“Mr. Darcy, I think I really ought to mention a conversation I had with Lady Catherine this afternoon.”

“My dear, do you mind if we discuss this later? I might not just at this moment be able to devote my full attention to the matter.” He could not see his hands, hidden as they were by the billowing folds of her night-rail, but he feared they were gripping perhaps a little too tightly, and he loosened his hold.

Elizabeth tightened her own hands on his ribcage, little more than a sympathetic squeeze, but enough to let Darcy know she’d noted and appreciated his consideration. She shifted her position, sliding back and then forward again, and he gasped. “No,” she said. “I think it best I mention it quickly, or I may forget or lose heart before morning; and I would rather you learn from me than from her what transpired between us.”

“Elizabeth.” His tone was warning, if breathless, but even he was not quite certain whether he were warning her for distracting him at such a time – and that with Lady Catherine, of all people – or for clearly having had an argument with her, when she had sworn to him that she would not.

She looked so lovely with her hair falling around her shoulders, and so guilty with her eyes
downcast, that he focused on the former, more immediately concerning but altogether less transgressive. “Very well, then. Tell me about it. But do not be surprised if I cannot sustain my ardor through a story of my aunt.”

She resumed her movement against him with renewed energy. “I will endeavor to see your ardor is sustained, sir.” And really, if she kept doing that most particular swivel, he would be pressed to last through the story, much less be deflated by it. He closed his eyes, felt her slippery warmth surrounding him, and lifted his hips, pleased to hear a sound from her that told him she felt an urgency as keen as his own.

“I do mean to tell you, sir; you needn't try to distract me so unchivalrously.” He made to scoff at her foolishness, but she shrugged him off with a determined gesture. “I really do, and I mean to say it now, so you may not be quite so annoyed with my rashness.”

He was beginning to suspect the flush on her face was less about the arousal than the guilt. “Elizabeth, what on earth did you say to her?”

“Oh, nothing unkind, I assure you! Only, I know we promised to wait longer until we told anyone that I was increasing, and...” she trailed off uncertainly as his eyes widened.

“You didn't tell her!”

“I'm very much afraid that I did, Darcy.” She bit her lip. “Only, she would go on and on about how a 'gel of proper breeding' would have taken her duty as a wife seriously, and I couldn't just let it lie!”

He knew his wife, and he sighed. “No, you certainly could not,” he agreed, in the most austere tone he could manage, which given that his wife was currently on top of him, doing the most delightful things to him, was not as austere as he would have liked. “Elizabeth, do you know the trouble you've stirred with this afternoon's work?”

“I do know, Darcy, I really do,” she assured him earnestly. “I know that Mama will be angry she wasn't told of it first, and I know Lady Catherine will be absolutely insufferable for the entirety of my confinement, and I know I must tell Georgianna before breakfast, even, so that Lady Catherine doesn't tell her first, and I know we agreed, and – Oh, Fitzwilliam, I never meant to say anything at all, truly I didn't. It just – slipped out.”

Darcy imagined the look on his aunt's face as she spoke of “proper breeding.” He sighed and admitted, “I understand that the provocation was great,” adding as she met his eyes hopefully, “but that doesn't mean you haven't made a mull of this, you know.”

“I do know, Darcy, I really do,” she assured him earnestly. “I know that Mama will be angry she wasn't told of it first, and I know Lady Catherine will be absolutely insufferable for the entirety of my confinement, and I must tell Georgianna before breakfast, even, so that Lady Catherine doesn't tell her first, and I know we agreed, and – Oh, Fitzwilliam, I never meant to say anything at all, truly I didn't. It just – slipped out.”

“I really, really do know.” She shifted on him again, and smiled at him. “But you'll forgive me, won't you?”

“He said, slipping his hands from her hips, over her gently rounded belly, and higher; more sensitive now, she leaned into his touch with an appreciative shiver. They both watched his hands for a moment as they moved under her night-rail, before her eyes closed and her head tipped back, and her movements around him grew less deliberate and more uncoordinated.

He pulled his hands away from her abruptly, and her eyes flew open as he used them to flip her onto her back. From his new vantage point, he gathered her wrists over her head and smiled a little grimly down at her. “Yes, I'll forgive you, not least because you've created a situation with a built-in punishment.” He paused while he reseated himself with a meditative air. “I believe you'll be the one to suffer the most from your premature admission, so I'm inclined to be generous.” He moved, and she arched her back with a little mewl. “And your penance will be to bear it all, Lady Catherine's
overbearing advice and your mother's jealous pets, with unflagging good will, my love, do you understand me?"

She wriggled impatiently underneath him, struggling to wrap her legs around his waist. “Yes, yes! I promise faithfully.”

He pressed harder, eliciting a sound from his wayward bride that pleased him very much. “Of course you do,” he said judiciously. “But you also promised not to tell anyone you were increasing, either. You see, I know the value of your promises! You are profligate, ma'am.”

“Now wait one minute!” It amused him that even on her back with other things on both their minds, even at fault as she undeniably was, she was fully prepared to turn this into an argument. But he buried his face in her neck and bit gently into the tender curve he found there, and they both of them forgot any intentions other than those most immediately before them.

Much later, she stirred in his arms. “I really have built my punishment into this, haven't I?”

“Yes, my love, you have.”

“And I suppose you will do nothing to stop Lady Catherine's interference? You know how horribly commanding she can be, and always with that air that speaks of her generosity and condescension under the most trying circumstances!” Her face was almost comically indignant, but Darcy knew better than to laugh.

“Elizabeth,” he chided. “I believe that in the time we've just spent together, you've amply demonstrated your own ability to manage your household. You manage me with a minimum of effort, and I've no doubt that the managing of my aunt lies well within your grasp.” He brought his hand up between them and reveled in her almost-inaudible gasp.

Her smile was decidedly mischievous, but tinged round the edges with sleep. “I have demonstrated it, haven't I? But it is altogether too bad I can't coax her to sweetness the way I can coax you.”

He laughed out loud. “Good God, Elizabeth, the things you say!” He withdrew his hands from her in mock horror. “Go to sleep, you wretch, and we'll discuss in the morning how well you've managed to turn me up sweet.”

“Well, I have, you know I have,” she murmured, and Darcy felt disinclined to argue further. It was quite true, after all.

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