she and Amelia were going to get into their finery. Wendell and Jamie were going to dress in Jamie's room.

"I thought April would have been here by now," said Liza, "but I did tell her to dress for the evening first, so I suppose it's taking her a little longer. I did hear the boys return a while ago, so she could be busy with them. Never mind, we're quite capable of helping each other."

April appeared suddenly out of breath and apologetic. She had on the dress that had been made for her the year before and both Liza and Amelia stared at it.

"My goodness, you've grown," said Amelia. Liza nodded thoughtfully and went to her wardrobe and pulled out a very pretty shot silk pink gown and although rather low cut it had an attractive matching bolero which would cover her nicely.

"That should fit you," said Liza and April stared at it open mouthed. She stammered a thank you and Liza said she could change there when she had finished helping them and they would make sure she looked alright.

Amelia was dressed first and finally Liza was helped into her gown which was silver and the four tiers on the skirt were edged in the most exquisite thick red lace, as was the off-the-shoulder bodice. The fashion was that skirts were overly full, and her knickerbockers were of matching silver silk edged in the same red lace as were her evening gloves. Both Amelia and April stood back and drew in their breath with Amelia nodding approval.

"You certainly know how to dress Liza, and of course you still have the body for it," said Amelia. "Let's get April into her dress now."

Liza nodded and said that she would have to put her jewellery on next and then she would be ready. They helped April, and Liza pulled her hair up on the top of her head allowing ringlets to fall around her ears and neck. "You look lovely April," said Liza. "Go along and show yourself to the boys and then find Adam to escort you."

There was a knock at the door and both Wendell and Jamie stood there in their evening suits. "What a handsome pair you are," said Liza. They both stared at April as she left the room and told her how very pretty she looked. She blushed as she went off to the boys' room.

"I'm nearly ready," said Liza. "I just have to put my jewellery on."

"I'll help you with that Liza," said Jamie.

"We'll go down to the conservatory; we're all meeting there aren't we?" said Wendell as he ushered Amelia out of the room.

Liza went to get her diamonds, but Jamie stopped her and pulled from behind his back a large jewellery box. She looked at him questioningly.

"These are some of the Edgeworth family jewels Liza and I should be honoured if you would wear them tonight," he said and he opened the box which contained a ruby and diamond necklace, bracelet, earrings and ring, but the main jewel was a magnificent tiara.

Liza gasped, "They're magnificent Jamie. I had no idea that you had such things. They'll match what I'm wearing beautifully."

"Yes, I know. I saw what you were planning to wear and knew that the time had come for you to have them," said Jamie and he started to fasten the necklace and then the bracelet. He let her put the earrings on herself but placed the ring on the finger of her right hand on top of her eternity ring.

"I'll let you put the tiara in place yourself," he smiled, and she settled it comfortably on her head pulling some of her curls attractively in place. She turned and looked at him for his approval and all he said was "Beautiful".

"Thank you, Jamie, I'll look after them for you and for the lady that young James finally marries," said Liza.

"I'm lucky to still have them, I'm afraid they were in and out of pawn shops during my father's time. He always managed to borrow enough to redeem them. I finally paid off his debts which were quite considerable, thanks to your help, so you deserve to have them," said Jamie.

Liza looked at him and smiled and her eyes sparkled and he saw the seventeen-year-old again that he had always loved. He took her arm and escorted her along to the boys' room where she was greeted with squeals of delight and affection, but they refrained from clasping her as they didn't want to 'mess her up' as Matthew said.

They then went down the stairs and into the conservatory where most people were gathered and there were gasps of approval as they walked in. Lord Palmerston and the Duke of Norfolk followed them in with their wives and Jamie introduced them to the assembly. Liza excused herself and went to check that all was in order and as she left the music began playing and the refreshment room and dining room were completed. The ballroom looked delightful and Liza mapped out where she, Jamie, Wendell and Amelia would stand to greet all their guests.

Harper and Mrs Frances came over to her and wanted her to know that neither the staff nor the additional servants were taking any money for the evening, and they had asked that whatever they would have earned be put towards the charity. Liza looked at them and found it hard not to cry. "I really don't know what to say. That means so much to me and it will do to the children that it will eventually help. Thank you for telling me, I will personally thank everyone later."

Liza went back to the conservatory and said that everything was ready for the guests to arrive so Jamie, Wendell and Amelia should come with her so that Harper could announce them all. She said that she realised it may seem foolish announcing all the house guests, but Harper was a stickler for protocol, and she smiled as Jamie led her into the ballroom.

Of course, Lord and Lady Palmerston were first to be announced followed by the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk; Myra and Henry were next with Charles Enderby. Carriages were now drawing up and so the house guests were interspersed with others and the champagne was handed out after they had been introduced. It was an hour and a half before they felt that they could leave their greeting position although there might be a few stragglers, but Liza and Jamie felt that the dancing should begin and so they went onto the dance floor to the strains of a waltz which was the cue for others to join them.

The evening was going well; even Evelyn seemed to be enjoying the event. The drink was flowing nicely and the only person that it was felt could have a problem was Binky who seemed glued to the refreshment room, or more accurately, a wine bottle. Diana was happy with the non-alcoholic punch and she said it looked as if she was joining in.

Small tables had been set up all around the dance floor and when the guests were informed that the dining room was now open and they were invited to choose whatever they liked, members of the staff would assist them to their tables with their choices.

It seemed that most of the guests had not eaten for a week before the function as very few held back and it was good to see how much the food was appreciated; there would be some left, but not a great deal. Desserts were served and cheese, biscuits and fruit were available to those whose appetites still felt the need of a little more.

Members of the staff were making sure that everyone had what they wanted including drinks and it seemed time for Liza to make her speech.

During all this time the orchestra had continued quietly playing and now there was a drum roll which quietened the guests. Tables had been set up in the hall and these were going to be used to collect money or take names for pledges under the guidance of Miranda, Lucinda, Jennifer and Myra.

The room quietened expectantly, and Liza stood on a dais and looked around the room. She had known how she was going to start her speech but now she had changed her mind.

"This evening I have been humbled; I was going to go straight into what the charity needs but instead I want to start with something that our butler told me just before all our guests arrived and that is that none of our staff tonight are going to take any wages for their work, they have asked that anything due to them is given to the charity. You will all appreciate that this is an extremely generous gift and personally I am very touched by what they are doing."

There were many nods and murmurs of agreement to this statement. Liza continued.

"As many of you already know, our charity was started a few years ago when we became aware of the vast number of children who were being abused both physically and sexually in and around the Belfast area. We were shocked to find that such abuses were taking place across many other parts of Ireland and England, as well as some in America and possibly other countries worldwide. Each day children find their way to us asking for help and we cannot refuse them."

"Our company does what it can, but it is not enough. We need funds to ensure that we can provide adequate food, medical help and accommodation, as well as training so that they can be placed in suitable situations and become useful members of our society."

"These children take great risks to get to us; we have no idea how many are caught and punished and possibly even killed, but they are willing to take that risk to get away from the life that others have dictated for them. Often there is an older child who takes the responsibility to bring little ones to safety. We are also finding that we receive threats daily and need to have at least one security guard on duty at each of our Homes. Of course, a pretty child, be it a girl or a boy, is worth a great deal of money to these unscrupulous people, so we have to be very careful."

"Our Homes have become overcrowded, but we are managing to place the older ones in suitable employment or arrange for them to travel as bond servants to America. The younger ones are candidates for adoption, and we do ensure that they are placed in respectable homes. We are desperate for further premises and of course such places need to be staffed."

"We have with us tonight Mr Charles Enderby from South Carolina, who has been instrumental in ensuring that any bond servants are correctly and legally safeguarded. He has undertaken this role now for a number of years," Liza looked across at him and smiled knowingly. "If you have any questions about bond servants, I'm sure he would be happy to answer any queries."

"I am delighted that so many guests are here tonight. Apart from the fact that my husband and I are pleased to see you all and enjoy your company, I know that you were under no illusions about the motive behind this evening's event and would ask that you follow the example of our staff members and do what you can to help with this very important charity."

"My mother-in-law, Lady Miranda Edgeworth, our friends Mrs Lucinda Peabody, Mrs Jennifer Armstrong and Mrs Myra Mahoney will be taking whatever donations you can make, or pledges for regular payments and they can tell you more about adoptions, employing servants or organising bond servants. Of course, Mr and Mrs Wendell Fuller and their sons can also answer any questions you may have, as can both my husband and I."

"Thank you all for listening and please carry on enjoying yourselves."

She received a hearty round of applause but before anyone could move to the tables the Prime Minister came up to the dais and called everyone back to attention. Liza frowned not knowing what was about to happen and she stepped down and stood next to Jamie. He looked at her and indicated that he had no idea what was going to be said.

"Lady Liza Edgeworth has said that she has been humbled by the generosity of those working here tonight. This evening, before I joined you all, I can honestly say that I was humbled by a visit from a young person. It took great courage to knock on my door and ask to speak to me, but she felt that she must do so because she needed to get her message across to the one person she considered able to stamp out the disgusting trade that has been touched on this evening."

"This young person had, since before she could remember, been in the hands of those who sold her each day to those who used and abused her. She saw little ones brought to the house on numerous occasions and they were used to such an extent that some died. One day three little ones came, and she was told to get them ready; she couldn't do it and she took advantage of an opportunity to escape with them. That courage was given to her by the story of the tall American soldier who rescued children such as her and the little ones and she made her way to where she had been told his house was. She was very frightened, but she was willing to take the chance for herself and the little ones. She was bright enough to know that if she didn't get away her future would be one of disease and death, so what did she have to lose?"

"Today she begged me to do all that is within my power to stamp out this trade and she wanted me to know that without this charity she and those little children would still be used in that deplorable manner or probably dead. She now has a future to look forward to, although she also feels that it will never be one that others enjoy, but she has found happiness and she wants that for all others like her."

"Yes, I too feel very humbled and until today did not realise the scale of this problem and I will do whatever it takes to stamp it out. I believe I know who the tall American was who unfortunately is no longer with us, but the children don't know that, and he has given them an aiming point and become a legend. Please everyone think about what I have told you and help in whatever way you can. I shall do what I can through Parliament and legislation. I'll leave you to ponder how you can help."

There was a marked silence as everyone seemed to be digesting what Lord Palmerston had said, and Liza looked around, but April was nowhere to be seen. She would find her once she had the party underway again.

Jamie then took it upon himself to thank everyone and jokingly said that the ladies at the tables were becoming anxious to take their money from them and he signalled for the music to start again and looked around for Liza, but she was nowhere to be found. He moved towards Amelia and said, "The Prime Minister was talking about April, wasn't he?"

"I believe so, Liza never mentioned her past. You know that she believes that if others don't know then someone who has been abused will be accepted normally and not talked about or pitied. I think she has gone to find April to make sure she is alright," said Amelia.

"Will you and Wendell look after our guests for a short while because I must make sure Liza is alright? I saw her face when the 'tall American soldier' was mentioned; she did not appear happy to be reminded," said Jamie.

"You have nothing to fear Jamie. It was a shock for me to hear it also, as it probably was for you. But Lord Palmerston is right, Patrick has now become a legend and if it helps countless children, then so be it," said Wendell and Jamie nodded and made his way upstairs.

He found her sitting in the school room with April, who was sobbing but when she saw him, she tried to hide her face.

"There is no need for you to hide from me April or anyone else," said Jamie kindly. "Nobody knows it was you who the Prime Minister was talking about, some may have guessed and if they have they will only think how brave you were to get those children out of that situation and how brave you were to face Lord Palmerston to tell him how important you felt the charity was. You have achieved what you set out to do in both cases; you and those children are safe, and the Prime Minister is going to do all he can to stop this appalling trade. Well done April; I'm very proud to have you within our household and protecting our children."

This unfortunately brought further tears from April and Liza leaned over and wiped her eyes. "You are needed downstairs April; Adam has been looking for you and so have others. Dry your eyes and walk down with us. We will be proud to escort you back to the party."

They waited a little while with her and generally chatted about how the evening was going and she became composed.

"Are you ready?" asked Jamie and April nodded. He looked at Liza whose face was looking strained, but she looked up at him and suddenly it seemed as if the sun had come out as she smiled, and her eyes once again sparkled at him. He breathed a sigh of relief as he thought that the mention of 'the tall American soldier' had brought back too many memories, but even if they had she still showed him that she had eyes only for him and again his heart missed a beat.

Jamie walked down the stairs with a lady on each arm. "With those huge skirts it's just as well that our staircase is wide," he casually commented and both Liza and April smiled. He escorted Liza over to Wendell and Amelia and took April over to where Adam was standing

looking concerned. Jamie noted the look of relief when he saw her, *I wonder*, he thought, *perhaps something is stirring between those two*.

People were dancing but many were in the hallway talking to the ladies at the tables. Charles could be heard extolling the virtues of bond servants in his distinctive Southern drawl and Henry was saying how a number of children had gone to America for adoption and others had successfully been placed as domestic servants and tradesmen.

Lord Palmerston and the Duke of Norfolk were calling Wendell to them, and then beckoned to Jamie and they became in deep conversation with them both. The outcome being that neither Wendell nor Jamie would commit to anything without Liza's approval. The Duke said that it was a little unusual for a woman to be consulted on matters of policy but both Wendell and Jamie told him in no uncertain terms that Liza was the driving force behind not only the charity but also the two companies that she was involved in.

"We are here tomorrow, so we won't disturb her this evening," said Lord Palmerston. "You're a very lucky man Lord Edgeworth; you seem to have the perfect wife."

"Thank you, Sir, I think she's perfect, but I know she would say otherwise," laughed Jamie proudly he excused himself and went to find Liza.

She was standing in the refreshment room scowling at both Evelyn and Binky. "Have neither of you any sense whatsoever?" he heard her say. Diana was standing nearby looking very upset.

"Do you think it's funny to try to undo all the good that Diana has done over the past months, and the encouragement that she has received from everyone. Anthony is going to be furious. It would be best if he isn't told this evening, but he will have to be as he is the one who has to put up with the consequences of Diana's drinking," hissed a furious Liza.

"What on earth has happened?" asked Jamie but he was ignored as Liza carried on her tirade.

"I thought you were her friends, and so did she, but friends don't try to make fools of people. I hope, Evelyn, you weren't the instigator of this, and I hope Binky that you didn't realise the consequences of such a foolish act," hissed Liza once again.

A tear was edging its way down Diana's cheek and Liza turned to her and said. "It's alright Diana. Nothing is your fault. Would you like us to fetch Anthony for you?" asked Liza.

"No, it's best if he doesn't know tonight. I'll just go up to my room for a while. If he asks, please just say I needed a rest," said Diana and she left the room.

Jamie turned to Binky. "You gave her alcohol, didn't you? You had to be aware that she mustn't drink, it's dangerous for her. You knew that didn't you and if you didn't, I know that Evelyn did. You two really are just about the worst friends that anyone could have."

Liza and Jamie left them standing but those who were serving the drinks had heard what was said and knew what had happened. They had heard both Binky and Evelyn planning to enjoy getting Diana drunk as they knew what she was capable of when she was in that state. The staff chatted amongst themselves and decided that they would make sure that nobody served Diana other than themselves and her husband.

Evelyn seethed with annoyance and said to Binky, "She really is the most appalling goody two shoes. She needs to be taken down a peg or two. I have an idea how to do it; it will take a while, but I'm prepared to wait."

Both Evelyn and Binky had never learned that servants not only had ears but they also had loyalties; all that had to be done was work out a way to get the warning across to Lord and Lady Edgeworth and after a short discussion they decided to enlist the help of Harper and Roberts.

Jamie looked at Liza as they walked back into the ballroom and he said, "Another disaster avoided I'm pleased to say. How did you know what they were doing?"

"I didn't really, but when I walked in, they were sniggering just after Binky handed Diana what she had thought was the non-alcoholic punch. She was about to drink it when I grabbed it from her and tried it myself. It was definitely the alcoholic one; it does look slightly different if you knew what you were looking for. The staff confirmed it too. I do despair with your friend Binky. He is making this evening hard work as we have to keep our eyes on him all the time," said Liza.

"Lord Palmerston and the Duke of Norfolk want to see you tomorrow, Liza. They wanted to talk to Wendell and myself and were surprised that

all decisions have to go through you; a mere woman," he said as he smiled down at her.

"You and Wendell don't have to defer to me over the charity. Your hearts are in the right place and what we need is money. There's nothing difficult in that," said Liza.

"I think business also wants to be discussed, especially as you have American guests from both the North and South of the country and once again there seems to be controversy between both ends of that country," said Jamie. "Bradley & Company have a great many assets in America as do Marchant & Fuller, so you probably know what's going on more than most."

"Yes, if they do go to war with one another, it could set business back quite considerably, but I'm not going to worry about that tonight. I'm going to dance with my husband as much as possible and hope that he holds me closely because I love the feel of him," said Liza happily.

Mrs Frances and Harper tidied up the dining room and moved all the food on to one table and they were surprised to see that the guests were coming back to see if anything was left that they liked. There was a great deal of laughter which always seemed to be where Liza and Jamie were. The ladies in the hallway were also in high spirits as they had received many pledges and money. Some of the ladies sought Amelia out to see if she thought that there may be some children who could add to their staff. Two ladies asked to speak to Liza, and they felt that they could give good homes to some of the little children. Liza made a note of their names, firstly having established that their husbands would be in total agreement. Charles had explained so many times how the bond servant system worked and he appreciated that his worth was more from America than in England, but he was surprised by the interest shown and also he had several people who said they would cover any costs so that the children could be guaranteed a suitable and happy place to work.

The orchestra were playing gently, and Liza asked them to call the function to order as she wanted to make an announcement.

"I just wanted to say that this evening is a resounding success. We have already received in excess of £3,000 in cash and numerous pledges of regular sums and offers to give employment as well as a few who are interested in adoption. We are very grateful for all your support; it is going to make such a difference to what we are trying to achieve. The evening is

certainly not over, and we have a great deal more eating, drinking and dancing to enjoy, but I wanted you all to know how wonderful you all are in supporting the charity.”

She jumped off the dais and went to Jamie dragging him onto the dance floor. He smiled down at her as if she was the seventeen-year-old girl again and needed pampering. It did not go unnoticed to Evelyn how happy Jamie looked; he had never looked that happy before and although Liza had helped her on numerous occasions, she hated her at that moment and was determined to ruin their happiness.

A few of the guests began leaving at around midnight but the evening seemed to be continuing. Mr and Mrs Rogers sent a message that they would be leaving as they had to make sure that they were on duty at the Inn to receive those who were staying with them that night.

At one o'clock the party was still going strong and Jamie felt that he had a permanent fixed smile on his face, but each time he looked at Liza she seemed quite awake and acting the perfect hostess. He noticed the look of jealousy on Evelyn's face and then embarrassment when Binky whispered something in her ear and tried to guide her towards the stairs. She pulled away and appeared to say something curt to him and he wandered off unsteadily towards the refreshment room yet again.

Lord Palmerston and his wife came to bid Jamie and Liza goodnight saying that they were too old to stay any longer. Harper was miraculous in somehow getting their servants into their room without being seen. Next was the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk and they too said that they would see everyone during the course of the next day.

Wendell and Amelia were reluctant to leave but they were extremely tired now and Liza told them that nobody would mind if they quietly disappeared to their bed.

Harper made arrangements to have Miranda, Lucinda and Jennifer escorted to the Dower House and finally at around three o'clock the only people who were left with Jamie and Liza were Henry, Myra, Charles, Peter, Edward and Nicole, Joseph and Lily. The ladies sat down at last and kicked off their shoes, the men wished that they could do the same but being able to put their feet up was a great relief. Mrs Frances brought coffee for them all and Liza was concerned that she and the rest of the staff must be exhausted but Mrs Frances told her not to worry.

"I think all that went very well," said Charles with his distinctive Southern accent and everyone agreed.

"I hadn't expected the Prime Minister to make a speech," said Edward. "It was quite powerful and made everyone think. I presume he was talking about April. It was very brave of her to go to him. I bet she was nervous."

Liza and Jamie didn't comment, but everyone else agreed with him.

"I suppose you'll all look at April differently from now onwards," said a rather unhappy Liza.

"Well, that was the price she was prepared to pay for trying to help but of course you have always been right, once people know they will look differently at her," said Joseph.

"Well I'm not going to look at her differently; she's been very brave and probably by doing what she did she boosted the charity's coffers quite considerably and the Prime Minister is going to do something about that disgusting trade," said Lily and the others agreed with her.

Finally, everyone made their way up to their bedrooms. Jamie helped Liza out of her dress. "Do you know Liza that until we came together I had never helped undress a woman. I have to say that it can be interesting but often rather complicated. I dare say that Binky helped Evelyn out of her dress, and I wouldn't be surprised if his bed won't be slept in tonight."

"Surely not Jamie; surely they won't do that under your roof," said Liza.

Jamie looked at her and shook his head, "At times Liza, you really are the most naive of people."

She climbed into bed and commented that it had been said before. Her head touched the pillow and she was immediately asleep. Jamie carefully picked up the Edgeworth jewellery from the dressing table, put it into its case and replaced it in his safe. Nobody had worn it since his grandmother; he had not let Evelyn wear it as he didn't think she deserved it, but Liza did. She had proudly worn it that night and promised that she would treat it with care and respect. She didn't know that there were other pieces of jewellery in his safe, but when all their visitors had left, he would show it all to her and he knew she would be delighted to wear it and that would greatly please him.

Her dress was neatly lying over a chair and he went over and touched it. It was beautifully soft, and it smelled of her, turning he could see she was fast asleep, and this didn't disappoint him because he was quite

happy to climb into bed next to her and put his arm around her. She snuggled into him which was her way of getting comfortable. He smiled and gently drifted off to sleep with the only woman he had ever wanted.

Liza was still asleep when Jamie woke. He gently slid out of bed and quickly washed and dressed before the maid or Roberts could disturb Liza. She deserved to sleep as long as possible and he went down to the dining room which had now been restored to order. He asked Mrs Frances to let Liza sleep for another hour before sending her breakfast and hot water up to his room.

All the gentlemen were gradually appearing at the breakfast table. Edward said that they were all probably looking forward to a day of rest and Jamie commented that he didn't think that Liza had planned anything strenuous for them, but no doubt the dinner that night would be friendly and entertaining and he had no idea if and when lunch would be served, however he was sure that Liza had it all in hand.

The boys had decided that they would like to join the gentlemen for breakfast and April had made sure that they were smartly dressed for the occasion. She had managed to stop them rushing in to see Liza who she knew would still be very tired. Jamie looked up and beckoned them in and the three chose their breakfast in a very adult manner, which amused many there although the boys didn't realise that they were being watched.

They sat together and conducted themselves like adults and Jamie watched over them proudly and allowed them to join in some conversations. Lord Palmerston and the Duke of Norfolk congratulated Jamie on their excellent behaviour for which he thanked them, and the boys beamed up at him.

"Have you seen your mother yet James," asked Jamie.

"Which one do you mean?" he asked.

"You know who I mean," said Jamie quietly.

"No not yet; she's been too busy to see me," said James who was totally unconcerned.

"Well make sure you see her before she leaves," said Jamie although he knew that the onus was on Evelyn to see her son.

Jamie went up with the boys to see Liza. He looked in on her and asked if she was able to see the boys, which she was. She was sitting up in

bed attempting to eat her breakfast. A smudge of butter was on her chin and she was trying to clean marmalade from the front of her nightdress. Jamie sighed and took her serviette, wiped her chin and then the front of her nightdress. The boys giggled with Matthew saying that she always did that when she tried to eat in bed.

"Have you seen your mother James?" asked Liza.

"Dad has already asked me that. No not yet," he answered.

"I don't know when she's leaving, but you must see her before she goes," said Liza.

Liza finished her breakfast and lay back listening to everything the boys were planning for the day. Jamie was sitting in a chair watching them and with the door open Amelia looked in to see how they all were. She was sure that the last thing Liza really wanted was three boys bouncing on her bed, but she seemed to take it all in her stride.

Everyone was ushered out of the room as the hot water arrived for Liza's bath but she knew that she didn't have too much time to soak and relax as she had a house full of guests and she needed to make sure that they were all looked after well.

She came running down the stairs and was pleased to see that the house was virtually back in order. Miranda, Lucinda and Jennifer were already there, and Amelia was chatting happily with Myra. Where Edward and Joseph were was anyone's guess, but Liza presumed that they were with Lily and Nicole somewhere in the grounds. Wendell and Peter were deep in conversation in Jamie's study. David and Anthony were in the drawing room waiting for their wives to appear and Charles and Henry were with them. Jamie was walking towards the stairs as Lord Palmerston and the Duke of Norfolk were descending; their wives had yet to appear as had Binky and Evelyn, but nobody was commenting on their absence.

Harper was on duty to make sure that tea or coffee was available to anyone who wanted it; Liza smiled at him and whispered to him what a wonderful job he had done and was still doing. His face almost smiled at her.

The Duke and the Prime Minister gravitated with Jamie towards his study where Wendell and Peter were. Liza hadn't noticed the gathering but when she looked up, she was surprised to see the study door closed but she carried on making sure that everyone had what they needed. The door opened and Jamie beckoned to her. Miranda noticed that Liza was

needed and instantly took over the role as hostess with the support of Amelia who whispered that something was going on.

In the study Liza saw a sea of faces. Jamie opened the discussion with the fact that this was really concerning business more than the charity. "I am a patron of the children's charity, but my involvement with Marchant & Fuller is non-existent and Bradley & Company rents some of my land and assists in the farming of other parts. I therefore feel that it would be an intrusion for me to join in this meeting."

"Surely you are now part of both companies since your marriage Lord Edgeworth," said the Duke of Norfolk.

"Certainly not Sir; my wife has total control of her shares in Marchant & Fuller and Bradley & Company. I have relinquished any rights over what Liza owns," said Jamie.

"That's very unusual," said the Duke.

"I have no need of either her money or her property and I know that her contribution to the management and expansion of both companies is immeasurable. If you wish to discuss something about the charity, then yes I am very much involved in that, but if it is purely business then I will leave you in the very capable hands of those who run both Marchant & Fuller and Bradley & Company," said Jamie.

"I have no objection to you staying Jamie; does anyone else?" said Wendell and everyone agreed that he could stay.

"Thank you all, but unless I can make some significant contribution it would be better if I look after our other house guests," said Jamie and he bowed, turned and kissed Liza on the head and made a move to leave the room.

"That's very commendable of you Lord Edgeworth," said Lord Palmerston.

"He wouldn't have it any other way, and neither would we," said Wendell.

"I see," said the Duke. "However, what we wanted to discuss does not directly concern business, apart from the fact that your companies have interests in America. It is the current American situation that we felt you could give us an insight into."

Liza could see that Peter was getting unsettled as he always felt that meetings were a waste of time.

"Your company travels the world and sees and hears much of what is happening. We are at present getting increasingly concerned by the possibility of a division between the Northern and some of the Southern States in America and the affect it could have on our country. We have people who tell us how it will affect politicians and the rich but few who can judge the effect on the workers in our country," said Lord Palmerston.

"You are asking us to look into a crystal ball. Such a civil war has been talked about on and off for some time now," said Liza. "As you are probably aware I have lived in America over the course of many years and the thoughts and fears of the American people come to the fore periodically and then they try to push it all out of their minds and often succeed in doing so."

"Which side do you think will win if it comes to it?" asked the Prime Minister.

"The North will win. They will have more manpower and weapons, and they have a regular army instead of the militia that the South would rely upon. The North is desperate to abolish slavery, although they will probably treat freed slaves as second-class citizens. Those in the North are also determined that the slave trade doesn't reach the newly opened up western states but the real reason why the North will win is because the South won't have the funds to carry on," said Liza.

"There are a lot of rich people in the South; much richer than many of those that we consider rich in this country," said the Duke.

Liza looked around for someone else to answer, but nobody seemed to want to contribute.

"They are rich because their lands are rich. They are rich because they own so many slaves which are considered wealth and they are rich because their main products are cotton, tobacco and sugar. Take their slaves away from them and their wealth is cut vastly. They will then have nobody to pick their crops and even if they do manage to get a crop picked, there is no way that the North will allow it to be shipped to the factories either in the North or across to our factories in the north of England and the Midlands. Their rich land will be useless and gradually it will fall into rack and ruin," said Liza. "They will have to factor in the cost of workers rather than slaves and by the time they realise that, it will be too late."

"So, what you are saying is that it will have a detrimental effect on our factories and the workers," said Lord Palmerston.

"Yes, but you certainly didn't need me to tell you that; it's an obvious conclusion to come to," said Liza. "On the other hand, of course, is the fact that both sides will need weapons, and our country is quite capable of undertaking that in vast amounts. Officially all we have to do is work out which side we wish to be on, but I would think that our country would support the North and they will be able to pay for that service. It is rumoured that the Queen would prefer to support the South, but they would once again be restricted because of the number of sea patrols they would have to avoid and of course, if captured, any guns would be confiscated leaving them out of pocket and without weapons. England will, however, probably attempt to stay neutral but of course France would side with the South, but it would be difficult for them as they tried to avoid whatever blockades there might be."

"I would think that both your companies could be badly affected by any conflict," said the Duke.

"Well, I'll give somebody else a chance to answer. Wendell for Marchant & Fuller and Peter for Bradley & Company," said Liza who was beginning to realise that they were all allowing her to take the lead in this discussion and she wanted to hear what others had to say.

"Certain outlets will be closed to us," said Wendell, "but I can honestly see that others will open up. We trade throughout the world so I don't think we will lose too much, although losing cotton, tobacco and sugar from the South will mean that we will have to look for other products to make up that deficit. I hope that it won't come to war, but we are in business to make money and keep people employed, so I suppose we will deal in weapons. Liza won't like that, none of us will but we'll do what's necessary."

"Yes, we really would like to just carry out the nice side of business, but as Wendell says, we do what's necessary, although we have drawn the line at the slave trade," said Liza.

"As far as Bradley & Company is concerned, we may lose crops and animals, but we won't lose the land and hopefully not premises, and we can afford to ride the storm. We have more farms and premises in countries other than America, in fact most of our land is this side of the Atlantic," said Peter.

"Why are you so interested in how an American Civil war will affect our companies? There must be many other companies who you must know and who will also be affected," said Liza.

"You are just confirming what some of my advisers are telling me, but there are others who want us to believe that any conflict in America will affect nothing in our country. There are also those who would want us to ally ourselves with the South. Also your companies are a good indication of how others will be affected as you are the largest shipping company dealing in America," said the Prime Minister and he continued, "we are enjoying a time of some economic strength at present and want to be prepared for any downturn in that economy."

"Well, such economic strength should be used to make sure that our factories have enough raw materials to ease any future inability to purchase," said Liza pointedly. "We may also have an exodus to America from Britain and mainly from Ireland. Since the potato famine of the 1840s many Irish now live in America, but they have many relatives still over here and they will go to fight for what they see are the rights of their families and friends and that will be mainly for the North."

"I've noticed that you have a North American manager here with you and also that you have a Southern friend who helps you with your charity, you are going to have very divided loyalties," said the Duke.

"I won't have divided loyalties. Charles Enderby employs bond servants mainly from Ireland, I believe he has a couple of house servants who were once family slaves, but they have been free for many years. They have been with the family so long that they wouldn't know where else to go. He would, however, have just as many difficulties as his slave owning neighbours," said Liza. "It is all very well that those in the North wish to free all slaves and it is indeed the right thing to do, but most of them are uneducated and unskilled and would be in a worse situation than they are at the moment, however time will tell."

"I know that you have known two American Presidents, Lady Edgeworth and presumably you have had discussions with them as we are now having, can you tell me what they think the possibilities of civil war are and what the consequences could be?" asked Lord Palmerston.

"I have no idea what anyone in this room will tell others, but as far as I am concerned we have had a private conversation with you both today and it will remain that way, so you can't expect me to talk about any

discussions I may have had with the American Presidents, but if you were to ask me what my opinion is about the possibility of an American Civil war then I have to say that yes I believe it will happen, unfortunately, and the consequences for that country will be disastrous in the short term, but in the long term it will unify a nation which seems to be pulling apart at present and to be honest I believe it could eventually become one of the most powerful nations in the world,” said Liza.

Jamie was looking slightly shocked at Liza, as were Wendell and Peter. She had just told two of the most powerful men in England to mind their own business in the most charming of terms. They both realised it but smiled knowingly at her. “So,” said Lord Palmerston, “we will have to concentrate our efforts on perfecting the manufacture of armaments and the like.”

“And unfortunately, bandages, dressings and surgical implements and possibly uniforms, but for which side only you will know,” said Liza sadly and they all nodded in agreement.

“Thank you,” said Lord Palmerston, “it has given us an insight into what is happening across the Atlantic.”

“It can’t have been that helpful and you must have surmised a great deal already, but nobody is ready to commit to war yet, thank God. However a great many runaway slaves are making their way to New York and other northern cities and the South are demanding their return, so how that will be resolved I have no idea, but it has not as yet become a major confrontation I’m pleased to say,” said Liza. “However, I would think that your concerns would be levelled towards what is happening in the Crimea which involves our country on a very large scale. Any war in America is hopefully far away, whereas that in the Crimea is on our doorstep. If you will excuse me gentlemen, I must now return to my other guests; they will think I have deserted them.”

The men stood as she moved to leave the room, with Jamie opening the door for her and he excused himself and followed her out. Lord Palmerston then asked, “Does she still have very close ties to America?”

Peter answered, “She has property in New York and several in a town called Benson and others in Harris Town. She owns one or two farms near those towns and businesses also within the towns. She has a newspaper in Benson and was instrumental in arranging all the M & F Banks in America and they span both the North and the South, which is something that we

will have to look very closely at should war break out. She also instigated our security company there. She has also opened schools in both towns and undertaken numerous other charitable works there, most of which we know nothing of, but her closest link, which will never be broken, is that she has buried a husband and daughter in the graveyard at Benson. So, I presume the answer to your question is yes, she does still have close ties to that country,” said Peter.

“I would like to emphasise that although it seems that she may have concentrated her influence solely across the Atlantic, she has far more investment in Britain than anywhere else, although she does now have a very large undertaking in Italy. I only add this because I didn’t want you to think that she puts nothing back into our country, it is what is foremost in her business ventures,” said Wendell.

“Lord Edgeworth has ensured his future no matter what he has signed,” said the Duke and his comment rankled both Wendell and Peter.

“Jamie has loved her since she was a very young girl and had nothing; circumstances kept them apart until now and with all due respect it would be better if your comment was not repeated,” said Wendell risking the wrath of the powerful Duke.

“My apologies, it was an unworthy observation and I am pleased that no one else was here to hear it,” said the Duke.

Lord Palmerston smiled and thought that both Lord and Lady Edgeworth had true champions in the Fuller family.

As Jamie and Liza moved to join their guests, most of whom were enjoying the warmth in the conservatory, Evelyn could be heard saying “Well, as Liza has left her guests to fend for themselves I suppose I had better step in to make sure they are all well catered for.”

Liza and Jamie stood back with amusement to see what Amelia had to say about that. “That will not be necessary Evelyn as the Dowager Lady Edgeworth and I were put in charge by Liza whilst she was summoned by the Prime Minister and the Duke of Norfolk for a private conversation, no doubt about the state of the country, if not the world. She has much influence on political aspects of our country you know, as does Jamie.”

Liza and Jamie looked at one another. “I didn’t know we had that much influence, did you Jamie?” whispered Liza.

“No, but it’s good to find out,” whispered Jamie back to her.

Miranda had a smile hovering on her lips as they came into the conservatory and Amelia caught sight of them. "I presume your political insights were well received," Amelia said to both Liza and Jamie.

"Absolutely," said Jamie, "the country will run much better now."

In all the years that Amelia had known Jamie, this was the first time that she had seen and heard that he had a sense of humour, but it was probably also the first time that he had been truly happy.

Liza was telling everyone that lunch would be served in around an hour's time and when they heard the gong they could make their way to the dining room as this would be an informal affair and they were to sit where they pleased. She told them that there was plenty of salad and cold meats served with rolls and butter, all to be washed down with wine, lemonade or water and that this was to stave off any pangs of hunger which they might have before their dinner that evening. The boys would be joining them for lunch and so Liza made sure that April had them washed and scrubbed for the occasion.

The hour soon passed, and the gong sounded. There was a mass movement towards the dining room and Liza observed how excited everyone seemed to be at the prospect of food. Both she and Jamie made sure that nobody had been left behind and they then also made their way into the dining room only to be confronted by the sight of Binky sitting in Jamie's place at the head of the table and Evelyn sitting at the foot opposite him. There were one or two disapproving glances most notably from the Duchess and Lady Palmerston, but Jamie handled it well; he just stood and stared at Binky until he had no option but to say, "I say old boy, am I in your seat? I thought we could sit where we liked."

"Yes, you can Binky, but not at the head of my table," said Jamie.

Evelyn looked at Liza defiantly and was about to say something, but Liza pre-empted her by saying, "That's alright Evelyn; I like to sit next to my husband on informal occasions. This evening will however be a different matter and you will be escorted to your place then."

It was all very friendly with even the Prime Minister standing and choosing what he wanted before going to a seat and having what he had chosen placed in front of him. As the Duke was about to sit next to him, to Liza's and Jamie's horror the face of Matthew appeared there, and he had carried his plateful of food and placed it carefully next to Lord Palmerston and the Duke was obliged to move down a seat.

"I thought I'd come and keep you company," said Matthew to the Prime Minister.

"That's very good of you," said Lord Palmerston with a smile, he conveyed to both Liza and Jamie that it was perfectly alright for Matthew to be there and even the Duke was smiling as Matthew made himself comfortable between them.

"Nobody can doubt who your mother is young man," said Lord Palmerston.

"Yes, people say that I have her eyes, but I have been told that I have my father's hair. I didn't know him," said Matthew and Liza and Jamie groaned. "I knew my daddy though and he was really nice, just as nice as my father is now."

The Prime Minister looked confused and Liza and Jamie just smiled at him, wondering if the conversation was going to give away any more secrets, not that any of it was a secret anyway. It was too late to undo whatever had been said and so Liza and Jamie just let it all happen.

John was sitting closely to Peter and they were having a conversation, but Jamie wondered why Binky kept staring at them; he was probably getting over a hangover Jamie thought.

James came over to Liza and asked where he should sit, and Liza suggested that he sat next to his mother. "But there's no room next to you," came James' reply.

"Oh James, you know what I mean," said a tired Liza.

"Oh alright, I'll see if she wants me there," said James and he walked away with his lunch towards his mother, whose first words were, "Don't spill that on me." James sat next to her and ate his lunch in silence and when he had finished, he came back to Liza and said, "Well, I did as you said. I think I'll go and sit next to Uncle Joseph now." Liza just nodded as mealtimes were meant to be happy times not awkward and stilted. Jamie just shrugged and raised his eyes. "Well you tried Liza," was all he said.

Matthew was still regaling the Prime Minister with tales of his past life and Liza tried to intervene but was told that he was finding it all very interesting and informative and Liza groaned again and looked appealingly at Jamie, who just smiled and said that there was nothing in her past life that she need be ashamed of.

The Duchess and Lady Palmerston were now listening intently to Matthew and Jamie tried to tell him to stop bothering people, but the

Duke brushed aside his intervention and the four of them carried on listening. Liza could hear words such as “and my Indian name is . . .”, and “my friend Si . . .”, and “my daddy . . .”, also “she wouldn’t want us to live like that . . .” Liza was getting increasingly upset by what Matthew was saying as it was reminding her of how much she missed her friends in Benson. Jamie noticed this and moved to Matthew and whispered something to him and he got up and excused himself from his seat and went to see John who appeared to be rather on edge and needed his brother with him as well as his beloved Uncle Peter.

“What’s wrong with John?” asked Jamie.

“I don’t know, but he seems unnerved by Evelyn and Binky. We’ll probably find that one of them has said something to upset him. I’ll see him when lunch is over and make sure he’s feeling well,” said Liza.

It was a beautiful early autumn afternoon and most of the guests decided to take walks around the grounds. Liza decided to go to the kitchen to see Mrs Lambert who she really had not had a chance to thank for all her hard work. The kitchen staff appreciated her visit and she told them that the next day would be a little easier as many of the guests were leaving.

Liza then went to find John who was with Peter but had a look of relief when he saw her. “I don’t know what’s wrong with John, but he seems very upset. I know that he can be very serious, but something seems to be bothering him and he won’t say what it is,” said Peter.

“I’m going to have a rest, would you like to come with me,” Liza asked John and he nodded vehemently, and they went up to Jamie’s room and lay on the bed with John snuggling up to her. “What’s the matter John, has somebody said something nasty to you?”

“No,” was all John would say.

“Do you feel unwell?” asked Liza.

“No,” said John.

“Is there anything you want to tell me? Or are you just tired?” said Liza.

“I’m tired,” said John.

“Well, you just rest and perhaps you can get some sleep,” said Liza but she wasn’t sure that somebody hadn’t upset him. He lay in her arms and went to sleep, and she also nodded off.

Later Jamie found them like that, and he had James and Matthew with him as it was time to go to the kitchen for supper.

John woke up and said that he wasn't hungry. "Doesn't matter," said Matthew, "You don't have to eat anything, but Mrs Lambert will be upset if she doesn't see you, so come on let's go."

He reluctantly climbed off the bed ready for them to lead him down to the kitchen with Liza telling both Matthew and James to stick closely to John because something had upset him. "It's probably that Binky person; he keeps staring at us all," said James.

"I know you all look after one another; you're good boys," said Liza and Jamie frowned looking a little worried.

"How long is Binky staying with us?" asked Jamie

"I don't know Jamie; you invited him, I thought he would have told you," said Liza.

"Well, I didn't expect him to bring Evelyn with him and I had assumed that he would leave either today or early tomorrow, but I'm beginning to wonder if he'll be staying for months," said Jamie. "He seems to be quite comfortable here."

"I suppose he said something thoughtless that John took to heart; he can be very sensitive at times. He'll probably be better when the place isn't so crowded," said Liza.

Before she went down to dinner, Liza called in to see the boys and John looked much better. April was reading to them and all three looked so comfortable in their beds. They had their own bedside cupboards and wardrobes which made each area have its own individuality. There was a fourth bed there which John and Matthew had said was for when Si came to visit, and James said that he was anxious to meet him.

At dinner the Duchess of Norfolk leaned across the table towards Liza and said, "Your son kept us quite entertained at lunchtime today Liza."

"Yes, that was what I was worried about," smiled Liza.

"Don't worry he didn't tell us anything that need worry you. In fact, he sung your praises and told us how brave you had been," said the Duchess.

"I suppose to small boys anything normal appears bigger than it is," said Liza.

"I think you're being a little modest, but I can see that I'm embarrassing you," said the Duchess. "Are you staying here for a while or will you be travelling to one of your other houses soon?"

"We'll be spending Christmas in Belfast; which is what we normally do each year," said Liza.

"I think I'd like to have James with me this Christmas," said Evelyn out of the blue.

The Duchess turned and stared at Evelyn with contempt and Liza said, "Well Evelyn that's something that you will have to sort out with Jamie."

"That would be a shame as he seems so happy with the other boys, but as you say Liza, that's something for your husband to sort out," said the Duchess who was well aware that Evelyn had not been invited and never missed an opportunity to create a problem.

Dinner was another successful event, and everyone went to bed well fed. Liza went in to see John and the boys before she went to her bed and Jamie also came to check on him. John was awake but seemed to relax with them there and he was soon fast asleep.

Lord and Lady Palmerston and the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk left soon after breakfast the next day. Just before lunchtime Anthony, Diana, Anne and David bade farewell and said that they would all be in Belfast for Christmas.

It wasn't until three o'clock that Evelyn appeared, and Binky arrived a few minutes later. Liza tried not to show how annoyed she was as they were sleeping together in Jamie's house and all the remaining guests were well aware of it.

Jamie called them both into his study and Liza felt it prudent to encourage the house guests either to take advantage of the good weather, or rest in their rooms for a while. Miranda invited Lily and Nicole for afternoon tea, Joseph, Peter and Edward took the boys for a game of bat and ball. Wendell and Amelia decided that they would stay so that Liza would not be alone at a difficult time. They were also there to give Jamie some support should he need it. Liza really knew that Amelia wanted to be the first to know the outcome of Jamie's meeting.

Liza, Wendell and Amelia stayed in the conservatory until they heard Jamie approach them. All he said was that Evelyn and Binky would be leaving the next morning. Liza did wonder why they were not going until the following day but thought better of asking.

Evelyn decided that she would have her meal in her room that evening, but Binky was going to brazen it out and joined everyone for

dinner. It was an informal affair that evening with Liza sitting next to Jamie and everyone finding where they wanted to sit.

It was the last evening that they would see the Fuller boys and Nicole, Lily and Jennifer until Christmas as they were also leaving the next morning. Wendell and Amelia were staying for at least another week as were Henry, Myra and Charles and Liza would rearrange their bedrooms the next day. She would be pleased to get her room back, although she always wanted to sleep in Jamie's bed.

Lucinda seemed to be enjoying her stay with Miranda and didn't appear to be anxious to leave for her home, but Miranda was quite happy to have her company.

When they got into bed that night, they both were exhausted but Liza still asked Jamie what he had said to Evelyn and Binky. "I just told them to leave my house as soon as possible as it was insulting of them to use it as a brothel. I also told Evelyn that she stood no chance of having James with her at Christmas."

"That's a relief," said Liza as she tried to keep her eyes open. She looked at Jamie and he was in the same condition, so they just settled down and were asleep within minutes.

They were woken in the early hours of the morning by piercing screams, interspersed with cries of 'mummy'. Liza was up and running towards the boy's room. April was also pushing her way in. Jamie was running down the corridor as it had taken him a minute or two to realise where the sound was coming from. Liza was confronted by James and Matthew hitting out at someone who was rolling on the floor, but her main concern was John who was screaming uncontrollably in his bed and his nightshirt was partially over his head.

"I'm here John," cried Liza, "I'm here my darling," and she clasped him to her and he clung to her tightly, so much so that he was hurting her, but she didn't care as it was what he needed to do.

Jamie was trying to pull the boys from the person who was cowering on the floor; they were hitting him and kicking him. Peter came rushing in, took in the scene and attempted to help Jamie get the boys away from the man. John was still screaming but not quite so loudly and Liza was gradually calming him down. She pulled John's nightshirt down and picked him up and carried him out of the room and down to Jamie's room, telling April as she went to bring Matthew and James into her.

John was now crying pitifully, and Liza knew that somebody had tried to sexually assault him, and she prayed that they had not succeeded. She got to the room and Amelia followed her in. Wendell had gone down to where the commotion was. Liza was now crying along with John who was still clinging tightly to her. Adam and April came along with Matthew and James who both were now also crying because their brother had been hurt. Liza told them to get into the bed to keep warm and she asked April to find her an extra blanket as John was now so cold. She was rocking him backwards and forwards as if he was a baby and it seemed to comfort him.

Peter came in to see if there was anything he could do to help as he knew that John trusted him completely, and John put his hand out to him. Peter took it and patted it and told him that he was safe now with his mummy and that she would look after him. Liza looked up at him and asked a question with her eyes and all he said was "Binky". Liza nodded and just closed her eyes in despair and suddenly her tears wouldn't stop.

"I promised him that he would always be safe with us and I haven't kept that promise. I should have realised when I saw the way that man was looking at the boys but his association with Evelyn clouded by judgement. How could I have been so blind?" said Liza between sobs.

"It isn't your fault Liza," said Peter.

"No of course it isn't," said Jamie from the doorway. "None of us would have believed that such a thing could happen."

"Where is that man?" asked Amelia.

"We've locked him in his room and he's nursing a great many wounds, none of them serious. Thank goodness our boys sleep together otherwise it could have been a good deal worse. How is he Liza?" asked Jamie.

"Oh Jamie, I promised him when we first had him that nothing like this would ever happen to him again, how can he trust anyone again?" cried Liza and she clasped him even closer to her and carried on rocking him backwards and forwards.

"That man kept calling him his prince," said Matthew and a cold shiver went up Liza's spine. No wonder Binky kept looking at him, he must have recognised him from the past and he had the cheek to be here pretending that he was supporting the charity which was trying to stamp out that disgusting trade.

Wendell put his head around the door to see how the boys were and said that everyone was milling around in shock, especially Evelyn. Jamie's

face went cold and he stormed off to where he thought she would be and the tirade that came from his mouth sent Lily and Nicole immediately back into their room and Edward and Joseph stood by to give moral support to Jamie. Myra, Henry and Charles disappeared into one room, no doubt to discuss the situation. April was hovering in the room not knowing how to help and she was showing that she was in a state of shock and horror as she had lived through attacks like that many times in her young life. Amelia took her hand and led her back to her room and Adam slowly followed them and he looked furious and Jamie came back and he had a face like thunder.

Peter and Jamie were now just left in the room with them and Peter was still holding John's hand which seemed to calm him.

"I was going to leave tomorrow Liza, but if you don't mind, I think I'll stay for a few days longer," said Peter.

John looked up at him and nodded and Liza said, "You really are the kindest of people Peter, but I know you wouldn't want anyone to know that. Thank you it will make John very happy."

Peter patted John's hand again and said, "I must write some letters for Edward to take back for me. I will have to get my assistant to reorganise some meetings and also he will be able to deal with a few of the contacts that I have, so if you don't mind Jamie I'd like to use your study for a while."

"Of course, Peter, you know you really are welcome to whatever you need," said Jamie.

Peter got up and looked down at John and smiled at him saying that he would see him in a few hours and that he would spend every moment he could with him.

Matthew and James were virtually asleep, and nobody was going to disturb them. Liza gently lifted her legs into the bed trying not to move John too much and she settled down with him still leaning on her and holding tightly onto her. There was a couch in Jamie's room, and he took a blanket and stretched out on it hoping to get some rest. The lamps were left alight so that John could see as Liza didn't think that he would want to be in the dark.

Jamie looked across at Liza who was sitting in bed and leaning back on her pillows. "I am so sorry Liza," he said quietly. "You really have had some

difficult times since you came here, and this really is the worst thing that could happen to our family."

"It is, isn't it Jamie, but as we are a family, we will give one another the help and support to get through this. You had better try to get some sleep as you have some decisions to make tomorrow," said Liza equally quietly.

"We both do Liza," said Jamie and Liza nodded in agreement.

Jamie was awake early. He had hardly slept that night. He quietly washed and dressed and leaned over and kissed Liza on the head, whispering that he was going to see who was already up. He hoped that Wendell would be awake as he felt the need of his advice.

Matthew and James were rousing and shortly April came and took them to get ready for the day. John was still resting on her and she hoped that he was beginning to feel safe and secure again.

Mrs Frances knocked and entered bringing a breakfast tray containing food for both Liza and John. "We thought that the young master would like to have his breakfast with you this morning," she said. John looked up and a slight smile crossed his face.

Mrs Frances plumped up the pillows and at last John stopped holding onto Liza and sat up in bed with a tray in front of him and he gave her a watery smile and took a mouthful of porridge and then another and another. He then enjoyed some bread and marmalade and a cup of tea; he seemed to enjoy the pampering, but Liza was a little worried as he had said nothing since he had stopped screaming.

As usual Liza had a drip of coffee on her chin and Jamie came in followed by Peter. He looked at her and just naturally took her serviette and cleaned her chin. Peter watched this with slight amusement as Liza was known to have problems with eating in bed.

"I've come to take you to get ready John," said Peter. "Will you come with me?"

"Yes," said John and he climbed out of bed and off he went with Peter. They could hear Matthew and James asking him if he had really had breakfast in bed with their mummy and how lucky he was. Jamie smiled and commented how resilient children were.

"Liza, we need to make a decision about Binky. I know what Wendell thinks but whatever we do it should be your decision and I'd like you to tell me your thoughts before I tell you mine and Wendell's," said Jamie.

"I have had a while to think about it and much as I would like Binky to be hung, drawn and quartered, if we report him it will mean that John would have to give evidence and I can't put him through that. His life has been so heart-breaking already that I just don't want him to suffer any more. I know that he has never forgotten what happened to him when he was younger, but it was easing, and he was acting like a normal boy of his age. Binky has brought it all back to him and all the love and effort that everyone has made to make him feel like everyone else has been wiped out in just a few minutes," said Liza and she was now crying.

"Binky must be stopped but I don't know how that can be done. I know you'll never allow him in your house or near our children again, but it doesn't seem enough for what he's done, so I'm afraid I have no answers," said Liza.

"I can assure you that Binky will not be worrying young boys or girls for some time to come. Adam saw to that. I knocked him down, but Adam came at him with a cricket bat and it wasn't across his head," said Jamie meaningfully.

"Oh," said Liza. "Is he permanently damaged?"

"I doubt it, but he won't sit comfortably for a few weeks," said Jamie. "He threatened to call the authorities and Adam told him to do it and see what they say about the reasons why he attacked him. That quietened him I'm pleased to say. It's amazing how that affected way that he speaks has disappeared."

"What did Wendell think?" asked Liza.

"Really the same as you have said. He thinks it could be detrimental to John's permanent recovery if he has to relive it all again in a court room. He and Amelia will make sure that he will never be at any functions that they are attending. They can do that quite easily without saying why, and I can do the same here and if I do come across him I can cut him dead, others will notice and follow my lead and that will be a true punishment for him," said Jamie.

"It seems very little for the damage he has caused. What about Evelyn? I presume she will be leaving with him," said Liza.

"No, she has refused to have anything to do with him, so she will be leaving later by herself. She realises that what he tried to do was quite despicable. I'll organise a carriage for her this afternoon," said Jamie.

As Liza was dressing she heard a carriage draw up and when she looked out she saw four men escorting Binky out of the house and into the carriage, his bags were tied on and away he went and all Liza could think was *good riddance* and now they all had to bring John back to how he was before the attack.

Liza could hear noises coming from the boys' room and when she went along to them Peter, April and Mrs Frances were moving all John's possessions to the area that was reserved for Si. Matthew and James were doing their best to help, and John was sitting on the bed directing operations, but nobody was complaining.

"He didn't want to go back to his own bed," whispered Mrs Frances who obviously knew what had happened to John.

"That's a good idea; let's hope he'll settle there," said Liza. "But if his Uncle Peter tells him that it's a good idea, he won't argue."

Jamie came running up the stairs and along to the boys' room. "Well, that's one down and just one to go. This hasn't been as happy a time as it should have been because of those two. I see John is moving to another bed, that's a good idea. I suppose Peter suggested it," said Jamie and Liza nodded.

Miranda and Lucinda came over with Jennifer who was leaving that morning. They had heard that there had been a commotion during the night and that Binky had been the instigator of an attack on one of the children. They were all shocked and disgusted, especially as it had been perpetrated by a guest in the house.

Lunch was necessarily early because of the guests who were leaving. The boys came rushing down to join them; they liked these lunchtimes where they could help themselves and sit where they liked. Of course, John sat next to Peter. Evelyn did not appear and did not ask for any refreshments in her room.

They all stood on the steps to wave them off. Wendell had given explicit instructions to Edward and Joseph concerning business and Peter gave them his letters for his assistant and when they had driven away the boys went over to the Dower House for afternoon tea, and Peter went with them.

Amelia, Wendell, Henry, Myra and Charles were enjoying some relaxation in the conservatory and Liza had joined Jamie in his study.

Evelyn knocked and entered, "I'm packed and ready to leave if you could organise a carriage for me please Jamie," she said.

"I would have thought that you would have apologised to Liza for all the trouble you and that idiot of a partner of yours have caused," said Jamie.

"Yes, of course, I'm sorry but what Binky did was nothing to do with me," said Evelyn.

"Wasn't it Evelyn?" said Jamie. "I thought you felt that you had to take Liza down a peg or two, or so I have heard."

Evelyn looked very flustered. "I don't know what you mean."

Liza was sitting and looking puzzled as this was the first she had heard whatever it was Jamie was referring to.

"What you must appreciate and what you have never learned, is that members of staff aren't deaf, and they do have loyalties. I find it despicable that you took out your jealousy on a child in the most disgusting way," said Jamie.

Liza continued to look puzzled and surprised.

"No, Jamie you're wrong; I did not instigate any of what happened last night, please believe me, no matter what else I may do, I most certainly would not take any revenge on a child. It could have been James that he chose; you can't think that I would condone that. No Jamie, I promise you that what happened yesterday was nothing to do with me," said a distraught Evelyn.

Jamie sat and looked at her for a while and then said, "Alright, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. Does that mean that we may expect some other jealous attempt to hurt Liza?"

Evelyn gulped and said, "That was just said in the heat of the moment when Liza had made both Binky and I feel rather stupid and I apologise for that. We hadn't realised how serious alcohol was for Diana, we knew that it would probably make her say and do something silly and foolishly we thought that would be funny. I can only apologise again and hope that you will put it down to the fact that we also had consumed too much wine."

Liza looked away; she didn't like listening to this conversation. She just wanted Evelyn to leave so that she could enjoy the company of Jamie, her boys and close friends and try to forget the havoc that had been caused by Binky and Evelyn.

Jamie rang for Harper to organise Evelyn's departure and he informed her that her baggage was already in the carriage.

"Goodbye Evelyn," was all Liza said as Jamie escorted her from the study and out to her carriage. Unfortunately for Jamie and Liza, Evelyn seethed on her way home and came up with several plans which could be disastrous for them both.

When Jamie returned, Liza said, "I gather that I really upset Evelyn and I suppose I meant to. She and Binky were acting very foolishly as far as Diana was concerned and presumably they wanted Diana to do something that would upset both of us. Anyway, they've both gone now so shall we get back to our good friends before the boys get back from your mother's."

In the conservatory Henry and Charles were having discussions on the differences between Northern and Southern America and how any conflict between them would affect each side. They weren't arguing as neither thought that war was the answer to the differences.

Myra and Amelia were talking about planning a charity function in New York; neither of them thought to ask Liza if it could be held at her house, it was a foregone conclusion that it would be as far as they were concerned.

Wendell was reading a newspaper and not contributing to either conversation. He looked up as Liza and Jamie came in and said, "Has the troublesome Evelyn left?"

"Yes, we are at last free of our irritants," said Jamie.

"You will never be free of that irritant Jamie," said Wendell. "I would be very cautious as I feel that there is so much truth in the saying that 'hell hath no fury like a woman scorned'. Yes, both of you must be very careful. I don't think she will take a knife to you, but she can create a great deal of trouble for you."

Jamie and Liza looked at one another and knew that Wendell was right; they would watch out and look after one another and their family well.

Matthew and James ran into the conservatory, followed by Peter and John. They regaled everyone with the wonderful tea they had had at the Dower House and then went rushing off to the kitchen for their supper. Peter frowned and said, "How can they eat supper after what they had this afternoon? John seemed to relax a little."

"It's good of you to spend the time with him Peter," said Jamie.

"It's the least I can do. It was a terrible thing to happen to him. I know that Liza has never mentioned his past, but I believe none of us were under any illusions over what he had gone through in his short life. It's so annoying that all the love and care that he's received from us all to help him forget could have been wiped out by that evil man," said Peter.

All the remaining guests had been moved into more comfortable bedrooms and Liza now had her bedroom back and she left the conservatory with the others so that they could rest before dinner.

John knocked at her door and came in; Liza put out her arms to him and he came to her and she engulfed him warmly. "I remembered that man when he arrived; I thought that he had forgotten me," he said.

"You should have told me, and we would have got rid of him immediately. He's gone now and he will never be back and if you ever see anyone like that again, you must promise me that you will tell me because I can deal with it right away and save you from being hurt again," said Liza.

"I promise, but I'm alright now because I have you and dad, Uncle Peter and my brothers and you all look after me. My brothers protected me last night; they hit him and kicked him and got him off me. My dad punched him, and I heard that Mr Reece hit him hard and you cuddled me all night. I had breakfast in bed with you and that was nice, but that man was really horrible," said John.

Liza thought that it was one of the longest speeches that John had ever made.

"Are you going to be happy in your new bed tonight?" asked Liza.

"Yes, I'll be quite happy there; I think it's a better place than my old one. It will be nice when we go to Belfast though. Will we be in your house or in dad's?" asked John.

"I presume we'll be in your father's now. It should be ready for us by the time we get there," said Liza.

"Good," he said. "I'll tell the others, good night Mummy."

"Do you want me to take you to your room?" asked Liza.

"No thank you; there's nobody here now who will hurt me," said John and Liza breathed a sigh of relief that he was back to normal, all she had to deal with was the fact that everyone now knew of his past and she hoped that nobody would treat him differently because of it.

It was a much more relaxed dinner that evening. Charles and Henry still argued the merits of the North versus the South with good humour. Amelia and Myra carried on planning Liza's charity New York party. Miranda and Lucinda talked about how much they enjoyed one another's company. Wendell and Peter discussed business and Liza and Jamie just sat and breathed sighs of relief that they were now with uncomplicated friends.

Both Liza and Jamie carefully checked on the boys that night before they got ready for bed. Liza went to her room, but it wasn't long before Jamie could hear her padding across the hall to his room. She opened the door and smiled at him and he pulled back the bedclothes inviting her to join him.

"You can relax a little now Liza," he said as he held her tightly.

In the morning Jamie, Wendell and Peter were in the study, each behind a newspaper. Liza smiled broadly as she came in and wondered if they all would lower their papers at the same time.

"Good morning gentlemen," she said, and they all lowered them in unison and said, "Good morning Liza."

Liza laughed and they each looked at her questioningly, which made her laugh even more, but before she could tell them what had amused her Miranda and Lucinda came in.

"We wanted to talk to you about an idea that we've had," said Miranda to nobody in particular.

"Is it something private?" asked Liza.

"No, not really," said Miranda. "As you must realise Lucinda and I get on really well together and we thought it might be a good idea if she moved in with me on a permanent basis."

Three newspapers were lowered, and three pairs of eyes stared at Lucinda.

"How do you think that would work Miranda? Lucinda has a home of her own; what would happen to that?" asked Liza.

All the newspapers were now completely lowered.

"Eventually I would try to sell it or perhaps rent it out, but initially I would just close it up. I am quite confident that there would be no

problems, but just in case it would be foolhardy for me to have nowhere to return to should it be necessary," said Lucinda.

Liza could see the irony of the suggestion, "so what you would like to do is become a companion to Miranda. That's a role reversal."

"Do you feel the need of a companion Mother?" asked Jamie.

"No Jamie, but I do enjoy the company of a friend and it does seem foolish for us to have two houses when one would be sufficient," said Miranda.

"I suppose it would be equally foolish for you to move in with Lucinda when you now have such a lovely home here," said Wendell who felt that he was making an important point.

"Well of course, I am now with my son and his family and I wouldn't want to give that up for all the money in the world," said Miranda.

Two newspapers went back up, but Jamie smiled at his mother and continued to look at her.

"This is Jamie's house," said Liza, "so it's up to him to say what he thinks, but I would just like to pass one comment and it's not designed to upset anyone. The Dower House is Miranda's home and any decisions regarding staff and any other arrangements should be hers and hers alone. Your roles are now reversed and it may be difficult for both of you to adjust to your new circumstances."

"I appreciate what you are saying Liza," said Lucinda, "and there may be occasions when I forget myself, but I am hoping that Miranda will put me right over that."

"Do you have no family?" asked Jamie.

"No, there is nobody left now," said Lucinda.

"I have no objections as long as you are both truly sure that it is what you want," said Jamie.

"What about your current staff Lucinda?" said Liza.

"My maid would come with me, but my cook and housekeeper are both due to retire so I would make sure they are well provided for. I understand that a butler is needed at the Dower House so if it is acceptable to you, I could ask my butler if he would be interested in the position," said Lucinda.

"That seems sensible," said Jamie, "but will he be able to take orders from my mother instead of you?"

"We would all have to make some adjustments, but it's nothing that's insurmountable," said Miranda.

"Your two members of staff will become Edgeworth employees; you don't see a problem with that, do you?" asked Jamie.

"That hardly seems fair on you," said Lucinda.

"No Lucinda it's perfectly fair as Miranda needed a butler and your maid can assist you both, which will leave the housekeeper with more time for other duties," said Liza.

"Well, we'll see how it all works out, really you have nothing to lose, especially if you are keeping your house until you both see how you get on," said Jamie.

"What will you do about your furniture?" asked Liza.

"There are just one or two pieces that are important to me and there is room at the Dower House to easily accommodate them," said Lucinda.

"We'll go today to your house then Lucinda," said Miranda rather excitedly.

"Hmmm," said Jamie and he went back behind his newspaper and Miranda and Lucinda went off happily to organise their transport.

"You handled that very well Jamie," smiled Liza as she left the room and all three newspapers dropped and the men watched her leave.

Over the course of the next week Liza had many meetings with Wendell and Peter and on occasion Henry was included.

John seemed to settle well, and Adam started the boys' lessons again, with Derek joining them.

Lucinda moved in with Miranda and their butler, Stewart, who seemed extremely happy to be in Miranda's employ, realising that all his orders now had to come from the Dowager Lady Edgeworth.

Then the day arrived when Wendell, Amelia and Peter were to leave, and Liza and the boys felt sad at their departure, but it would only be a couple of months before they would be in Belfast for Christmas.

Myra, Henry and Charles were staying for another week before they went on their long journey to New York and then Charles on to his Southern home. The differences between the North and South were discussed frequently around the dinner table and it was difficult to believe that there may be war between them if Henry and Charles were anything to go by.

The day before they were due to leave Liza asked if they felt that their trip had been worthwhile.

"It's the first time I have been to England and it's a very beautiful country. I'm pleased I made the trip and I'm pleased to see you looking so well Liza. I'm saddened that you married whilst my back was turned, but it seems to suit you," said Charles.

Liza laughed, "It was such a surprise to see you Charles, but I was so pleased that you came. Is there no Mrs Enderby on the horizon?"

"No not yet. I'm going to have to find someone like you and you are a very hard act to follow," said Charles.

"It's kind of you to say Charles, but I'm sure there are plenty of Southern Belles who you would find very attractive and would find you equally attractive," said Liza.

"Yes, I hope you're right," said Charles.

"When are you thinking of holding the charity ball in New York?" asked Myra.

"Probably after Easter, but no doubt you will be informing people that it will be happening at the end of May or June," said Liza.

"We'll make arrangements for all of us to travel to New York then," said Jamie. "We'll take the boys and Adam and April. Who will you and Lucinda need with you mother?"

"Just our maid Jamie, but really I didn't for a minute think that you would be taking us also," said Miranda.

"You're part of our household. You'll be coming to Belfast with us also at Christmas," said Jamie.

"Oh," said Lucinda.

"Yes, you too Lucinda. Unless of course you don't wish to," said Jamie.

"That will be wonderful," said Lucinda. "Thank you, Jamie."

"Well, I don't know that we'll be up to the trip to New York, but Christmas in Belfast will be wonderful," said Miranda.

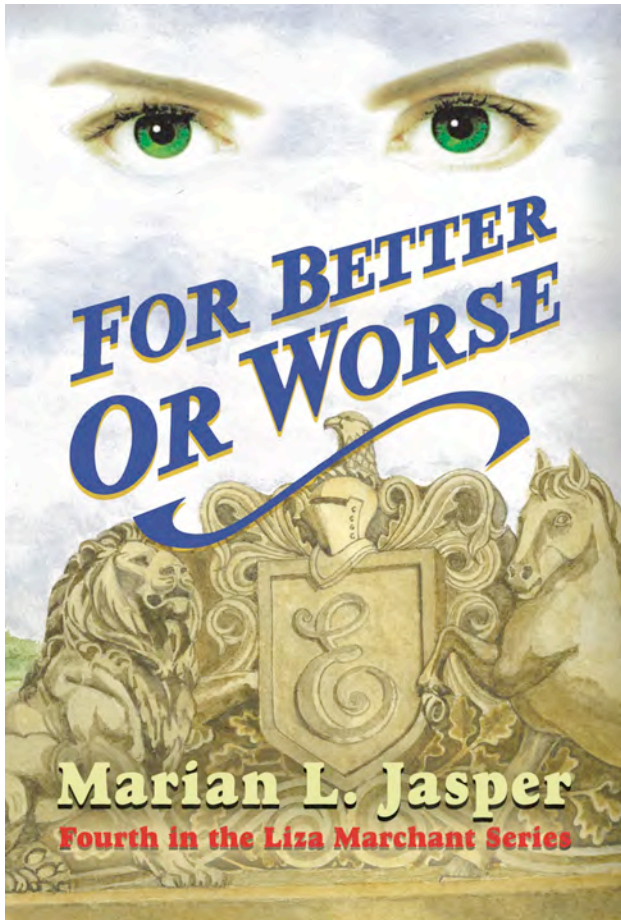
The next morning their American guests took their leave saying that they would see them again next year in May or June, and then the house seemed to fall quiet. It seemed to have been such a long while since the house had only had family within it and Liza and Jamie could now relax. The boys missed all their aunts and uncles and would much rather not have had lessons but knew that they only had to wait a few weeks and then it would be the exciting Christmas time in Belfast.

Nothing had been heard of Evelyn or Binky; they both seemed to be hiding away from society, although Evelyn had no need to feel ashamed. They presumed that Binky was at his country house as he had not been seen on the London circuit since his visit.

Anthony and Diana visited on a few occasions and the difference in Diana was remarkable and they had the wonderful news that she was pregnant. Liza was delighted but a little envious and they wanted both she and Jamie to be godparents. It was due in July and Liza said that they would come back from New York as soon as they could so that the Christening could be arranged.

Liza asked Miranda if she was disappointed that she would not be spending Christmas in her comfortable home.

“No, we’re quite happy to be coming with you, but we would be happy wherever you and the boys were. Christmas is a family time, and this will be the first time for thirty years that I will be with my family. I’m quite excited at the prospect and I’ll probably be acting like a child myself,” said Miranda.



FOR BETTER OR WORSE is the fourth in the Liza Marchant series and modern-day writer, Ellie Fuller, continues her research into Liza's life in Victorian times. She hopes that Liza will finally find contentment with the man who has always loved her. Liza's letters and diaries show that her life was never destined to run smoothly.

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