Summary

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a man of good fortune and elite warrior skills must be in want of a warrior wife. In Colonel Darcy's case, he is quite content snubbing off all of the opposite sex, until a certain female warrior catches his eye. P+P+Z told from Darcy's POV.
Fitzwilliam Darcy stormed angrily from the parsonage resided by Mr. Collins. Feeling dejected, bitter, and vulnerable, he wished to quit this blasted countryside as quickly as possible. When did he begin letting his emotions cloud his judgment? He wished she had just finished him off. Rammed that letter opener into his heart for now he wanted to rip it from his chest all on his own. Detesting himself, he mounted Combat and galloped towards Rosings. What he desired would never come to pass. Together they could have been the deadliest couple in all of Great Britain. Her wielding her katana, slicing zombie heads from their foundation, fire in her eyes as her unruly curls flowed gracefully about her shoulders with every subsequent kill.

Exiting the forest, he slowed Combat to a trot on the gravel drive leading to Rosings Park. Glancing down at his faithful horse, Darcy unequivocally determined two things: The first, he would write Elizabeth to explain his actions. If she comprehended his motives, she may endeavor to forgive him. And the second, he would seek solace in combat, his faithful retreat. In more ways than one, his horse and the battlefield provided comfort and a sense of belonging. In normal society he felt awkward, insecure, and out of place, but he always felt sure of himself with a weapon in his hand and an undead lying slain at his feet. Arriving at the lowered stairway, he dismounted Combat and began walking up the steps into the heart of Rosings.
Colonel Fitzwilliam Darcy's hair blew in the wind as he rode his black colt Combat over Hingham Bridge and towards the town of Meryton. Hands gripping the reigns tighter, he kicked Combat's sides to encourage him further. He was anxious to see his best friend, Charles Bingley, after these several months. In his letter, Bingley had detailed how he purchased an estate called Netherfield and wished for Darcy to stay. As it happened, Darcy had just received orders to call upon the King, who, in turn, personally asked for him report to the residence of a Mrs. Featherstone, who resided on the outskirts of Meryton. It had been brought to the King and regiment's attention that an undead may be harboring in her midst and it was left up to Colonel Darcy to investigate.

Seeing as his duties brought him near Bingley's new Meryton residence and quite close to his Aunt Catherine's estate, Rosings Park, he hastily wrote Bingley agreeing to a visit to Netherfield. After settling his affairs and leaving his sister in the capable hands of her governess and training Master, he set out for London. He had just left London that morn and now rode the tiresome journey through the In-Between toward Mrs. Featherstone's residence. That night he was to meet Bingley at a dance, and so long as he did not run into too many of Satan's undead along the road, he should be able to make his engagement.

Riding had always provided a much-needed escape to Darcy for he did not possess the eloquence that came so naturally to Bingley or the social graces that his stature should have allowed him. He took after his father in that regard for he too was a man of few words and stern demeanor. After his untimely death, Darcy isolated himself further and spent the majority of his time within the confines of Pemberley honing his skills in his lavish dojo or engrossed in combat across Great Britain fending off legions of the undead.

Many hours had he spent going over the two facts he knew surrounding his father's death: Mr. Wickham unearthed the documents detailing the generous living Darcy's father intended to leave him upon his death, and his father had been bitten in the neck shortly thereafter despite no undead being on the grounds of Pemberley. All of this pointed to Wickham somehow leading Darcy senior to his demise. Despite his apprehensions, Darcy handed over the sum his father had left Wickham. Wickham returned shortly thereafter requesting more money after he squandered his original living. Some months later he even tried to weasel his way into the affections of his sister, Georgiana, without question to commandeer her £30,000 dowry. Notwithstanding, he possessed no facts to challenge him to a trial by combat, and he prayed to the good Lord that he would never see him again.

His position as a Colonel had required him to travel through the In-Between en route to London on many occasions. During his visit with the King, his majesty once again emphasized the importance of Darcy's talents for vanquishing the undead being utilized near the final access bridge connecting London to Meryton and the rest of the outside countries. This is what now sent him in the direction of Hingham Bridge. In his coat pocket hid a vile of carrion flies and a dagger. His trusty musket was holstered to his black saddle and his katana smacked against his left leg with every jerk of the horse. Both weapons were gifted to him by his father upon completion of his Japanese training and brought fond memories of fighting alongside his father against the undead in Derbyshire.

The brick wall surrounding Hertfordshire County came into view, with its spiked wheels and a mere three regimentals guarding the gate. He would have to write to their superior notifying him of their ineptness at protecting the lands against swarms of the undead.
Riding through the country for several more hours, he finally saw the iron wall barricading Mrs. Featherstone's estate. Upon approaching the entrance, he dismounted, happy to stand.

"Who goes there?" someone asked.

Darcy glanced around and finally saw a musket barrel poking from a grate in the ground.

"Darcy. Colonel Darcy," he replied, surprised at how anyone could still not know who he was. A young man emerged from the grate, and aimed his rifle in Darcy's direction. *Is this really necessary?* he thought. Another man arose from the grate, and Darcy promptly removed his weapons belt, thrusting it at the youngest guard before climbing through the grate and into the tunnel that ran underground towards the estate. After a thorough body examination for zombie bites, he was granted access to the foyer, where a housemaid promptly informed him that Mrs. Featherstone was currently occupied hosting a whist party. Darcy insisted that urgent business required him to gain entrance to the party and after shooting her an unnerving glare she led him to the lady of the house.

The King had mentioned a certain gentleman by the name of Mr. Kingston had a run-in with a hoard of undead and was mysteriously left alive while traveling through the In-Between towards Mrs. Featherstone's gathering just days prior. The regimentals that happened to be riding by saw them barricaded inside their carriage while undead swarmed the gentleman in want of his delectable brains. Mr. Kingston had been trained himself in Japan, however his age and tendency to overindulge in drink and cards had replaced the warrior he used to be and instead stood a more sluggish serviceman who wished to enjoy the refineries of life.

Upon entering the quiet room, Darcy realized his reputation was widely spread throughout the party, seeing many pairs of unsettling eyes glancing his way. He inwardly grew prideful, taking his reputation to take down any undead, whether they be friend or enemy, as a highest compliment.

"Mr. Darcy," said Mrs. Featherstone in greeting.

"Colonel Darcy, Mrs. Featherstone," he replied, wanting to assert his rank and position in this uncomfortable situation. "I'm here on official business."

Mrs. Featherstone appeared anxious and walked towards Darcy, questioning him with her eyes.

"There's been a report that somebody here has been bitten," he said, addressing the room.

"Surely not," Mrs. Featherstone quickly responded, "there hasn't been a zombie instant in Hertfordshire for over two years."

At that, Darcy slowly began pacing through the room, eyeing each guest searching for undead tendencies.

"I assure you we have taken every precaution," she desperately urged on, no doubt wanting to assuage her guests.

"A newly infected zombie is almost impossible to detect," he said. "Until they have ingested their first human brains, at which point transformation accelerates with every subsequent kill."

"Yes, we are all well aware of how it works, Colonel Darcy," said Mrs. Featherstone growing impatient with his presence at her once merry gathering. A gentleman residing at one table then began dealing out cards. *Odd, thought Darcy, especially considering everyone else was so enraptured with his presence to continue their pursuit of a winning hand.*
"Are you quite satisfied?" she inquired after he did not respond.

"Quite," Darcy said, giving her a rare smile. "Might I play a hand?" he asked, hoping to get a closer look at this gentleman.

"Of course," Mrs. Featherstone said, smiling back, no doubt happy to have this business behind them.

Darcy moved to the unoccupied seat to the right of the certain gentleman and offered everyone at the table a proper afternoon greeting accompanied by another smirk. The tension seemed to ease from the room, and lively conversation began again by all parties present. Mrs. Featherstone glanced up from her seat across from Darcy and offered him a smile.

Before picking up his cards, Darcy pulled the vile containing the carrion flies from his coat pocket and placed it upon the table.

"A potion?" the elderly lady to his right asked.

"Flies mum," he said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Carrion flies," he said placing his cards down, picking up the vile and releasing the stopper to allow a few flies an escape. "They are in possession of but one truly enviable talent: the ability to detect dead flesh." The flies were now buzzing loudly about the room, putting people in a state of unease once more.

"I've won the trick!" said the gentleman to his left. Seeing the flies hovering around their table, Darcy no longer doubted that one this gentleman next to him was Mr. Kingston and second that he had been bitten by an undead. Darcy decided to test his theory.

"Very crafty play, Mr. Kingston," he said. Receiving no correction of the gentleman's name, he awaited for his moment to strike.

"The buzzing is frightfully loud," the elderly lady said addressing Darcy.

"It is not the buzzing that should concern you madam, but rather when the buzzing stops," he rebuffed.

At that moment, the buzzing did indeed stop. "Oh dear," said the elderly lady upon seeing all flies clinging to Mr. Kingston's face.

Without glancing up, Darcy was fully aware of Mr. Kingston's eyes turning red and undead like. He was left to play this kill close to the chest for he only had his dagger within the confines of his coat. He then noticed an almost empty glass on the table that would do for a makeshift weapon. After all, by the time he dislodged his dagger, Mr. Kingston could have already begun feasting on the brains of one of the guests. Darcy slowly pressed the glass to his lips, downing the last bit of remaining sherry. Upon completion, he hastily broke the glass on the table, and slammed it into the neck of Mr. Kingston, startling all around him. Mr. Kingston abruptly began growling and clawing at Darcy, but Darcy quickly liberated his dagger from his coat pocket and used the sharp blade to separate Mr. Kingston's head from the rest of his body, letting both drop to the floor once the task was complete.

Standing above his most recent kill, Darcy gave a quick kick to his brains to ensure the undead Mr. Kingston was certainly dead, and then used his blade to determine the source of his bite. Upon
opening his right sleeve, Darcy discovered a zombie bite Mr. Kingston no doubt received while fending off those undead several days ago.

Darcy began wiping his black boots on the floor to rid them of Mr. Kingston's blood, and then pulled out a white handkerchief to clean his dagger. "Is there anyone else present whom he would have had the opportunity to infect?" he asked, throwing the now ruined handkerchief to the floor.

Mrs. Featherstone shook her head indicating that no, there was no one else.

"A family member perhaps?" he encouraged, glancing at Mrs. Featherstone's daughter, Cassandra.

Mrs. Featherstone again indicated that he had no relatives within the residence. Darcy glanced at both faces for a while, feeling that they were hiding some fact from him. After a few moments, he decided to take his leave. He wished them a good evening and turned to quit the room and make his way to Netherfield.

"Who dare would just leave a zombie head in the middle of the floor?" cooed one of the female guests. At that, Darcy promptly kicked Mr. Kingston's undead head across the room, gaining shouts and cries of panic from all parties present. He had enough of these people and their ingratitude for saving their lives from the undead Mr. Kingston. Packing the remaining steps to the door, he abruptly left, leaving a trail of bloody footprints in his wake.
The Meryton Dance

Stopping only once to clear the road of unmentionables in his path, Darcy arrived at the assembly room on the other side of Meryton just after nightfall. Bingley had written saying he was escorting his two sisters, Miss Caroline Bingley and Mrs. Louisa Hurst, to the gathering, along with his brother-in-law, Mr. Hurst, and would meet Mr. Darcy there upon his arrival. Dismounting Combat and leaving him in the care of the attendant with strict instructions to have him watered and fed, Darcy adjusted his cravat, ran his fingers through his matted hair, and straightened his jacket. Feeling ill at ease, he wished he had been able to meet his party at Netherfield before entering a room crowded with people not of his acquaintance.

Glancing down one final time to check his attire, he noticed that a trace of blood from the undead Mr. Kingston still plagued his boots. Grasping onto a nearby railing, he extracted a handkerchief from his coat pocket and eliminated the last undead remnants from his person, flinging the kerchief on the ground when the task was complete. Armed with his dagger, musket, and courage, he entered the doorway to seek out his companions.

He determined, knowing his genial friend, that the ballroom was most likely where he would find Bingley; no doubt cordially greeting every townsfolk introduced to his person, their affable daughters not far behind. Moving quickly through the parlor, he located the entrance to the ballroom and stepped inside. Glancing about the room, he desperately searched for a recognizable face, trying to ignore the curious stares from those around him.

"Welcome, dear friend!" cried a familiar voice behind him. Darcy sighed in relief and grasped Bingley's hand in greeting.

"How are you?" Bingley inquired.

Darcy offered a smile in response and returned the question. Now that he was in the company of his oldest friend, he was able to relax slightly and take in his surroundings. Jovial music rose up from a band located at the end of the room and lines of people danced country steps in the middle of the floor, the women eagerly testing their accomplishments out in polite society. Meryton lacked the lavish ambiance Darcy's wealthy upbringing exposed him to. There was no grandeur or lavishness. Women were noticeably in their Sunday finest, apart from Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, who were both dressed from head to toe in the latest fashions. Not to mention the ballroom was aggressively hot due to the compactness of the room, excessive amount of people, and candles littering every surface, candelabra and chandelier in sight. In more extravagant society, the rooms would be more expansive, allowing people more space to walk around and more circulation for the comfort of the guests.

"So this is Meryton," Darcy said, disdain flooding his face. He continued surveying the room, this time searching for exits in the event any potential threat from undead were to arise. He located two more in addition to the doorway from which he entered.

When he began questioning if anyone in the room would be able to aid him should something transpire, Bingley suddenly declared, "She is the most beautiful creature I have ever beheld!"

Following his gaze, Darcy promptly located the target of Bingley's outburst; a fair skinned female smiling shyly back at Bingley from across the room. She boasted blonde hair, a feminine figure, and, now, a slight blush upon her cheeks. She quickly directed her attention back to her
acquaintances, politely laughing at a comment made by one of the females on her right.

"She smiles too much," Darcy responded.

"She's an angel," Bingley said, abandoning Darcy and making his way towards the beauty to make introductions. Darcy had never seen Bingley so enraptured with someone of the opposing sex, especially considering he was about to abandon all decorum to make introductions on his own accord with no mutual acquaintance.

Taking in the parties surrounding this mysterious female, Darcy's eyes locked with a pair of brown eyes, belonging to yet another country girl. She had been surveying him with questioning eyes, no doubt desiring for him to make her acquaintance as well. Following Bingley, Darcy sighed and reluctantly made his way over to the party, standing a few paces behind Bingley.

"Charles Bingley. Pleased to make your acquaintance," Bingley said smiling in greeting to the handsome blonde.

"Mrs. Bennet," responded the woman directly to the right of his intended target. "We've heard so much about you, Mr. Bingley." Bingley turned and bowed in acknowledgement at the lady. "My daughters, all of impeccable character," she continued motioning to those around her. The four ladies in the group all bowed and smiled at Bingley, who no doubt realized the mother's scheme, but paid it no heed.

"May I introduce my friend, Mr. Darcy of Derbyshire," Bingley replied, turning around and gesturing for Darcy to step closer and join the party.

Darcy stepped forward, bowed his greetings, and remained silent.

"Are you enjoying Hertfordshire, Mr. Bingley?" inquired the brunette with the brown eyes Darcy's had locked with moments before.

"Very much," Bingley responded, sneaking a look at the blonde again.

"I have heard the library at Netherfield is one of the finest," the brunette inquired.

Knowing Bingley was never keen on reading, Darcy was not surprised when his friend responded, "Li…Library? Is it?"

The brunette glanced sideways at her sister, eyebrows up and mouth slightly agape in surprise at his own indifference towards his new residence.

"Miss Bennet," Bingley probed at his originally intended target, "may I be so bold as to request the next two dances if you are not otherwise engaged."

"I am not engaged," the shy blonde responded smiling at Bingley. She placed her delicately gloved hand into Bingley's and they ventured off towards the dance floor.

"Good for you, Mr. Bingley!" shouted Mrs. Bennet as they walked away. "You chose the loveliest of my daughters!" The remaining girls began reproaching their mother, despite Darcy's presence.

He was trying to determine the best means of escape when Mrs. Bennet addressed him.

"I consider dancing to be the first refinement in polished society. Don't you agree, Mr. Darcy?"

"No, every savage can dance," he retorted. "Why I imagine even zombies could do it with some
degree of success." Using this opportunity to evade more stares, giggles, and exasperating questions, he wished them a good evening and went in search of Miss Bingley, and Mr. and Mrs. Hurst.

He located Miss Bingley first. She was standing alone off to the side of the dance floor. Darcy bowed in greeting, exchanged pleasantries for a few moments, and then copied her sour disposition while watching Bingley and Miss Bennet on the dance floor.

Upon completion of their dance, Bingley made his way over to him saying, "Darcy! I hate to see you just standing there. You must dance!"

"Oh you know I detest it when I am not acquainted with my partner," Darcy replied, knowing full well Bingley could bring to mind all the awkward moments Darcy experienced in the ballroom while growing up. Despite his position, Darcy had never been as eloquent or genial as his friend and, therefore, rarely put himself into a position that required him to be in intimate contact with someone of the opposite sex.

"Darcy…" Bingley said, drawing his friend away from his sister.

"You were dancing with the only handsome girl here," Darcy retorted once they were out of earshot.

"Yeah, but one of her sisters is also very pretty. Dare I say, very agreeable," Bingley said, smirking and motioning towards the brunette from earlier. Darcy turned and saw she was now sitting alone, apart from a young lady who was yawning into a novel. As if subconsciously knowing they were discussing her, she brunette glanced up and locked eyes with Darcy once more.

Darcy quickly turned his attentions back to Bingley and said, "Well she's tolerable, but..."

"Tolerable?!" Bingley rebuffed.

"Yes, tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me. Nor any other man here apparently," said Darcy, hoping to be rid of the conversation.

"Darcy, your standards my dear fellow…"

Bingley never finished his sentence for at that very moment the brunette had accidentally knocked over a bottle of port, sending it to the ground where it shattered into hundreds of pieces. The entire room silenced and turned to stare at the source of the commotion.

"Oh that is unfortunate," Darcy mocked.

After a few short moments the music began once more and people proceeded with their conversing and dancing. Deciding he had enough of the commotion within the assembly room, Darcy told Bingley he would step outside for some fresh air and would meet him outside after his second dance with Miss Bennet was concluded.

He noticed a few others had shared this same idea upon exiting the assembly room, and his eyes soon focused on a female wearing a blue dress by one of the lit fires. He rolled his eyes in admonishment that such a female would dare venture out without a male escort to protect her should an undead happen to attack. At that moment another feminine figure slowly started making her way towards the female in blue. They conversed for a few moments before the first female turned around to look at her new companion. Darcy was shocked by the look of fright in her eyes. Upon further inspection of this newcomer, he realized the new figure was none other than an undead Mrs. Featherstone. Blood dripped down her face, and her skin was beginning to rot around
her cheeks and jawline. Darcy began advancing towards the scene, drawing his musket and cocking his weapon. Taking aim, he realized the female in peril was the very one he was mocking moments ago. As soon as he saw the undead lean in towards the brunette in blue, he paused, took in a deep breath, and fired.

One bullet was all he needed to blow the head off of Mrs. Featherstone. Her body immediately crumbled to the ground with a loud thud. The brunette gasped and both hands flew to her mouth in astonishment. Smirking with pride, Darcy began advancing towards the brunette to collect the appreciation to which he was due.

"What happened, Lizzy!?” cried the voice of her mother, who had begun running towards the remaining female with her other daughters.

"I narrowly saved her life,” Darcy said smugly.

"From Mrs. Featherstone?” the brunette, whom she had called Lizzy, asked, sizing Darcy up.

"From an undead Mrs. Featherstone,” Darcy corrected.

"I find that to be exceedingly tolerable,” she responded, narrowing her eyes. Darcy furrowed his own brows, knowing he had heard that phrase before. At once it dawned on him- he had used that very line to describe Lizzy's appearance, and she had obviously eavesdropped on his private conversation with Bingley.

"Well done Darcy. Very heroic,” said Mr. Hurst said. Darcy glanced around and realized some members of his party, including Bingley, had joined him.

"She was trying to tell me something,” Lizzy insisted, glancing behind her towards her sisters for support.

"A recipe perhaps?” Darcy mocked with a laugh. The gentlemen surrounding him chuckled.

"Laugh as much as you choose, but you shall not laugh me out of my opinion,” retorted Lizzy, raising her chin. "She posed no threat.”

Darcy was about to relay to this naïve country girl that undead did indeed pose many threats, especially to delicate females who were not skilled in the deadly arts, but he never got the chance. Warning bells began clanging from the assembly room and people began pouring out of the exit doors, screaming with panic-stricken faces.

"We're under attack!” shouted Darcy as he began running towards the assembly room with Bingley several paces behind him.

At that same moment, the five Bennet sisters also began running towards the threat as well. Knowing full well that Mr. Hurst was more for wine than training, Darcy and a somewhat reluctant Bingley prepared to eliminate the undead swarm on their own, while Mr. Hurst was to guard the others outside, out of the way.

The five sisters were the first to enter the ballroom. Positioned in a flocking pattern, with Lizzy in the middle, the sisters began advancing towards the undead swarm, each wielding a weapon of their choice. Lizzy armed herself with two daggers, one in each hand. She stabbed one undead male through the head and proceeded to kick his stomach to rid her blade of him. As he fell to the ground she moved onto her next target. She began spinning to gain momentum and she sliced an undead woman, releasing a warrior cry upon impact. Her sisters made similar kills, and the formation made its way to the center of the room, leaving crumbled bodies in their wake.
It was at that moment Darcy and Bingley entered the room through a side door, blades at the ready. Darcy was speechless at the sight before him. The sisters moved like a militant convoy, and Darcy recognized they must have received some form of training to be of their caliber. It was not unlike his own Japanese training, but the style seemed to indicate Chinese training, specifically the Shaolin temple in Henan province.

Darcy knew he should look for threats against his own person but he could not remove his eyes from Elizabeth Bennet. She continued fighting, stabbing an undead to her left and, quickly relinquishing her blade, drove both daggers through the brains of another undead on her right. Both fell to the ground. Then, using the body of a hunched over undead for support, she placed one hand on the undead and, disregarding modesty, cartwheeled her body around, kicking another undead that had begun advancing on her. She spun around one more and sliced another undead behind her before pausing with both daggers in the air, ready for her next victim. Her eyes were determined and focused, bosoms rising and descending fast from exertion. Darcy knew of only one other woman in all of Great Britain who wielded a dagger with such skill, grace and deadly accuracy.

"Her face is rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes," Darcy suddenly pronounced. "And I'm forced to acknowledge her figure as both light and pleasing. And her arms are surprisingly muscular yet not so much as to be unfeminine."

Bingley furrowed his eyes and shot a questioning look at Darcy, for he too had never seen his friend acknowledge any woman in such a pleasing way. As if waking up from a daydream, Darcy shook his head and scanned the room, realizing all the undead lay still on the ground thanks to the five sisters.

Darcy looked at Bingley to convey his shock at being deemed unnecessary in battle, however he discovered his friend was beaming up at him, his eyes dancing with humor. He blushed upon realizing his best friend overheard his private thoughts. Bingley laughed and slapped him on the back. Darcy knew he had his strictest confidence and released a quick smile as his only response to his prominent outburst. They then proceeded outside to gather all able-bodied men together to remove the corpses from the assembly room floor, but not before Darcy turned to sneak one more quick glance at the fine eyed Elizabeth Bennet.
An Unexpected Visitor

Despite his exhaustion, Darcy lay awake in bed that night in a state of agitation. His mind was constantly running through the events of the day, particularly those including Elizabeth Bennet and her fine eyes. Rolling over once more, he sighed, resigned that he should not find sleep tonight and arose from the bed in search of his breeches and a white linen shirt. Grabbing his katana before exiting his room, he made his way to the spacious gardens behind Netherfield and began running through a series of training techniques and exercises in the dark, trying to clear his head. Many nights had he spent mentally and physically preparing himself for the day he would finally be able to avenge his family, specifically his sister. Bringing the memories of the incident to mind, Darcy mentally moved to a Zen-like state using his anger as fuel, his motions becoming fluid and automatic.

He had not even mentioned the events that had transpired to Bingley. Until that event, Darcy had been the picture of pleasantry, being of merry disposition and utmost attentiveness. He knew his friend sensed something behind his suddenly cold and standoffish demeanor, and Darcy was pleased that Bingley had not mentioned it. Taking a deep breath, Darcy moved his katana lithely through the air and felt his mind thinking once more of the events at the dance.

The warrior men of the assembly had worked for over an hour gathering the undead bodies together, tossing them into a pile outside to be burned. Upon lighting the heap, the servants had completed the cleaning of the bloodied floor and walls, and the dance commenced once more.

Bingley had approached Miss Bennet, requesting another dance, and Darcy stood stoically off to the side of the room, scanning the assembly room in case another threat was lurking in the shadows. Subsequently he noticed Sir William Lucas, who owned the assembly room and boasted the title of host for the night, approaching him. They had been formally introduced before the zombie attack a few hours ago, and he no doubt wished to assuage any unresolved tension in the room by mingling with his guests.

"What a charming amusement for young people this is, Mr. Darcy!" Sir William Lucas said gleefully.

"Certainly, sir," responded Darcy. "However, as one can see from events that transpired earlier, it also makes them more susceptible to turn into one of Satan's children if they are not cautious enough."

Sir William's smile faded upon realizing that Darcy was implying his own lack of security and safety towards his guests. Sir William eagerly began searching for a new companion to converse with when he spotted Elizabeth Bennet approaching.

"Miss Eliza!" Sir William exclaimed, pulling Elizabeth into their conversation. "Why are you not dancing? Mr. Darcy," he said glancing at the dark haired gentleman, "you must allow me to present this young lady to you as a most desirable partner."

Secretly, Darcy had been wishing to know more of her, especially after appreciating her superior warrior skills moments ago, but before he could request the honor of her hand, Elizabeth spoke.

"Indeed, sir, I have not the least intention of dancing, and do not suppose I moved this way to beg for a partner," Elizabeth said. At that she shot Darcy a cold glance, curtseyed toward Sir William, and walked away.
Despite knowing her behavior was likely the result of her eavesdropping on his earlier conversation with Bingley, Darcy was still disappointed and quite embarrassed at her abrupt refusal. He knew there could be no future with her due to her circumstances, but it did not mean he had to avoid her altogether. With that, he watched her disappearing figure fade into the crowd and thought that she was the very opposite of his initial assessment of her.

While Darcy had been pondering his situation with Elizabeth Bennet, Sir William Lucas had taken the opportunity to escape the rather awkward situation, leaving Darcy standing alone. Darcy surveyed the room and noticed Bingley, the eldest Miss Bennet, and Miss Bingley conversing on the other side of the room, and he immediately began making his way over to the group.

As he approached, Mr. Bingley was commenting on Miss Bennet's impressive warrior skills. Jane Bennet blushed and attempted to direct the conversation from her person by asking Miss Bingley about her life in London society among the ever-present threat of the undead. As the pair proceeded to get better acquainted, Bingley shot Darcy an encouraging smile. After several minutes of conversing amongst the group, Bingley asked for Miss Bennet to join him in one final dance before the party was to take their leave and retire to Netherfield for the night.

With his best friend occupied and Miss Bingley proving to be silent company, Darcy found himself once more sneaking glances at Elizabeth Bennet. She was laughing with Sir William Lucas' daughter, Charlotte, near the dance floor. It was at that moment, for the first time that night, Miss Bingley addressed him directly.

"I can guess the subject of your reverie," she cooed.

"I should guess not," he responded, his face remaining stern.

"You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many an evening in this manner," she said.

"You are entirely wrong," responded Darcy. "My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow."

"And who, pray tell, is this fine eyed beauty?" inquired Miss Bingley, smiling in silent hope.

"Miss Elizabeth Bennet," he replied, glancing at Miss Bingley with a smirk. Miss Bingley's eyes narrowed. She then suddenly proclaimed she felt ill and wished to retire immediately. With that Caroline abruptly turned on her heels and went in search of her sister and brother-in-law after commenting that they would meet him and Bingley at the carriage.

The next morning after breakfast, Miss Bingley promptly announced she was inviting Miss Jane Bennet for tea that afternoon. Darcy glanced up from the letter he was writing his sister, Georgiana, when Miss Bingley sat down next to him at the writing table. Not wishing to be subject to her grievances again, he stood and joined Bingley on the other side of the room.

Removing his musket from his weapons belt, he began the tedious process of cleaning his most valued weapon. His mind soon envisioned the very moment he had shot it last- when he saved Elizabeth from Mrs. Featherstone. Bingley smiled up at him as he lifted his own dagger from the whetstone. Darcy immediately knew he too was thinking of a Bennet sister, no doubt the very one calling upon them this afternoon. Each man left the other to his private thoughts and soon all weapons were sharp and shining for their next fight against the undead.
Upon completing her letter, Miss Bingley called for Edmund to see to it that the note be delivered to Miss Bennet at Longbourn during the course of the morning. During luncheon a servant returned saying Miss Bennet had enthusiastically agreed to afternoon tea and would arrive promptly at 3 o’clock. She and Mrs. Hurst then decided to escape to the female sitting room until the guest arrived.

When the clock struck four and Miss Bennet had still not arrived, the parties at Netherfield grew anxious. Seeing the rain streaming from the sky, Mr. Bingley called for his horse to be brought, and he hurriedly put on his coat, determined to set out and investigate. Darcy insisted he accompany his friend, knowing how easily zombies emerged from wet earth, but Bingley protested, stating that it was not necessary for both of them to expose themselves to the harsh climate.

After riding into the forest some ways, he came across Miss Bennet laying on the ground, an undead man, woman, and child slain near her. Upon further inspection, he saw her palm had been punctured and she was shivering from her wet clothes. He quickly slid from his horse and wrapped his coat around Miss Bennet, who briefly opened her eyes and offered a small smile at her rescuer. Bingley then lifted Miss Bennet onto his horse, and hoisted himself up behind her. Grabbing the reins, he secured one arm around her waist and kicked his heels into his horse's sides as they hastily rode the short distance to Netherfield.

Miss Bennet was shown to a room and given fresh clothing upon her arrival. A rider immediately was dispatched to the physician when it was discovered she had a fever and the chills. He returned saying that the doctor would arrive on the morrow as they were presently tending to a family whose youngest had contracted influenza. Bingley also had a letter sent to Longbourn to notify her family of her impending illness, stating that she was to stay at Netherfield until her condition had improved.

Bingley ordered for a servant to keep watch over Miss Bennet during the course of the night with strict instructions to inform him of any changes to her condition. Darcy was concerned how his friend could be so naïve as to ignore the signs of an obvious zombie infection. There was no way Miss Bennet could have evaded such an encounter without getting bitten; three against one? The odds were highly unlikely. Besides, Bingley informed him that she had an apparent wound on her right hand. Regardless of his friend's apparent feelings for the eldest Miss Bennet, he had to right the situation, and he knew the only time he would be remotely permitted inside the bedroom would be during the physician's visit.

Darcy decided to confront Bingley the next morning at breakfast to remind him of the dangers a newly bitten undead posed, using the situation at Mrs. Featherstone's estate as an embarrassing but necessary example.

"She must be closely monitored and her room locked at all times, Bingley," said Darcy, willing his friend to see reason.

The door abruptly opened and Edmund entered, announcing the presence of Miss Elizabeth Bennet, who followed him inside the breakfast parlor.

Darcy's eyebrows shot up in astonishment, and he rose from his seat, giving her a curt bow.

"Did you walk all the way here?" Caroline inquired, her tone dripping with contempt.

"Yes," Elizabeth responded, gasping to steady her breathing. "How is my sister?"

"She was feverish and slept ill last night. I fear she has the flu," responded Bingley.
"Or worse," Darcy added, glancing at his friend. *How could Bingley be so blind?*

"I detest illness," stated Caroline. "It keeps one in a continual state of inelegance."

"Quite," confirmed Mrs. Hurst from the other side of the table.

"May I tend to her?" asked Elizabeth, addressing Bingley.

"Of course," Bingley replied. "Edmund, show Miss Bennet the way."

Elizabeth thanked Bingley, glanced Darcy's way, and then left the room.

"I will not make the same mistake I made at Mrs. Featherstone's whist party, Bingley," said Darcy after the door had shut. He was determined now more than ever to extinguish the potential zombie threat. If he was unable to control the very residence he was residing in, how could he be expected to protect his own estate and surrounding lands, or all of England for that matter? Besides, he had made many kills in his time as a Colonel, and relieving the world of an undead Miss Bennet, despite his friend's affections for the lady, would unfortunately not be the most trying kill of his lifetime. No, that kill would always be closer to his heart.

When the physician arrived, Darcy volunteered to escort him to Miss Bennet's room. While walking up the steps he updated the doctor on how Miss Bennet came to be in their charge and suggested she may have been bitten before arriving at the estate. Darcy knocked on the wooden door to announce their arrival and they both entered. Elizabeth was seated next to the bed, one hand upon her sister's brow and concern on her face. The physician headed to the side of the bed to inspect his patient, while Darcy proceeded to close the door. He then reached into his jacket pocket to extract the vile of carrion flies he placed there that morning. Releasing the stopper and tapping the vile discretely against his hand, the flies began buzzing about the room.

"She got caught in the downpour?" the physician inquired.

"Yes," Elizabeth eagerly confirmed before noticing the new vermin in the room.

Darcy snuck the vile back into his pocket and calmly placed his hands behind his back. He moved to the foot of the bed and slipped the dagger he had hidden up his right sleeve into his hand, ready to attack once the flies confirmed his suspicions.

Seeing Elizabeth's alertness to the flies, he glanced her way and then turned sternly towards the bed. To his surprise, Elizabeth quickly extended her arm right in front of his face, catching one of the flies between her thumb and pointer finger. Darcy was shockingly impressed, after he realized she was thwarting his attempt to expose Jane as an undead. Elizabeth then darted another hand out, catching a second fly.

At that moment the physician removed Jane's bandaged hand from below the bed sheet. Elizabeth caught one more fly from in front of Darcy's face, distracting him momentarily.

"The wound, doctor?" Darcy insisted after refocusing.

"Her musket backfired," stated Elizabeth. The doctor began unwinding the bandage and examined Jane's hand.

"I see no indication of a bite," the physician said after inspecting the wound.

"That was never in question," Elizabeth said, glancing over at Darcy, and capturing yet another fly before him.
Darcy glanced back at Elizabeth and promptly slid the dagger back into his sleeve before attempting to sneak out of the room. He knew Elizabeth had figured out his scheme, and he did not wish to remain any longer.

"Ahem," Elizabeth said, gaining Darcy's attention. "I believe that these belong to you," extending a clenched hand towards him, indicating the captured flies.

Darcy walked back towards Elizabeth and stretched out an opened hand. Holding his gaze, she squeezed her palm tight, killing the flies, and then smirked while proceeding to drop the now useless creatures into his palm.

He was all astonishment at her lack of civility. He glanced down at the smashed flies and then up at Elizabeth, his cool glare now mimicking hers. Granted he had plenty of more flies at his disposal, but the way she challenged him was one experience he had never faced before. Was she so reckless as to ignore the signs of zombie contamination right before her very eyes?

Moving his hand down to his side, he offered her a curt bow and left the room, seeking out peace in the library.

Once dinner concluded, Elizabeth dismissed herself to check on her sister once more. Darcy joined the others in the parlor for a game of cards and wondered if the zombie infection had taken over Jane's body by now. He feared that Elizabeth's carelessness would lead to her being her sister's first victim, and he intended to inquire after Elizabeth's welfare if she did not return before they retired. They had just finished their third round when Elizabeth walked in. He sighed quietly in relief. The gentlemen stood in greeting, and Bingley immediately inquired after her sister.

"She's fast asleep," responded Elizabeth smiling.

"I'm sure she'll be quite well," said Bingley encouragingly. "Please, join us Miss Bennet," he continued, stepping behind his chair, indicating for her to take his seat at the table.

"Thank you, but I'll amuse myself with a book."

"You prefer reading to cards?" Mr. Hurst said shocked.

"I prefer a great many things to cards, Mr. Hurst," Elizabeth responded honestly.

"Sekai no han bun wa, hoka no yorokobi o rikai suru koto wa dekimassen," said Miss Bingley, laughing from her spot at the table. Mr. and Mrs. Hurst joined in on the private joke. One half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of another.

"I don't speak Japanese," Elizabeth responded.

"No, of course. You didn't train in Japan. China was it?" Caroline said condescendingly. By now Darcy had realized the game Caroline was playing. She had been a constant presence in his life, one he had tolerated because of his friend, and now she was attempting to demean this apparent female threat. Darcy found it amusing. No doubt Elizabeth had sharp enough wit and tongue to defend herself against Caroline's ridicule.

"The Shaolin Temple in Henan province," Elizabeth said. "It was there that I learned to endure all manner of discomfort."

"May I inquire as to the nature of this discomfort?" Caroline persisted. Darcy reached for his glass of port, knowing if he did not occupy his mouth soon he would start speaking on Elizabeth's behalf.
Undoubtedly she was jealous of his comment the night before over Elizabeth's fine eyes and was attempting to diminish Elizabeth's appeal in his own eyes.

Elizabeth glanced evenly at Caroline and, with a smirk, responded, "Oh, I would much rather give you a demonstration."

Darcy chose this as a most inopportune moment to take a sip from his glass. His eyebrows rose in shock, and he quickly swallowed, for he did secretly wish to receive a demonstration himself. Putting his glass down, he and Bingley both began chuckling at Miss Bennet's brilliant retort. Elizabeth then turned to examine a set of novels on a table behind her.

Caroline, determined to turn her attentions back to the source of her affections, glanced to Mr. Darcy and inquired after his sister.

"Is your sister much grown since the spring?" Caroline asked.

Darcy, sensing her new scheme, replied, "She is now about the same height at Miss Elizabeth Bennet," knowing it would both vex Caroline and force Elizabeth to acknowledge his presence once more. He was right. Elizabeth turned to look at him briefly and then resumed admiring the small collection of books.

Ignoring his redirection towards Elizabeth, Caroline said, "I do not believe I have ever met a girl who was so extremely accomplished."

"The word accomplished is far too liberally applied to young ladies today," said Darcy, "but my sister, Georgiana, does deserve that distinction. Not only is she a master of the female arts, but the deadly as well."

Darcy took any moment allowed to dote upon his sister. Apart from Bingley, she was his closest confidant. He had been her sole guardian since their father's death, and he ensured she received the best training master and educational tutors available. She had grown into a kind, compassionate female, as fierce as any warrior and affectionate, as a young lady ought to be.

"I cannot boast of knowing more than half a dozen in the whole range of my acquaintance that are thus accomplished," Darcy continued.

"Nor I, I am sure," Caroline quickly agreed, smiling. Darcy smiled back at Caroline, knowing full well she would have eagerly agreed with anything he had said in that moment.

"Then, Mr. Darcy," said Elizabeth, approaching the table and staring at him straight on, "you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished woman."

"I do," Darcy stated firmly to Elizabeth. "A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and the modern languages. She must be well trained in the fighting styles of Kyoto masters and the weapons and tactics in modern Europe or the term would only be half deserved."

"And you know six such women? I wonder now at your knowing any," Elizabeth challenged.

"Are you so severe on your own sex?" asked Darcy.

"A woman is either highly trained, or highly refined. One cannot afford the luxury of both in such times," Elizabeth responded. She then walked over and selected a worn copy of Sun Tzu's novel, The Art of War, and began flipping through the pages.
"Ah," exclaimed Darcy, immediately recognizing the book in her hand and pleased to see it was one of her favorites as well. "L'Art De La Guerre. *The Art of War.*"

Elizabeth turned and looked at him questionably. "Have you not read it in its original Wu dialect?" she inquired.

"Alas," Darcy admitted, shaking his head and lowering his gaze to the cards in his hands.

"Ránhòu, nǐ cónglái méiyǒu dúguò sūnzi bīngfǎ," Elizabeth said aggressively to Darcy in Chinese. *Then you've never read* *The Art of War.* Darcy slowly lifted his eyes, locking them with Elizabeth's. He did not speak Chinese himself, but he knew she was challenging his competence on the matter. His stony glare did not deter her from offering a quick smirk before she announced her intent to check on her sister once more.

Darcy and Bingley rose from their seats, and all three gentlemen nodded in politeness as she departed the room. Darcy's eyes followed her until the door shut, and then he sat down to resume their game of whist.

"She's one of those young ladies who seeks to recommend themselves to men by undervaluing their own sex," Caroline offered.

"Undoubtedly," agreed Darcy, feeling dejected by Elizabeth's misunderstanding of his comment.

With just the moonlight guiding his way, Darcy walked outside with his katana to the gardens. Everyone had retired for the evening and he wished once again to meditate in silence. His frustration grew with each fluid movement of his blade. Frustration with his growing feelings for Elizabeth. Frustration for her brashness in dealing with her stricken sister. Frustration for his familial obligation to marry well. Frustration for not having his father or mother alive to provide advice in the matter.

He glided his katana through a series of sword training techniques as he maneuvered his way through the garden. His mind then transitioned to the other frustration that plagued his mind: that he had not yet been able to avenge his family against the man who wronged his family. He knew the good Lord would give him his day of reckoning; he just had to be patience and seize the opportunity when it arose.

Darcy had maneuvered himself before a knight statuette in the garden and promptly decapitated it with one swift movement of his blade, wishing instead that it were that of a certain gentleman. Sensing a presence watching him, he turned around and saw a particular pair of fine eyes gazing out at him from an upper window. Upon discovery, the figure quickly retreated and the curtain dropped hastily back into place. Darcy turned back towards the statue and offered a rare smile. Maybe there was hope.

The following morning Bingley and Darcy descended the stairs to greet Mrs. Bennet and her other three daughters.

"Mrs. Bennet, I am so glad to see you," said Bingley in greeting.

Mrs. Bennet returned a smile and curtseyed while responding, "Oh, and sadly in distressing circumstances."

"Are you here to take Jane home?" Darcy inquired upon noticing a servant carrying several trunks.
"No," responded Mrs. Bennet.

"Yes!" shouted a familiar voice. Darcy turned to his right where he was greeted by Elizabeth Bennet, her pale sister leaning against her for support as they walked into the foyer. "We must not trespass any longer on your kindness," Elizabeth insisted while rushing towards the front door. Darcy glanced at Bingley, knowing he would refuse such a proposal.

"Surely she is too ill to be moved!" Bingley objected, moving swiftly towards the front door to chase after the pair.

"She does look very pale," agreed Mrs. Bennet.

Darcy quickly bowed towards the sisters and rushed after Bingley, calling his name. He knew it was best for Jane to leave, especially in the event she was unable to control her impending zombie urges. He would not risk his friend over some fleeting romance.

"I must protest!" Bingley was insisting when Darcy walked out the door. Elizabeth had successfully placed Jane into the family carriage and turned to block the entrance.

"Bingley, please," said Darcy, placing his hand on his friend's chest to stop him from approaching the carriage. He then attempted to talk sense into his friend. "Carelessness when dealing with a zombie infection can lead to your abrupt demise."

"Arrogance could lead to yours," said Elizabeth, who was now standing directly behind Darcy.

Darcy turned around to face the brazen Elizabeth Bennet. "Your defect, Miss Bennet, besides eavesdropping, is to willfully misunderstand people," he said, his stern glare unwavering.

"And yours is to be unjustly prejudiced against them," she retorted, lifting her chin and staring defiantly back at him. Their dispute would have surely continued would not have Mrs. Bennet intervened.

"Come on, Eliza," Mrs. Bennet insisted, grasping Elizabeth's hand firmly and pulling her away. Darcy and Elizabeth continued scowling at each other until the moment she turned to step into the carriage. He wished she would understand that his actions were done with honorable intensions for he merely wished to save her from the same fate he endured with his father.

Bingley turned towards Darcy before walking to the carriage, pleading silently for him not to intervene any more. All sisters were seated as he approached, and Mrs. Bennet turned to say her final goodbyes before stepping in.

"Mr. Bingley, I know just the thing to break this terrible tension and lift the spirits of the county: a ball at Netherfield," she said.

"Out of the question!" Darcy interjected. "The security arrangements alone…"

"It's a brilliant idea!" Bingley said interrupting him. "When Jane is recovered, you shall, if you please, name the day." He then offered his hand to assist her into the carriage.

"I should be honored," replied Mrs. Bennet with a flirtatious smile.

Darcy observed Elizabeth steadfastly as she sat in the carriage. She turned in her seat to reciprocate his cool glance. After a few moments, she forced herself to look away, only to focus on his face once more until he was no longer in view.
He raised his head proudly as the driver ordered the horses to proceed. Watching the carriage depart up the drive, Darcy's face softened, and he wished she would glance back at him once more. When the carriage was out of sight, Bingley turned around to glance back at his friend. Darcy quickly averted his eyes back to Bingley, his scowl returning. He knew his friend would have some choice words with him later about his rude behavior, and Darcy certainly wanted to deliberate on Bingley's agreement to host a ball, but for now at least he wanted to relish in the memories of the feisty Elizabeth Bennet.
"Why would you agree to such a scheme, Charles?" Darcy asked Bingley while reaching for his bokken. After the Bennet ladies departed they decided to use the rest of the morning in the practice room training, both knowing they had much to discuss. Seeing as there was unfortunately no dojo on the estate, they settled for an old ballroom on the west end of the manor. Darcy grasped his wooden practice sword and moved to the center of the empty room.

Bingley sighed, glancing up at the gilded ceiling. He knew Darcy would be against the thought of a ball at Netherfield for he was always on the alert and ever conscious of the safety of those around him. Bingley reached for his bokken and turned towards his friend, mentally preparing to battle both Darcy's criticism and superior mastery.

"Because it is best for the county," Bingley replied as he walked towards Darcy. "It'll lighten spirits, allow us to gain more acquaintances, and give everyone something to look forward to other than another impending zombie attack."

"And by declaring all that, you are actually implying that it vindicates you seeing the eldest Miss Bennet again," responded Darcy dryly. "As I mentioned before, security arrangements would have to be numerous. All guests would have to be inspected upon arrival, extra guards brought in, all outside doors guarded… If one zombie slips through our security precautions, they could easily turn half of the guests undead before we have our katanas in hand. Your sisters would be in danger, and all guests and servants. I cannot allow you to risk so much."

"Maybe you're right," Bingley said after some time.

"Of course I am," Darcy said to him with a smile. He then grasped the weapon in his right hand a little tighter, and both men bowed towards each other to symbolize the start of their first sparring match.

"I have a proposition," said Bingley after the pair had been circling each other for some time, swords at the ready. Darcy knew Bingley never dared to make the first move out of fear, so he always waited, knowing his friend grew more and more skittish with each passing moment.

"Let's hear it," said Darcy curiously.

"If I am able to strike you, then you will give me your complete consent in me hosting a ball," he proposed. "And if you win, I will write my condolences to Mrs. Bennet, clearly stating you were in the right and that another ball would put all at risk."

Darcy smiled. Bingley had never been able to strike him before in their two and twenty years of knowing each other. While studying in Japan, Bingley was always more astute with languages. He knew Japanese, Wu, and Mandarin, among many others, and excelled in history, but was never eager to brandish a sword for he preferred to be agreeable. That is what made him a fine Captain worth following. Darcy, on the other hand, prevailed in regard to wielding weapons and formulating strategies. He fought with passion and fluidity, and, before long, he had surpassed everyone in their class in combat skills. Already at eight and twenty, he was a Colonel in his Majesty's militia and boasted a record amount of kills, a number only surpassed by his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh.
"I agree," Darcy conceded, knowing he should have his way. With that, Darcy stepped quickly towards Bingley, swiping his sword from right to left. Bingley anticipated his first move and blocked Darcy's bokken with his own. Both men stepped back and began circling once more.

Darcy did not wait as long this time. He stepped towards Bingley again, turning his body around to gain momentum, and struck Bingley's right arm this time.

"Point for me," he said haughtily.

"You can strike me as many times as you please," retorted Bingley, "but do remember, I only have to hit you once." He smiled.

Darcy chuckled at his clever friend. "Ah, yes," he responded, "however in a typical round the winner is the first to receive three points. Two more left, my friend."

Bingley attempted to take Darcy by surprise by quickly making a strike towards his torso right after he finished speaking, but Darcy was too fast. He stepped to his right and hit Bingley in the calf.

"Two points," said Darcy with a smile.

Bingley remained focused. He had been training with Darcy his entire life, and even though Darcy was clearly the superior warrior, he also had his weaknesses. Bingley decided to exploit one.

"I find that perfectly tolerable," replied a smirking Bingley. Darcy's smile fell.

Bingley then advanced on his friend, bokken gliding through the air, but Darcy blocked it with his own. Bingley made another attempt, and Darcy blocked that attempt as well. The men each took several more shots at each other without either prevailing.

"You should ask her to dance at the ball," Bingley suggested in a rare moment of overconfidence, trying once again to catch Darcy off-guard. "I've seen the way you two bicker back and forth… besides you did give that eloquent soliloquy after you saw her fight off that horde."

This time it worked. Bingley jerked his sword to the right and then quickly changed his mind, making a wide swoop with his sword on his left towards Darcy's right arm. Darcy assumed his friend would go right again as it was more familiar to him, so when his friend did so, he allowed his mind to stray momentarily to what it would be like to dance with Elizabeth Bennet. Realizing he actually wanted it to come to fruition, he decided to let Bingley have his strike, and intentionally left his sword arm exposed.

Bingley cheered in triumph, and Darcy released a fake groan before offering his friend congratulations. Smiling, Bingley stated they would call upon Longbourn later that week to inquire after Jane's health.

Upon mentioning Jane's condition, Darcy wondered once again if she had given in to her zombie urges. Although Elizabeth had thwarted his last attempt, he was certain that his next encounter with the eldest Miss Bennet would truly expose her condition.

The gentlemen proceeded with their sparring for another hour, at which time Bingley announced he would withdraw and inform his sisters of his intention to host a ball. Darcy remained for several more hours, honing his skills, eagerly awaiting their visit to Longbourn.

That afternoon, Darcy found himself in the parlor responding to a letter he had received from his
sister, Georgiana. She wrote saying she was pleased to receive his letter that indicated his safe
arrival at Netherfield and that the circumstances surrounding the incident at the Meryton dance had
ended in a happy manner. She also inquired for more details, particularly those concerning this
Elizabeth Bennet he spoke of. Darcy chuckled, knowing she would see right through him.
Georgiana concluded her letter by stating she successfully decapitated two undead that found
themselves on the Pemberley grounds and that she wished for him to return as soon as he was able.

While penning out his response, Edmund entered with another letter addressed to him. This one
was from his Aunt Catherine. She inquired after his health and insisted he come visit, no doubt
hoping to further encourage an understanding between him and his cousin, Anne. Darcy sighed.
His sickly cousin was the last woman he wished to think of at that moment.

Bingley entered the room just then. "Ah! I wondered where you were hiding."

"I'm writing to Georgiana," replied Darcy.

"How is she?" Bingley inquired sincerely, sitting down at a chair across from his friend. Darcy
provided him with an update on her lessons, the recent undead threats on the grounds, and her
inquiring after more details on the Meryton dance.

"Did she state her opinion on the elusive Miss Elizabeth Bennet?" Bingley inquired with a smirk.
Darcy glared at his friend, and Bingley laughed good-naturedly, deciding it was not best to tease
his friend any further.

"I am actually quiet happy to have caught you alone," Bingley said, growing more serious. "I was
wondering if I could be of some assistance with whatever has been troubling you."

"You have always been a keen observer," stated Darcy, offering a small smile, "and I thank you for
kindheartedness… I scarcely know where to begin." Darcy released a sigh and sat back in his chair.
Knowing what he was to disclose would be taken in the strictest confidence, he began, "Do you
remember my mentioning George Wickam to you?"

"He was the son of your late father's steward, correct?"

"Yes, the same. Well upon my father's untimely death, he was granted the living owed to him.
After squandering that money, he proceeded to write demanding more and more until I finally
refused, at which time he severed all ties with our family." Darcy took a deep breath and exhaled
before continuing. "Last summer I arrived home early from a zombie expedition in the In-Between,
hoping to surprise Georgiana. When I walked into the parlor I was shocked to see none other than
George Wickham sitting with my sister. He had apparently secretly begun courting Georgiana in
my absence, and they were to elope later on that day. You cannot imagine the rage I felt towards
him. It took every ounce of my strength not to pull out my katana and behead him right then and
there. But, for Georgiana's sake, I pulled Wickham aside and told him to leave. He outright reused,
saying they were in love and he would get what was owed to him. You know she is to inherit
£30,000, which no doubt was the motive behind his attachment. I then spoke with Georgiana and
was able to make her see reason. She broke off the engagement after I explained his true character.
He left in a fit of rage, saying he would have his revenge in due time."

Bingley stared at Darcy, still processing everything he had just heard. "And where is this
gentleman now?" he finally asked.

"I know not," replied Darcy. "Last year I heard he had gambled through all his living and was
residing somewhere in London. He has most likely moved on by now to take advantage of another.
But that is not all..." He then leaned forward in his chair and ran his hands through his hair in
frustration. "I also have reason to believe he deliberately infected my father." Bingley's eyes went wide. "I have no facts to prove it, however the timeliness of Wickham learning of the supposed inheritance he would receive after my father's death and him being infected only a short time later cannot be circumstantial."

"Was it ever determined how your father was bitten? Pemberley is one of the safest, if not the safest, estates in all of Great Britain," said Bingley.

"The physician said the wound on his face could have easily come from any undead, but I gather Wickham intentionally led an undead to my father, specifically seeking this outcome," said Darcy. "He wanted his inheritance and the only thing standing in his way was my father's life."

Seeing his friend's distress, Bingley grasped Darcy on the shoulder and said, "I am sorry you have been carrying this burden, my dear friend."

"Thank you," Darcy replied, happy to have finally unburdened himself.

Bingley and Darcy rode across the lavish meadows surrounding Netherfield Park en route to Longbourn. Bingley had grown quite anxious in not yet receiving an update about Miss Bennet's condition and insisted he and Darcy set out to inquire after her health. Darcy had no objections, for he also wished to assess her condition, and provide Combat with some exercise.

The gentlemen turned right onto the road that lead towards Meryton and quickly approached the brick gates, slowing to a trot. Upon riding through the iron gates, the gentlemen heard a familiar female voice shouting Bingley's name. It was none other than Lydia Bennet, holding several rifles in hand. Upon further inspections, three of her sisters accompanied her: Kitty, Jane, and Elizabeth, as well as two gentleman.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bingley, "We were just on our way to Longbourn!"

Bingley dismounted his horse and bowed in greeting. That's when Darcy saw him: Wickham. He stood quite close to Elizabeth, and Darcy immediately halted Combat in his tracks. The two gentlemen glared at one another, Darcy contemplating all the ways he could slay him.

"Mr. Bingley," Lydia continued, "you promised you'd throw a ball at Netherfield."

Removing his top hat, Bingley addressed Jane, "Are you quite recovered?"

"She is," Lydia insisted on her sister's behalf. Jane offered a shy smile at Bingley in silent agreement.

"Then I shall begin preparations immediately for the most glorious ball Hertfordshire has ever seen," responded Bingley, smiling wide at Jane.

"Can Lieutenant Wickham come?" inquired Lydia. Bingley was shocked and glanced over to look at the man Lydia motioned to, the same man who had caused his friend so much pain.

"Of... of course," Bingley fumbled. "An invitation shall be sent to all my fellow officers."

Darcy hardly listened to the conversation surrounding him. How long had Wickham been of Elizabeth's acquaintance? He knew the Bennet sisters had no means, so was Wickham trying to extort them for their warrior skills? Sick of the sight of him, Darcy urged Combat forward, deciding it best to leave before he removed his musket from his saddle pouch and offed Wickham in front of the sisters. Giving Wickham one more cold glance, he galloped off, without ever having
acknowledging anyone in the party.

Bingley quickly donned his hat, mounted his horse, and raced after Darcy after bidding Jane a good day. He caught up with him at the end of the street.

"So that was the gentleman?" Bingley inquired, even though the look on Darcy's face was confirmation enough.

"The very one," Darcy responded, his eyes filled with rage. "And now I am to endure his presence at Netherfield."

"It was the kind thing to do," Bingley insisted. "Besides, he would most likely not attend knowing you will be present. Lord knows why he would risk another encounter considering you allowed him to keep his head today."

Darcy sighed. "Thank you, Charles," he finally responded. "I'll reconvene with you at Netherfield later." Bingley nodded, understanding Darcy needed time alone, and set off for home to begin preparations for the ball. Heading in the opposite direction, Darcy ventured towards the In-Between to release his tension on some vulnerable undead.

Darcy glumly descended the staircase dressed in his standard black attire, a dagger hidden in his coat breast pocket. He had waited as long as possible before joining the celebration, and certainly his absence would soon be noticed by his friend. No doubt Bingley and his sisters had already greeted all of their guests and had moved on to enjoying the fruits of their labor. He could hear the orchestra playing and the sounds of people laughing merrily from below. He had spoken with the guard and servants beforehand, expressing the importance of the safety of the guests, as well as proper procedures should another zombie attack occur similar to the one at the assembly room only weeks prior. Now all left was for the parties to enjoy the ball and grandeur of Netherfield Park- all except Darcy.

No, he had a different undertaking in mind for tonight. Turning right at the bottom of the stairs, he entered the drawing room in search of Wickham. Anticipating he would no doubt wish to prey on all affluent guests tonight, endowing them with his charm and happy manners, before exploiting the innocent, naive guests. Glancing about the room, he eyed every red-coated regimental in sight, knowing full-well Wickham would be required to don his militia uniform at all assemblies. After slowly walking through the room, Darcy determined he was not in this particular area of the estate.

He then entered the library. Apart from himself, there was only one other gentleman present in the room. The older white-haired man sat contentedly in a large velvet chair reading a novel, a glass of port on the table beside him. Darcy was immediately jealous, for he too would slip away to this very spot if the opportunity presented itself. The man then happened to glance up, as if sensing his presence in the room, and gave Darcy a curt nod in greeting before glancing back down at his novel. He did not bother to stand or make introductions, and Darcy recognized that they both had the same reserved disposition.

Resolute to examine every room for his presence, Darcy then made his way into the ballroom. Bingley had gone to every trouble to make his home as splendid as possible, surely to impress the eldest Miss Bennet. Candelabras cast intimate glows about the rooms, and he had hired affluent entertainers, which were placed strategically about the parlors, and the finest wine and food was ordered to ensure his guests were given the best affordable.

Darcy stood in the shadows of the ballroom, quietly observing the parties in his search for Wickham. He quickly spotted Bingley dancing with Jane Bennet. She was offering him the
occasional shy smile, but otherwise appeared indifferent to his presence. She also seemed quite unchanged and he was frightful to admit that he had indeed been wrong in his original assessment of her condition. Darcy then started scanning for more redcoats. Two blonde males boasted the correct attire, but lacked Wickham’s dark, conniving appearance. Another, dancing with Miss Lydia Bennet, boasted the same color hair, but was too short. That is when he noticed Miss Elizabeth Bennet, moving gracefully just beyond the dancers. She glanced happily at her sister, Jane, and then turned around, drinking in the general splendor of the room. Smiling gleefully towards those in the room once more, she turned, and maneuvered into the room from which Darcy had just come.

As she disappeared, Darcy watched the doorway longer than he cared to admit, hoping she would return and glance his way. Shaking is head, Darcy refocused and moved towards the next room. After a thorough examination, he was unable to locate Wickham in that room as well.

Deciding it best to return to the most crowded part of the house, Darcy maneuvered his way back through the crowd and into the ballroom as the next dance commenced. He noticed several parties eyeing one particularly enthusiastic dancer with jests and snickers. He watched this man, sensing he had seen him before, however he could not place the day or hour. Upon turning with his partner, Darcy realized he was dancing with none other than Elizabeth Bennet. She seemed rather discomfited with her partner, and Darcy could hear her encouraging him to talk quieter. She also glanced around the room, as if knowing she may become the talk of the town for standing up with such a man as this during a dance.

Elizabeth gave a visible sigh of relief when the music concluded and the gentlemen and ladies bowed and then clapped in thanks to all. She proceeded to glance about the room, no doubt searching for some way to be rid of this odious man.

"Splendid!" said the man quiet loudly. "Splendid work everyone! Thank you for your attention. Everyone did valiantly!" He proceeded to clap rather loudly, as if praising himself for his distinct dancing style, and everyone else for being blessed with his presence.

The man then stepped quite close to Elizabeth and said, "Miss Bennet, it is my intention to remain very close to you throughout all the evening."

Darcy had heard and seen quite enough. It was obvious that Elizabeth did not wish to be in this man’s company, and he intended to save her from the awkward situation in which she found herself.

Approaching Elizabeth from behind, he asked, "May I have the next dance?"

"Yes!" Elizabeth enthusiastically agreed as she turned around to face her rescuer. Upon seeing Darcy, first shock and then amusement plagued her face. He abruptly bowed in thanks and went in search of a glass of sherry, requiring something to calm his nerves. All too soon, the orchestra began tuning, and Darcy went to claim Elizabeth’s hand and lead her to the dance floor.

Darcy and Elizabeth silently stared at each other as they stood in line with the other ladies and gentlemen on the dance floor waiting for the song to begin. The musicians lifted their instruments and proceeded to play a slower tune, more sensual and engaging. They danced for some time without speaking until Elizabeth decided to break the tension.

"I love this dance," Elizabeth said matter-of-factly.

"Indeed," Darcy agreed, "it is quite exhilarating."
The pair was silent for several more minutes, focusing on the steps, and she occasionally placed her hand or shoulder to his as the motions required.

"It is your turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy, I talked about the dance, and you ought to make some sort of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples."

Darcy offered a brief smile. "I would be perfectly happy to oblige you," he replied, "which one would like most to hear?"

"Very well," she said. "That reply will do for present. Perhaps by and by I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones."

"On the contrary, I find that balls are much more enjoyable when they cease to remain private," Darcy said suggestively. He caught sight of a blush upon her cheeks, making him smirk.

"I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds," said Elizabeth after she had recovered. "We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, or be regarded as uncommonly clever."

"This is no very striking resemblance of your own character, I am sure," he replied. "How near it may be to mine, I cannot pretend to say. You think it a faithful portrait undoubtedly."

"It must not decide on my own performance," she retorted.

He made no answer, and they were again silent until they joined hands and danced toward one side of the room with other pairs. It was then that Darcy asked, "Do you and your sisters very often encounter zombies on your walk to Meryton?"

"Occasionally," she admitted. "When you met us the other day we had been forming a new acquaintance."

Darcy reddened at the mention of Wickham. Using all the restraint he could muster, he replied, "Mr. Wickham is blessed with such happy manners, he is assured to make friends- whether he may be equally capable of retaining them is less certain."

"He has been so unlucky as to lose your friendship," she stated, raising her chin. Darcy then began to wonder what lies Wickham had articulated to Elizabeth. Not trusting himself, he remained silent. Now was not the time to explicate his dealings with Wickham.

After waiting several moments, Elizabeth suddenly commented, "I remember hearing you once say, Mr. Darcy, that you hardly ever forgave, and that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very cautious, I suppose, as to its being created."

"I am," he said firmly.

"And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice?"

"I should hope not."

"It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to be secure of judging properly at first?"

"Why do you ask such questions?"

"Merely to make out your character," she replied challenging him, her eyes narrowing briefly.
At this moment, the men on the dance floor were obliged to face their partners and position their right hand on the waist of the lady in front of them. Darcy did thusly and joined their other hands together, creating an arch above their heads. They then proceeded to circle slowly together in one spot on the floor.

Both were keenly aware of the intimacy of the dance move. Her small hand gripping his own above their heads. His hand pressed against the small of her back, pulling her nearer to him. How close their faces were. He stared into her eyes and quietly whispered, "And what of your success?"

Elizabeth gazed back and, after a pause, responded, "I do not know. I hear such different accounts of you as to puzzle me exceedingly." Her eyes scrutinized his face, as if trying to divulge a full understanding of his character. Darcy's gaze remained fixated in his typical brooding manner.

"I can readily believe that reports may vary greatly with respect to me; and I could wish, Miss Bennet, that you were not to sketch my character at the present moment," said Darcy, removing his hand from her waist. Their other hands remained fixated as they proceeded to the middle of the dance floor and joined hands with others, all parties moving in sync.

"But if I do not take your likeness now," said Elizabeth glancing over at him, "I may never have another opportunity."

They moved back to their original starting points and faced each other once again.

"I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours," Darcy said sincerely, concluding the conversation.

They both stood fixated, glaring at each other, while the other males escorted their partners off the dance floor. Rather unexpectedly, another male approached Elizabeth from behind- the same one who had danced with her previously, and stated he "intended to remain close to her throughout the evening." Darcy glanced at the intruder when he cleared his throat, obviously demanding their attention. Elizabeth seemed confused by the sudden presence and abruptly turned around, releasing an exasperated sigh upon seeing whom the mysterious party was.

The male smiled and indicated with his eyes that he wished to be introduced to her dancing partner.

"Mr. Darcy, this is Mr. Collins," said Elizabeth.

"…Parson Collins," Collins interjected.

"Parson Collins…" she corrected.

"Your…." he urged encouragingly.

"Well, he's my cousin," she explained.

Darcy eyed this curious man. After several moments he realized this Parson Collins was the other male present in their party in Meryton the other day. He was almost certainly staying with the Bennets during his visit and undoubtedly intended to marry one of his cousins. His partiality to Elizabeth, along with his stroppy character, was enough to make Darcy wish to be rid of him.

"Mr. Darcy, I have made the most incredible discovery, nay, an extraordinary discovery, sir," Parson Collins exclaimed, touching Darcy's arm intimately with his white-gloved hand. Darcy glanced down at the connection and glared back up at Collins. Ignoring Darcy's looks of detest, Collins said, "You are the nephew of Lady Catherine de Bourgh." With that, Collins beamed and gave a look of pride as though he had unearthed some astonishing secret.
Darcy glanced behind Collins to where Elizabeth stood, and she favored him with an exasperated glance, despite their heated discussion moments ago. Darcy then turned his gaze back at the odious Mr. Collins.

"I know," responded Darcy bluntly.

"Well, I know you know," Parson Collins fumbled. "Please let me do the honor of introducing myself…"

With that, Darcy had heard quite enough. He excused himself and proceeded to make his way towards the parlor. At that same moment, Elizabeth excused herself as well, and began walking in the opposite direction. Collins glanced between the two disappearing figures, quickly decided to pursue Darcy, much to Darcy's dismay, all while continuing his introductions as he followed quickly behind him.

"I am Parson Collins. My humble abode abuts Rosings Park," Collins practically shouted. Darcy entered the parlor, with a still gibbering Collins in tow.

He abruptly turned, exasperated, and faced the man, tuning out every word. Darcy's tolerance was diminishing and he began eyeing those in the room, looking for a reprieve. Collins was now mumbling about how esteemed his cousin, Anne, was and then moved on to describing the cost and overall grandeur of each furnishing within his own cottage that was bestowed to him by Darcy's aunt.

Parson Collins' voice was then muted by the sound of a pianoforte. After a few notes the female player began wailing along to the music. Darcy glanced over at the lady exhibiting at the nearby instrument and saw it was one of Elizabeth's younger sisters, however her name could not come to mind. She played quite well, almost as well as Georgiana he noted, but her vocal accompaniment could certainly benefit from subsequent practice. Others seemed to notice her lack of accomplishment for soon everyone was staring and snickering discretely at the poor female.

Once her song concluded, she immediately began to play another, however the older white-haired gentlemen Darcy saw in the library earlier that evening approached the girl and whispered in her ear, his face stern and discomfited. She looked at him and tears abruptly began filling her eyes. Surely embarrassed, she dashed out of the room, the older man following close behind. Darcy understood by this moment that the white-haired man was indisputably Elizabeth's own father.

Darcy glanced back at Collins, who was still standing in front of him prattling on absentmindedly. Sick of listening to his nonsense, Darcy turned without saying a word and walked away in search of Bingley. This time, Collins was smart enough not to follow.

The candlesticks were in need of replacement, and the crowd had begun dissipating when Darcy began wandering throughout the rooms to ensure nothing was amiss.

Upon approaching one of the more elaborate sitting rooms, he heard a familiar voice drunkenly declaring, "I predict a wedding in under three months. Such a charming young man- So Rich!"

Darcy eyed the source of the noise: Mrs. Bennet. She was draped lazily across one of the couches, her head on one of her daughter's laps.

"Jane marrying Bingley is bound to throw her sisters into the way of other rich men," she continued, "and then..."

Elizabeth quickly arose from her seat on the ottoman in front of her mother and placed a gloved
hand over her mother's mouth to silence her. "Mother, it's time to go!" she aggressively whispered.

Mrs. Bennet bit down on her daughter's hand, making Elizabeth yelp in both shock and pain. She then turned and spotted him standing silently in the doorway, watching the entire display.

Darcy quit the room, having heard quite enough. He was right, Jane's affections for Bingley were apathetic and fleeting, and she was being pushed into relations with him at the behest of her mother, not due to affection for his friend. He decided to find Caroline and together with the Hurst's, they could make Bingley sensibly understand that a match with Miss Jane Bennet would not in his best interests. For Darcy trusted few, but towards those he loved he was steadfastly protective, unapologetically generous, and unashamedly affectionate.

He found Caroline talking with Bingley and her sister. She was commenting to Mrs. Hurst how the servants were dallying in presenting the desserts to the guests, and Bingley, always detesting spats, offered to check on the matter. Bingley immediately left the room in search of Edmund. In his absence, Darcy began plotting with Caroline and Louisa to confront Bingley on the matter the next day. Caroline then began complaining how there were no servants in sight to refresh her wine glass.

"Why did we bother bringing on extra help if they are not going to complete the tasks assigned to them," she grumbled. Mrs. Hurst nodded in agreement. Now that she mentioned it, he had not noticed any servants in the household for some time.

"Something is amiss," said Darcy. He advised the women to secure themselves in an upstairs room while he investigated. He went in search of a weapon and spotted a decorated sword hanging on the wall. Taking it down, he rationalized how best to proceed. Bingley would have begun searching for his butler in the servant's stairway off one of the main hallways, most likely the one that lead towards the kitchens. Darcy swiftly made his way towards the hallway.

Upon turning the corner, Darcy saw the door to the servant's circular stairway wide open. He silently crept up to the door and stared into the dark abyss. After a moment he heard none other than Elizabeth Bennet tensely conversing with what sounded like an undead boy on the floor below.

He ran, heart beating rapidly. He had to save her. Jumping over the metal railing, sword in hand, he gave a shout. Darcy landed on his feet on the floor below, blocking the undead from an unconscious Bingley and stunned Elizabeth. He immediately stabbed the undead child that stood in front of him and many freshly turned servants. Two more descended on him, one boy and one girl. They could not be over two and ten years of age, and he wielded his blade gracefully, killing them both. He turned and decapitated another undead running his way, and kicked one to the ground that was coming up on his right. The undead child landed a few feet from where Elizabeth knelt over Bingley. Darcy abruptly brought his blade down and stabbed it through the brain.

"Mr. Darcy!" Elizabeth suddenly shouted in warning.

He saw movement to his right. One undead remained. The oldest zombie, a male boy, was running towards him, teeth barred. Darcy ran towards the undead, slicing him across his torso. The undead growled in anger, and Darcy pushed him into the kitchen furnace, thrusting the door shut. The undead howled for several seconds in the midst of the fire before the cries died down. Darcy removed his hands from the door, and kicked it in frustration.

With the threats eliminated, he made his way over to Elizabeth and his fallen friend, dreading what was to come.

He glanced sullenly at Elizabeth and asked her quietly, "Was he bitten?" She remained silent, and
he raised his blade above Bingley's head, grasping the hilt tightly. He asked again, more forcefully, if he was in transition.

"No!" she responded. "No, he fell and hit his head."

Darcy hesitated, not knowing if he should believe her. However, as he stared at his immobile friend lying helplessly on the ground, he couldn't do it. He couldn't kill another he loved. Darcy then reflected on how he had not believed Elizabeth concerning her sister's wound, and he absolved to deem what she said as fact.

Lowering his blade to the ground, he knelt over his friend, placing one hand on his breast while the other gently tried to bring him to consciousness.

"Bingley," Darcy quietly urged. "Bingley, wake up." After he did not stir, he hoisted Bingley over his shoulder and stood up, making his way to the circular stairway.

He was about halfway up the stairway when Elizabeth addressed him. He stopped his ascent and turned to look at her, mouth slightly agape from the burden of his friend upon his back.

"Your abilities as a warrior are beyond reproach, Mr. Darcy," she commented. "If only you were as good a friend."

He closed his mouth for he knew not how to respond. After examining her face one last time, he glanced forward, and continued climbing the slender staircase feeling dejected.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you're enjoying it so far! Please be sure to comment and leave kudos!
Darcy took Bingley into the closest parlor room and laid him down on one of the couches.

"Bingley?" he said again, patting his chest and gently hitting his face in an attempt to awaken him. Several guests began surrounding the pair, curiosity flooding their faces. They began chattering about what had occurred, many elaborating on the rumors quickly spreading throughout the room. Darcy found himself growing more intolerant with every lie. Considering none had actually seen what transpired, apart from him and Elizabeth, additional speculation would only encourage more gossip.

"Does anyone have smelling salts?" Darcy yelled towards the group. One middle-aged lady dressed in white abruptly pulled a small bottle from her bag and offered it over to him with a trembling hand. Removing the cap, Darcy placed the vile underneath Bingley's nose.

After a few seconds, Bingley awakened and began punching his fists wildly throughout the air in panic. Darcy leaned back in his crouched position beside the couch to evade one of Bingley's flying fists before it made contact with his face.

"You're safe, Charles," Darcy told him. "The undead have been eliminated and the threat is no more."

Darcy stood once more as Bingley attempted to sit up. He moaned quietly from the exertion and began rubbing his temples.

"Then why do I feel like death?" Bingley joked. Darcy briefly smiled, happy to see his friend was returning to his good-humored self. Bingley glanced up at Darcy, his face paling, and hastily inquired, "...And what of Miss Elizabeth?"

"She is as spirited as ever," responded Darcy, his face stern. "Can you stand?"

Darcy had grown quite tired of the inquisitive stares and wished to move his friend to more private quarters. Bingley declared the dizziness had passed, and he made an attempt to stand. He grasped onto Darcy's shoulder for support for a brief moment, but was otherwise quite well. The clock then chimed thrice, and Bingley's hand went automatically to his head from the clamor. When Bingley tilted his head, Darcy noticed a sizeable lump growing on the side. He then declared it was time to retire for the evening, and the two left the parlor en route to the main stairwell.

Upon stepping onto the landing, they were met by Bingley's curious and emphatic sisters. Bingley kissed each on the check and declared he would continue on to his room, after offering Darcy another word of thanks. Darcy gave Caroline and Mrs. Hurst a prompt rundown of the events involving the undead, eliminating the mention of Miss Elizabeth Bennet, and then declared they would all assemble in the morning after breakfast to speak with Bingley in regard to Miss Bennet and their return to London.

The next morning Bingley was in high spirits, despite his aching head, and Darcy found himself somewhat anxious about the impending confrontation. He knew it was in his friend's best interests to not bind himself to Miss Bennet. Although Darcy would never propose to Bingley outright that money might be an inducement, it certainly appeared that way based on what Mrs. Bennet had
been slurring the night before. Her ramblings about Jane marrying rich and having all her daughters marry favorably were still fresh in his mind. As if money were the only thing in the world that could make a couple genuinely content. Then there was her demeanor when she was with Charles. For she behaved exactly as she would with him than any other man in her acquaintance. Jane had danced several dances with Bingley, but just as many others with members of the militia and even her dreaded cousin, Parson Collins. During each turn, she possessed the same polite smile and confidence she had when she stood up with Bingley. She paid him no extra attention, nor even attempted to demand his attention. Whereas Bingley was completely infatuated with Miss Bennet, and there was no doubt in anyone's mind as to where his affections lingered.

If she was truly indifferent towards Charles, Darcy was obliged to protect his friend.

Caroline began the exchange by stating what a sweet, affable girl she found Jane Bennet to be. Bingley quickly agreed, as she knew he would, and Caroline took the opportunity to suggest that she did not care for him as he did for her.

Bingley immediately began protesting until Darcy spoke.

"I agree with Caroline," Darcy confirmed. "I perceive her to be indifferent towards you, Charles."

"Good heavens! What do you two mean by this?' asked Bingley, still remaining oblivious as to their intentions.

"We simply do not wish to see you trapped in an understanding that is not in your best interests," Darcy explained.

"I think it best we return to London," declared Caroline. "I miss society and it will do you well, Charles, to meet handsome, cultured women in town."

"Jane is a lovely, sweet-tempered girl, Charles, but I believe your affections for her are greater than hers towards you," said Darcy bluntly. Bingley looked at him questioningly, as if he had not considered that before.

"Besides, I am most anxious to leave this zombie-plagued countryside," added Caroline. "Every assembly now has included hordes of undead, and now half our servants have been burned due to their transformations. That would never happen in London! I wish to return to the safety of the Grand Barrier." The Hurst's agreed.

"I think returning to London is in all of our best interests," Darcy declared. "It will give me the opportunity to meet with His Majesty once more regarding plans to combat the scourge, and I would feel more comfortable with Georgiana visiting us within the confines of the London wall."

Darcy knew Bingley would never argue with them, due to both the ductility of his temper and the reference of safety being of utmost concern. After a brief pause, Bingley yielded to their request.

"It's settled then," proclaimed Caroline with a smile. "We can begin making preparations to quit Netherfield tomorrow, and I shall write to Jane in the morning to inform her of our departure."

"So soon?!" exclaimed Bingley.

"It is for the best, Charles," said Darcy, sighing quietly. His friend glanced over at him and immediately understood. It was for the best. For Darcy too knew parting from the two Bennet sisters would be hard to endure, but it must be done.

The following morning, the Bingley's, Hurst's, and Darcy set off for London. The Hurst's left with
armed guards after they breakfasted while Darcy remained behind for several hours with Bingley and Caroline as they settled last minute affairs. It was decided the Hurst's would venture slowly through the country and meet the remainder of the party at Hingham Bridge. From there they would caravan through the In-Between together, with Darcy and several militia providing necessary protection.

The three found themselves in the parlor after the Hurst's departed. Darcy was sealing the letter to his sister, notifying her of their move to London and his intention to visit her at Pemberley after he had safely seen the Bingley's to London. Caroline finished penning her letter to Miss Bennet. It included the fact that they were closing down Netherfield to return to London and were unsure as to when they were to return. She then mentioned the prospect of convening with Miss Darcy, how Bingley is particularly fond of her, and Caroline's wish to make their acquaintance a more permanent union. She concluded with hope for an eventual reunion at Netherfield, but expressed delight in friendly correspondence, on Jane's end, in the meantime. The remaining staff was then provided with specific instructions on how to close up the house and when to post the letters.

The Bingley's and Darcy then attended a small memorial service in the backyard gardens for Edmund and his fellow servants that had met their untimely demise at the ball. Darcy stood beside the symbolic casket, brooding as usual, and Caroline let one disingenuous tear fall down her cheek. After the local parson concluded, the Bingley's and Darcy rounded the house and entered the lavish carriage to begin their journey southward towards Hingham Bridge. Darcy could not help but notice the smirk on Caroline's smug face and the crestfallen look plaguing Bingley's normally jovial appearance. He himself glowered out the window, discouraged and taciturn.

Upon arriving at the bridge, Darcy and Bingley quit the carriage. Darcy glanced around and was pleased to see the number of soldiers dispatched to the bridge had increased since he last passed through.

"Colonel Darcy! Captain Bingley!" a red-suited men exclaimed, saluting the gentlemen in greeting.

"We wish to make our way to London," said Darcy. "We require no less than ten capable soldiers to accompany us."

"Yes, sir. The arrangements shall be made," responded one dark-haired soldier. Darcy nodded curtly at the soldier, and then returned to the carriage to don his weapons belt and fetch his extra katana and musket for his saddle. Should the need arise, he wished to be amply prepared.

Soldier's playing cards outside a nearby tent were dispatched to accompany the group. The militia mounted their horses and followed Darcy as he led the way atop Combat. Bingley opted to remain in the carriage with his sister, as he was still boasting a headache from the night before, and the Hurst's remained in their carriage bringing up the rear with four mounted soldiers surrounding them. With two carriages, they should make the journey to London before nightfall.

The group stopped to rest and water the horses halfway through the journey. They pulled off the road by a field, so as to easily spot any undead lurking about. Darcy dismounted Combat and led him over to a makeshift-watering trough. He rubbed his hand along Combat's neck and then made his way over to Bingley where he was standing next to his sisters.

"We should not stop for long," Darcy said as he approached the group. They all nodded in agreement and the women glanced around uneasily. Despite her training, Caroline was just as uneasy about weaponry and warfare as her brother was. She preferred being refined to being a warrior.

"How much further is London?" Mrs. Hurst asked Darcy, her voice shaking slightly.
"About two hours, provided the latter half is like the first."

The rest of the group exchanged polite conversation for several more minutes before carrying on, while Darcy walked around the perimeter of the group, wishing to stretch his muscles.

Darcy mounted Combat after several minutes and set the pace once more up the road. He knew they were more likely to encounter undead the closer they got to the city as they often congregated around the wall and surrounding road. The remainder of the venture went rather uneventfully, aside from a few stray undead along the roadside, which Darcy effortlessly sliced down with his katana.

As they approached the Grand Barrier, the great Iron Gate was opened and the carriages entered the confines of London as their militia guards killed any undead that dared approach.

London society was everything Darcy remembered it to be: full of gossips, ostentatious socialites, and throngs upon throngs of people. He had assembled with the king and fellow superior officers within the militia to discuss the progress on eliminating the undead. The king determined that the scourge was under control and there was no need to fret due to their absence of tactics.

He was also obligated to meet with casual acquaintances. After a week of dinner parties and other proposed outings, Darcy was ready to be rid of the crowds and curious eyes, and he told Bingley he was to leave Grosvenor Street for he wished to return home and see his sister.

Darcy set off for Pemberley the following day right after breakfast. Bingley followed him outside the home, down the steps, and onto the busy London streets. They said their goodbyes and shook hands before Darcy mounted Combat. He nodded at his friend before trotting down the street, making his way towards the great Iron Gate.

Once he escaped the confines of the Great Barrier, Darcy took a deep breath, feeling like it was his first in days. He kicked Combat's sides and they raced down the road through the in-Between. The undead were surprisingly scarce and at this pace, he would arrive home by dinner.

He stopped in Meryton to rest Combat and stretch his legs for a while. Darcy walked into a local tavern, sighing with relief when he did not meet anyone of his acquaintance. He ate quietly in a dark booth towards the back, keeping his head down and then mounted Combat once more, feeling slightly refreshed.

He was about two hours from Pemberley when he came across an overturned carriage. The horses lay on their side and were still attached to the reigns. Three undead were crouched over them, attempting to feed on the brains of the struggling creatures. Darcy pulled back on the reigns and drew his katana from its sheath. Dismounting Combat, he abandoned him at a safe distance and cautiously approached the zombies.

The zombies were all male, about his age Darcy reckoned. All three had their backs to him and were dressed in somewhat gentlemanly attire. One still had a top hat upon his head and another a pair of spectacles perched on his nose. All three were covered in blood and had streams of it pouring from their mouths and down their chins.

Darcy slowly approached them, katana at the ready. Before they were alerted to his presence, Darcy pierced one through the head. Kicking the first undead off his blade, he whirled around and sliced the second, sending it to the earth as well. The third zombie then started running towards him. His red and yellow eyes fixated on Darcy, and he snarled in hunger. Darcy readied his katana in front of him, eyes focused, trying to determine which side the undead would attack. The hairs on Darcy's neck slowly started rising as he sensed something behind him. Knowing the other undead
was still several yards in front of him, Darcy quickly turned around and came face to face with a female zombie, her mouth open, closing in on his neck. He shoved his katana upwards, through her chin and into her brain. Letting the zombie fall backwards with his blade still attached, Darcy turned back towards the final undead, lithely removing his musket from its holster. Raising it up to eye-level, he aimed and fired. The final undead fell to the ground.

Darcy turned and removed his katana from the fallen woman, wiping his dirty blade on the fabric of her dress. Walking over to the dying, twitching horses, Darcy shoved his blade through both brains, putting them out of their misery. He glanced around curiously, but saw no indication of how these individuals had been infected.

Walking back to Combat, he stroked his black mane and mounted him once more, then headed northwards to Pemberley.

Georgiana must have spotted him first, for his sister stood at the front gate to meet Darcy as he approached. He quickly dismounted Combat and pulled his sister into his arms, giving her a kiss on top of her head.

"You're here!" she squealed with delight. Darcy smiled and squeezed her tighter. They both pulled away after several moments, and she beamed up at him. He grabbed Combat by the reigns and together they walked up the gravel drive hand in hand towards home.

He noticed she had grown since he last saw her. She donned her black training clothes and had the katana he gifted her softly tapped her leg with every subsequent step. She inquired after his journey and he assured her it went smoothly. He then questioned her about her training and tutelage. Georgiana excitedly detailed all the new defensive moves she had learned and expertly gave a full account of the history of the Great Barrier and the plague. He smiled, feeling content for the first time in weeks.

At dinner she peppered him with questions about Bingley, and Meryton and the assemblies he had attended since last seeing her.

"Oh please tell me more!" Georgiana insisted. "You wrote saying you were leaving for London. Why so soon? I thought the intention was to stay there through until after the Christmas season. Caroline even wrote saying I was to even join you at Netherfield for the holiday festivities."

"You must pay no mind to what Caroline says," responded Darcy, "for she tends to make many falsified gestures."

"Fine," said Georgiana. "Then tell me about these Bennet sisters I have heard so much about."

Darcy picked up his glass of port and took a slow sip, savoring the rich flavor.

"Oh William!" Georgiana said impatiently, sticking her mouth out in a pout. Darcy chuckled.

"The five Bennet sisters were some acquaintances we met in Meryton. Despite their Chinese training, they were all very well equipped in vanquishing the undead, which we all experienced first-hand the night I met Bingley at the assembly room." Darcy then proceeded to detail the events of his first night.

"Elizabeth seems like an excellent fighter," Georgiana commented, smirking at her brother.

"Yes, she is," he responded, keeping a straight face.
"William! I know you fancy her! It's clear as day in your letters and right now on your brooding face," she retorted. She always did see right through him.

"Elizabeth and I have no future. Just like Jane and Bingley."

"I still don't see why it has to be that way," commented Georgiana, before taking a fork full of meat and proceeding to chew thoughtfully.

"Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance," said Darcy with a sigh. He took another swig from his glass.

"I refuse to accept that," she said stubbornly.

"Gi," Darcy said, using his pet name for her, "it is not for you to concern yourself with."

She cast him one more petulant gaze, but dropped the subject, knowing he was just as stubborn as she.

Darcy leaned back in his chair and exhaled contentedly before declaring, "There is nothing like staying at home for real comfort."

"Then you shall remain for some time then?" his sister asked hopefully.

"I intend to, yes. When I left His Majesty, there were no new threats, but he did recommend meeting with our aunt to propose more counter attacks should the need arise."

"So you'll be journeying back towards Meryton?" she inquired. "...And a certain female warrior?"

He did not honor her with a response. Instead Darcy arose from the table and kissed her on the head, saying he was retiring for the evening. She grasped him around the waist and affectionately added, "It is wonderful to have you home."

"I missed you too, Gi," Darcy responded tenderly, running a hand over her wavy blonde hair.

Darcy spent the next several days meeting with his steward, reconnecting with his sister, and lazily walking the grounds of Pemberley to ensure its security. One particular morning about two weeks after his return he awakened feeling particularly refreshed and wished to take some time to himself during the course of the morning. Dressed simply in a white linen shirt and breeches, his weapons belt hanging how on his hips, he meandered through the gardens and around the pond, making his way to his dojo.

He removed his katana and fell into a Zen like state, practicing his swift sword motions. He thought about Bingley and how he was coping, Elizabeth and her fine eyes and sharp wit, and Wickham. When he realized he never caught sight of him at the Netherfield ball, Darcy smirked. He turned around and quickly brought his blade down over handedly in a striking motion. He was shocked when he heard it hit against the metal of another blade. Darcy opened his eyes and he saw his sister smiling back at him from behind her blade.

He blinked rapidly and noticed the sun now shone overhead- he must have been there for hours.

"You mustn't sneak up on me like that," Darcy reprimanded her.

Georgiana gave him a defiant glance and rolled her eyes. After hilting her katana, she eagerly stated, "Two letters have arrived." She ran over to where she had placed them on a side table and
handed them over to her brother, anxious to hear updates.

The first was in his aunt's writing and the last was from Bingley. He opened the latter first, anxious himself to hear how his friend was faring in the city. Bingley was all pleasantness, mentioning the balls and assemblies he had attended, new acquaintances he had the pleasure of meeting, and inquired after his health and Miss Georgiana. He also mentioned that Parson Collins was engaged, but he did not mention to whom. No doubt Bingley omitted the name to spare him, at which Darcy knew the truth- Collins would have proposed to Elizabeth.

Georgiana looked at him curiously, wondering why his scowl had returned. "What is the matter?" she inquired, placing her hand gently on his arm.

"It is nothing," responded Darcy, forcing an awkward smile and patting her hand. He then opened the note from his Aunt Catherine. She encouraged Darcy to visit within the next several days, saying she had received a letter from His Majesty requesting them to discuss oppositional strategies and tactics, and she also spoke briefly of the marriage of Parson Collins. Aunt Catherine stated his bride to be and her chaperone would be visiting within two days' time, and she wished for Darcy to be there to meet them person.

Darcy sighed and looked at his worried sister. "Elizabeth is marrying the parson on Aunt Catherine's estate," he told her bluntly. It was at that moment, after speaking it aloud, he realized what he had lost.

"Oh, William I'm so sorry!" she said, giving him a hug around the waist. His hands remained hanging by his sides in shock. Darcy never thought Elizabeth would marry Collins, given the way he embarrassed her at the assembly, but she loved her family enough to put them above her own desires. He wished to see her once more. Before she became another man's. Before her spirit was driven from her. He opened his mouth to begin making his excuses, but Georgiana stopped him.

"I already know what you're going to say. Go see her one last time," his sister said smiling. "I am capable of looking after Pemberley, and my sword master is here in addition to our own guards. I shall be safe." He loved his sister more in that moment than any other. He kissed her tenderly on the check and they walked up to the house together so he could send a letter to their aunt to notify him of his imminent arrival.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Please be sure to comment and leave kudos!
Darcy galloped Combat over the English countryside at a fast pace. He wished to reach Rosings Park before twilight and he could just spot the tips of the turrets peaking above the distant tree line. He urged Combat down one of the rolling hills surrounding the estate and into the forest, where he came across the gravel road leading to Rosings. Urging Combat onto the road, they pressed on and Rosings soon arose from between the tree canopies.

As he approached the elaborate house one of the Black Guard signaled for the stairway to be lowered. He dismounted Combat in front of the small garden, where a servant was waiting to take his steed to the stables. Darcy walked through the lavish gardens, up the stairway, and into the main foyer. He was greeted by the butler, Franklin, who bowed and instructed for Darcy to follow him into his aunt's throne room. They walked up a lavish corridor boasting gilded ceilings, rich dark wooded engravings, and a posted member of her Black Guard every few feet.

Franklin entered the room first, and announced Darcy's presence.

"Ah! My favorite nephew! You have finally arrived," exclaimed Lady Catherine when Darcy stepped into the room. She sat in a large, richly upholstered chair. Her dark hair was pulled back tightly into an elaborate updo and a black eye patch covered the hole where her left eye used to be. He approached his aunt and bowed formally in greeting to her and then again towards his cousin, Anne, who sat quietly by her side. His cousin was just as Darcy remembered: sickly, pale, and immobile.

"How was your trip?" inquired his aunt.

He gave her a thorough explanation of his journey from Pemberley, including the chance encounter he had with a few rogue undead. She proceeded to pervade him with questions until she determined it was time they all adjourned to freshen up for dinner.

Walking the hallways of Rosings en route to yet another elaborate parlor room before dinner, Darcy remembered the times he spent here as a child. He approached a wall in the corridor that housed the painting of his aunt vanquishing the undead Lucifer. Darcy smirked. His aunt's ostentatious nature never ceased to amaze him. He then moved to inspect the next paining. It held four men on horseback- the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse as they were termed. When he was younger, he heard many legends and stories claiming that when they arrived the end of days was nigh. Now that he was older, he let go of such fanciful fables.

Franklin announced his presence and Darcy entered the parlor. His aunt and cousin were already present, dressed in fine, fashionable dresses. Darcy himself traded his black leather overcoat for a more sensible black dinner jacket, at his aunt's request. Aside from his aunt's occasional question about his sister or an indirect comment about Anne and Darcy's farfetched union, the three ate in silence. After dinner Darcy and his aunt proceeded to discuss strategies should the worst occur concerning the undead. His aunt was brazen when it came to battling the undead, and she never shied away from the opportunity to partake in combat or boast about her superior warrior skills, for she was the deadliest swordswoman in all of Great Britain. Having heard quite enough of her nonsense for one night, he excused himself for the night.

Sleep did not come easy for thoughts of Elizabeth filled his mind. He rolled onto his back, placing
his arms above his head. Darcy had been distracted all night. He knew he was behaving recklessly, and realized he should not have come, to make himself vulnerable like this. And yet, he could not help but see her once more. He was angry with himself for leaving Meryton, when he was just beginning to understand her. He had been kinder towards Bingley than his own self in that regard. But whenever he thought of her visiting the following day, he couldn't help but smile.

The guests were to arrive at two o'clock for afternoon tea, and, knowing Parson Collin's particular obsession with his aunt, Darcy imagined they would be prompt. He paced back and forth down a hallway that ran along the front of the house in anticipation of their arrival. From there he was able to glance discretely at the front road.

Darcy paused and approached a window upon seeing three figures walking up the drive. He stared out and immediately singled out Elizabeth. Her eyes were shining bright and her brunette hair had a few stray untamable curls profiling her face. She glanced occasionally at her cousin and then towards her chaperone in discussion. Darcy looked at her female companion and recognized her as Sir William Lucas' daughter, Charlotte. Elizabeth seemed happy, and she was never one to hide her feelings, so maybe she was excited about her upcoming nuptials.

His aunt told him to present himself in the throne room upon their arrival, wanting to make proper introductions. Darcy conveniently avoided telling her that they were already acquainted, not wishing to disclose all of their history. He walked over to a side door and heard them greeting his aunt. Darcy took a deep breath and entered the room to the right of where his aunt and cousin sat.

"Mr. Darcy?" Elizabeth said shocked upon noticing his presence.

Darcy stared at Elizabeth, his mouth slightly agape. He glanced over at his aunt, knowing she would be confused, and suspicious, at the lack of explanation regarding their prior acquaintance.

"Miss Bennet," Darcy responded to Elizabeth, giving a polite bow.

Lady Catherine glanced from Darcy to Elizabeth and asked her pointedly, "You know my nephew?"

"Yes," Elizabeth responded pleasantly. "I had the tremendous pleasure of meeting him in Hertfordshire." Darcy continued staring at the ground, ceiling, or walls, avoiding eye contact with her, or anyone else for that matter. He noticed she did not stand directly next to her intended. Instead Charlotte Lucas was standing awkwardly between them.

Franklin then entered the room to announce that Mr. Wickham had arrived. Darcy's eyes grew wide in shock, and rage consumed him. Why was he here?

"Is that the soldier you spoke of?" inquired his aunt as Wickham entered the room, bowing gallantly. When Wickham righted himself, he noticed Darcy. His eyebrows rose with shock, and Darcy rewarded him with a scowl.

"Yes, Miss Bennet requested he attended that he might confer with your Ladyship about a strategy with which to combat the scourge," said Parson Collins.

"Hmm… a Leftenant …really," said Lady Catherine unimpressed. Darcy scowled at Wickham, his eyes narrowing and eyebrows furrowed. What sort of game was he playing?

"Indeed," agreed Collins in the same condescending tone.

"And tea is brought up," said Franklin, interrupting their conversation.
"Oh!" exclaimed Lady Catherine in delight. "Shall we?" She arose from her chair.

"Oh, delighted to," said Parson Collins as he stepped forward to assist her down the stairs of her platform.

Seeing his cousin left alone on her chair, Darcy extended his hand towards Anne and aided her down the stairs before falling into step behind his aunt. Elizabeth leaned over and whispered something to Wickham before falling into step beside Darcy as they made their way into the parlor.

They all proceeded to sit after Lady Catherine took her position at the head of the table. All except for Wickham, who opted to stand behind his intended chair. Parson Collins, wishing to have the best view of Her Ladyship, resided in the seat directly across from Darcy's aunt, with Charlotte on his right. Meanwhile Darcy sat to the left of his aunt, with Elizabeth to his left and his cousin across from him. Darcy ignored the tea and scones in front of him for he had no appetite, and instead continued focusing on the man who infected his father and almost ruined his sister.

"Your Ladyship has perhaps heard that some of the stricken have not succumb to the urge to feed upon the living and in so doing have maintained their human ways," began Wickham.

"And they have managed to resist this most primal of zombie urges how? Their ironclad constitutions?" Lady Catherine joked, gaining a chuckle from Parson Collins.

"Yes," confirmed Elizabeth. "Fortified by religious piety in pig brains, which they receive in communion as the blood of Christ." Elizabeth glanced towards Darcy. "The pigs brains quench their appetite for human brains." He furrowed his brow, confused how she could possibly believe the undead could sustain their old ways while they lost their moral capabilities. He had himself seen it many times before: after one was stricken, regardless of the struggle, the infected would always gorge on human brains when exposed, thus completing the transformation. You cannot rationalize with the undead as they had no control or restraint. It was inevitable.

"Oh, yes, of course," declared Lady Catherine.

"The crown's funds are being drained," declared Wickham.

"You're here to solicit money!" exclaimed Darcy incredulously. He should have known that was Wickham's scheme. Surely his aunt would see right through his happy manners to his real objective.

"I'm here," retorted Wickham, "to propose a venture that would end the war forever. These new zombies can be reasoned with. With the proper funding I believe we can cultivate trust and even good will with this new iteration of the undead, who seem to posses an inherent power of the lower ranks of their kind."

"Zombie aristocrats?" Lady Catherine asked laughing.

"Oh, really!" said Collins smirking.

"I prefer to think of them as souls lost in purgatory," Wickham said defending himself.

"Hmm…" said Lady Catherine as she considered what Wickham was proposing.

"The common hordes look to them for leadership," said Wickham. "It takes just one of them to realize that power and then to lead the hordes into battle."
"The undead are like locusts!" Lady Catherine stated.

"Locusts," repeated a still smirking Collins.

"They go forth and destroy," continued his aunt. "They have no use for leaders!"

"Oh, uh, except one actually," Collins hesitantly stated.

"Hmm?" questioned Lady Catherine, turning to face Parson Collins. Darcy leaned back in his chair and averted his scowl hesitantly from Wickham to Collins.

"Oh, well, um," he began, "according to the Book of Revelation actually the antichrist shall lead the undead, uh, on the day that shall be the last day of mankind."

"How cheery, Collins," said Lady Catherine flippantly.

"Thank you, Lady Catherine, very generous. Franklin, are there more scones?" Parson Collins inquired, taking a sip of his tea. The butler hustled to complete Parson Collins' demand.

"If we can negotiate with a select group of…"

"Aristocrats?" finished Lady Catherine. "To what end?"

"A treaty," responded Wickham.

"Appeasement?!" said a shocked Darcy, glowering at Wickham. "Never!"

"Well then the human race is surely doomed," responded Wickham. "Your Ladyship, the undead will always multiply faster than the living can procreate. Nine months to make a baby, then sixteen years to make a soldier, and one raw second to make a zombie. You must realize that if they were to organize we cannot defeat them. The only hope is to find a way to coexist with them before they find their antichrist." Wickham glanced at Darcy and boldly stated, "The late Mr. Darcy would have supported such a venture."

"I have tolerated your presence long enough, Wickham," responded Darcy with more control than he knew himself capable of. How dare he mention his father's name. "Guards!"

As the guards approached, Wickham looked at Darcy and boldly said, "Please do remember this moment and the opportunity so glibly spurned. The day of the zombie is already broken. Awake and face the light or slumber into oblivion." Wickham nodded in politeness towards Lady Catherine and was then escorted out of the room by the Black Guard.

"Mr. Darcy," said Elizabeth, he turned to look at her, "You are as unfeeling as the undead."

Ignoring all sense of decorum, he abruptly stood and quit the room. Darcy stormed into the hallway, down the main stairway and out towards the stables. Saddling Combat, he mounted him, and took off, needing to escape.

Darcy did not know which he hated more, Wickham's consistent presence in his life or his feelings for Elizabeth. Wickham had done more wrongdoing to his family than any other, and against his better judgment what he had come to feel toward Elizabeth was something he never thought himself capable of. Now Elizabeth was to be another's and Wickham was once again to walk free, at least until the next time he decided to haphazardly enter his life again.

Darcy rode until the stars were shining and the moon was bright in the sky. He brushed Combat
down and fed him before walking up into the house. He discretely collected his katana before venturing back outside into the gardens. His aunt's dojo was restricted to her purposes, so he instead began hacking wildly at the various shrubberies in her garden, grunting in frustration. After he had made a thorough mess, he ascended the main stairwell and began walking towards the living quarters.

"I do not know what's happened in the past between you and that Leftenant," said a female voice, "but I found him to be charming. Misinformed, but charming."

Darcy turned around and saw his aunt dressed in her training apparel, her cheeks red and katana in hand. Darcy stared at her, not replying.

"Do you wish to eat something?" she asked more tenderly.

"No, but thank you," he responded.

His aunt then wisely chose to avoid discussing Wickham further, but unfortunately set her thoughts on a subject that unintentionally disturbed him just the same.

"I think Parson Collins has found a most sensible wife," she commented as they walked together. "She is pretty and has good breeding, despite her circumstances and obvious forthcomings. Overall a pleasant girl."

"Indeed," Darcy replied.

"Yes, Miss Lucas will suit him just fine," She continued. Darcy looked at her astonishment and stopped in his tracks.

"What are you implying?" Darcy quickly asked.

"I'm implying," said Lady Catherine turning to look at him, "that Miss Lucas' quiet disposition will balance Parson Collins' ...outlandish... behavior. What? Did you think Miss Bennet was a suitable match?" His aunt laughed. "Why that girl is very opinionated and brash, not to mention her lack of connections. What a poor match she would make... for anyone."

"Yes... quite," responded Darcy quietly. He heard not a word of what his aunt said for he was too shocked at what she uttered. Elizabeth was not Collin's intended. She was free. And despite her inferiority and his family's expectations, Darcy admitted he had come to care for her. And there was hope. It was then that Darcy decided he would, within the course of the next morning, present to her an offer she would dare not refuse.

Chapter End Notes

Please be sure to comment and leave kudos!
Fitzwilliam Darcy paced nervously in front of the parsonage resided by Mr. Collins. The cottage boasted perfectly trimmed bushes, blooming yellow and pink roses, and a spectacular view of Rosings Park. He came to the end of the house and turned around once more, creating yet a deeper path in the gravel drive. Darcy had woken after a restless night's sleep just as the sun was peaking above the horizon. After a quick bite or two of breakfast, he mounted Combat and set off for Collins' parsonage.

Upon arriving, he was greeted by a maidservant who promptly told him Parson Collins and Miss Lucas had departed for a walk and that Miss Bennet had not yet come down for the morning. She welcomed him to wait in the parlor, but he insisted on waiting outside until Elizabeth emerged. He detested confinement. Darcy had been pacing since that occurrence several hours ago, growing more maddened with each subsequent step, in an attempt to compartmentalize his thoughts.

Darcy paused for a moment and glanced up at the cottage, trying to determine which window was Elizabeth's. He remembered the first time he saw her at the ball in Meryton. Pouty lips, unruly brown curls, and fine eyes. Granted, he had assumed her to be comparable to all other naïve and exasperating ladies that existed within the country. After all, she was not dancing or conversing with other locals. Not to mention he had to save her from an undead Mrs. Featherstone. But who knew what feminine wiles existed once a look of determination crossed her face or that the deadly blades hidden beneath her skirts awakened a warrior equal to his own Japanese training.

He continued his pacing and ran his hand through his unruly hair. Here he was waiting to do the one thing that feared him the most; render himself as vulnerable. Maybe he had gone mad, like a freshly turned undead during their first human feeding frenzy, for he was going against his better judgment and his aunt's expectations of him. Perhaps he should just ride Combat back to Rosings and forget this whole ordeal. But he did not wish to be deemed a coward. He determined he would not repress his feelings any longer. Since his aunt told him she was not to be married to Parson Collins, he felt like there was none other for him, in both disposition and warrior talents. And he was willing to risk all he had and all he was for her.

Just then, then the front door opened, and the servant who had greeted him earlier appeared.

"Mr. Darcy," she said with a polite curtsey, "Miss Elizabeth has come down and is currently in the parlor. If you please, follow me, sir."

Trailing her inside, she led him through a main hallway along the front of the house and opened a small wooden door, revealing the woman who held all his affections.

"Miss Bennet, you finally have risen. How fortuitous," he said upon briskly entering the room. After glancing around to ensure he had indeed caught her alone, he continued, "There are some words I must say." What she spoke he could not say for his emotions were overwhelmed. Being alone in the same room as her had enhanced his apprehension, and he feared he would quit the house without ever accomplishing his mission.

He decided the best way to avoid further embarrassment was distancing himself from the door, his only means of escape. He paced to the window, cleared his throat, and began his declaration.
"Miss Bennet, although I know many consider you to be decidedly inferior—there's the matter of your birth, your family, and your circumstances. My feelings will not be repressed. In vain I have struggled. I've come to feel for you a most ardent admiration and regard, which has overcome my better judgment." Dropping to one knee and glancing up unwaveringly at Elizabeth, he said, "So now I ask you most fervently, to end my turmoil and consent to be my wife."

Darcy nodded decisively and stared at Elizabeth, waiting for her response.

After what seemed like hours, she replied, "If I could feel gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot. I never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly."

Darcy's astonishment was beyond expression. He remained kneeling for a moment and tried to resolve how he found himself in this position. She was refusing him? A man of £10,000 a year, superior breeding, and Japanese training.

Chucking from embarrassment, he rose up to his full height, straightened his coat and asked her outright, "Might I be informed why with so little endeavor at civility I am rejected?"

"You intentionally ruined the happiness of my most beloved sister," she rebuffed. "Do you deny it?"

Darcy could see the outright disdain on her face at knowing the truth and felt his own composure slowly beginning to crumble. It was at that moment he realized his mistake in making his feelings known, and determined that his objective was now to answer with honesty, as brutal as it may be found.

"I have no wish to deny it," he replied. "I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your sister."

What Darcy could not have prepared for was Elizabeth's reaction. With one swift movement, she kicked him in the stomach and sent him flying across the room onto a wooden table, shattering a vase upon his landing.

"How could you!?" she cried.

"Because I perceived Bingley's attachment to her to be far deeper than hers to him," he responded while abruptly dodging books Elizabeth had begun projecting his way. "I believed her to be indifferent!"

"Indifferent?! She's shy!" Elizabeth shouted back, flinging two more books his way.

Darcy ducked, barely missing the ricocheting novels. After a moment he straightened up and adjusted his coat, believing her aggression to be dissipating. He soon learned he was very wrong. Elizabeth hastily glanced around in search of a makeshift weapon to use in her defense. Selecting a fireplace stoker, she wielded it in her hand and began advancing on Darcy.

Deciding it was best distancing himself from her, Darcy moved around the table he had crashed into and confidently readied himself for whatever revenge she had in mind. After all, he had been trained by the best Japan had to offer, and he had joined the ranks of a Colonel at only twenty and eight. Whatever this woman had in mind would be miniscule compared to the hundreds of undead he had successfully slaughtered over the years.

Approaching the table, Elizabeth glowered at Darcy on the other side and asked, "Did you suggest to Mr. Bingley that his fortune had some barring on the matter?"
"I wouldn't do your sister the dishonor," Darcy replied honestly. "...Although it was suggested."

Promptly ducking, Darcy knew she would no longer be able to compose herself and would attempt to strike him with her makeshift weapon. Elizabeth struck where Darcy has been standing, but he was too quick and skillfully trained to be so easily outmaneuvered. Realizing she missed her mark, Elizabeth went in for another advance, leaning over the table, before realizing he had taken the opportunity to maneuver himself over the table, his own hand now wrapped around the wrist wielding the poker. Elizabeth was forced to lay with her back on the tabletop with Darcy leaning over her, pinning her down.

"By Miss Bingley?!" she cried.

"By your mother at the ball," Darcy responded honestly.

Elizabeth glared up at Darcy and momentarily he was distracted once again by how handsome she was. Her fine eyes were shining from the scuffle and her hair falling softly around her face made him want to reach out and feel a strand between his fingers. Suddenly realizing the intimate position they were in, Elizabeth shoved her other hand against his chest, and Darcy stumbled back a few steps.

Elizabeth quickly regained her footing and made several sharp attempts to knock Darcy off his feet while shouting, "Your character was revealed to me many months ago by Mr. Wickham as I heard of the scandalous misfortunes at your hand!"

Swiftly knocking Elizabeth's feet from under her, Darcy maneuvered Elizabeth onto the floor. Darcy reached for her hand and dislodged the fire poker. She quickly used his moment of distraction to wrap her ankles around his neck, disregarding modesty, in an attempt to strangle Darcy.

"Oh yeah, Mr. Wickham's misfortunes have been very great indeed," Darcy choked out, color heightening in his face, not only from strain. He began hitting her ankles in an effort to break free. In any other instance he may have enjoyed the compromising position, but at this moment she was a better adversary than he cared to admit.

Elizabeth bent her knees, bringing his face closer to her own and delivered a direct punch to his face, which sent him flying back onto another smaller antique table behind him; this one breaking upon impact and dropping him onto the ground.

Realizing the vulnerable state he was in, Darcy quickly rolled over and sprang to his feet, taking a defensive stance, during which time Elizabeth had obtained a letter opener as her next weapon of choice.

"You withheld the advantages you knew were designed for him!" she said.

Elizabeth presently attacked with a series of striking techniques, one of which occupied both of Darcy's hands. Taking this opportunity, Elizabeth moved the letter opener to his vest and promptly cut the top half of golden buttons off, sending them flying into the air and onto the ground.

Darcy glanced down in surprise. Growing more exasperated with how things were unraveling, he locked eyes with Elizabeth and blocked her next attack. Then, using her own momentum against her, he hurled her into the door from which he entered, granting him a needed respite.

"This is your opinion of me?" he asked, reaching down for the abandoned fire stoker and facing her once more. "Then I thank you for explaining it so fully."
Knowing she was completely wrong about his intentions towards both her sister and Mr. Wickham was only adding to his distress, but at this moment he realized he had nothing else to lose. For the woman standing before him— the one who held his heart— had spurned him and viewed him with little regard. How had he left himself become so vulnerable? In every possible way.

At this moment Elizabeth advanced on him again, letter opener in hand, while Darcy readied himself with the fire stoker. Elizabeth made the first move, attempting to strike his torso, but Darcy was too quick. Grasping her wrist, he steadied the letter opener and brought the poker towards Elizabeth. Breathing deep, he moved it between them, accidentally ripping the top button from her blue dress, exposing her corset beneath.

Eyebrows rising, Darcy realized his action, as unintentional as it may have been, would bring about retaliation from Miss Bennet. Sure enough, Darcy peeled his eyes away from her ample bosoms and met Elizabeth's rage filled face. Without wavering, she delivered an abrupt roundhouse kick to his face and then to his feet, knocking him to the parlor floor.

Grasping the letter opener in both hands, she dived towards Darcy, aiming for his heart, but he grabbed her wrists and managed to maneuver her beneath him once more. Pinning her wrists on either side of her head, he straddled her on his knees and glanced down at her angered face. Breathing rapidly, he anticipated her surrender given the subservient position she now found herself in.

"You could not have made the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it," she gasped. "I had not known you a month before I felt you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry."

It wasn't until that moment Darcy realized his hopes to make Miss Bennet his own would never come to fruition. Feeling dejected, he released her wrists and sat back on his haunches. Elizabeth quickly took the opportunity to win the altercation by bringing the letter opener to his heart, stopping just short of piercing his skin.

"You've said quite enough madam," Darcy sighed, crestfallen. "I fully comprehend your feelings and now have only to be ashamed of what my own have been." He then stood, and righted his vest and coat. Decorum returning, he hastily added, "Please forgive me, and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness." With one last bow, he hastily turned to leave the room and a sobbing Elizabeth in his wake.

Despite the rejection, hostility, and prejudices, he still loved her. He realized he may have been hasty in his dealings with Jane Bennet, but in regard to Wickham, his actions were just. He just needed to relay it towards Elizabeth. Once again she had willfully misunderstood him and even though she was not to be his, he hated knowing she thought ill of him.

Grasping Combat's reigns, he fled up the drive leading back to Rosings and tried to pinpoint the exact moment it all went so terribly wrong.

Chapter End Notes

Please be sure to comment and add kudos!
Darcy galloped Combat down the path towards his aunt's estate, reviewing the events that recently transpired. She had rejected him. That fact alone filled him with shock, humiliation, bafflement, distress...

Darcy grasped the reigns tighter and attempted to decipher her allegations against him. Yes, he had separated Bingley and Miss Bennet, however he did not know her character as well as Elizabeth did. Rightly so, for they were siblings and Elizabeth seemed to favor Jane over all her other sisters. Goodness she had even walked all the way from Longbourn to Netherfield upon hearing of Jane's condition several months ago. Darcy possibly was hasty in his decision to separate them, regardless of his good intentions. If Jane truly cared for his friend, he was indeed in the wrong, for how could he refuse his friend this opportunity if affections were indeed involved? He himself had just proposed to a lady of the same social standing and graces. Darcy was many things- sincere, unyielding, overprotective- but most assuredly not hypocritical.

Her words regarding Mr. Wickham, however, were faulty. For Wickham had received what was due to him, and Darcy wondered how many deceptive tales he had been spinning in Miss Bennet's direction. Darcy had not reduced Wickham to his present circumstances. Rather, Wickham himself had chosen to squander what the late Mr. Darcy left him and what Darcy himself had additionally bestowed upon him in his good graces. Wickham had even gone as far as to attempt to ruin his sister as part of a vengeful plot. Certainly if Elizabeth was aware of the truth, she would see reason and the justification behind his hostility towards Wickham.

Darcy passed under a marbled archway and pulled the reigns back, adjusting to a slower gait as he approached one of the ponds on the grounds. He had learned more about Elizabeth during their brief confrontation. She demonstrated a fierce love for her sister that he too possessed towards Georgiana. They would both defend their own sibling's honor whatever the cost to their own person, and, little did Elizabeth know, his actions towards Wickham were accomplishing said objective. And, most importantly, Elizabeth had rejected him and his £10,000 a year.

Unquestionably, like him, she too could not marry without affection, despite her mother's urgings towards an advantageous marriage. And it made Darcy love her even more.

Stopping Combat, Darcy slowly stroked his horse's mane for a few minutes before dismounting. He sighed and removed his overcoat, placing it over his saddle, followed shortly thereafter by his vest and cravat. Somberly he made his way towards the waters edge in just his breeches and a white linen shirt.

Darcy stared into the water. Gazing at his reflection, he did not recognize the apprehensive, dejected man staring back at him, and he quickly glanced away, for he hated any sign of weakness in him. *I shall conquer this*, he thought. Spreading his arms, he dove into the water, washing away the rejection, grief, frustration, and all feeling. He slowly grew numb beneath the confines of the cold water.

Upon entering the foyer that afternoon Darcy was greeted by Franklin, who offered him a letter in Bingley's handwriting. He anxiously opened it while walking to his room to change out of his wet things.
Dearest Friend,

I hope your trip to Rosings Park has been to your pleasing and you have pleasant news to report, for alas, I do not have the honor of bestowing upon you any correspondence living beings wish to hear. After your departure, the undead began rising up in London, slowly at first, with more subsequent killings every day. But now the citizens live in fear as many more are turned into the undead. His Majesty has called upon us to help secure London once more to the living. I have taken the liberty of sending Caroline and the Hursts to Rosings Park, knowing your aunt's hospitality. I anxiously await your arrival in London to combat the scourge and defend Great Britain from the undead that threaten its very existence.

Yours,

Charles Bingley

Darcy hastily made his way to prepare for his immediate departure, happy to have an occupation to occupy his thoughts. Upon assembling all of his belongings, he sought out his aunt in the throne room. She herself was reading her own letter, no doubt detailing of the uprising first-hand from some London acquaintance. When she glanced up from her letter, Darcy could see the concern on her face.

"I assume you have heard?" she inquired.

"Yes," responded Darcy. "I intend to depart immediately for Hingham Bridge and then onward to London to assist Bingley and the rest of the militia in regaining control."

"Do you think there's hope?" she asked.

"It depends on our ability to reclaim power. If London were to fall, you know Hingham Bridge would have to be blown or they risk overrunning Meryton and eventually Rosings."

"Indeed," she responded thoughtfully. "God be with you." His aunt then nodded stiffly as her final parting gesture, but Darcy also detected a trace of worry in her eyes for her favorite nephew. Touched by the tenderness, he bowed and left to retrieve his weapons and begin the journey south.

"It is worse than I imagined," Darcy shockingly said to Bingley as he glanced down from the Great Wall at the hordes of undead rallying against red suited militia below.

"After I wrote to you they began specifically attacking militia," responded Bingley, yelling over the sounds of muskets and cannon fire. Darcy wondered why undead began unionizing together to attack a specific target. After so many years of zombies seeking out the closest possible feed, something had to have changed.

The horde was manageable and soon his men had cleared the majority of the undead invaders on their side of the wall. In the cool night air, they burnt the undead bodies, and stopped for a respite. During which time, Darcy briefed Bingley on his encounter with Elizabeth at Rosings Park, leaving out the cool words exchanged regarding Jane and his friend. When he had finished, Bingley offered his sympathies and a bottle of port to assuage any remaining distress. He took several swigs before handing the bottle back to Bingley, sincerely happy to be with his dearest friend, despite the circumstances. The pair continued talking until an explosion broke their focus. They quickly looked up and saw debris flying into the air over the rooftops. Smoke billowed high into the air. The palace was burning.
Bingley and Darcy arose to their feet, both praying the King and his family had survived. That’s when they heard it. Like the sound of a gurgling brook, an enormous horde began making its way towards the Great Wall where Darcy and Bingley stood. The militia on the ground below began running towards the wall, climbing in haste to escape the hundreds of undead coming their way. Without his katana and musket, Darcy grabbed a nearby pole and began striking the undead as they attempted to climb over the wall.

His men immediately began firing their muskets into the fray, dropping a few undead to the ground, but not enough to make a difference. Zombies were turning all living within their reach into undead, creating a feeding frenzy. At this pace Darcy realized they would soon have to retreat towards Hingham Bridge.

"Ready the cannons!" Darcy yelled, in an attempt to regain control of the wall. After waiting a few minutes, he stepped back and ordered his men to fire into the horde and utilize their swords to cut down the undead.

The night seemed never-ending as waves of zombies piled up around the wall. Halfway into the night it appeared that their main objective had changed. They no longer turned the living, but instead they rallied to ascend the wall at whatever the cost. Darcy had then stationed his men in various points leading up the wall, to thin out the horde.

There were two more explosions. One on the northeast side of the city near the river and the other only a few blocks from where he stood fixated on the wall. The two main houses within the wall crumbled as well. They were losing, and he had to develop a better plan, and send out warning should the city fall to the undead and they were forced to retreat.

His men were growing weary from the physical demands of fighting, and he was beginning to see hopelessness and fear in their eyes.

"Come on lads!" he shouted encouragingly in an attempt to boost morale. He then used the pole in hand to strike down three more undead. He began considering who or what was behind the attacks and sudden strategy.

"This isn't the random act of some mindless horde," he said thinking out loud. He stepped back from his position and other soldiers filled the gap. "They struck the palace and both houses. They cut off our head before we could cut off theirs..." But how did they know where to attack? And what made them all rally together towards specific targets?

"Keep fighting!" he encouraged, coming out of his reverie. He patted one of his soldiers that had ceased fighting to listen to him reassuringly on the shoulder. "Come on men!"

"Colonel Darcy!" shouted a soldier some time later. He was quickly approaching his position on the wall. "Others along the wall have been able to hold off the undead but are loosing resources fast. His Majesty survived and he has ordered for you to ride out to Hingham Bridge to alert the militia there that the bridge will have to be rigged and possibly detonated should the worst occur. His Majesty leaves it up to your discretion as to when and if it is necessary."

Darcy nodded in understanding and went to his second in command to explain his mission, leaving his soldiers in his capable hands. Bingley had been ordered to depart for Hingham Bridge shortly after the palace had crumbled, and Darcy was eager to see how his friend was faring.

Before he left, Darcy fetched his katana and musket, and he decided to pen one final letter to Elizabeth in the event he did not last til morning. He wished to warn her of the inevitable threat the London horde served to the rest of Great Britain should they manage to escape. But, most
importantly, he wished to attempt to assuage her resentment towards him, regardless of how improbable it may be. He sat down and began writing his final declaration.

Dear Miss Elizabeth Bennet,

I'm not writing to renew the sentiments which were so disgusting to you but to address the two offenses you accuse me of. I did not intentionally wound your sister. It was a most unfortunate consequence of protecting my dearest friend. Mr. Bingley's feelings for Miss Bennet were beyond any I had ever witnessed in him or indeed even thought him capable of. The evening of the dance at Netherfield, after overhearing your mother coldly stating her intention of having all her daughters marry favorably, I persuaded Bingley of the unfitness of the match. If I have wounded Miss Bennet's feelings, it was unknowingly done.

As to your other accusation of having injured Mr. Wickham, no sooner had my father made clear his intention to leave Mr. Wickham a handsome sum, than Mr. Darcy was mysteriously infected by the plague. It was left to me, his son, to provide a merciful ending. Still I gave Wickham the inheritance my father left. Wickham squandered it. Whereupon he demanded more and more money, until I eventually refused. Thereafter he severed all ties with me.

Last summer he began a relationship with my 15-year-old sister and convinced her to elope. Mr. Wickham's prime target was her inheritance of £30,000, but revenging himself on me was a strong additional inducement. Fortunately, I was able to persuade my sister of Mr. Wickham's ulterior motives before it was too late. I hope this helps explain and perhaps mitigate my behavior in your eyes.

Of all weapons in the world, I now know love to be the most dangerous, for I have suffered a mortal wound. When did I fall so deeply under your spell, Miss Bennet? I cannot fix the hour or the spot or the look or the words which laid the foundation. I was in the middle before I knew I began. What a proud fool I was. I have faced the harsh truth that I can never hope to win your love in this life. And so have sought solace in combat. I write to you from the siege of London.

There is now a cunning design to the zombie attack. I sense a dark hand is at work here, guiding the enemy, Miss Bennet. By taking London, they've increased their ranks a hundredfold. Now we endeavor to keep them trapped within the Great Wall. If we should fail to contain them and they breach Hingham Bridge, it'll be as if a great dam has broken and they'll reach out for us swiftly, and in overwhelming numbers. Dear Miss Bennet, I implore you to be ready.

Yours,

Fitzwilliam Darcy

He gave the letter to one of his best riders, ordering him to deliver it with haste to Longbourn. Darcy stood on the wall watching the officer fade into the darkness as they rode further and further away, while, behind him, London burned to the ground with undead wreaking havoc upon the cursed living.

Darcy was greeted by a distraught Bingley upon arriving at Hingham Bridge. "I was afraid you would not make it," Bingley stated as Darcy dismounted Combat.

"Come on, dear friend, you know me better than that," responded Darcy easily. He could see
London glowing red in the distance, and a constant cover of smoke had descended upon the bridge and In-Between. He rubbed his eyes and stifled a yawn, trying to remember how long it had been since he rested.

Bingley looked at him, concern etched on his face. "When was the last time you slept?" Darcy looked seriously at his friend, but was still amused at what Bingley deemed important at such a time.

"It is of no importance," Darcy responded, dismissing his friend's comment. "We must begin charging the bridge. From what I saw when I departed, the remaining men will not last until the next sunrise."

"The men here can charge the bridge," Bingley said in an attempt to sound authoritative. "You really must get cleaned up and rest. If what you say is true, we will all need our strength to make it through this last day."

Bingley ushered Darcy into a white tent. Darcy took the water pitcher and rinsed his hands and face.

"I wrote to Elizabeth Bennet," said Darcy hesitantly after he had dried his face. He cast his tired eyes upon his friend and leaned against the makeshift vanity. "I explained all of my dealings with Wickham and urged her to prepare should the worst arise. I have no doubt that her and her sisters are more than capable of defending Longbourn should the London horde break over the bridge."

After a long pause Bingley spoke. "I still love Jane," he confessed. "Regardless of what you and my sisters say, I know she feels the same."

"I should never have interfered," admitted Darcy sincerely, looking at the floor. He glanced up and gazed unwaveringly at his friend. "It was very wrong of me, Charles, and I apologize."

"You admit that you were in the wrong?" Bingley said stunned.

"Utterly and completely."

"So if we make it out of this alive, do I have your blessing?" asked Bingley.

"Do you need my blessing?" asked Darcy amused.

"No," said Bingley, "but I should like to know I have it all the same."

"Of course," Darcy said with a smile and light chuckle.

"Thank you, my friend," said Bingley giving his friend a rare hug. "Do you think you can amend things with Elizabeth?"

"Some things are just not meant to be, Charles," responded Darcy solemnly.

"Well, I shall leave you to rest," said Bingley after some time. With that, he left the tent. Darcy made his way over to a cot in the back corner and drifted off into a fitful sleep.

"How are the charges coming along?" Darcy asked Bingley after he had risen.

"Quite well," said Bingley, glancing down into the canal. "I have men placing explosives along the supporting columns and they can be detonated should the need arise. It should not take more than a few hours more to complete. A report came through while you were sleeping that a small horde
managed to climb over the wall and escape into the In-Between. They have mostly been killed with except for a few strays. We did lose quite a number of men though."

"The In-Between should be clear of all remaining undead before the horde comes charging through," said Darcy. "We should go assist them. The men have the explosives under control, and we can better assist with the onslaught."

Bingley hesitantly agreed and they both saddled up.

The situation was worse than they imagined. It appeared as if a giant explosion had been set off near the checkpoint. Bodies of both undead and killed militia were scattered everywhere, and fires burned on the wooden barricades. Half of the remaining militiamen were walking around stabbing the slain zombies through the brains to ensure their demise, and others then dragged those undead into piles to be burned or exploded.

Bingley saw a pile in a nearby valley not being attended and ventured off on his horse to investigate. Darcy opted to remain on the hilltop. Abandoning Combat by a nearby tree, he brandished his katana and began piercing any undead he came across. He spotted one female in a now putrid brown dress slowly walking towards him curiously. He promptly stabbed her through the brains and kicked her now lifeless body off his blade.

Darcy made his way further out and came across a snarling undead man crawling on the ground in an attempt to get away from him. He walked up, and sliced him as well. Upon turning though he found himself caught. Darcy glanced down and noticed a half dozen undead hands poking from the earth and clinging to his shoes, breeches and the tail end of his overcoat, forcing him to remain in place. He tugged his feet in an attempt to release himself. Darcy then heard a snarl behind him. He whirled around just in time to see a large undead man coming hastily towards him. Darcy quickly began swatting the zombie hands with his katana to free his feet and enable him to face his opponent. Just as he had managed to escape, he swung his blade towards the undead man but the zombie had suddenly stopped mere feet away from him, his face going blank. The zombie abruptly dropped to the ground, reveling Elizabeth Bennet behind him. Her arm was still extended from throwing an axe into the back of the undead's head, killing him before the undead could descend upon Darcy.

She glanced up at Darcy, her breathing rapid. He stood there stunned. Darcy never thought he would see her again and yet here she was. He noticed the same fierceness in her eyes that had existed when she vanquished the undead at the Meryton assembly. She looked like the deadliest of warriors. In place of her typical modest dress she wore fighting trousers, a black corset, and a blue overcoat that emphasized her fine eyes. Her katana was at her hip and some stray brown curls had escaped the confines of the pins on the back of her head.

She spoke to him and brandished her own katana, holding it up in the air.

"Yes, quite," responded Darcy when she had finished. He then realized he did not hear what she had uttered. "Pardon?" he said, confusion etched all over his face.

Elizabeth smiled at him. "This," she said. "What we're standing on- it's an unmarked zombie graveyard."

Darcy looked up at her once more and responded, "Yes, of course." Although he still did not fully comprehend what she had said moments before.

They both then began piercing the undead at their feet. Darcy snuck an occasional glance at Elizabeth, admiring the forcefulness behind every movement of her katana. Her presence struck
him like a bolt of lightening, reawakening all his feelings and heartaches. He still had bruises from where she had kicked and hit him, a brutal reminder of a life he was not meant to have. Darcy wondered if she had received his letter. Had she changed her opinion of him? Did she seek him out? If not, why had she journeyed to the In-Between and into the very danger he warned her about?

They remained until all undead in the immediate area had been struck through the brains. At which time, he lead her to where Combat was waiting. Darcy mounted and looked down at her, silently lowering his left arm to assist her up. He wondered if she would take it. If she didn't, she had either not received his letter or ruled it as fabrications. If she did, there was hope that she had forgiven him and they could possibly make amends. Regardless, he wished to move Elizabeth to a more secure location as quickly as possible for another horde could break free at any moment. Elizabeth glanced up at him for a few moments and, using his arm for support, situated herself behind Darcy. Only after another brief hesitation, she wrapped her arms around his waist to secure herself. Darcy smiled.

He felt her warmth behind him and all too soon they had returned to the checkpoint, whereupon he noticed none other than Jane standing with Bingley. Darcy dismounted before helping Elizabeth down. Securing his hands around her hips, he eased her down to the ground, her eyes meeting his the entire time. She floundered and walked off several paces. He followed closely behind, a smirk plaguing his face. She had received the letter.

"Miss Bennet, what possible cause could the two of you have for leaving Hertfordshire and entering the In-Between?" Darcy asked after several moments of silence.

"If adventures will not befall a young lady in her own village," responded Elizabeth haughtily, "she must seek them abroad."

Knowing her character by now, Darcy continued gazing silently at her. She would relent the true reason under his intent fixation and stubborn silence.

"We had no choice," she finally said with dejection. "Wickham has run off with Lydia. He's taken her to where zombie aristocrats congregate: St. Lazarus."

He should have killed him when he had the chance. Darcy's mercy had not only caused Elizabeth to place herself in peril but also put her sisters in danger as well. He now knew where Wickham was holding up and it was time to end this. The ride to St. Lazarus was several hours, and if he left soon, he could make it there and have Lydia back across the bridge possibly before the London horde broke free. He could not have Elizabeth venture to such a place where she could entice a ravenous zombie. He saw frustration, sorrow, anger and stubborness all flooding her face. The warrior in her would seek out Wickham and get vengeance at whatever the cost, all for the sake of her honor and the dignity of her family. Yet he could not jeopardize her safety. No, it was best for her to believe that there was no hope for her sister, and it would grant him the opportunity to spare her and right his wrongdoings. After all they had been through, she may never forgive him anyways for his past behavior, and looking at her now, he still hesitated to part from her and do what needed to be done. What is right to be done cannot be done too soon, he thought.

"St. Lazarus?" Darcy asked. "I know it well. I saw it raised to the ground five days ago. Your sister couldn't possibly have survived."

Elizabeth began shaking her head, not believing him. She quickly turned away so he wouldn't see the silent tears roll down her cheeks.

"I'm profoundly sorry for your loss," he said. He hated the lie, but he hated Wickham more. He
would kill Wickham for causing Elizabeth the same pain he had endured with his own sister.

"Colonel Darcy!" said a soldier approaching him from behind. The soldier came up and whispered that the London horde would most likely break free of the Great Barrier and reach the bridge by daybreak.

"I fear I must depart for Hingham Bridge," Darcy said, hating himself for lying in their last moments together.

"Yes, of course," Elizabeth quietly replied, sniffling. He opened his mouth, for there was much more he wished to say to her, but he knew time was not on his side, and if he wished to save her sister, he needed to depart for St. Lazarus immediately. With one last glance in her direction, he turned and walked away, knowing full well he would never see her again.

What had Elizabeth said? These zombie aristocrats used pig blood and brains to quench their appetite for human flesh? Darcy ventured into one of the tents housing military cadavers and sliced open the skulls of several men. Pulling their brains out, he placed them into a bag and strapped it to his saddle. There was no way undead could resist brains if offered to them, and it could prove to be a formidable distraction once he arrived.

He met Bingley by one of the smaller tents and discretely updated him on Wickham's whereabouts.

"Elizabeth informed me that Wickham is holding up with Lydia in St. Lazarus," Darcy informed him. He paused before telling Bingley he lied about the condition of the church.

"Darcy! I cannot in good faith…" Bingley began protesting.

"It is my fault Wickham entered their lives, Bingley!" reasoned Darcy. "If I had properly dealt with him last summer or even when we saw him in Meryton those many months ago, none of this would have happened. It's my fault he took Lydia, and he knows full well I will come to save her. But I need you to stay and command things here. I was just informed that London will fall and the horde will swarm Hingham Bridge by daybreak tomorrow. Make sure all the men and Jane and Elizabeth make it to Hingham Bridge and detonate it at first light no matter what."

Darcy pulled out his father's pocket watch. He had twelve hours total. Taking the distance there and back into account that left two hours to find and free Lydia once he arrived. And with the human brains along to provide a distraction, Lydia should be able to cross Hingham Bridge before it was destroyed. Darcy sighed, for he did not intend on returning. He knew Lydia's best chance was to ride back on Combat alone, and there was no way Wickham would let her go without a fight. Darcy would finally get the revenge he had been waiting for.

Bingley pulled out his own watch, ready to sync with Darcy's and begin the countdown.

"Let's see how reasonable these aristocrats are after their appetites have been wet. On my mark," Darcy said, readying his finger over the crown. "Now." They both pressed down on their watches, and Darcy slid his back into his vest pocket. "Dawn breaks at five o'clock tomorrow," he said. "I'll make it back."

"Of course you will, old man," Bingley responded apprehensively.

"The order must be given at first light, no matter what," Darcy emphasized, knowing his friend would be hesitant to blow the bridge without Darcy safely back on the mainland.

"I'll give the order," Bingley confirmed. The pair shook hands, and Darcy took one last look at his kindhearted friend. He hastily mounted Combat and set off for St. Lazarus to fulfill his mission,
whatever the cost to him.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos please!
Darcy rode with haste to St. Lazarus, approaching the unforthcoming church just before sundown. From a distance he could hear the bells tolling from the stone steeple, signaling the imminent commencement of nightly mass. The church would be filled with undead aristocrats quenching their zombie urges on the brains of slaughtered pigs. Darcy could not have timed it more perfectly. If he could sneak in and switch the pig communion with that of real human brains, he could ignite a frenzy that may allow him time to free Lydia and grant her a means of escape.

Passing the wooden pig stalls on the rear of the church, undoubtedly holding the creatures waiting to be eradicated for the next suppression meal, he slowed Combat down, dismounted, and guided his horse discreetly 'round the side of the church. The structure was as grey as the sky and, upon further inspection, run down from ill repair. Orange and black rust stains decorated the sides of the church, fading the further down they fell. There were also tremendous gaps in the steeple and sides of the church from missing stones. Birds had nested in the great heights, taking advantage of the shelter.

Male and female undead, all dressed in black, were still entering through the front doors of the church. Four men in top hats with their backs to Darcy stood like statues watching the procession enter past them. He spotted a small intricate black grate along the side half of St. Lazarus and tied Combat's reigns around the low bars, as it would almost certainly be their means of escape. Knowing Wickham, Lydia would be in the heart of the church- the cellar- where exits were limited and any attempt to escape would be arduous. Combat was undeniably strong enough to disengage it however, should he be spooked enough by the undead horde.

Darcy rubbed his right hand on Combat's mane a few times before surreptitiously peaking around the stoned corner of the church towards the front entrance. Only the four men in top hats remained. As if sensing Darcy's presence, the man standing closest to his position began slowly turning his head in Darcy's direction. Darcy moved out of view once more, instinctively wrapping his right hand against the hilt of his katana in the event the man decided to investigate. If he was even a man... for they all wore golden masks that covered their entire face, concealing whether they were undead or of the living.

After waiting several moments, Darcy rationalized that he had indeed not been spotted and walked over to Combat. Reaching towards his saddle, he removed his musket, placing it in his weapon's belt along with an axe he had brought last-minute, and then proceeded to untie the sack containing the human brains he had dissected earlier that afternoon. Blood dripped from the bottom of the bag as he covertly snuck his way into a side entrance of the church.

He walked through a dark corridor that ran alongside the length of the large sanctuary. Archways lead into the sanctuary every few yards and he paused before each one, glancing around to ensure no one would spot him before pressing on. He paused before one archway as the priest and altar boys proceeded down the candlelight aisle towards the altar to begin the mass. Creeping through the shadows, Darcy made his way to the back of the altar to where the communion was being stored. The pig's brains and blood were encased in golden goblets and communion bowls until it was to be brought out at the end of mass and distributed to the undead congregants. Darcy swiftly removed the pig contents and replaced it with the dripping human brains.

Disposing of the bag underneath the white tablecloth that was draped over the table, he glanced at
his watch to estimate a time frame as to when the feast would be served and then began searching for a door leading to the catacombs beneath the church. After several failed attempts, he finally located a wooden door through which were stairs descending to a lower level. Darcy quietly closed the door behind him and peeked over the railing. Down below, in the first gated interior area, was Lydia. Melted candles were scattered around the cell in candelabras and on the ground, serving as the only light in the vast room. In the warm glow, he saw she sat on the floor, head downcast, with her back leaning against the iron wall for support.

Darcy used his vantage point to glance around the rest of the room. The cell housing Lydia had alternating intricate ironwork embellishments between every other sequence of bars with black rods spanning all the way to the ceiling. Two iron doors with iron detailing that outlined the entrance served as the only way in or out of the confinement, a single latch keeping it closed. The iron structure caged Lydia on three sides, the fourth being a stoned exterior wall of the church, and there was a darkened stoned hallway around the various cells in the cellar. Darcy listened intently for any signs indicating that another soul was present in the space. After not hearing any audible warning of another presence, he deftly began descending the stairs, making his way towards the iron doors.

Darcy raised the latch and opened the door, movements that created a deafening noise in the otherwise eerily silent room. Upon closing the door and replacing the lock, he made his way to Lydia, who had not stirred once during all the commotion. His concern grew for her well-being, given her lethargic state. Darcy knelt down next to her. Lydia immediately turned towards him upon sensing his presence. She stared at him with a glazed expression. Lydia had lost the shine in her eyes and lively demeanor that made her stand out from the rest of her sisters. He prayed Wickham had not ruined her. He saw chains wrapped around her feet and wrists, keeping her in place against one of the ironed walls. Darcy wondered the last time she had eaten or drank, and he wished he had some way of tending to her basic needs.

"Mr. Darcy!" whispered Lydia in surprise. She reached her bound hands out towards him but they slowly began falling back towards her lap for all the strength had left her. Darcy quickly extended his own hands and guided hers gently down towards her lap.

"It's alright," responded Darcy, examining the shackles.

"He said you'd come," she sobbed out. "Wickham said you'd come."

Lydia started to shiver and tears streamed down her pale face. Darcy abruptly stood, determined more than ever to free her from her bindings, and began tugging at the end of the chain, which was attached to the top of the iron encasing. Alas it would not budge.

"Mr. Darcy!" Lydia whispered in warning for his efforts were drawing too much attention. The metal clanking was still echoing against the stoned walls. Darcy grunted with one last attempt and then slowly dropped the chain, determined to discover another way of freeing Elizabeth's sister.

The cell was quite large and housed various tables and other old pieces of furniture. He moved deeper into the enclosing and saw the same iron grate he attached Combat's reigns to—escape was possible. Various maps also scattered the walls. One of which housed a map of London that read "The London Offensive: Plan of Attack" scribbled across it in blood red. The palace and both houses were circled and given a numerical sequence, detailing the order in which the locations were to be attacked. Wickham was behind the undead uniting together in London and the subsequent attacks.

"Bastard," Darcy said angrily under his breath enraged.
"My god you're so predictable," said a haughty voice behind Darcy. "I knew by taking young Lydia you'd have to protect the Bennets' honor."

Wickham emerged from the shadowed hallway and moved closer towards the doors leading into the cell. Darcy turned slowly around to face him, his face stern.

"So," said Wickham after Darcy remained silent, "come to kill me then, Fitz?"

"On the contrary," replied Darcy in the same confident manner. "I've come to make you an offer."

Darcy removed his father's pocket watch. He had to stall Wickham until the horde completed the transformation and distracted the leftenant. At that moment, he could break free Lydia free of her binds and escape through the grate.

"The Bennets' have authorized me to offer you a commission of £10,000 to return Lydia and leave England for good," negotiated Darcy.

"How very noble of you to deliver the Bennets' offer, Fitz," retorted Wickham, "but I'm afraid my answer is no."

"And is there no financial inducement that could convince you to do the honorable thing, George?" inquired Darcy.

"None," responded George. "You see money is of no use to me now."

Darcy glanced down at his pocket watch again. The aristocrats upstairs would be served their communion momentarily. Darcy would only have to delay Wickham for a few more moments before they descended upon the room, grasping for any living being within reach.

"Is that your father's watch?" Wickham suddenly asked.

"Yes," responded Darcy matter-of-factly.

"Give it to me," demanded Wickham, raising his musket and aiming it at Darcy's head.

Darcy took a few steps to the left until one of the iron embellishment columns was placed between him and Wickham. If George decided to shoot, he would now have to aim between twisted rods of metal to get a clean shot.

"No," said Darcy defiantly.

If this is the way the good Lord wished him to meet his end, he would face his destiny without complaint, but Darcy firmly believed this was not how he was meant to leave this earth. For men like Wickham were not meant to flourish.

Wickham chuckled at Darcy's tenacity and pulled the trigger. The bullet made contact with iron and the sound reverberated within the room.

"Bloody hell!" shouted Wickham in frustration as he quickly attempted to reload his weapon to make another try of it. Shouts could then be heard from up above.

Darcy glanced upward towards the door and smirked.

Wickham paused upon realizing what was happening up above and began slowly backing away from the stairway just as the door at the top of the stairs was flung open and unbridled, ravenous undead poured into the room.
Darcy watched from within the safety of the ironed walls as Wickham struggled to reload his weapon as the zombies descended down the stairs and made their way towards him. With Wickham distracted, Darcy rushed towards Lydia's side once more, pulling at the chains again in an attempt to free her from her confinements.

Undead were leaning over the bannister, reaching towards Lydia and Darcy, hoping to make contact with flesh. Darcy continued pulling relentlessly on the chains until they final gave way, separating from the ironed wall. Darcy knelt down and began removing the braces from Lydia's wrists and ankles. He then heard another ruckus coming from the stoned wall opposite them. Combat had successfully separated the iron grate from the stoned wall, giving them a small window of escape from within the cell.

Darcy carried a hysterical Lydia towards the window just as the snarling horde approached the ironed doors, reaching through their bars with their hands, arms and heads, endeavoring to reach the potential feast. Blood from the officer brains still clung to their chins, hands, and mouths. The dignified undead were no more.

The opening was some ways up, so Darcy placed Lydia on a ledge just below the window and encouraged her to crawl through as he hoisted himself up next to her.

"What have you done, Darcy?!!" shouted Wickham.

Darcy turned around and saw Wickham surrounded by undead.

"I fed them!" Darcy called back with a smirk. "Godspeed, Georgie!" he mocked as he lifted himself up and exited the window, pleased to know George Wickham would not last the night.

Lydia still lay on the damp ground as he crawled out the window.

"Lydia," he said softly. After she did not respond, he gently shook her, and she opened her eyes slowly to look at him. "I need you to stay awake. Can you stand?"

She nodded groggily, and he guided her over towards Combat. Helping her up, Darcy untied the reigns from the iron grate and handed them to Lydia. He then began guiding them through the dark woods surrounding St. Lazarus, in the direction of Hingham Bridge.

Undead began running towards the bridge as well, and Darcy knew he had to stay. Not only to fend off as many undead as possible but also to ensure Wickham was surely dead. He had entered his life so arbitrarily in the past, Darcy was not willing to risk another instance in the future in which he could ruin yet another family. Darcy glanced up at Lydia.

"Lydia listen to me," he said to the weary girl, "you have to get across Hingham Bridge."

"Mr. Darcy you have to come with…" she protested.

"As long as Wickham lives, England is in peril," he retorted ignoring her. "Go Lydia!"

With that, he urged Combat on, and his noble horse took off into the night. He silently prayed she would make it back.

Undead began emerging from the wood behind him, alerting him with their snarls. Quickly grabbing his axe from his weapons belt, Darcy turned and flung his weapon upward under the first undead's chin, knocking him to the ground. He then spun around on two more zombies to his right, slicing the first across the face and the second through the back of the scalp. One zombie made his way towards Darcy and he jerked his axe forward and struck the undead to the ground.
Darcy stared down at his latest conquests, his bloodied axe wielded in the air, ready for the next victim.

"I conquered London, Darcy," said Wickham from behind him. He emerged from the dark woods and slowly walked towards him. "Did you really think you could defeat me?"

Naturally Wickham would have managed to escape the horde inside the church, but the situation had allowed Darcy the opportunity he always hoped for: Vengeance for his sister. His father. Elizabeth. He threw his axe on the ground, and retorted arrogantly, "I always have."

Darcy then withdrew his katana and removed his weapons belt, flinging it on the ground away from him. He rotated the blade skillfully in the air to reacquaint himself with the weight of his blade just as Wickham decided to strike.

With a cry, Wickham ran towards Darcy, his own katana in the air. Wickham's blade came down where Darcy stood. Their weapons met briefly for Darcy had ducked and missed the brunt of Wickham's initial attack. Both men turned round quickly to face the other once more, and immediately raised their katanas, springing for another assault. Wickham attempted several swipes at Darcy's chest, which Darcy narrowly avoided.

Darcy's hands held fast onto his weapon, whipping it towards one of Wickham's arms. It met Wickham's blade defiantly. The two parted and Wickham made an overhanded strike attempt on him. Seeing Wickham size up, Darcy spun around, knees bent, and evaded Wickham's effort. Glancing coldly at Wickham, Darcy proceeded to unarm his opponent, but Wickham matched him at every endeavor. Both men were grunting at the exertion.

Attempting a kill strike, he struck for Wickham's torso, but Wickham turned and the pair found themselves back to back. Many straggling zombies were running past them, still rushing towards the bridge.

"You're a traitor, George," seethed Darcy. He breathed heavily from the exertion and could see his breath in the cold night air with every attempt to refill his lungs.

"No, Fitz," shouted Wickham, "I'm the king!" With that, he pushed off Darcy's back and the men prepared for another violent onslaught. Darcy glared at the dark face across from him. He couldn't help but acknowledge that the two were equally matched, however Wickham was appearing not tiring out as quickly as he was, despite the continuous hours of fighting.

Wickham's eyes narrowed and Darcy knew he was about to attack. He sprang with his katana wielded in his right hand, coming at Darcy's left side. Darcy moved his katana, secured with both hands, round his body and aimed the blade down, meeting Wickham's mere moments before it would have made contact with his skin. Wickham pushed his blade forcefully up, making Darcy lose balance. He then took the opportunity to strike Darcy's face with the hilt of his blade. Wickham never did fight fair.

Rage surged through Darcy. He quickly recovered and met Wickham blow-by-blow, speeding up the fighting pace. He noticed the sky gradually growing lighter and hoped Lydia had made it safely to the bridge. Surely Bingley would blow the structure at any moment for the horde was en route and dawn would soon break.

He focused, waiting for the opportune moment to deliver a killing strike to Wickham. He swung his blade over his head, gaining momentum, and slashed at Wickham's head. Wickham raised his blade with both hands, his own katana almost making contact with the bridge of his nose.
Wickham pushed Darcy's blade off and raised his high in the air, striking low towards Darcy's left side. Darcy locked his blade with Wickham's and raised them both in the air, then promptly delivered a swift kick to Wickham's stomach in his vulnerable state. Wickham teetered back and Darcy advanced on him. Catching Wickham off guard, he raised his blade once more and slashed at Wickham's head. Wickham placed his katana horizontally in the air in a desperate attempt to evade Darcy's blade. Wickham moved his blade to the left, angling it downward, making Darcy lose contact. Wickham hit Darcy in the face once more with the hilt of his blade.

Darcy stumbled backwards several steps before recovering. He promptly slashed his blade upwards from right to left, meeting Wickham by his right shoulder, and then down again, meeting his opponent's blade once more. Darcy then brought his arms in and charged his blade at Wickham's face, slicing his cheek. Darcy drove his shoulder into Wickham's, knocking him away. Wickham roared with rage.

Raising his katana, Darcy aimed once again for Wickham's head. His blade blocked Darcy's once more. This time, however, Wickham held the hilt of his blade in his right hand and the tip in his left palm in a desperate attempt to evade Darcy's katana. Wickham's mouth formed in a hard line, and he wrapped his hand around the blade, trying to push it up against Darcy's efforts. Darcy gritted his teeth and pushed harder, forcing Wickham to his knees, and then kicked him in the face. Wickham managed to maintain his position however and, upon realizing Darcy now only had the strength of one hand behind his blade, mustered up the might to push against Darcy's katana and rise to his feet. They were both on equal footing once more.

Wickham knocked Darcy's katana away from his own and sprang at him again. Darcy met his blade and the two made several more attempts to outflank the other. Wickham extended his right arm towards Darcy, who brought his own weapon downward with both hands. Their blades met and released quickly. Wickham then sliced his blade towards Darcy's head. He promptly ducked and seized Wickham's vulnerable moment to spring forward and drive his katana through his opponent's heart. Triumph was his.

Darcy stared smirking at Wickham, elation, pride and liberation all coursing through his body. His chest was rising and falling rapidly from exertion, and it felt like he was breathing for the first time in months. He had avenged his sister and father and Elizabeth's family. This man would no longer prey on the living. Darcy then realized he could go home. See his sister. Bingley. Elizabeth. If he could find another horse, he may be able to make it to Hingham Bridge on time for he had not yet heard the explosion separating the In-Between from the rest of England.

Wickham slowly lowered his katana in his right hand, the power leaving his body. The blade fell from his hand, and he began slumping to the ground. His left hand clasped around Darcy's right arm, which was still grasping the punctured hilt of his own katana. Instead of falling to the ground, however, Wickham rose up and his left hand began inching towards Darcy's neck. He took a step forward and soon his hand was tight around Darcy's throat, blocking his ability to breathe. Darcy's right hand covered the hand at his neck, but his attempts were futile. He then began grasping at Wickham, in any attempt to free himself. The katana still punctured his chest- how was he still alive? How did he have such strength?

Darcy's vision began darkening on the sides. He gasped for breaths and clutched Wickham's overcoat for both support and in desperation. Darcy started falling to the ground, all his strength leaving him. He took Wickham's shirt with him as he collapsed to his knees, tearing it open to reveal a zombie bite on the right side of Wickham's chest. Darcy was paralyzed in astonishment. Suddenly everything made sense.

"You fool! I've been one of them all along," shouted Wickham. "If I had the living your father..."
intended me, I never would have been in the Army. I never would have been infected. This is your doing, Darcy! Suppressing my hunger was easy - I had my hatred of you to sustain me. The Four Horsemen have risen from hell. The Zombie Apocalypse is here. I am the one the undead have been waiting for. The one to lead them."

Wickham swiftly removed the katana from his chest and held it in the air, readying the weapon to make a subsequent killing strike. Darcy's life to be taken by his own blade. How ironic, he thought. Surely Wickham's plan all along was to have Darcy's own brains as his first feed. First Wickham's hatred sustained him, and now Darcy's innards…

Darcy chose not to dwell on what was to come. Instead he thought of Georgiana. The estate would pass to his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam, and he would protect her as if she was his own sister. Gi was most certainly able to defend herself, but Darcy knew losing him, the last of her immediate family, the one who she looked up to like a father, would break her heart. Darcy thought of Bingley. His good-natured, affable friend. The one man who had been there for him for most of his life. They had trained together, laughed together, confided in each other. Thank goodness he was safe and had found happiness with Jane. Lastly, he thought of Elizabeth. The beautiful, brazen Elizabeth. How he hated lying to her in their last moments together. He wanted to tell her how much he loved her. She had pierced his soul with her sweet stubbornness. Oh how he was an arrogant fool the first time he proposed. She deserved so much more. And he hoped that she could endeavor to forgive him in time and think of him fondly after he was gone.

"Every life I take, every atrocity I commit, is on your head," said Wickham. He began bringing his arm down.

Darcy caught a brief movement in his peripheral vision and suddenly Darcy's katana was flying through the air, Wickham's severed hand still wrapped around the hilt. Darcy placed both palms on the ground and gasped in deep breaths for Wickham's hold on his throat had finally lifted. He wearily raised his head, and thorough the fog Darcy could make out a white horse with a rider rearing back towards Wickham. Wickham whirled around in astonishment just as the horse trampled him. He lay still and silent. Darcy glanced up at the rider and made out the form of Elizabeth Bennet. She had come for him. She had saved him. Again.

His vision was blurry, but he could make out the determined look he had come to love flooding her face, and it was now paired with what appeared to be adoration. He closed his eyes briefly in an attempt to rid himself of the headache and dizziness he was experiencing. Upon opening them again two mounted Elizabeth's now plagued his vision. He tried to right himself and opened his mouth to speak, but his body was too weary from his standoff with Wickham.

"Mr. Darcy!" Elizabeth shouted, quickly dismounting and rushing to his aid upon realizing his condition.

She placed her arm around his torso and gazed steadily at his face, silently communicating with him what he already knew- they needed to make for Hingham Bridge. With her help, he mounted the white steed behind Elizabeth and wrapped his arms around her frame. Elizabeth urged the horse on and they both prayed they would not be too late.

After only a short time they caught up to the spot where London and congregant zombies merged in their assault on Hingham Bridge. The horse flew through the mass, dodging undead men, women and children. The snarling noise rising up around them was unbearable, and it took all his remaining strength to stay on the saddle.

He could see the bridge at a distance, and he was pleased they were close, that Elizabeth would soon be out of danger. A sharp pain raced through his head. In a bold move, he leaned his head
against Elizabeth's back and squeezed his arms a little tighter around her, in an attempt to assuage the discomfort. She removed her left hand from the reign and placed it over one of his, squeezing it gently before taking the reins once more.

"Hold on," she said quietly, "we're almost there."

Now they were in front of the horde. The thousands of zombies were tight on their heels and the bridge was still intact. The white steed galloped over the beginning of the bridge, and Darcy could hear one of the soldiers counting down from the other side.

"Three... Two... One..."

With that, the ground below them began rumbling and the bridge started to give way. The horse drove on through the explosions that followed, but soon all three were engulfed in smoke and debris. The final explosion sent Elizabeth and Darcy flying into the air.

When he regained consciousness, Darcy realized he could not move or speak. He lay paralyzed not knowing where he was. If he was still living. If this was the afterlife. He tried to open his eyes, but his body rejected all movement. The air smelled like burning flesh and smoke. He could hear shouting in the distance and fire crackling.

His body was suddenly moving, but not from his own will. Someone was pulling him onto his back. He could make out whimpering.

"Mr. Darcy?" cried a soft voice. *Elizabeth.*

He wanted nothing more than to reach out and hold her. Tell her he loved her. But once again, the one thing he desired most in the world was just out of reach.

He could feel her attempts to awaken him, but it seemed fortune once again sought to keep them apart. He could hear her whimpering subsiding.

"The very first moment I beheld you," she sobbed quietly, "my heart was irrevocably gone."

He felt her gloved hands caressing his face and hair. Then Elizabeth's soft lips were upon his. Her tears fell down the sides of his cheeks, and he felt her sobs shudder through her body. Then everything faded to black.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos and comments please!
Darcy groaned and opened his eyes. The first thing he noticed was the bright light streaming in from the window across room. He immediately shut them, embracing the darkness once again. The blue curtains were drawn back and he briefly wondered who had left them open. Darcy opened his eyes once more and blinked several times, acclimating slowly to the brightness of the room. After the initial fuzziness disappeared, his eyes fell upon a white ceiling with white crown molding and gilded detailing.

He tried lifting his head to determine his whereabouts but the action sent shooting pain throughout his body. His head hit the pillow and his right hand automatically reached up to assuage the sharp pain arising in his temples. After the discomfort subsided, he noticed black and blue bruises spotted his arm and deep cuts covered his palm. He pulled his other arm out from under the sheets. It too was in the same state. Glancing down, he saw he wore no shirt. His chest and sides also boasted bruising and cuts of various sizes and depths. Heaven knew what his face looked like.

Turing his head, he saw fresh bandages, a variety of medicines, a small plate of food and drink, and a basin of water with a clean cloth were organized neatly on the nightstand near the bed. He relaxed a bit. Given the extreme measures towards tending to his condition, he was without a doubt in friendly company.

He began moving his eyes about the room. Everything seemed familiar upon further inspection, but he couldn't quite yet place his present location. There was blue and gold wallpaper decorating the walls. The giant bed he lay in boasted rich brown wood and a soft comforter. A fireplace was on one adjourning wall across the room and two matching decorative chairs faced the hearth. Another simpler chair sat near the foot of the bed, but was presently unoccupied.

Various paintings scattered the walls. One was the silhouette of a woman holding a katana. He stared at it for some time before realizing it was one of the many illustrations of his own Aunt Catherine. He was at Rosings Park in his normal guest quarters. But how had he gotten there? And how long had he been asleep?

His eyes then rested on another painting. This one displaying London - its magnificent buildings painted in vibrant colors and a bright blue sky created depth in the majority of the art piece. Looking at the canvas, however, Darcy did not see what was depicted. Where the sky was blue, he saw red and black. And in place of the vibrant colored buildings was gray with fire and smoke bellowing from the windows, rising up towards the heavens. Undead ran through the streets, bodies scattered the pavement, and blood flowed through the gutters.

Suddenly, all the events that had occurred before the darkness swallowed him up rushed into his mind. Freeing Lydia at St. Lazarus. His standoff with Wickham. Elizabeth saving him. The explosion at Hingham Bridge. Her sobs and last words to him. *The very first moment I beheld you, my heart was irrevocably gone.* Their kiss.

Just then, the door opened.

"You're awake!" stated Bingley happily upon seeing Darcy staring wearily back at him. He gave Darcy an affectionate pat on the shoulder; carefully selecting an area void of cuts and bruises.

Darcy tried to speak but found his voice hoarse and mouth dry. Bingley offered him the glass of
water from the nightstand, which Darcy gladly accepted. After several gulps, he leaned back and tried again.

"How did I get here?" Darcy asked weakly.

"Elizabeth and I rushed you here after you both were flown onto the mainland section of Hingham Bridge during the explosion," Bingley explained. "When Jane and I found you, Elizabeth was weeping over your body. I thought you had died." Pain formed in the creases of his eyes. "She looked up at us pleading frantically for help. I knelt down to inspect you. Your breathing was very faint, but you were alive. We took you by carriage to Rosings and you have been laying unconscious since then."

"How long has it been?" Darcy inquired.

"A fortnight," Bingley said hesitantly.

"What!?!" said Darcy aghast, cursing his bodily instinct to sit up upon learning this sudden information. He winced and lay back on the bed once more.

"The doctor has been vigilant in his assessment of you. He inspected your body for undead bites, and it was determined all your ailments were only the result of combat and the subsequent events at Hingham Bridge. You're lucky, my friend."

Darcy groaned. He didn't feel lucky. His head ached, palms were extremely tender, and the rest of his body experienced shooting pain every time he attempted to move. He fussed with one of the white bandages around his arm, loosening it a bit.

"Did the explosion work?" he asked after he settled once more.

"Yes," confirmed Bingley. "The undead have been freely falling into the canal, but they have not yet been capable of escaping its depths. Eventually we will need to find a more permanent solution for the trapped undead. Now, however, you should focus on recovering your strength."

"And what of Elizabeth? Is she alright?"

Bingley sat down in the empty chair. "She has been quite concerned." Darcy looked over at him. "Every time I pass her she inquires after your health."

Bingley shot him a smirk. He wondered how much he knew. And then he realized Bingley's tone implied Elizabeth was also at Rosings.

"She's here?" Darcy probed, his eyes furrowing.

"Yes," responded Bingley with a smile. "As is her entire family. Your aunt has been quite hospitable towards the Bennets'."

"However did Elizabeth manage that?" Darcy thought aloud, not really expecting an answer.

"From what Jane has mentioned," Bingley answered, "it sounded like your aunt challenged Elizabeth at Longbourn. She, in return, refused to fight her due to her elite status throughout the nation. Your aunt then conceded to her wish but instead had Elizabeth fight her favorite guard, Willhelm, as her proxy. After great effort, Elizabeth overpowered him and gained the respect of your aunt, who then offered to protect her family while her and Jane went in search of Lydia."

Darcy smiled with pride. He was not surprised Elizabeth had won. Her courage always arose with
every attempt to intimidate her. He had seen it first hand on many occasions.

"And what of you and Jane?" he asked, upon recalling their last conversation.

"Mr. Bennet has given me his blessing as well," replied Bingley smiling, also remembering their recent discussion on the topic, "but I wanted to wait until you were recovered before pursuing anything further."

"Charles, you have waited long enough," said Darcy. "Do not think that…"

"I insist," retorted Bingley, raising his hand to silence him. "I have no intention of getting married until you have recuperated and found your happiness as well."

"You are too good, Charles," responded Darcy. "But what makes you think I shall find happiness?"

"Simple," said Bingley, his optimism never wavering. "From the way Elizabeth challenges you at every opportunity. From the way she chased after you when she realized I had misinformed her about where you went. From the way I found her weeping over your body on the bridge. And from the look of worry that plagues her eyes every time I pass her in the hall and she asks how you are faring." Darcy stared in astonishment at Bingley. "There is hope, my friend. I believe that whatever has transpired between the two of you is in the past… She has forgiven you, but can you forgive yourself?"

Bingley waited, but Darcy offered no response.

"It isn't what we say or think that defines us, Darcy, but rather what we do," Bingley continued. "You risked your life to save Lydia, avenged both your families against Wickham, and reunited me and Jane. I'd say everything has been rectified apart from you and Elizabeth. None of us want to be in calm waters all our lives, Darcy. Take a chance and dive in deep."

Darcy offered a small smile, still processing Bingley's words. Could she still care? Should he take a chance and propose again?

There was a soft knock on the door just then and Bingley shouted a verbal command, bidding them entrance into the room. A young servant entered with a curtsey and announced that luncheon was served before promptly leaving the room. Bangles rose shortly thereafter, saying he would return that afternoon.

Darcy smiled and offered his friend a sincere word of gratitude before he quit the room. Lying there, he felt the weight of Bingley's words fall upon him. Elizabeth cared. He had been a fool the last time he proposed. A prideful, ignorant man who expected the world to yield to what he demanded simply due to his status in life. He had changed, however. And Elizabeth had changed. But he could not determine if this change on her part was a step towards love or simple acceptance of his character. Then he remembered her words to him on the bridge and he realized, regardless of all that has transpired, there was indeed hope.

He determined that once he was recovered, he would do right by Elizabeth and would seek out her father before making his intentions known once again to her. For his affections were unchanged, but he had to ensure nothing would hinder his chance at happiness this time around.

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After many days of fitful slumber and meals in bed, Darcy found his bruises fading, cuts healing, and his strength returning. He managed to sit at his writing desk early one morning, taking the opportunity to read letters sent from fellow officers regarding the scourge and propositions for instating a new capital within Great Britain after the fall of London. He also wrote to Georgiana,
updating her on all that had transpired and his plans for the future.

Feeling quite recovered and in good spirits, Darcy summoned his valet to assist him with dressing, and then went off in search of Mr. Bennet. He made his way down the main stairwell towards the second floor, which housed the kitchens, formal dining room, the largest of the parlors, and, most importantly, the library.

Knowing Mr. Bennet's fondness for reading, he was most likely seeking solace in the quiet room. He approached the wooden door leading to the library and lifted his hand to the brass knob.

"Mr. Darcy!"

He glanced up and saw Lydia rushing up the hallways towards him. He backed away from the door and began walking towards her.

She bowed in greeting and then, after hesitating for only a moment, wrapped her arms around him in a grateful hug. He stood there awkwardly, but was pleased to see some of her natural demeanor had returned. She reminded him of Gi just then, and he could not help but feel affection towards the naïve, lively girl.

"Thank you," she choked out before stepping back and quickly wiping her tears away. He offered her a smile and nodded before stating how happy he was to see her fully recovered. She then glanced knowingly between him and the library door. Shooting him a smile, she said she did not wish to intrude and headed in the direction of the main stairwell, no doubt en route to the throne room to advise the ladies on his whereabouts and dealings.

Darcy turned around and entered the dark library. He immediately spotted Mr. Bennet. He sat behind a large wooden desk piled with various stacks of books. Upon noticing Darcy's presence, he looked up contentedly from the worn novel in his hands and placed it on the surface in front of him.

"Mr. Bennet," said Darcy bowing in greeting, "if I may…"

"Sit down, my boy," Mr. Bennet ordered. Darcy never did as commanded by an inferior, but he had come to respect the patriarch of the Bennet family for not only the way he encouraged his daughters to be trained in the deadly arts but also in his ability to withstand his tiresome wife.

Darcy selected one of the ornate chairs opposite the gentleman and prepared for what was to come.

"I will not pretend to be ignorant as to why you are here," Mr. Bennet said, looking Darcy sternly in the eyes. Darcy nodded and opened his mouth to speak, but Mr. Bennet raised his pointer finger, signaling he had more to say. "I have spoken with Mr. Bingley concerning Jane, so I can surmise your intentions for seeking me out, but first, I wish to thank you."

Darcy furrowed his eyebrows, glancing at him in confusion.

"Lizzie has told me everything." Darcy broke eye contact, uncomfortable with the route this conversation was heading. "You have saved both her and Lydia. The whole of England for that matter. Whatever you wish, if it is in my power, I shall give it to you."

Darcy offered a short smile to the man. "I deserve no thanks," he said modestly. "It was my failing to deal with Wickham from the beginning that lead him towards ravaging England and taking Lydia. He wanted revenge upon me and knew my close connection with your family would force my hand. I was only doing what was ethically and morally required. I tried to keep Elizabeth from the fray when I sought out Lydia, but you, more than most, understand how obstinate and head-
strong she can be."

Mr. Bennet chuckled, nodding in agreement. "Yes, she is quite determined when she wants to be." He leaned forward then and began scrutinizing Darcy's face. "Lizzie has also confided in me what transpired on the bridge." Darcy glanced down in embarrassment, ignorant to how much he knew. "I do not know if you recall the events, but, well, to put it simply, she loves you." Darcy glanced up, hope flooding his face. "As a father, you are not supposed to select favorites amongst your offspring, however, Lizzie is dearest to my heart. And you are dear to hers. If you ask, I will not deny you."

Darcy took a deep breath. "I do wish to ask for her hand… again."

"Again?" Mr. Bennet inquired with confusion.

"Yes," responded Darcy, omitting a sound between a sigh and a chuckle. "Again. This time, with your blessing."

Mr. Bennet laughed. "That's my Lizzie… Colonel Darcy, if she will have you, you have my consent."

Darcy rose and bowed his thanks to the gentleman. Mr. Bennet nodded from his seat and once again lifted the novel he had put down moments ago.

Darcy exited the library and began walking towards the throne room. In spite of himself, he could not help the smile that plagued his face.

Upon walking up the hallway leading to where Elizabeth and the other ladies were gathered, he saw Bingley and Jane exiting. He nodded at the pair as they passed, suspecting the cause for their private encounter.

Franklin saw him approaching and offered Darcy a welcoming smile before proceeding into his aunt's throne room to announce him.

"Mr. Darcy," he could hear him saying to the group before too long. Taking a deep breath, he walked into the room.

He immediately sought out his aunt's gaze, and couldn't help but noticed his cousin, Mrs. Bennet, the younger Bennet sisters, and Bingley's sisters were all present, diligently cleaning their weaponry.

"My favorite nephew," said his Aunt Catherine, "you lay unconscious for so long that when we heard you'd risen we feared you'd joined the ranks of the undead. Any word from the canal?"

"It's holding for the time being," responded Darcy, sneaking a glance in Elizabeth's direction. He grew anxious to speak with her alone. Upon doing so, he heard an exuberant "Yes!" being shouted from the hallway upon which he had just exited. Jane had accepted Bingley. His friend deserved happiness, and he offered a smile, knowing he had amended another one of his wrongdoings.

The ladies of the room immediately jumped to their feel in delight and began proceeding past Darcy and into the hall to congratulate the newly engaged couple. Joyous shouts and cheers poured into the room as Jane received blessings from her mother and youngest sisters. When his aunt passed him, he offered her a small smile, mostly for her kindness towards the Bennets.

Glancing past her, he singled out the only other remaining individual in the room: Elizabeth. She was quite altered from when he had seen her last. In place of her black combat pants and blue
overcoat was a light, modest gown. All of her hair was pinned up, however a few unruly curls still managed to escape, symbolizing her lively heart. Her expression was now one of apprehension and uncertainty, quite unlike the fierce stubbornness and confidence she possessed while trampling Wickham down and rushing them both back to Hingham Bridge.

She did not glance his way as she walked by. Darcy spoke, not wanting to risk squandering forever his last chance to speak his mind. Regardless of the outcome, he was determined to put his pride aside to thank her for saving his life and lay his heart on the line one final time. For her own words to him, whether spoken in clandestineness or not, were still resolute.

"Miss Bennet," he said softly. She turned hesitantly and met his eyes.

"Mr. Darcy," she responded apprehensively. "You look as though you're fully mended?"

"I am. Thank you," he responded. Elizabeth offered him a shy smile, which encouraged him to continue. "If it weren't for you I would have surely perished. You have saved me in more ways than one." Darcy paused briefly and glanced down at the black and white tiled floor before continuing. "What you said to me on Hingham Bridge…" He glanced up at her with uncertainty and met her shocked and confused eyes.

"You heard me?" Elizabeth gasped.

"I did," said Darcy quietly. Elizabeth pursed her mouth in embarrassment. "It gave me hope," he admitted.

"What?" said Elizabeth, meeting his gaze once more.

"That your feelings towards me may have changed," he explained. "However one from you now will silence me on the subject forever."

Darcy expected to be met with her sharp wit once more and was unsurprised when Elizabeth opened her mouth as if to say something. Darcy pulled in a sharp breath. Then, thinking better of it, she quickly shut her mouth and lifted her head up in a determined fashion, encouraging him to continue.

Darcy took a step towards her. Apart from their ride together and their brief moment on the bridge, they had never been this close. Standing face to face, he sensed her vulnerability in the moments that passed as she stared at the floor, the walls, anywhere but him. He sought to assuage her uncertainty about his feelings, and waited patiently until she finally met his gaze before continuing.

"You are the love of my life, Elizabeth Bennet," he admitted. "So I as you now, half in anguish, half in hope, will you do me the great, great honor of taking me for your husband?"

She stared at him for a second before smiling, and he knew from this moment on, he would be the happiest he ever deserved to be. Elizabeth nodded her head assuredly and whispered, "Yes." She continued repeating the three-lettered word, smiling up at him, and Darcy exhaled in relief before offering her his own genuine smile in return.

He inclined his head slowly towards her, and their lips met. One grasping the back of his head, the other draping securely around his neck, pulling her body flush against him. She ran her fingers through his soft brown hair. His hands ran down to the small of her back, pulling her even closer. It felt like she was molded just for him. Darcy kissed her with the same fierceness he exhibited on the battlefield, and she responded with equal vigor and passion.
He knew they should pull apart before the party returned to the room and caught them in such an intimate state. But he could not yet summon the resolve to separate her from his arms. Sharing a few more soft kisses, they smiled at each other. He reached out and touched one of the soft brown curls framing her face. It immediately wrapped around his index finger, not wanting to let him go. Elizabeth tilted her head, leaning into his warm palm and closed her eyes.

"I was so scared," admitted Elizabeth in a moment of weakness, a tear streaming down her face. He leaned forward, pressing his lips against her forehead.

"I'm not going anywhere," responded Darcy, wiping away her tears with his thumbs. "My heart is, and always will be, yours."

Elizabeth smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck, glancing up at him. Her eyes were shining and communicating what did not need to be spoken aloud. There could have been no two hearts so open, no feelings so in unison.

"Then I must learn to be content with being happier than I deserve," responded Elizabeth jokingly. She fell into his body and kissed him once more. They reluctantly pulled apart as they heard the group returning to the room and shared one last affectionate glance as Jane and Bingley entered, the others following close behind.

Jane, as if sensing the sudden shift between them, automatically rushed towards Elizabeth, enveloping her in a tight hug and offered her congratulations. Bingley approached Darcy with a smile and patted his shoulder approvingly.

Mrs. Bennet looked around in confusion and demanded to know what all the fuss was about.

"Mamma," said Jane, "Darcy and Elizabeth are engaged!"

It took Mrs. Bennet some time to process what her eldest daughter had said, but before long she cried out and rushed to give Elizabeth a hug. Glancing over her mother's shoulder, Elizabeth rolled her eyes at him as her mother began spouting off nonsense about how rich she was to be and how many carriages she would have. Darcy suppressed a chuckle, finally accepting Elizabeth's family as they were.

When Elizabeth broke apart from her mother's tight grasp, her younger sisters immediately surrounded her. Darcy enjoyed how she tailored her exchanges with each depending on their own personality. With Lydia she was more outlandish, Mary more cultured, and Kitty more reserved. Bingley and Jane approached the girls shortly thereafter and Elizabeth took the opportunity to escape. She walked over to Darcy, grabbed his hand, and the pair discretely fled the room.

She led him down the hallway to the main stairwell. After descending a floor, she pulled him into a small nook under the stairway. Reaching up, she wound her fingers in his hair and pulled him in for a tender kiss, taking him by surprise. He chuckled against her lips.

Elizabeth pulled back. "What, pray tell, is so funny?" she inquired.

"I have just learned that you, my dear, are insatiable," responded Darcy with a smirk. She smiled and offered a chuckle. He examined her face and reached into his pocket. With his mother's wedding ring in hand, he said, "I should have done this before but we got a bit distracted. So, I ask you again," he humbly knelt on one knee and asked "my dear, sweet, headstrong Elizabeth, will you take me for your husband?"

Elizabeth smiled down at Darcy, her face full of love, admiration and regard. "Yes," she whispered.
once again. He took her left hand tight in his own and moved the ring into place. Lifting it to his lips, he kissed the ring over her finger, silently promising his devotion to her forever.

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Epilogue

"Dearly beloved," began Parson Collins, "we are gathered here today in the sight of God to join together this man and this woman... and this man and this woman in holy matrimony."

Darcy glanced over at Bingley and Jane, who joined him and Elizabeth at the altar. Before looking back at Parson Collins, who was officiating the ceremony, he snuck a glance at Elizabeth, his soon to be wife. She looked radiant in her pure white gown and the pearl earrings he had gifted her the day before. Despite her protests to carry her katana during the ceremony like Darcy was, she had left it abandoned, but he didn't doubt a dagger or two was hidden within the confines of her dress. Elizabeth turned and smiled up at him, the happiest he had ever seen her.

"I now pronounce you man and wife... And man and wife," Parson Collins then stated towards each of the couples. "You may now kiss Mr. Darcy... the brides! The brides. You may now kiss the brides."

Darcy turned towards Elizabeth and wrapped his arms around her back. He pulled her towards him and kissed her passionately, surprisingly unembarrassed considering the number of eyes upon them. She placed her hands against his chest and clutched the front of his dark overcoat, grasping it tight. Reluctantly parting, he wrapped her fingers through his own and led her towards the back of the chapel and out the doors, Bingley and Jane beside them.

Upon exiting the chapel, they were met by a shower of pink and white rose petals. Darcy could hear Elizabeth giggle with excitement and he couldn't help but smile. They approached an elaborate trellis and the crowd encouraged them to kiss again, the couples did not protest. Darcy pulled Elizabeth to him once again, savoring yet another kiss. He leaned back but Elizabeth persisted, peppered him with another series of kisses. She laughed when they parted and he smiled embarrassed by her rather over the top public display of affection.

They continued up the walkway. The Bennet's occupied one side and Bingley's sisters, brother-in-law, and Darcy's aunt and cousin stood on the other. They all tossed more petals in the air and shouted words of encouragement as they walked past, aside from Caroline Bingley who boasted a sour expression. Elizabeth looped her hand in the crook of Darcy's right arm, his other hand rested comfortably on the hilt of his katana.

He offered polite smiles to everyone as they passed and glanced up towards their destination—an iron gate that connected the fence surrounding Rosings Estate. He noticed movement in the distance and squinted, trying to determine what was gathering in the road ahead below the treeline. Upon further inspection he saw hundreds of undead emerging from the trees before him, one in red rode a dark mare and four others in masks were mounted as well. Wickham.

Darcy slowed his pace and his eyes grew wide with shock. He felt Elizabeth's curious eyes on him given the sudden change in his demeanor. She followed his gaze and he heard her gasp quietly in shock. By that time Bingley and Jane also noticed the horde and all four came to an abrupt halt. Darcy shot Elizabeth a worried look and she offered the same apprehensive glance back before it transformed into determination.

They glanced back at the horde and noticed they had begun charging towards the wedding party. Glancing at his wife, Darcy grasped the hilt of his katana and told her to run and get everyone to safety. Cursing under his breath, Darcy unsheathed his weapon and prepared for what was to
come. After a few moments he felt someone's presence beside him and he glanced over to find Elizabeth, her hand pushing aside her skirts to fish out a dagger.

"Elizabeth, get out of here!" urged Darcy.

"No!" Elizabeth cried. "I am not leaving you."

He glared at his wife, his eyes pleading. All he ever wanted was to keep Elizabeth away from danger and instead he had once again lead it right to her. Suppressing his reservations, he strode over and pulled her in for one last passionate kiss before the horde descended upon the newly married couple. Till death do us part.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all enjoyed my take on P+P+Z from Darcy's point of view. What happens next? Darcy and Elizabeth's story continues in my P+P+Z: The Aftermath story!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!