

Just Right

by Laurita Miller

Ms. Darcy set her breakfast dishes on the fresh table cloth. Breakfast was usually the same, a soft boiled egg, a piece of toast, and a glass of orange juice. Sometimes, on cold mornings, she would have a nice bowl of oatmeal.

Once the meal was finished and the dishes washed, Ms. Darcy looked around her apartment for anything out of place. Her rooms were small but comfortable and she liked to keep them presentable. The cushions were fluffed, the knick-knacks straightened, and she could find nothing more to be done. She looked at her wall clock. She would have just enough time to go to the grocer's before the mail delivery. She was expecting a package and had to be home to receive it.

The walk to the grocer's was pleasant. It was warm, but not too sunny, and there was a nice cool breeze. It was just right for walking.

Ms. Darcy's cheerful mood faltered when she reached the grocer's and saw the boy behind the counter. The grocer, Mr. Butler, was a nice man, always helpful and polite. "Good morning, Ms. Darcy" he would say, and perhaps chat about the weather as he rang up her purchases. The boy he hired was another story. Billy Neill was about eighteen and far too familiar for her liking.

"Good morning, Ms. D," Billy called as she entered the store. "Lovely morning for a walk." He nodded to her and smiled as she moved along the far end of the room.

Billy gestured with the cloth he was using to wipe the counter. "Peaches are nice today. Fresh and very sweet. Just right. You should try some. I know you like good produce."

Ms. Darcy smiled thinly and chose some asparagus and a few apples, deliberately moving past the peaches, although they did look lovely and ripe. At the counter she rummaged through her purse until her purchases were wrapped, avoiding eye contact with the boy.

"Would you like those delivered, Ms. D?"

"No, thank you", she said, and headed quickly for the door.

The walk back up the hill wasn't nearly as pleasant. The sun was hot and the bags were heavy. If Mr. Butler had been keeping the shop perhaps she would have had them delivered, but she wouldn't have Billy Neill think she couldn't carry her own groceries.

Ms. Darcy had just put away the last of her purchases when the doorbell rang. She quickly wiped her hands. It was Mr. Henry with the mail. He usually pushed the letters through the slot in the door, but today he had her package.

"Good morning, Mr. Henry. It's a fine day, isn't it?"

"It was Ms. Darcy, but the wind has picked up some, and I believe we may get some rain." Mr. Henry passed the bundle of mail through the doorway and looked over his shoulder toward the window in the hall.

"Oh dear. Well, I've no more plans to go out today. I suppose it wouldn't hurt to have a small shower or two. I do hope you finish your rounds first." The package was fine and heavy in Ms. Darcy's hands and she hoped Mr. Henry was not in a chatty mood today.

"Oh, I'm sure I'll be home to my lunch before the first drops fall. Have a good day, Ms. Darcy." He tipped his hat and headed upstairs to the next apartment.

Ms. Darcy put aside the telephone bill and the letter from her sister and placed the parcel on the coffee table. The package itself was lovely, brown paper wrapped with string, her name and address written neatly in black. The return address for Anderson Books was scrawled in the upper corner.

The bookstore was only a few blocks away. Ms. Darcy spent many hours there, browsing through volumes and reading passages from new authors. They had a lovely reading corner there where customers could take their books and relax in comfortable chairs.

Then the owners decided to add a coffee shop to the store. Ms. Darcy disapproved of the change. Young people flocked to the shop, ordering fancy coffees and scones, laughing and talking while a few feet away bookstore customers tried to read. Ms. Darcy found it impossible to concentrate over the clatter of cups and saucers and raucous chatter. Eventually her frustration at the noise outweighed the convenience of perusing her books before buying.

This book came highly recommended and Ms. Darcy was quite eager to read it. She called the bookstore and they told her that they could order it and send it over as soon as it was available. Ms. Darcy was starting to believe they had forgotten about it when they called and said it had arrived, but as it was a Friday afternoon, it could not be sent out to her until Monday morning.

Now here it was, and it couldn't have arrived at a better time. With dark clouds moving in and threatening rain, Ms. Darcy thought an afternoon of reading would be just fine. She would make a nice pot of tea and settle in for the day.

While the tea was steeping, Ms. Darcy unwrapped the package. The book was lovely. It had nice heavy paper and the print was a good size for reading. The cover was glossy and not too showy, and Ms. Darcy thought it would look just right on her shelf.

Ms. Darcy put the teapot and her cup on a tray on the coffee table, then took her book to her favourite chair. It was positioned so that she could take advantage of the natural light through the window during the day, and a floor lamp provided reading light in the evenings. The first drops of rain hit the window as Ms. Darcy opened her book. How fortunate that she had something good to read to pass the day.

She was barely into the first paragraph when her fingers touched something on the back cover. Ms. Darcy turned the book over. There, on the bottom corner, was a price sticker, or rather two stickers, one on top of the other. The corner of the tag had been pushed back so that the sticky edge was free from the book cover.

The protuberant corner was directly under her fingers as she held the book to read.

Ms. Darcy tried to ignore the tag, but found that it was impossible. Her attention was eventually pulled from the story to the sticky piece of paper. Her finger stuck and she pulled it away, only to have it stick again a few moments later. In exasperation she closed the book and studied the nuisance. Perhaps she could peel it off. If she did it carefully enough it wouldn't leave a tacky patch on the cover.

With great care, Ms. Darcy took the corner of the sticker between her thumb and forefinger and gently peeled it back. At first, it seemed as though it would come away easily, but the glue underneath was stuck fast to the cover and the tag ripped away, leaving a patch of rough paper. Ms. Darcy rubbed at the remainder of the tag, hoping to scrub away some of the residue, but to no avail. She sighed. It was better than a protruding corner, or a large sticky patch.

The rain was coming down heavily now, a steady rush against the window. Ms. Darcy freshened her cup of tea and opened the book again. The story was engaging, just the sort of thing Ms. Darcy enjoyed. She was just beginning to fall into step beside the main character, eager to know where his travels would take him, when her fingers found the coarse patch once again. For a few minutes she kept on reading, but the roughness of the paper against her fingertips gradually drew her away from the story.

Ms. Darcy closed the book and placed it on the tray. A fresh pot of tea, that was what she needed. She wasn't in the mood for English Breakfast. Perhaps a nice pot of Earl Grey would better suit her mood. Yes, that would do nicely.

She took the tray and went to the kitchen to prepare the tea. Along the way she carelessly deposited the book onto the side table.

The wind now whistled around the building and sent sporadic torrents of rain against the window. Such terrible weather. She certainly wouldn't be going out in this. Ms. Darcy rinsed the tea

pot and put the kettle on to boil. This was a good day to finish her mending. Yes. It was just right.

