

HEATHER VOGEL FREDERICK

Pies & Prejudice: Chapter 1

EMMA

"I often think," said she, "that there is nothing so bad as parting with one's friends. One seems so forlorn without them."

– *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen

Jess stares at me in disbelief. "What do you mean, you're moving to England?"

"It's just for a year."

Her blue eyes well up with tears. "Just for a year! It might as well be forever!"

I knew that breaking the news to my best friend would be hard, but I didn't know it was going to be *this* hard.

"Wouldn't you want to go, if you were me?" I ask softly.

The thing is, I really want Jess to be happy for me, the way I was for her last year when she got the scholarship to Colonial Academy. Of course I'll be sad to leave Concord, and all of my friends, especially her. But still – *England!*

I only found out about it myself an hour ago, at breakfast. My dad spilled the beans.

"Your mother and I have a surprise for you," he told my brother and me.

"Another one?" I asked. Two weeks ago, he got a call from a publisher in New York. They're going to publish his novel, the one he's been working on for years.

"Yes, another one," he replied. "Your mother and I have been talking, and we know we should probably put the money I'm getting into fixing a few things around the house, or replacing our rattletrap of a car, or beefing up your college funds."

"But..." my mother prodded.

He smiled at her. "But," he continued, "for once in our lives, we decided to throw caution to the winds and do something a little crazy."

My brother and I exchanged a wary glance.



"It's all your mother's fault," my father said, trying to look disapproving but failing miserably. "She's wanted to go back to England ever since she was a graduate student there."

"We're going to England?" I said eagerly.

"Actually," he replied. "We're moving there."

Our complete and utter shock must have showed on our faces because my mother started to laugh. "It's just for a year," she added.

"A year?" my brother repeated. I was too stunned to say anything at all.

I'm still stunned, but happy, too. I try and explain this to Jess. "It came as a shock to us, too," I tell her. "You should have seen our faces when my parents told Darcy and me this morning."

Jess, who has been staring down at the floor, looks up at the mention of my brother's name. She's had a crush on him since elementary school.

"Is he excited about going, too?" she asks, wiping her nose on her sleeve.

I lift a shoulder. "We're both still getting used to the idea, you know?"

Which is kind of stretching the truth. Darcy was furious.

"What am I supposed to tell the football coach?" he'd demanded. "School is starting in a couple of weeks and there's a good chance he's going to pick me to be quarterback this year."

"Tell him the truth," my dad replied. "That an amazing opportunity came up for your family, and that you'll be back in time for your senior year. You can be quarterback then."

Darcy leaned back in his chair and whooshed out his breath. I could tell that moving out of the country was definitely not part of his plan. My brother is a total sports nut. He lives, breathes, eats and sleeps football, hockey, and baseball. Did they even have those sports in England, I wondered?

"Where are we going to live?" I asked.

"I'm working on that," said my mother. "I found a website that arranges house swaps."

My brother frowned. "What's that?"

"Exactly what it sounds like," my father told him. "You live in someone else's home while they live in yours."

"You mean other people will be using our stuff?" I didn't like the sound of this idea at all. Someone else would be sleeping in my bunk-bed, and using the roll-top desk that used to

be my grandfather's? Someone else would be looking at the old-fashioned wallpaper with the yellow roses that my mother and I picked out for my room after reading *Anne of Green Gables*?

My mother reached over and patted my shoulder. "Don't worry, honey," she said. "Your dad and I have it all figured out. We'll rent a storage unit for the things we don't want anybody else using while we're gone."

"What about your job?" My mother works at the Concord Public Library.

"They're letting me take a leave of absence."

"A sabbatical," my dad explained.

My mother has not just one but two master's degrees – one in library science, and the other in English Literature. Her specialty? Jane Austen. She's a complete Austen nut, which is why my name is Emma and my brother's is Darcy. We're named for a couple of characters in Jane Austen's novels.

"People have been swapping homes successfully for many years," she continued, swinging into full librarian "let me give you all the information" mode. "It's a very practical and economical arrangement. The service I've been working with has found someone they think would be perfect for us."

"Who?" I muttered.

"A professor who's coming here on a teaching exchange at Harvard. He and his family had a house lined up in Cambridge, but it fell through at the last minute."

"He's a history professor, so Concord would be the perfect spot for him," added my father. "He wants to learn about the American Revolution from our perspective."

He was right about that. Concord, Massachusetts, is practically the birthplace of the American Revolution. One of the first major battles of the war was fought here, and just about every inch of our town oozes history.

"The family's name is Berkeley," my mother told us. "Professor Phillip Berkeley and his wife Sarah. They have two boys, Simon and Tristan."

They had names. They were real people. This was really happening.

It was more than just the thought of strangers living in our house and messing with our stuff that had my head spinning, though. It was the thought of missing out on my freshman year at Alcott High, and leaving Stewart Chadwick, my sort of boyfriend, behind. If I went to England, the two of us wouldn't be able to work together on the school newspaper the way

we'd planned. Plus, there were all my other friends, too, not to mention Pip, the golden retriever puppy I co-owned with my skating teacher. And what about—

“Book club!” I blurted. “What about our mother-daughter book club?”

My mother bit her lip. “That’s one piece of the puzzle I haven’t figured out yet. I’m sorry, sweetheart. Maybe we can write to them, the way you did with your Wyoming pen pals last year.”

“So this is a done deal?” said my brother. “We don’t have a say in it at all?”

My parents were looking worried by now. I guess they’d been expecting us to be all thrilled about their announcement.

“Come on, kids! Where is your sense of adventure?” my father coaxed. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! We’ll be back here in Concord before you know it.”

“A whole year is hardly ‘before you know it,’” Darcy said icily. “I vote no.” And with that he got up from table and stalked out of the room.

I sat there feeling uncertain and confused. Was my brother right? Should I boycott the idea, too?

My mother slid a piece of paper across the table to me. “The agency emailed me a picture of the Berkeleys’ house this morning. It’s called Ivy Cottage.”

Reluctantly, I glanced down at the picture, then drew in my breath sharply. Ivy Cottage looked like something out of a fairy tale. It was small and snug, like our house, but it was made of stone, not wood. The front door was nearly obscured by the thick ivy that clambered up the cottage’s exterior, and the windows had little diamond crisscross patterns across them. There was something else, too. “It has a *thatched roof*?”

My father grinned. “How cool is that?”

Pretty cool, I thought. Trying not to show my excitement, though, I asked casually, “How old is it?”

“They’re not exactly sure,” my mother replied. “They think it was built sometime during the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First.”

“Are you serious?” said Darcy, poking his head around the corner. He must have been listening from the hall. My brother is kind of a history buff.

Sensing they were winning us over, my parents pressed the point.

“The village where the Berkeleys live is supposed to be beautiful,” said my mother. “It’s on the outskirts of the city of Bath.”

“Jane Austen territory,” added my father with a wink. “Catnip to your mother.”

He took her hand across the breakfast table. My parents hold hands a lot, which isn’t so bad at home but can be really embarrassing in public. My dad always says he and mom are as crazy about each other as they are about books.

He smiled at us. “You’ll get to ride a double-decker bus to school, and we plan to do a lot of exploring on the weekends. England, Scotland, maybe a bit of Europe, too.”

“What about Melville?” Darcy asked, reaching down to stroke our elderly marmalade-colored cat, who had finished his breakfast long ago and was hoping for some of ours.

“The Berkeleys are willing to look after him for us if we’ll look after their parrot,” my mother replied.

All of this replays in my head as I’m sitting here beside Jess. I slant a glance in her direction. She’s still brooding. I give her blonde braid a tug. “The Berkeleys have a parrot,” I tell her, hoping this will pique her interest. Jess loves animals. “And check out their house.” I take the picture my mother gave me out of my pocket and pass it to her. “It’s called Ivy Cottage, and it’s almost 400 years old!”

“Half Moon Farm is nearly that old,” Jess grumbles. “Why don’t you just move in here with us?”

I sigh. Jess is being stubborn. I hate it when she gets like this.

I know why she’s so upset, of course. It’s not just because I’m going away. It’s because Darcy’s going away too. Jess almost didn’t go back to Colonial Academy this year because she was so looking forward to being at Alcott High with him. Ultimately, she decided that she might as well continue at her private school, because she’d still get to see Darcy all the time anyway. She practically lives at my house, the way I practically live at hers.

Jess takes the picture from me and stares at it. “You’re really going, aren’t you?”

I nod. “Uh-huh.”

A tear trickles down her cheek. “What am I going to do without you for a whole year?”

“You’ll still have Cassidy and Megan and, well, Becca,” I remind her. Becca Chadwick is in our book club, but she’s not exactly our favorite person in the whole world. “And Frankie

and Adele and all your other friends at Colonial. And we can email and IM each other every day.”

She gives me a sidelong glance. “Promise?”

“Promise.” I bump her shoulder with mine. “What are best friends for?” I look at my watch. “I’ve got to go. I promised my mom I’d be back in time for lunch. She says we have a ton of stuff to do to get ready. We’re leaving in two weeks.”

“Have you told Stewart yet?”

“Nope. You were first on the list. Remember? BFBB?”

This earns me a half-hearted smile.

Best friends before boyfriends. Jess and I made a pact this summer. I almost broke it this morning, though. I had to ride right by Stewart’s house on my way over here to Half Moon Farm and I was really tempted to stop and tell him first. But I didn’t. And now here I am, holding up my end of the bargain, and Jess isn’t excited for me at all. Not one bit. I feel like a deflated balloon.

I try not to show my disappointment, though. I know this is hard for her.

“When are you going to tell him?”

“Right now,” I reply, strapping on my bike helmet.

“How about the rest of the book club?”

I grin. “They’ve probably already heard. My mom was on the phone with Cassidy’s mom when I left, and you know the mother-daughter book club grapevine.”

I give her a quick hug goodbye and head downstairs. Pedaling down Old Bedford Road a few minutes later, though, I start to worry. What if breaking the news to Stewart is even harder than telling Jess?

When I reach his house, I prop my bike against the wrought-iron fence that surrounds his front yard and head for the front door. Becca answers my knock. “Hey, Emma,” she says, not sounding too thrilled to see me. But then she never does. “What’s up?”

“Um, is Stewart around?”

It still bugs Becca a little that her brother likes me. She jerks her thumb toward the hallway leading to the kitchen. “He’s out in the backyard with Yo-Yo.”

“Thanks.” I reply. “I’ll go around.”

I skim back down the front steps and trot around the edge of the house, stopping abruptly when I almost collide with Mrs. Chadwick's bottom – smaller and less alarming than it used to be, thanks to a couple of years' worth of yoga classes, but still not something you'd want to meet in a dark alley, as my father would say. The bottom in question is sticking straight up in the air at the moment because Mrs. Chadwick is bent over, weeding. She spots me and straightens up.

"Hi, Emma!" She wipes her brow, and her gardening glove leaves a broad streak of dirt on her forehead.

I squelch a smile. "Hi, Mrs. Chadwick."

"Big news, huh?"

My heart sinks. She's heard about England, then, which means she's probably told Stewart. I'd hoped to get to him first. "Um—"

"Didn't Becca tell you? I'm going back to school." I must look surprised at this, because she adds, "I'm going to become a landscape designer."

Mrs. Chadwick has been going through a bit of a midlife crisis. At least that's what my parents call it. It started last year when she got a drastic new hairdo and started wearing all these outrageous clothes. Maybe it's over now, because compared to that, a degree in landscape design seems pretty tame.

"Sounds like fun," I tell her.

She nods enthusiastically. "I decided to get started now, before classes begin. I need the practice, and my garden needs a makeover."

I glance around at the piles of mulch and clippings and dirt mounded everywhere, wondering if this is going to be another of Mrs. Chadwick's misadventures, just like her "whole new me" was last year. It looks like a giant mole has attacked her yard. The outside of the Chadwicks' house is just as formal as the inside, what with the wrought-iron fence and tall, stiff hedges that circle the property and the carefully placed shrubs patrolling the interior at regular intervals. Not a daffodil is ever out of place; not a rosebush dares drop a petal on the perfectly mown grass. A row of small bushes severely clipped into ornamental shapes used to march around the house's foundation. What they were supposed to be, I'm not sure. I always thought they looked like chicken nuggets. Now, though, they've been uprooted and are lying on the lawn like a row of sleeping soldiers.

"Do you know where Stewart is?" I ask.

"He and Yo-Yo are back there somewhere," she replies, waving her trowel vaguely toward the shed. "Would you like some lemonade? I think I'll take a break and make some."

"Thanks," I tell her. "Maybe in a while."

As I cross the lawn, I can hear Stewart talking to his dog. I flatten myself against the shed and peer around the corner, trying to sneak up on the two of them, but the second I poke my nose out Yo-Yo spots me. With a gleeful bark, he hurls himself through the air and a second later I'm lying flat on my back in the grass with his paws planted on my shoulders. I am one of Yo-Yo's favorite people.

"Hey, boy," I say, breathless, squirming to avoid his slobbery dog kisses. "Good to see you, too."

Yo-Yo is a Labradoodle, and the sweetest dog in the entire world next to Pip. He's not very well trained, though.

"Where are your manners?" scolds Stewart. He grabs Yo-Yo's collar and pulls him off me, then reaches out a hand and helps me to my feet.

"Hi," I say, a little breathless. We stand there holding hands, beaming at each other. I suddenly remember my parents at the breakfast table this morning doing the same thing, and that reminds me why I'm here. "I, uh, have something to tell you."

"You won the Nobel Prize for literature."

"Shut up! I'm serious."

"You were named the first teenage poet laureate of the United States."

"Stewart!"

"Sorry," he replies, grinning. Stewart loves to tease me. "What's up?"

"Um, I don't really know how to say this, so I'll just say it. We're moving to England."

Stewart's smile fades. He stares at me, open-mouthed. *Uh-oh*, I think. Just like Jess.

"It's only for a year," I add hastily, and explain my parents' plan.

Stewart doesn't take his eyes off me as I talk. He has beautiful eyes, deep gray with a thick fringe of dark lashes. I love to look at them. Right now, though, I'm just relieved to see that he doesn't have the same deer-in-the-headlights look that Jess did when I broke the news to her.

"A whole year, huh?" he says when I'm done talking.

I nod.

“So you won’t be going to Alcott High, obviously.”

I shake my head.

“And we won’t be working on the school newspaper together.”

I shake my head again. “Not this year.”

I can tell by the way he’s chewing the inside of his cheek that he’s thinking things over. That’s another thing I really like about Stewart. He always thinks things through.

He lets go of my hand and leans down to grab the tennis ball by his feet, then throws it – hard. It soars across the yard and Yo-Yo tears off after it. Stewart turns back to me and before I realize what’s happening, he puts his arms around me. And then, just like that, as if he’s done it a million times before, he kisses me.

It’s a real, proper kiss this time too, not a peck on the cheek or a forehead kiss like before. Maybe it’s because he didn’t give me any advance warning, but I don’t feel awkward at all. All I feel is thrilled. My heart is pounding like it’s trying to leap out of my chest. Stewart’s is, too, I can feel it. I close my eyes and kiss him back, trying to memorize every single thing about this moment. I don’t ever want to forget it as long as I live. I don’t want to forget the warm sunlight filtering down on us through the branches of the apple tree overhead, or the distant buzz of a neighbor’s lawnmower, or the sound of Yo-Yo’s happy bark as he brings the ball back and drops it at our feet. And I especially don’t want to forget the way Stewart’s lips feel against mine.

It’s a perfect first kiss.

There’s only one problem.

I’m moving to England.