Untold Stories

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Untold Stories

by Natico

Summary

A compilation of a series of interludes between Darcy and Elizabeth which happen during the main plot of the 2005 movie. From 'An Excellent Hiding Place' to the conclusion 'The End and Beginning of All Things That Matter'.

"Well, do you remember that game we used to play?" Caroline let a smile cross her face, "Sardines, Charles, do you remember?"

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
It was a rainy afternoon in Netherfield Park, and even though the morning had seemed to be promising, as hours passed enormous graying clouds settled over the glorious mansion. In the house Mr. Bingley, and all sat in the drawing room; Bingley was staring off in to space probably thinking about the sick Miss Bennet who lay upstairs accompanied by her sister. He sighed and felt slightly jealous of Miss Elizabeth for being able to spend so much time with the beautiful Miss Bennet. Miss Bingley kept walking around the room slowly while looking at a certain dark-haired gentleman who did not bother to pay any attention to her at all; he was deeply immersed in a book, or at least he appeared to be, for thoughts of Miss Elizabeth kept popping into his mind and so forbidding him of actually advancing on his reading.

As the rain continued to increase, and the dull atmosphere which surrounded the house intensified, Miss Bingley was starting to get positively annoyed at Mr. Darcy's lack of attention and her brother's dreamy expression and after some time she stopped her pacing in the middle of the room and remarked with an exasperated voice:

"Lord! What a dull afternoon this is," she looked at her brother, "we should play a game to amuse ourselves,"

"What do you suggest, Caroline?" Bingley asked with a happy smile plastered on his face.

"Well, do you remember that game we used to play?" she let a smile cross her face, "Sardines, Charles, do you remember?"

"Ah yes!" he exclaimed enthusiastically, "Indeed, that is quite an amusing game!"

"Will you join us Mr. Darcy?" Caroline asked with what appeared to be a seductive smile.

Mr. Darcy took his time to answer Caroline's inquiry, he sighed deeply, closed his eyes for a moment and looked up just in time to see the door of the room open and the woman who plagued his thoughts enter it. His breath hitched and he completely forgot about Caroline's invitation to the game, his eyes were drawn to Miss Elizabeth's figure. He stared at her for a few seconds before she met his gaze and he broke the connection clearing his throat nervously. Upon her entry Mr. Bingley did not hesitate to ask after Miss Bennet's health.

"I believe she is getting better," Elizabeth replied with a smile, "I am deeply ashamed of trespassing so much on your hospitality,"

"An Excellent Hiding Place"
"Please Miss Elizabeth, you are certainly not trespassing," he smiled at her, "It is a real pleasure to have both of you here." Caroline certainly looked like she did not agree with her brother's last statement but she kept quiet. Mr. Darcy on the other hand nodded and moved closer to the party.

"Actually," Mr. Bingley added, "we were just about to start playing a most amusing game Miss Bennet, would you like to join us?"

"May I inquire which game this is?" she asked with a small smile at him, she did not notice Caroline's sulk at the knowledge of her presence in the game nor Mr. Darcy's nervousness and slight blush. He knew how the game was to be played and though at first he was feeling quite reluctant to join because he was aware of Caroline's real intentions at suggesting the game, he now felt quite overwhelmed by the possibility of Miss Elizabeth playing. If she were to hide and I was able to find her first…it would certainly be quite a unique opportunity to be with her. But there's also Caroline…she will not hesitate to get me alone with her…

He shivered at the thought and looked up to see all the party staring back at him with expectant looks in their eyes.

"Darcy?" Bingley asked, "Are you joining us? Miss Elizabeth has agreed to,"

"I suppose I will join your little game," he appeared uninterested but on the inside his heart started beating faster, "Have the rules been explained yet?" he asked with his usual stoic expression and he then noticed Miss Elizabeth's playful smile.

"Oh yes, the rules!" Caroline exclaimed, "Dear Miss Eliza does not know them," she said with a satisfied smile.

"Well, the game starts by someone hiding somewhere in the house," Bingley started, "and after a hundred seconds the other players are to look for the person and whoever is able to find them has to hide with them,"

"The last person to find the hiding spot is the loser," added Caroline, her stare boring into Miss Elizabeth's. "Is that clear Miss Eliza?"

"Quite clear thank you," she smiled innocently, "I suppose we should get started?" she turned her eyes towards Mr. Darcy's face for a moment and she noticed his abrupt intake of breath and smiled once more.

"We should select certain rooms for the game," Darcy remarked suddenly, "If we do not we might not end this game today,"

"I agree with Darcy," said Bingley, "How about the library, dining room, the study and the first two chambers next to the stairs?"

The whole party nodded and Caroline was about to state her desire of hiding first but her brother drew a deck of cards and said kindly:

"Whoever draws the lowest card is to hide." They all grabbed a card; Darcy got a four, Caroline a three which plastered a triumphant smile on her face, Bingley got a queen and finally Elizabeth got a two.

As Elizabeth saw her card she quickly looked up and saw the amusing expression change in Miss Bingley's face, she almost started laughing but managed to restrain herself and just let a teasing sparkle appear in her eyes. Darcy felt his throat tighten and stared at Miss Elizabeth until Bingley drew him out of his reverie by shooing the lady out of the room and started counting. Elizabeth stood
In the middle of the main hall feeling quite puzzled for she did not know where to find a suitable hiding place. As she heard Bingley nearing a hundred, she bolted to the door which lead to the study. She pushed the door open and found a slightly sunlit room. She could spot several decent hiding places yet she noticed a door behind an enormous curtain and decided that that one was certainly excellent.

As she closed the door, she found herself in what appeared to be a small storage room with two bookshelves one on each side of it; these two made the room look even smaller and she found that the room was quite dusty because after one minute of being in it she could not help but sneeze softly. *Is not this brilliant, I am now allergic to dust…they will find in me in no time.* She sighed and stood leaning on one of the bookshelves being careful not to move it so much so that the dust would not start floating around the room.

As soon as Bingley finished counting out loud, Caroline all but bolted out of the room as if her life depended on it; she was determined to find Miss Elizabeth first even though the idea of spending time alone with her while waiting for the other two gentlemen to find them did not appeal to her at all. She hurried to the upper rooms while her brother followed her upstairs; Darcy stood in the middle of the hallway just like Elizabeth had, wondering where she could be hiding. He thought of the library, but then again a small voice in his head assured him that she would be smarter and less predictable than that.

He took a peek in the dining room but saw that there were no hiding spots in the room. With a long sigh he decided to try the study before he went upstairs.

He pushed the oak door open and was mesmerized by the tangible warmth which caressed the room; he could see some dust floating in the air and several opened books lying on an old table. He stood still in case he heard any slight movement that could tell Miss Elizabeth's location but she had heard his footsteps as he entered the room and so did her best to stay still and silent. Darcy started a slow pacing through the room looking at each surface, behind the large window curtains, in between some bookshelves and even under a rather large tea table which was innocently settled next to a large velvety curtain.

He bent down to look beneath the table and felt rather foolish. He was sure that if anyone was to enter the room it would have been a most embarrassing situation for him; as he stood up he noticed a wooden door behind the curtain and was quite surprised for he had never noticed that door during the afternoons he had spent in the study. He pushed the curtain aside and slowly opened the creaking door and walked into the dimly lit storage room. He saw the two bookshelves and as he looked down at the floor he caught a glimpse of a white garment. Elizabeth was pressing herself painfully onto the other side of one of the bookshelves; she felt the air being squashed out of her lungs and stifled a small cough.

*I am starting to believe I am taking this game too seriously…being found cannot be half as bad as not being able to breathe!*

She started coughing non-stop and as she tried to step away from the book shelf she tripped and closed her eyes for she feared her collision with the floor which in turn never came. Instead she felt warm arms holding her up and as she steadied herself she looked at the person who had helped her; she held her breath as she saw Mr. Darcy's intense blue eyes looking back at her and for a complete minute no words were uttered. Noticing the awkward silence which fell between them Elizabeth felt the necessity of saying something:

"It appears to be that you have found me," she said uncertainly.
"So it would seem," he said in a deep voice, "are you quite alright, Miss Elizabeth?"

"Oh, yes, I just tripped while trying to move," she felt a slight blush reach her face. "Thank you for helping me Mr. Darcy."

"I heard you cough," he said softly almost worriedly.

Elizabeth unconsciously smiled sweetly at him and saw how his eyes visibly softened.

"You need not worry Mr. Darcy," she said gently, "though your worry is quite appreciated," she added with a teasing smile.

Darcy's heart was pounding since the moment he held Miss Elizabeth in his arms. He felt his whole body ache with longing for her and as he helped her up he was overwhelmed by the deliciously intoxicating lavender scent her hair left in his nostrils. When he let go of her he could not help but feel the emptiness in his arms and it took all of his self restraint not to reach out for her once more. They stood quite close but they were not pressed to each other, and as the room fell silent again a whole stack of books fell on the ground with a dry thud and the sound was followed by a wave of dust which quickly dispersed through the room and made Elizabeth cough madly.

Mr. Darcy went to her and patted her back gently while handing her his handkerchief so that she could cover her face with it. She nodded her head slightly as her coughing subdued, and as she had been standing where the fallen books now were, she had to stand closer to Mr. Darcy. He gently put his hand on her shoulder to keep her steady and they stood still, her back pressed against his chest and he leaned on the bookshelf.

Time passed by and slowly the room darkened, Elizabeth could still see the palm of her hand but if she wanted to see any surrounding objects it proved to be impossible unless she stared long enough. How can it be possible that they have not found us yet? she thought as she tried to ignore the warmth Mr. Darcy's hand produced on her shoulder.

"It appears to be that you selected an excellent hiding spot, Miss Elizabeth," he whispered into her ear. She shivered slightly and by being pressed to Mr. Darcy it was no surprise that he felt it.

"You are shivering," he said with that soft voice," Please, allow me." He took his hand off her shoulder and shrugged his black coat off while gently putting it over her shoulders.

"Oh," she was speechless for a moment as she felt the warmth from the coat and his body coursing through her and shivered once more. "Thank you, sir."

Darcy nodded once more and took the risk of gently putting his hand on her hip. Elizabeth slowly and unconsciously leant back against his chest and his hand moved slightly surrounding her waist. They were blushing profusely and Elizabeth could feel Darcy's speeding heart and she even felt how her own seemed to match his. Each breath he took gently caressed her ear, her breathing started speeding up and she looked down.

"It appears Mr. and Miss Bingley will not be finding us anytime soon," she said with a nervous yet amused voice.

"As I said before Miss Elizabeth," he said softly, "You chose an excellent hiding place."

"And yet…you found me," she whispered.

"Hmm…it was mere luck," he stated simply, "I had never seen the door which lead to this room,"
"Oh?" she turned her head slightly to look up at him and saw his eyes shining brightly in the dark. She was overwhelmed by their beauty and was reminded of the morning in which she saw him look up at her dripping water from the pump and looking like a completely different person. *Just like he looks now,* she thought. She felt that with such a longing gaze it was so easy to forget that he was an arrogant and pompous man, it was so easy to forget that remark he had made about her being "Barely Tolerable" when he looked at her with such intensity.

Darcy looked down at Elizabeth's beautiful eyes and felt himself drown in them, he felt utterly exposed under her gaze and he felt himself leaning down, closer to her…he could see how her eyes drew closer and for a moment he averted his stare towards her soft looking lips. Elizabeth turned her face back down and looked at the floor; if Darcy had been his usual self he would have let the matter go, but since that morning when he saw her walk in with her hair down and looking so breathtakingly beautiful he knew he was not himself anymore. He knew for a fact that it was her who controlled his every action and reaction…she had cast a full body- and soul-binding spell and he had no intention of breaking it.

As so, he boldly but gently reached out for her small face; he touched her chin tentatively and with painful softness turned her face once more towards him. He felt her soft hair caress his face and he breathed in deeply. He slowly leaned his head down and placed a small almost non-existent kiss on her long neck and he heard her breath hitch. He whispered huskily into her ear with his eyes closed: "Lizzy, get a GRIP! This is a man whom you deeply dislike! His lips slowly traveled up her neck in a silent caress. *This is highly improper, tell him to stop right NOW!* He was turning her face once more towards him until she was staring into his passion-filled, blue eyes; she saw him look at her lips and saw his own lips tremble in anticipation. Their breathing was ragged and nervous; she felt his warm breath gently touch her lips and she looked back into his eyes. *This is Mr. Darcy…he does not like me, I do not like him…I do not…*

"I…" she whispered against his lips which were just barely touching hers. *I cannot help this;* they both thought and leaned towards the other. Their lips connected and bliss coursed through their bodies, Elizabeth turned in his arms and raised her hands to touch his face and his hair while he trailed one hand up her back and undid the plait which held her long mane. As her hair fell on her shoulders she shivered and she felt Darcy do so too; he trailed his hand gently and slowly through her hair while he continued to kiss her. The kiss had turned from a simple touch to a full kiss in which Mr. Darcy's hesitant tongue had softly caressed Elizabeth's lips as if begging her for more; she obliged unconsciously and as soon as their tongues met both of them heard a very soft and desperate moan in the back of their throats.

They kissed slowly and as the kiss neared an end their hands went back into place except for Darcy's right hand which was feather-caressing Elizabeth's cheekbone. They reluctantly let go of each other and they stood with their eyes closed as if not wanting to wake into reality. Elizabeth opened her eyes first and let out a ragged breath and when Darcy opened his eyes she could not help but gasp; they glowed with passion, longing and another feeling which she could not quite put her finger on. *Is he looking like that because of me?*

"Miss Elizabeth," he started hesitantly almost fearfully, "I am…I" he looked at her pleadingly as if begging for forgiveness which he did not really want to ask for.

"Perhaps it would be wise if we go look for Mr. Bingley," she whispered and looked intently at Darcy with an unreadable expression.

"Yes," he looked back at her and nodded, he opened the door for her and let her out of the small
room; he looked back at it and sighed deeply, engraving the moment which had occurred there forever in his heart.

They walked silently out of the study, Elizabeth always in front of Mr. Darcy feeling betrayed by her own emotions and heart...feeling utterly confused and even embarrassed. Darcy, as he stared at Miss Elizabeth's figure, felt sure about the constantly growing feelings he harboured for this woman; he wanted to reach out and hold her just like he had a few minutes ago but he could not risk pushing this any further and so he silently continued to walk behind her until they reached the hall and he heard Bingley.

"Darcy!" he exclaimed surprised, "Old chap, where did you run off to?" he looked at Miss. Elizabeth and then back at Darcy, "Oh, I believe you managed to find her?"

Mr. Darcy could only nod his head numbly and he almost jumped when he heard Bingley's laugh.

"Capital!" he said with an amused smile, "Caroline and I spent hours looking for you two," he smiled at Elizabeth and she forced herself to smile back and ignore the turmoil inside her head.

"Well Miss Elizabeth," he said happily, "do tell where you were hiding! It has proved to be quite an exceptional spot!"

Elizabeth cleared her throat softly and answered softly.

"I found a room behind a large curtain in the study," she glanced at Mr. Darcy for a moment and then looked back at Bingley, "Mr. Darcy found me about fifteen minutes later,"

Bingley laughed heartily and gave Darcy a light pat on the back.

"I did not know you had it in you," he said.

Darcy only nodded slightly and the corners of his mouth twitched upwards. Miss Elizabeth saw Caroline coming down the stairs with a clearly annoyed look on her face; as she reached the bottom of them Elizabeth curtssied to both men, her gaze lingering for a moment on Mr. Darcy and she left for her room in the hope of some peace and a chance of organizing her thoughts. Darcy watched her go and completely ignored Caroline's sulky remarks and complaints about how bad the game had turned out; he certainly had a different opinion about it.

Late that night Darcy and Elizabeth each laid on their beds thinking about the other. Darcy could not erase the feeling and taste of Elizabeth's kiss nor did he think he wanted to. Elizabeth could not get the image of Mr. Darcy's gaze and caresses out of her head...she shivered as she thought about it and hugged the bed covers tighter around her. As she had entered the room, Jane had asked her if anything exciting had happened during the day; Elizabeth hesitated and with a small smile she said:

"No, nothing special," and she went to change into her pajamas. As she thought back on Jane's question she thought sadly and quite longingly, if you only knew...

And she reached up to her lips touching them softly, exactly the same way in which Darcy touched his as he laid in bed in his room thinking about Elizabeth and saying in a soft voice:

"If you only knew."
The night passed swiftly and the moon left the dark sky and returned to its sleep. Netherfield Park shone with a beautiful morning light which gently poured through each of the windows of the glorious house. The grooms and the maids had been long awake as they prepared their master's breakfast and dining room.

Darcy was hardly able to sleep through the night; he would wake up to dreams of the kiss he had shared with Miss Elizabeth and of her eyes, voice, figure and even her lips. As soon as sunlight crept through his silky curtains he got up and got dressed, he was not able to keep his thoughts from straying to Miss Elizabeth. *I was supposed to build more distance between us…Whatever it is that I am feeling right now confuses me, I was supposed to stop paying so much attention to her, to stop thinking about her so much!*

"Ah, blast," he said under his breath as he tried to get his cravat set for the third time. He went to his window and stared at the morning-glowing grounds and decided that he needed to get his composure back up, set his thoughts straight and calm down. He knew that if he were to see Miss Elizabeth in the state he was right then; he would not be able to control his actions…*Just like yesterday.*

"Blast."

He dashed out of his room, down the staircase, past the grooms, towards the stable, onto his horse and away from Netherfield Park.

Elizabeth breathed in deeply and slowly and quite reluctantly opened her eyes; she saw the handsomely decorated room which Mr. Bingley had arranged for her sister and herself. She sighed and turned to look at the canopy of her bed. As she laid there in her bed staring intently at the edge of her canopy memories of the previous afternoon plagued her. She gasped softly and unconsciously raised her hand to touch her lips.

"My God," she whispered to herself, "It was not a dream."

"Lizzy, are you awake?" her sister's soft voice whispered.

Elizabeth sat up on her bed and looked at her sister's face which was funnily framed by her sleep-ruffled hair. Jane gave her a sweet smile and she smiled back at her and then said:

"Beloved sister, how are you this morning?" Jane laughed softly, "Are you feeling better now?"

"Quite well, I do feel better, thank you for inquiring," She replied, "how are you today, dearest sister?" she continued.
"Awake," Elizabeth answered with a small smile; she stood up and went to get ready for breakfast. She walked towards her small suitcase and pulled out one of her dresses; she then leaned towards a wall as the thought of seeing Mr. Darcy popped into her reeling mind. Good Lord, how am I supposed to look him in the eye after such an interlude! She thought as she sighed once more, I do not think that staying in the room for the whole day is a wise decision even if it sounds very agreeable.

"Lizzy, the groom just announced breakfast so we better make haste," her sister said from the room.

"Oh, yes" Elizabeth looked at her reflection in the mirror, stared at her lips as the memory of a kiss touched them; she came back to her senses and ran to meet her sister.

"Shall we get going then?" Jane nodded with her usual sweet smile and they made their way down the staircase and towards the dining room.

As the grooms opened the white doors they revealed the occupants of the room. Mr. Bingley was already sitting at the table and engaged in conversation with his sister; when he noticed Jane's figure as she entered the room he completely lost the course of the conversation and gasped softly. Caroline Bingley turned as she saw the Bennet sisters approaching the table and directed a glare at Elizabeth who did not notice it at all for she was trying to suppress a smile at Mr. Bingley's blushing face.

They said their "Good Mornings" to each other and Bingley happily asked:

Miss Bennet are you feeling better this morning?" with a smile towards Jane.

"I do feel better, I believe it is because of the attention I have received here, Mr. Bingley," she smiled at Bingley and added shyly," I can not begin to tha-"

"I will have none of that, Miss Bennet," he smiled at both sisters and beckoned them to sit, "You must be hungry,"

Elizabeth was surprised by Mr. Darcy's absence and was about to ask Mr. Bingley about him but thought better about it and kept quiet; her sister however did inquire after him.

"Is Mr. Darcy not accompanying us this morning?" she asked politely.

"The groom informed me that he left earlier today," Bingley replied, "You need not worry, perhaps he had urgent matters to attend,"

Caroline seemed to sulk after her brother's remark. After not finding Mr. Darcy during the Sardines game which had taken place the previous afternoon and discovering that he had been hiding with Miss Elizabeth all those hours she hoped she would be able to spend some time with him. Caroline had felt outraged as she walked down the staircase the day before; she heard her brother's and Mr. Darcy's voices and when she saw him with Miss Elizabeth she almost choked with jealousy. They both had looked somehow uncomfortable that the thought of something happening between them popped into her mind; she shooed it away knowing that Mr. Darcy would not do such a thing.

"Let us not wait any longer," Bingley remarked after a minute of silence, "The food will get cold you know," Elizabeth gave him a smile, Jane laughed softly and Caroline simply kept quiet and ate her food silently. After breakfast was over Caroline excused herself and said that she was returning to her bedchamber; Elizabeth looked at her retreating back and understood the reason for her bad mood. While Miss Bingley felt utterly disappointed by Mr. Darcy's strange departure, Elizabeth could not be more relieved for she did not trust herself to be able to look him in the eye just yet.

It was not that she was ashamed or embarrassed; she found herself to be extremely confused by this
man. She was so sure that the man that hid with her the previous day was not Mr. Darcy; he looked at her so differently that to believe that it was indeed the same man she met at the Meryton Assembly was unthinkable. *He is prideful, arrogant, pompous, self-conceited…Who was that man I saw yesterday?* She thought as she walked into the library. *I have to remain calm…I have to stop thinking about what happened and not be blinded by it! I can not forget what he said about me!*

She nodded as if to reassure herself of her position in the matter and took a book from one of the enormous bookshelves. She walked out into the garden for the day seemed to be much more promising that the previous one; she sat on a small bench which was located under some trees and started to read. Hours drifted by and Elizabeth stayed focused in the book she had picked out. After a while she went into the house for some refreshment and she saw her sister and Mr. Bingley walking towards the garden entrance.

"Miss Elizabeth would you like to accompany your sister and I in a carriage ride through the grounds?" Mr. Bingley asked kindly. Elizabeth saw her sister's slight blush and decided to leave the two of them to some solace.

"Oh, no thank you, Mr. Bingley," she offered him a small smile, "I am not feeling quite apt for a ride plus I am reading an excellent book which I am looking forward to finishing,"

"Very well then, we will see you for tea then, Miss Elizabeth" he remarked with his usual smile.

"Indeed," was Elizabeth's brief reply, and she watched them walk out into the garden and towards a small carriage. She smiled to herself as the carriage drifted away; she walked back out and decided to take a small stroll around the nearby grounds before resuming her reading.

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Darcy had spent the whole morning galloping and then sitting under an enormously large tree, where he tried to arrange his reeling thoughts and calm his thumping heart. After what appeared to be eternal hours he decided to return to Netherfield and as he was about to mount his horse he decided that perhaps walking half-way to Netherfield would be helpful.

"I would like to walk with her," he thought to himself and he made his way back.

When the mansion came to view he mounted his horse and went straight to the stable where one the grooms seemed to be slightly surprised by him. *You did bolt out of the house with no previous notice,* he thought. He simply got off his horse and handed it to the groom; he straightened his coat and walked into the house, he asked one of grooms after Bingley and the Bennet sisters and he was told that they had left for a carriage ride around the grounds. Darcy felt slightly relieved that he was being given more time away from Miss Elizabeth; he decided to go to the library and perhaps spend the rest of the afternoon reading at least until tea.

When in the library he started looking for a particular book which he had begun to read a couple of days before but when he went to the spot where he had left it, he found an empty space. For a moment he stared at the empty space and then shook his head and looked for another book. *It is a pity, that book was certainly quite interesting.* He sat on one of the large velvety couches that were comfortably placed in the large room and began his reading.

Elizabeth ended up in a small clearing which was located in the middle of a large group of trees. She
decided to continue her reading there and sat down, as sunlight shifted every once in a while in between the tree's leaves. Elizabeth read on and enormous grey clouds like the ones which settled on Netherfield the previous afternoon drew closer to the mansion. Rain drops started falling and suddenly it was pouring down. Elizabeth made her way back as quick as she could for it was quite difficult to see through the woods with all that rain. She kept running but suddenly she tripped on a large root; the book she was holding flew out of her grip and into a bed of flowers.

She stood up and went to the flower bed to look for the book which she wanted to maintain as dry as possible. When she could not see the book, she slid her hand through the branches, leaves and stems, and she felt the tip of the leather binding. As she inched closer to it she felt a stabbing pain in her hand.

"Ouch!" she yelped and finally held the book in her hurt hand; she drew it out and stared at a rather large cut she had in her palm; blood started dripping out of it so she closed her hand and continued running with the book safely kept under her left arm. When the house came to view she decided to take a breath and stood under a large tree which protected her from the pouring rain.

"Another rainy afternoon," she sighed and stared at her bloody hand and then at the grey sky; she leaned her head on the tree's bark and released a shaky breath.

Darcy's reading was interrupted by the sound of raindrops crashing against the library window. He stood up and saw the grey clouds which settled right above the mansion and he sighed.

"I hope Miss Bingley does not suggest another Sardines game," he said to himself.

He lowered his gaze onto the darkening grounds and saw a small figure standing under a tree, the person was staring at the sky and simply standing there getting drenched by the rain. Who would be so crazy to stand under a tree in the middle of a downpour? He tried to see who the person was, he suspected it was a maid or a groom and when he was able to tell who it was his breath hitched. Do not tell me…It can not be...

"Miss Elizabeth?" he asked to the empty room, "Was she not with Bingley and Miss Bennet?" he saw her shaky figure standing still and after a few seconds of staring at her he realized that she was getting quite wet out there; he got his coat and ran outside to get her. As soon as he crossed the door he felt awfully cold and shivered slightly, how in heavens has she managed to stay out here with this cold?

When he got under the tree he saw that Miss Elizabeth had not noticed his presence, she still had her eyes closed and every once in a while she would let out a soft sigh. Suddenly as he gazed at her silently he realized that he was indeed standing next to her, standing so close to this woman who kept on plaguing his thoughts and made him lose control of himself…this woman whom he had kissed and held the previous afternoon. He swallowed and with his usual low voice said:

"Miss Elizabeth," when she heard her name being called she almost jumped, she opened her eyes and turned to look at the man whom she had no intention of seeing at all, who confused her and her heart so…why was he standing there next to her? She felt her heart thumping in her chest and tried to calm it down.

"Oh, Mr. Darcy," she replied softly, "I did not know you were back already,"

"I already solved the business I had," was all he said.

"Right," she looked at him in the eye and he did not falter, "If I may be so bold to ask Mr. Darcy, what brought you out here in the rain?"
"You did", he was about to answer but he held back and cleared his throat.

"I saw you from the library, you were standing still and getting wet," he gave her a small almost non-existent smile, "I thought that something might be wrong." Elizabeth stared at Darcy and a small silence fell between them, they both tried to keep the memories of the previous afternoon in the back of their minds but it proved to be amazingly difficult. Darcy then noticed that Elizabeth kept on stifling her shivering and remembered that they were under a tree in the middle of a downpour.

"Perhaps it would be wise if we go back in," he suggested softly, Elizabeth looked at him and only nodded while shivering slightly.

"Here, have my coat, Miss Elizabeth," he said as he placed the coat around her shoulders, "You have been out here too long, you might get ill," he said almost to himself but Elizabeth heard him and was shocked by his worrying. She drew the large coat closer to her and turned to look at Darcy with a small slight smile.

"Let us go, then,"

They quickly made their back into the mansion, when they were engulfed by the warmth the house radiated; they stood in the hallway with no idea of what to do or say. Elizabeth stood there with Darcy's coat, the book under her arm and blood still flowing from her wound, she lightly closed her fist and the stabbing pain returned reminding her of her hurt hand.

"Ouch," she groaned softly and grabbed her bleeding hand, as she did so the book which was under her arm fell to the floor with a dry thud. Darcy hurried to Elizabeth's side and looked at her hand, he wanted to see the wound so he requested to do so; Elizabeth hesitantly showed him her wounded palm. Darcy saw that it pained Elizabeth to move her hand, even open it so he cradled it gently with his own hands and examined the bloody wound. It was not serious but it had to be taken care of so he drew out his hanker-chief and wrapped it around the wound to stop the bleeding.

"We better treat this so that it does not get infected," he said to her with a serious expression, "Does it hurt too much, Miss Elizabeth?" Elizabeth was feeling slightly dizzy by Darcy's close proximity and the fact that he was still holding her hand in his and unconsciously caressing it; when he touched her, her mind immediately jolted back to the small storage room, to the memory of his hand caressing her face, she shivered as she remembered.

"Are you cold?" he asked worriedly, "Come with me; allow me to treat you wound," Elizabeth only nodded her head and just as they were going to make their way to the drawing room she remembered the book she had dropped so she leant down and tried to pick it up but she felt a pang again so she quickly stood back up. Darcy saw her lean down and he directed his gaze to the floor, he saw a book and picked it up for her; he stared at the book for a minute before he realized it was the same book he had been reading. Was she reading this...We read the same book?

Darcy blinked and though it was a very silly thing to think of, the idea of Miss Elizabeth reading the same book he read made his heart thump in his chest, somehow it brought a small thought to his head in which his mind whispered to him: "She is made for you," and when he thought this, the memory of how awfully right it felt to have her close to him, to hold her in his arms and to kiss her, made him weak in the knees.

"Shall we?" he asked as he cleared his throat, Elizabeth nodded once more and they walked side by side to the drawing room; Darcy waited until Elizabeth was sitting to go to one of the maids and ask her for some cloth and a bowl of water. When the maid left the room Darcy and Elizabeth were left in an uncomfortable silence in which they stole small glances at each other without the other noticing. Neither knew what to say or rather they did not know how to voice their thoughts;
Elizabeth was exceedingly puzzled by Mr. Darcy's worried behaviour, by his soft words and his warm eyes.

Darcy on the other hand felt utterly overwhelmed by Elizabeth, he felt drawn to her there was something in her which simply kept him enthralled...he discovered that despite his previous thoughts he felt comfortable in her company...he felt complete. He soon understood that his heart's wish was to hold Miss Elizabeth in the exact way he held her before and this thought frightened and thrilled him; he did not know how to act and what was worse he no longer could tell what could be his wisest move...whether to try and get closer to her or draw away from her and forget her. But I do not know if I will be able to forget her...

The maid came back to the room carrying the things Darcy had ordered. After she left, Darcy hesitated before nearing Elizabeth again. He took a deep breath and sat next to her in the large couch she was sitting on, he drenched the cloth in the water and said:

"Miss Elizabeth, let me see your hand," she stared at him as he took her hand and with exceeding gentleness started cleaning her wound; she stifled a groan when it hurt too much and Darcy admired her strength. He would look at her constantly to see her reaction to his touch and her gaze was the only thing that betrayed her strong attitude, it would falter when the cloth touched her skin.

When Darcy finished cleaning her wound he covered it with a small bit of cloth and sighed. He looked up at Elizabeth whom he found had been looking at him all along; Darcy blushed slightly under her intense gaze and after seconds of silence he cleared his throat for the umpteenth time.

"Is that any better?" he asked gently.

"It is," Elizabeth replied looking at her hand, "Thank you, Mr. Darcy,"

"Not to worry, Miss Elizabeth," he replied seriously and another silence fell yet again. Elizabeth kept staring at her hand and Darcy settled his gaze on the book he picked up for her and found himself asking after it.

"Were you reading that book, Miss Elizabeth?"

"I was, I started it this morning and found it quite interesting," she replied with a small smile.

"I am glad you found it to your liking," he replied while taking the book in his hands, "I myself enjoyed reading it,"

"Have you read it?" she inquired with pure surprise in her eyes.

"I am not quite finished," he said as he looked into her alluring brown eyes, "I looked for it this afternoon when I went into the library and felt slightly disappointed when I did not find it, I am glad to know you had it,"

"Oh, I am sorry I did not let you carry on with your reading," she stated with a slight apologetic look.

"Do not trouble yourself, I would have you finish it first," he replied with the same intense gaze he had the previous afternoon before he kissed Elizabeth. This made her breath hitch for a slight moment and she tore her gaze from his.

"I think I will return to my room now," she added as she stood up shakily. Darcy only looked at her with slight sadness for he liked having her near him. Elizabeth tried to support herself with her hurt hand and ended up in more pain than before; Darcy was immediately holding her steady and asking her if it hurt too much.
When she was able to stand, Darcy was still standing amazingly close to her and was holding her hand gently in his, he looked down at her, gazing intently into her eyes, and with a low almost husky voice he asked:

"How is your hand?"

Elizabeth was speechless, there they were standing in the middle of the drawing room alone once again, Darcy holding her hand and standing almost kiss-close to her. She closed her eyes for a moment as memories came back to her; she released a shaky breath and looked back up at Darcy.

"Better now," she said to her surprise and Darcy's too.

"I am glad," he said with a slight smile which knocked out Elizabeth, "Miss Elizabeth...I must tell you," he inched closer and Elizabeth could feel his breath on her face, *I am losing control again...* They both thought as Darcy softly caressed her hand and looked at her with his passion-filled blue eyes.

"Darcy!" a male voice called from the hallway, "Darcy where are you?" Darcy and Elizabeth jumped away from each other and avoided the other's gaze. When Bingley came in he found Darcy walking towards the door and Elizabeth leaning down to grab a book.

"Darcy, back already!" he grinned at his friend who only twitched the corners of his mouth upwards, "Miss Bennet and I were caught in a dreadful rain! We almost could not make it back here," he finished with a laugh. When Caroline heard Mr. Darcy's name being called she ran out of her room and down the stairs to meet her brother, Miss Bennet, Mr. Darcy and Miss Elizabeth.

"Oh, Mr. Darcy." she said with her light voice, "It is good to have you back," Darcy only nodded and excused himself with a last glance towards Elizabeth who was being questioned by her sister about her wet dress and wrapped up hand.

"I just tripped and fell," she said with a small smile, "I am fine now,

They all got ready for tea, during which Caroline spent the whole time trying to engage Mr. Darcy in a conversation. Elizabeth and Darcy did not cross gazes throughout the whole rest of the evening and when everyone went to bed they each had new thoughts to plague their minds; they both felt confused and they both felt in the bottom of their hearts a sense of loss for what may have happened if Bingley had not interrupted. *You can not think of that non sense Lizzy! Set your mind straight!* She thought as she lay in bed. *You can not lose control like that again, man! It is neither right nor proper!* Darcy thought as he undid his cravat and washed his face with cold water.

The next morning came, Mrs. Bennet came to Netherfield with Lydia, Kitty and Mary. They all sat in Mr. Bingley's drawing room as they waited for Jane to get ready to go. Elizabeth sat there feeling embarrassed by her mother and sisters, and though she would not admit to it she also felt nervous because of Mr. Darcy's presence in the room. He had been silent throughout the whole course of the morning until Bingley asked how he liked the country side. He did not as much as look at Elizabeth at all and this puzzled her even more, she did not understand his changing attitude. *Perhaps he has chosen to forget about both incidents...as I should do.* She directed a serious glance at him but he kept looking elsewhere...*Right that is what I should do.* She thought firmly.

They walked out to the main entrance where their carriage was waiting for them, Elizabeth was the last to go out of the huge mansion accompanied by Miss Bingley; they curtsied and Elizabeth made her way to say her good bye to Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy. She almost glared at Mr. Darcy as she let out her cold "Good bye, Mr. Darcy," and turned to Mr. Bingley with a smile and a small curtsy.
She was about to step onto the carriage when she felt a large, warm hand holding hers and as she stepped up, she turned and found Mr. Darcy's serious gaze staring back at her. They stood there as if time had frozen for a moment, a moment in which they both remembered both encounters, each touch and each look and during that frozen moment they knew that both incidents would be locked away in their hearts no matter how much they denied it. Darcy let go of her hand and turned away from her almost reluctantly and walked away.

"It will be a secret," he thought to himself. "A secret and a memory which I will keep in my heart" he muttered to himself as he flexed his hand and entered the mansion.

"It was a simple touch," they both thought as they parted ways.
It was a noisy morning in Netherfield Park, throughout the earliness of the day servants where hustling through the house with tables, chandeliers, wine bottles and sets of dishes. Bingley stood in the middle of the main hall next to his sister who was helping him in the necessary arrangements, every once in a while a servant would come up to them and ask Bingley about some specific detail and he would gawk while his sister answered with a somewhat annoyed look.

"I will not even begin to fathom how you will ever manage to organize a ball on your own, Charles," she said sternly. Bingley only let out a small embarrassed laugh, he continued to look around the house and then he heard Darcy's voice:

"I see you have all the arrangements set Bingley,"

"Why, yes Darcy! Though we must indeed credit my sister who has had the patience of aiding me in this matter which simply is beyond my understanding," Bingley replied with a wide smile. Darcy stopped and stood right next to him right after he bowed courteously at Miss Bingley, she attempted her eyelash flutter at him but, as usual, it was ignored.

"Would you not agree Mr. Darcy that these decorations are simply outstanding?" Caroline inquired proudly.

Darcy only nodded his head at her and then continued to talk to Bingley who was particularly eager at the thought of Miss Bennet being present in his house that evening. Darcy could almost feel his friend's enthusiasm as it seemed to be pouring from him, he on the other hand had to strain himself to keep his thoughts from straying to Miss Elizabeth whom he had not met since morning he had seen her walking with Wickham. Oh, how it hurt him to remember that day, he could not stop jealousy from coursing through his entire body, and anger at seeing the scoundrel again.

"Darcy, is everything all right?" Bingley asked slightly concerned.

"Excuse me, Bingley," Darcy said with a small nod, "it appears I drifted off, if you will excuse me, I will be in the library,"

"Oh, surely Darcy," Bingley said with a slightly surprised look at his friend. Darcy merely bowed his head slightly and took his leave towards his haven. As he entered the slightly cold room, he leaned back against the closed door and released a long sigh. He closed his eyes in tried to calm his thumping heart and to organize his overflowing thoughts. He could not fathom how he was supposed to act this evening, it seemed surprising to him how vastly his life had been affected by the glowing eyes and scent of a woman.

He pushed himself away from the door and towards one of the large clear windows which showed him the gardens of the mansion. His gaze traveled slowly through the fields and finally it rested on a large tree, located not far from the Garden entrance. He remembered the rain and a book. He shook his head, trying to rid himself from his memories but his heart held onto them with a fiery grip.

He looked away from the window and lowered himself slowly onto a couch that was located near one of the bookshelves; he could still hear the bustling of the servants and even felt a slight tremor as Miss Bingley's voice echoed through the hallways. Though it was true that Bingley had absolutely no talent when it came to organizing Darcy could only cringe at the sound of Miss Bingley's voice as
it uttered command after command and he particularly disliked the manner in which she constantly looked around for him, and more specifically for his approval.

He had no idea how to regard this ball; he did not mind Bingley's giddiness, in truth the thought of it hardly occupied his mind...it vexed him how Elizabeth Bennett had become the one and only being that constantly occupied his thoughts. This ball, in which she would most certainly be present, did nothing but unease him and truth be told, since the moment he became aware of the fact that Wickham had made her acquaintance his stomach had taken refuge somewhere near the region of his feet.

Darcy could do nothing but recall the overwhelmingly intimate moments he had shared with Miss Elizabeth in this very house, his hand shook slightly at the thought and every once in a while he caught himself with his hand raised and barely brushing his lips. Oh, but her taste still remained. He had locked her gaze and her taste in his heart; he brought the memory back usually at night as he lay up and stared at the canopy of his bed, as he whispered her name into the darkness.

But Wickham had brought doubts and anger to his heart as well, seeing him beside Miss Elizabeth felt as if something was gripping at his heart and trying to pull it from his chest. Bingley had asked him whether he would rather not have Wickham at all at the ball; Darcy simply shook his head and did his best to ensure his friend that everything would be alright even if he did not believe it himself. Darcy had no idea what he would do if he saw the man; he had no idea what he would do if he saw him with Miss Elizabeth again.

His fist fell soundly onto the table which sat passively beside him; the sound reverberated through the room and against the walls. He closed his eyes momentarily and then stole a glance at the large tree which was still visible through the window...he could almost see her figure standing below it.

"Enough," he whispered in a rough, though low voice, "That is enough,"

He stood hastily and stormed out of the room as if he were attempting to escape his very thoughts.

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Elizabeth found herself in the midst of absolute chaos; it became evident at this point that the people who inhabited her home had gone mad, or rather that is to say, madder. Since very early in the morning as she attempted to rub the sleep off of her eyes, she could hear the loud screeching which was most certainly produced by Kitty and Lydia. She wondered for a brief moment what could be reason for such an uproar and as the drowsiness faded she remembered that the awaited Netherfield ball would be taking place that very afternoon.

She sighed to the empty room as the thought of her entire family being present at Netherfield crossed her mind. She shook her head and almost shivered but in a flash another thought crossed her mind: Mr. Wickham would very likely be present that evening. She smiled to herself and stood up from the bed, the shrieking continued in the lower floor but her spirits were livelier at the thought of the blonde man.

Though at times it did not seem like it, the truth was that Elizabeth had been looking forward to the ball as well. The prospect of meeting Mr. Wickham there and even the possibility of sharing a dance made a small smile reach her visage. She enjoyed the man's company greatly, found him incredibly amiable and courteous, he demonstrated wit and at times his soft gaze convinced Elizabeth that she
had indeed found that which she thought she would never encounter.

However, no matter how hard she tried to avoid it, Elizabeth's mind kept drifting back to that morning in which she met the colourful soldier, not the exact moment at which they met but rather the moment when they encountered Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy. As soon as the latter and Mr. Wickham established eye contact Elizabeth could feel the tension in Mr. Wickham's shoulders and as she turned to regard Mr. Darcy she almost shivered at the coldness with which he regarded the other man.

Elizabeth hated the man's eyes, she hated the way she could not erase them from her mind. She hated the way each time she saw them or thought about them, she was immediately brought back to those rainy afternoons in Netherfield Park. She felt herself shiver at the thought; to her those moments which had occurred between them seemed to be from an unreal world, something similar to a dream in the sense that she could not possibly envision Mr. Darcy being the man he had been at that time.

It was because of the way he had looked at her, the way he had whispered gentle words and the way he had touched her that she could not force his gaze out of her mind. She grabbed the cloth she was holding in her hand tighter and let out an exasperated sigh. She had absolutely no regard for Mr. Darcy; she held firmly the opinion she had had of him from the moment they met, and though this very opinion might have shifted slightly during her stay at Netherfield, after meeting Mr. Wickham it had reclaimed its initial perspective.

"Lizzy!" came the muffled call through the door.

Elizabeth did not move, in truth she had not heard the beckon, her thoughts still remained on that morning, on Mr. Wickham's words regarding Mr. Darcy and on her surprise at hearing such accusations against a man who had gazed at her in the overwhelmingly longing manner in which had done during their encounters. After hearing Mr. Wickham, Elizabeth had sworn not to be fooled by a man's dazzling gaze much less for his soft spoken words.

"Lizzy! For heaven's sake what on earth are you doing?" exclaimed Mrs. Bennett as she opened the door, "We have been asking for you to come down and help your sisters with their dresses! It is of outmost importance we all look at our best this evening...you do remember the militia will also be attending?"

"Indeed?" Elizabeth exclaimed with a slight sarcastic undertone which went completely unnoticed by her mother.

"Dear Lord! Where is your head young girl?" was her mother's reply as she raised her arms above her head in a sign of resignation and walked out of the room, her voice however, came again, "Come along girl! Make haste!"

Elizabeth followed her mother downstairs and found her sisters constantly snapping at each other through tightening white corsets. As she entered the drawing room she looked around for Jane and found her sitting near one of the windows silently looking for an appropriate ribbon for her dress. Elizabeth smiled and thought that even though her mind had been constantly filled during the previous days she could not help but also feel a little giddy at the thought of her sister and Mr. Bingley.

Jane had not confided much to her about her regard towards the young man, however her gaze and her soft smile said enough. Elizabeth felt somewhat guilty at not having confided in Jane what had occurred during their stay at Netherfield, but Elizabeth saw no manner in which she could have related the events, in truth she hardly believed them herself.
Her sister looked up and walked towards her with two ribbons in hand, as she drew closer she presented Elizabeth with a slim white ribbon and smiled. Elizabeth smiled back and took it. After helping her sisters with their dresses Elizabeth went back to her room to find her own. She loved her dress, in truth it was one of her favourites and thus she only allowed herself to use it on very special occasions.

Jane came to help her fix her hair and carefully locate the ornaments which she had chosen to decorate it. Jane wanted to know the truth about the ordeal between Darcy and Wickham...Elizabeth wanted to leave it at what it was; she would rather not procure more thoughts regarding Mr. Darcy into her mind. She looked at herself in the mirror and smiled at her sister.

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As soon as Darcy had seen the orchestra make its way into the household he had fled the room. He stood in front of a full body mirror which was located in his room; his face was dripping small water droplets. A few seconds before he had splashed cool water from the basin which was positioned near the mirror, he had decided to ignore the cloth sitting beside the basin. He gazed at his dishevelled self, the missing cravat and the open at the neck white shirt he wore, the small droplets coursing through his throat and his quivering hands.

"Get a grip, man" he whispered angrily, "have a little self control,"

He sighed for the umpteenth time that day and proceeded to change into the attire he had selected for the evening’s event. His breathing was somewhat laboured but he had managed to subside his tremulous hands. Never had he felt so unlike himself, somewhere between the day of the Meryton Assembly and this very day he had lost control of himself, Elizabeth Bennett had robbed it from him.

He could still hear Miss Bingley's voice as it thundered through the rooms, she ordered the servants about exasperatedly and chastised Bingley, probably each time he attempted to position a flower pot in a completely inappropriate place. Darcy regarded himself in the mirror one last time, before him stood a stranger; a man he no longer recognized. This man was to blame for what had occurred with Miss Elizabeth...he was to be blamed and to be thanked.

Darcy shook his head at that last thought, readjusted his cravat and left the room as he proceeded towards what would be a very long evening. As he reached the entrance hall he found Bingley already handsomely dressed and with a silly smile of his face, his sister was nowhere to be seen. As Darcy stood beside Bingley he noticed the constant shifting of the latter, the wriggling of his hands and his complete inability to remain in the same position for more than five seconds. Finally, after a long silence he managed to let out a few anxious words.

"I have no idea what I would have done if Caroline had not been here," he released a soft yet apprehensive laugh, "I do hope the decorations are to the liking of the guests," Darcy immediately knew that by 'guests' Bingley was actually referring to Miss Bennett.

"I am quite sure they will be," was all Darcy could say.

"Might it be too much, old chap, to ask you share a few dances with the ladies this evening?" Bingley asked uncertainly, "I would hate it for you to stand idle...this is a ball after all,"

"I would hate to ruin your ball by standing around idly, Bingley," Darcy replied with a somewhat
annoyed look, he turned to his friend, "I shall oblige to your petition on the condition that you sit still for a brief moment, if you please!"

Bingley could only chuckle at his friend's exasperated remark and thus stopped twirling his hands and rather let them fall lightly to his sides. Darcy simply nodded his head and regarded the glowing room in more detail after a few seconds he simply let his gaze slide towards the room which would be destined for the dances.

"Ah, Mr. Darcy! I trust you shall find that Netherfield Park has never looked as handsome as it does on this night," Miss Bingley said as she approached both gentlemen and as her eyelashes fluttered unabashedly at Mr. Darcy. He simply gave a curt nod and continued to gaze and the candle lit entrance. Miss Bingley began to describe the process through which she had chosen the decorations for the evening but both her brother's and Darcy's thoughts rested elsewhere, Bingley's were probably focused on the oldest Miss Bennett which would account for his wistful air. Darcy on the other hand could only consider the possibility of Wickham making any sort of appearance at Netherfield during the evening.

After a few minutes of which Miss Bingley's voice registered as a mere buzz in Darcy's mind, he excused himself from their presence and went out to the terrace which faced the largest garden of the state. The moon shone brightly above, there were no candles in this terrace and thus it was merely showered in silver light. Darcy appreciated the soft breeze that caressed his worried features, the cool air helped soothe his mind, he felt it fill up his lungs as he breathed slowly.

He was brought back from his thoughts by the sound of carriages and the ringing of voices, laughter and music, which emanated from the inside of the house. He became aware of the fact that a large number of guests had already arrived and that the orchestra had began its performance, the crowds chattered and the music glided through the night air. Darcy took a deep breath, straightened his cravat and walked back into the household, as he stepped back in he did his best to ignore his throbbing heart.

The household seemed to glow more as the light was reflected on the pearl white dresses which the ladies wore. Darcy could also spot various red uniforms belonging to men of the militia, he felt his heart constrict a little and a slight knot formed at his throat. He looked around for Bingley, fortunately he was taller than most of the present guests which facilitated his task, however, as he turned towards the entry hall his breath caught in his throat.

Miss Elizabeth was standing there, in the middle of the hall and though she was surrounded by large groups of people; to Darcy she might as well stand on her own. All eloquent thoughts left Darcy; he was left with his quickening heart beat and the little breath that was left in his lungs. This woman would certainly be the death of him, how could she not? He saw look up at the clear chandelier, he saw her long, pale neck which shone ever so brightly like the rest of her, she twirled around slowly her gaze still fixed on the ceiling.

As Darcy remembered how to breathe he noticed that she moved away from the entrance hall and into one of the hallways. He cleared his throat and made to follow her though at what he considered to be a safe distance, he saw her walking slowly, almost tentatively and suddenly he lost his nerve and turned away from her once more.

Elizabeth thought that they would never make it to Netherfield Park. Lydia had decided to change her dress three times before settling for the very first she had put on, the same occurred with the ribbons. Jane stood quietly beside her and anyone would have thought her completely unfazed by the ball, Elizabeth, however, noticed the small blush that graced her cheeks and her ever so slight pulling at one of her gloves.
Once they finally got into the carriage Elizabeth allowed herself a smile which Jane noticed and mimicked. She could only wonder whether Mr. Wickham would be present, as she had decided to completely neglect Mr. Darcy's presence, she convinced herself that in the end the man's presence could not be relevant in any way, it was not as if he would ask her to dance. Elizabeth saw the brightly lit Netherfield Park drifting closer, the music caressing the air and the wind blowing ever so slightly through her pearly decorated curls.

As they descended from the carriage she noticed that there was a rather large number of guests which included many men from the militia, this in turn would not make her search for Mr. Wickham any easier. She simply smiled, the evening had just begun and thus she allowed herself to admire the exterior of Netherfield Park, as they walked in followed by a large number of people they approached Mr. and Miss Bingley who stood side by side, receiving all their guests.

Elizabeth noted that Mr. Bingley had a rather silly smile plastered on his face which only seemed to grow as soon as he saw Jane. He could barely take his eyes of her sister in order to greet the rest of her family. Elizabeth also noted the disdainful look which never seemed to leave Miss Bingley's face. While pleasantries were exchanged Elizabeth took the liberty of letting her gaze wander through the various rooms filled with red coated men, however none were the one she looked for.

"Miss Elizabeth?" said Mr. Bingley in his gentle voice, "were you looking for someone?"

"No, not at all" she smiled shyly, "Just admiring the general splendour,"

Elizabeth almost laughed when she saw the manner in which Mr. Bingley's eyes lit up at her sister's compliments of the decorations, he almost swooned. They moved on into the entrance hall, her mother and father continued their discourse about Mr. Bingley and his regard towards Jane, Elizabeth however, stood and looked around the glowing room completely in awe. For a moment she forgot that she desired to find Mr. Wickham for her attention was swept completely by the brightly lit room, the handsome decorations and the overwhelming air of elegance that filled it.

She glanced upwards and saw a magnificent chandelier hanging from the ceiling, the crystals reflected the light provided by the candles, and it was absolutely breathtaking. She came back to herself and locked her gaze on a dimly lit hallway, she took a deep breath and started walking slowly, thinking she might bump into Mr. Wickham at any given time. She entered one of the sitting rooms, looked around and moved on to another which had a piano forte in it, her gaze floated hopefully through the room only to be let down again.

She spotted Charlotte among a small group of people and took her hand in hers, asked for Mr. Wickham but Charlotte had not seen him either. They walked hand in hand through the halls until they met Jane, Elizabeth inquired once more for Mr. Wickham this time she could not keep the anxiety from her voice. Elizabeth's heart was beating quite quickly at this point, Jane held her hands tightly and she stated that Mr. Wickham was not there, Elizabeth could not keep her evident disappointment from her voice.

All of a sudden Mr. Collins was standing right beside them and nothing of what he said registered in Elizabeth's mind until there was a brief silence in which Elizabeth noticed that she had just been asked to dance by the petit man. In the midst of her disappointment she attempted to avoid the dance, however, she found herself obliged to accept and before she noticed she stood on the bright marble dance floor, Jane stood beside her. As the dance began, Jane attempted to explain the reasons as to Mr. Wickham's absence, Elizabeth focused her attention on her sister's words Mr. Collins, however, seemed determined to prevent her from listening as the man himself procured a speech of his own.

Nearing the end of the dance Mr. Collins made evident his intentions, leaving Elizabeth absolutely speechless and almost incapable of holding in her laughter. Even before the music was finally over
she curtsied and grabbed Charlotte by the arm as she merely made it out of the dance room without laughing. She forgot momentarily about Mr. Wickham's absence and allowed herself to laugh at the small man's rather abrupt advances, she took no notice of where she was heading and thus found herself almost colliding into a man's chest.

Her laughter stopped abruptly as she looked into Mr. Darcy's clear eyes, he stood silent for a moment gazing at her intently, she shifted ever so slightly and noticed her thumping heart. Suddenly Mr. Darcy spoke in an incredibly soft voice.

"May I have the next dance, Miss Elizabeth?" Elizabeth was so stunned by his clear gaze and his soft voice that she could not stop herself as she heard her voice utter a short acceptance. He gave a curt nod and walked away from them, Elizabeth stood there somewhat transfixed at the events that had occurred in the last brief minutes, suddenly she grabbed Charlotte's arm and dragged her away as the realisation sunk in.

"Did I just agree to dance with Mr. Darcy?"

Darcy found himself short of breath yet again; in truth he hated the feeling. As he gazed at Miss Elizabeth he felt that his heart would rip out from his ribcage, he prayed that his voice would not quiver, that his hands would not shake and that his gaze would not give him away. As soon as he heard her reply he had to walk away and compose himself...he had to breathe, because it seemed that her very presence made him incapable of it.

He found himself staring at her at the other side of the dance floor as they waited for the music to begin, then they moved, swayed, glided over the dance floor. Darcy had lost all coherent thought at the moment when their bare hands touched; it brought back a myriad of memories and sensations within him which almost swept him off his feet. Miss Elizabeth was speaking, almost mocking him, he would have engaged appropriately in the conversation if he could have focused his thoughts properly.

After a few seconds he managed to regain control of himself and pursued the conversation she had instigated. He asked about her walks to Meryton but she had seen past it, she knew he referred to Wickham and he felt her cold gaze on him. He then noticed that she was angry, she was defending Wickham; almost speaking on his behalf...she was defending the scoundrel. He stopped abruptly and so did she, there they stood the music went on but they remained still, she attempted to make out his character, she was judging him based on what Wickham had told her.

He began to move once more, circling around her and to his shame he could not prevent the anger from seeping into his voice, they finished the rest of the dance in silence, gazing somewhat coldly at each other. As the dance came to an end Darcy still attempted to determine how it had resulted so badly, he bowed and then raised his eyes towards Miss Elizabeth and found her icy gaze still fixed on him. He could not stand it so he looked away as he congratulated the orchestra, as he turned back almost hesitantly he saw Miss Elizabeth curtsy hastily, raise her piercingly cold gaze towards him and walk away with a last long glare. He looked after her and then turned back and the vacant spot on the dance floor...oh, he hated himself.

After that dance the rest of the ball seemed to pass in a blur, he heard Mrs. Bennett speak of Bingley's tentative engagement to her daughter, he then danced with Miss Bingley which only produced a dull sensation in his gut and she uttered sly comments regarding some of her guests. Darcy just wanted to walk away from it all and thus as the orchestra finished the song he bowed hastily and left the room. As he walked through the heavily crowded house he could not bring himself to understand how the evening came to be completely ruined, he was disappointed but he was also angry...
That scoundrel had been feeding Miss Elizabeth lies and what was worse was that she most likely believed him, his nature provided for him to have that effect on women, he had seen it. He sighed heavily and shook his head miserably, he had hoped never to see the man again and then by fate's fickle hand there the man is again, there the man is again trying to take away from him that which he holds most dear.

It became evident to him that this effect Miss Elizabeth had on him could come to absolutely no good, she clouded his judgement, filled his every thought, made his heart ache like it had never ached in his life...it hurt him that she would rather believe that man than him. As he stood in a hallway with no candles he could only let out a shaky breath, he looked around and remembered the moments they had shared in this house, he remembered the complete state of bliss in which he had fallen just by touching her. He could almost feel her there beside him and he hated himself for remembering so vividly...it felt like he was digging a dagger into his very heart.

He leant back against one of the dark walls, he covered his face with one of his hands, his breathing filled the entire hallway and then after some eternal seconds of absolute silence in the midst of all the celebrating, his voice broke through:

"Oh God," he whispered, "just stop,"

Elizabeth found a manner of escaping of all the noise and the bustling around of the guests and the servants. From her former visit she had learnt quite well the locating of various rooms in the mansion, thus she slipped through a door which led to one of the balconies. She leant against the wall and let out a long sigh as the laughter faded away. The evening had not turned out as she had expected and for some inexplicable reason Mr. Darcy's piercing gaze had managed to fix itself once more onto her mind.

She shook her head and gazed out towards the moonlit gardens. If there was something she loved about this house it would have to be the vast library and the glorious gardens. She walked out to the terrace, breathing in the cold night air and stifling a shiver; she walked towards the stone rail and rested her slim arms on its cold surface, she rested her head on one of her hands as she closed her eyes and hummed softly the melody to which she had danced.

Mr. Darcy had to be the most puzzling man she had met in her life; she could not put together the pieces to form his character, when she met him she thought she had figured him out immediately just like he had her, but then...then there was that man she had seen in the study's secluded room, the man she had seen under the tree in the midst of a downpour, the man who held her hand lightly as he healed it...no matter how much she wanted to deny it, she had wanted to know who that man was.

Wickham's account of Mr. Darcy had brought Elizabeth back to reality, away from those two bizarre and completely inexplicable moments that had transpired in this mansion. Elizabeth had desired to bury those moments away and thus she hoped that with the presence of Mr. Wickham she could let the memory of Darcy's exceedingly expressive eyes drift away. She had expected to see the red coated man, to dance with him and in all probability spend the evening with him but fate had taken a strange turn and suddenly here she was, alone on a terrace and thinking about Darcy and his exceedingly puzzling character.

Suddenly an impossibly soft voice brought her back from her reverie.

"Miss Elizabeth..."
She turned and there were those eyes again.

As Darcy stepped into the balcony he noticed a female figure and almost laughed when he recognized it, almost. Miss Elizabeth had not sensed his presence and thus he took a few steps forward and spoke her name softly. She turned slowly and he saw how her eyes widened as they took him in. They stood there silently gazing at each other, a soft wind caressing their faces and the soft murmur of distant music filling the air. Darcy blinked and the contact was broken, he saw Elizabeth's gaze shift and her shoulders tensed yet again.

"I apologise for intruding with no warning," Darcy spoke slowly, weighing every word carefully, "I merely wondered whether you were quite alright,"

Elizabeth remained silent for a few seconds, wondering how to reply, searching for any trace of the anger she had felt as they had swayed on the marble floor, she looked back into Darcy's eyes and nodded her head lightly and she turned her back towards him and faced the gardens.

"I am fine, Mr. Darcy,"

Silence fell yet again, the wind blew once and Elizabeth stifled yet another shiver, this however did not go unnoticed by Darcy who took another step forward.

"Perhaps it would be better for you to go in," his gaze was fixed on his back and his voice still held some trace of the exhaustion which he had let out in the dark hallway, "It is rather cold out here,"

"I like the cold, Mr. Darcy," was all that Elizabeth replied not bothering to turn around. Darcy took a few more steps until he was standing right beside her; he too rested his hands on the stone surface and felt her own incredibly close to his own.

"Miss Elizabeth," he whispered after a few minutes of silence in which they both gazed towards the darkened garden, he shifted his hand ever so slightly, "I would very much like to apologise for my appalling behaviour during our dance,"

"I fail to understand, Mr. Darcy, why you are offering your apologies," Elizabeth said in a soft yet clearly cold tone. Darcy, however, did not pull back; on the contrary he boldly laid his hand on Elizabeth's icy one.

"I had no business displaying such manner towards you," he said as he felt her hand tense beneath his own, Elizabeth almost withdrew her hand but with a small touch Darcy stopped her and held it softly in his own, "Believe me when I say that my anger is most certainly not directed at you,"

Elizabeth still gazed forward, her hand barely twitched at Darcy's contact, she then looked down at their hands, more specifically at Darcy's hand as he held her own, and she could already feel it warming up once more. She looked up at Darcy abruptly though with a serious and determined expression.

"No, it is directed at Mr. Wickham," she replied still in a soft yet stern manner, "what I do not understand Mr. Darcy, is why," Darcy's gaze shifted immediately, his eyes darkened and his hand tightened its grip over Elizabeth's. He looked away from her eyes for a moment and after a few seconds of silence he sighed and raised his gaze once more.

At this point the contact of their hands brought swirling memories of the day in the study's hidden room, Darcy's light touch and Elizabeth's soft voice, their bodies tingled at the memory, their hearts beat faster in their chests and both of them were doing what they could to push the memories back, to push the feelings back. As Darcy gazed at Elizabeth's hand he remembered the day under the rain,
the book and most importantly holding Elizabeth's hand in his own, feeling her closer to him than she had ever been.

"The reasons which lead me to such ill judgement of the...man, are of a very personal nature, Miss Elizabeth...and I am in a position which does not allow me to convey them,"

"I see," Elizabeth whispered icily, she began to draw her hand back but Darcy held even tighter, his finger caressed Elizabeth's white knuckles lightly as he raised his gaze to her own yet again. He then raised both of their hands closer to his chest as he turned to face Elizabeth, who shivered once more. He brought his other hand and thus held Elizabeth's lithe one between his own two sturdy and warm ones.

"The reasons I have are valid, please believe me...for I would never lie to you,"

As he said this he stepped closer to her and he saw her eyes widen. He then raised her hand with painful slowness towards his face and he closed his eyes as he ever so gently brushed her knuckles with his lips. Elizabeth's breath hitched and she felt Darcy's shaky breath on her hand as he sighed. They remained still as the world around them moved on, the memory of their kiss vivid in their minds, the brushing of lips and light caresses of hands. Darcy opened his eyes and they shone brightly in the night, filled with longing, Elizabeth felt herself drifting closer to him and he felt the compelling desire to kiss her again.

Darcy, however, feared that if he showed her any more affection she would only pull back and hurt him more. She had destroyed his self control, vanquished his composure and had transformed him into this man who wore his very heart on his sleeve. He closed his eyes once more and sighed, he took her hand gently, turned her palm towards him and placed a gentle almost nonexistent kiss there, the same palm he had tended to on a rainy day.

He heard the shaky breath she let out, he refused to meet her gaze for fear of not being able to control himself, he simply turned around and let her hand drop gently, he turned his head slightly so as to face her yet making no eye contact. He gestured his hand towards the balcony door and spoke in his usual tone.

"It is too cold out here, Miss Elizabeth," he cleared his throat lightly, "please return to the ball, your family are probably wondering at your prolonged absence,"

Elizabeth gazed at him in utter silence; she nodded her head in an extremely slow fashion and brushed past him as she made for the door. As she reached it she turned and saw him facing the garden again, thus she turned her back and crossed the door while delivering a swift:

"Goodnight, Mr. Darcy,"

Darcy remained standing in the balcony until the sun shone through the grounds; he could still hear various carriages drifting away from the state. He sighed as he looked around and with a determined look turned his back on the glowing grounds, re-entered the mansion and in a miraculous occurrence, went to look for Miss Bingley.

A few days later a letter addressed to Miss Jane Bennett arrived at Longbourn and Elizabeth read it aloud:

"Mr Darcy is impatient to see his sister
and we are scarcely less eager.
I do not think Georgiana Darcy
has her equal for beauty,

elegance and accomplishment.

I hope to call her hereafter my sister."

Elizabeth simply threw the letter on the bed and did her best to act like she did not mind and instead focused on her sister. While Darcy sat on a carriage trying to ignore the overwhelmingly haughty expression on Miss Bingley's face and the throbbing ache in his chest.
"I love you…most ardently,"

Elizabeth stood against the stone wall looking out into the rainy forest, her gaze was not focused, she could make out no clear imagine; she could only barely register the sound of the pouring rain; the memory of Mr. Darcy's words overwhelmed all of her senses. She felt her racing heart, in the midst of the argument she had not noticed how each beat seemed to increase in force and speed. Her anger at the man's words had taken over her and it was only until the distance between them was reduced to almost nothing that she became aware of the loud pounding in her chest.

For a moment she could no longer register the words that came out of her mouth, she then delivered the phrase that changed the entire course of the conversation and for a split second she hated herself for being the one to cause such sadness to another human being.

"You are the last man in the world I could ever be prevailed upon to marry."

And his eyes had shifted…any anger or desire to defend himself from whatever offense she could throw against him vanished, all that rested was raw grief, Elizabeth's words had most certainly driven the pointed dagger, that is rejection, straight to Darcy's heart. There he was, breathing heavily, rain still falling from his wet hair and hopeless. Elizabeth looked up directly into his eyes, she saw them shift, look down, she thought she heard him beg and then he looked right at her lips.

They were so close, so very close that Elizabeth felt she could smell the rain on him, breathe in the moment they were caught in. With her heart beating madly and her emotions stirred up, Elizabeth caught herself leaning in every so slightly towards Mr. Darcy; and he too, with his gaze intent upon her lips, moved in closer. Suddenly the argument they had had seemed long forgotten, part of another reality, all that existed now was them and the rain that fell around them; leaning in closer seemed like the most natural thing to do…the distance would only diminish until it had disappeared and then…

He stopped.

As if wakened from a dream, Mr. Darcy looked back at Elizabeth and recoiled, his eyes still shining with hurt, but the man stood firm, holding onto the dignity that he had left.

"Forgive me, Madam…"

And he was gone. There she stood, right were she had been standing as he turned his back towards her and walked away. She had let out a ragged breath and moved back toward the cold stone, her heart pounding loudly in her ears. She looked up at the gray sky and tried to calm her emotions, to settle herself and understand the events that had just trespassed but it proved to be tremendously hard; her mind was filled with the imagine of Mr. Darcy's penetrating blue eyes and the endless hurt that had tainted them.

"Remember When It Rained"
It had taken all of Darcy's self control to step back, utter a phrase and be gone. They had been so close, so very close that Darcy was completely swept away by the moment; he felt in his heart that the world could fall around him but he would still be fine as long as Elizabeth stayed this close to him. He felt himself stepping closer, he felt himself leaning down, and his eyes had no other focus but Elizabeth's lips.

As he approached bliss, reality broke all possibility of happiness as Miss Elizabeth's words resounded in his mind. Suddenly it had all come back and Darcy understood that the moment had passed, he had taken his chance, he had been rejected and the best thing to do, the right thing to do, was to walk away with whatever dignity he had left.

He stepped into the pouring rain and for a moment he wished he could drown in it. He had no desire to return to Rosings, he could only think of putting as much distance as possible between himself and Miss Elizabeth. As he walked with no destination and with the pouring rain around him, he could not help but wonder how his confession had turned out to be an awful disaster. He thought of the speech he had tried to deliver as he reached Miss Elizabeth, he had thought about it for hours on end…and then just at the sight of her, it had all gone wrong.

As he heard himself speak, as he perceived the anger and hurt in his words, in the back of his mind he could not fathom how he could deliver such harmful words to the woman to whom he had just professed his love. The tone in their voices had mounted and as soon as Miss Elizabeth had named Wickham something grabbed at Darcy's heart, at the memory of his broken-hearted sister and the fact that Elizabeth cared so much for the scoundrel.

He scolded himself mentally for the way in which the entire discussion developed and even though he had to be sincere, he knew that there were far better ways to voice his thoughts. As he brought himself to a halt not too far away from the Collins' cottage, he sighed and let out a small, bitter chuckle; so much for putting distance between them. The rain had somewhat decreased and leaned against one of the large trees in order to cover himself from the little drops that continued to fall.

His breathing was ragged, he had walked hastily without noticing, he felt he was running away but he knew he could not, he was not strong enough to run away, to turn his back and simply forget…the evidence of it was the fact that this hasty promenade had brought him straight to the Collins' cottage.

There was no possible way in which the situation between Miss Elizabeth and him could remain as it currently was. Their dispute had left him with the need to defend himself, to explain himself, to earn some sort of forgiveness and afterwards perhaps he could consider the possibility of accepting the reality that his love was unrequited and doing what any other dignified and sensible man would have done: move on.

But each time he thought about accepting defeat, giving up and letting go, he thought back to Netherfield, to the moments that they had shared together in the splendour of Bingley's house. The very first one, the very first and only kiss they had shared had completely altered Darcy's world and it was because of that kiss that he had dared to hope, he had been on verge of forgetting all possibility of approaching Miss Elizabeth but then that moment had occurred and Darcy was lost in the taste of her lips and the depth of her eyes.

He banged his fist against the tree's trunk and hissed slightly as he felt his knuckles crash against the hard surface. Frustration was not enough a word to describe the state he found himself in, of all possible outcomes he had portrayed in his mind, this was certainly not one he had considered and he knew he was to blame for that.

Darcy shivered slightly and he remembered that he had been standing under the tree and under the
rain for far too long. He looked up and saw how the grey sky shifted to a darker shade and he had to suppress another shiver. As he turned away from the dim light in the household his mind was brought back to the fact that during the time he had been standing near the Collins' household Elizabeth had not returned.

He looked around frantically as if he expected her to walk right past him, as if she would appear out of one of the dark corners of the forest. He waited, held his breath but she did not come. His heart caught in his throat and filled him with absolute worry. He shook himself and started back through the same pathway he had come.

-/-

Elizabeth felt numb due to the cold that crawled into her body; the rain had stopped but her attire was still quite drenched and she had made no move to return to the Collins'. She had the impression that she had been standing against the stonewall for an eternity, she felt that with this cold it would come as no surprise to her if she realised she was frozen in place.

She did not want to make any explanations to Charlotte, she simply wanted to return, have a warm bath and then to sink into the depth of her blankets, to drown in the softness of her pillow and to sleep until she could make sense of the situation she currently found herself in.

As a slight air current blew around her, she suppressed a shiver and decided that standing idle in the cold would not do her any good, she sighed and looked around the gloomy landscape; the memory of Mr. Darcy's speech engraved in her mind. She made her way back through the forest and then through a small clearing, small droplets fell every once in a while from the leaves. Elizabeth looked up through the clearing, directly at the darkening sky, she did not know how long had passed since she had left the Collins' side after the mass, she had left so hurriedly and she knew that it probably surprised her hosts.

She braced herself and sighed deeply, this confusion that plagued her vexed her to no end. She wanted to understand; she knew that it could have been so easy to wave Mr. Darcy off as an arrogant and insensitive man, but she knew better. He was the man how had kissed her passionately in a hidden room, who had taken care of her after she had cut her hand, who had searched for her on a moonlit night and softly kissed her hand.

Elizabeth did not hate Mr. Darcy, even if she had ever wanted to, she knew it was a unattainable task. She could not understand how a man could have such an influence on her state on mind, he had taken away her sister's happiness but regardless of this fact when he had approached her, she could put up no fight, she could only step closer to him.

Mr. Darcy probably had his very own reasons to defend his acts, Elizabeth knew that even if his character had sometimes been unpleasant, he was still a gentleman and something inside Elizabeth told her that there was something missing...something that could explain and clarify the events and that would lead her to an understanding of the man Mr. Darcy was.

"It is of no importance now," she said to herself, "I reckon that I will not see more of him."

It was evident to her that after the exchange they had had, the next time they would meet they would probably share a salutation if only for the sake of propriety. They had said foul things and most of them had sprouted due to the tense situation, the confusion they both felt in their hearts. Elizabeth
pushed herself forward as she determined it was past the time to return to the cottage, she needed rest, she felt she had been awake for days.

She heard footsteps as she moved towards a small path that lead away from the clearing, she spun around swiftly, suddenly a little afraid. She stood still and waited for something to step into the dim light; branches cracked, leaves rustled and suddenly a tall figure stepped out. There stood Mr. Darcy, breathing heavily and looking straight at Elizabeth. Her breath caught in her throat and she stood still; his eyes shone in the darkening clearing, his laboured breathing was the only sound; suddenly he steadied himself and took a step forward.

-Darcy felt he had walked for miles on end; the rain had stopped at some point but he could not be bothered, as soon as he had thought about Miss Elizabeth his mind had lost any other possible focus and his stride had taken a determined rhythm. His heart beat loudly in his chest and his breathing had become ragged.

He saw a glimpse of light and he imagined it to be a clearing that opened up to the forest; he walked towards it and as he stepped out of the wet bushes, which continued to soak his attire, he looked up and saw Miss Elizabeth standing beneath a large tree. His heart skipped a beat and his breath caught in his throat. He knew he was looking for her but as soon as he saw her he wondered what he could possibly say, the reminder of the argument they had had was still too recent.

Darcy felt relieved when he saw her, panic had not time to crawl into his heart, he was glad to see her there, in front of him, he took a deep breath and took a step forward, argument forgotten, all he cared about was her. He took another step forward and before he realised it he was almost rushing toward Elizabeth's lithe figure, her eyes were fixed upon him and he felt his heart pound more intensely which each step he took.

He wanted to pause, he wanted to consider, he wanted to be sensible but by God, whenever he was close to this woman he just could not be. He saw her eyes widen as he stepped closer and suddenly the distance between them was almost non-existent. He wanted to take her in his arms, he wanted to apologise and explain, he wanted to beg her to love him, to accept him. He saw her eyes, they were slightly moist and not because of the rain but because of tears that had not been shed.

"Mr. Darcy…" she said softly.

And that was all it took, he stretched his arms towards her and embraced her, he felt her cold clothes against his even colder chest and he tightened his grip around her. He sighed deeply and whispered her name under his breath, she had not moved but he did not mind, he was glad to find her, to see her and feel her against him. Oh, the fool, how could he even envision the possibility of forgetting about this woman?

She was still against him but she had not pushed him away, he tightened his grip once more and stepped back, remembering the rules of propriety and most importantly the words she had uttered against him no more than two hours ago. She looked up at him with a questioning gaze not understanding his unexpected appearance and above all his sudden attitude. He let go of her but stood close enough to remark the details of her visage. He knew it would be wise to utter some sort of explanation or even anything at all but words seemed to get caught in his throat, he was hesitant, afraid...she could hurt too easily.
"I…" he started, "I was worried…about you, you had not returned to the Collins' cottage."

Her eyes widened slightly at his words and she sighed as she turned her head away from him.

"I was thinking," she answered slowly, "I was making my way back just now."

Darcy wondered after her words, he knew that the events of the day had taken their toll on them both and he felt somewhat uneasy, he wondered how he could arrange the situation, explain himself and do things properly. Elizabeth continued to look away from him and it tore him apart to see her so dejected.

Elizabeth looked up with a determined look on her delicate face, her lips were firm and they parted slightly as she moved to speak. Darcy could only stare at her, his mind was reeling as he tried to arrange his thoughts, and he considered what could be the best manner to voice them, to make this woman understand that she meant everything to him.

"If you will excuse me, Mr. Darcy," she said plainly, "I shall take my leave."

She turned her back as she began to walk away but before she could leave the clearing Darcy took two quick strides and stretched his hand towards her, grabbing her arm gently.

"Miss Elizabeth, please wait," he said breathlessly. She turned around slowly, looking down at Darcy's hand on her arm and then raising her gaze to meet his own. "I feel the need to apologise… the manner in which our argument occurred was not at all what I had envisioned; I am aware that my behaviour was quite dreadful,"

"I must apologise then, for not providing you with the answer you must have had envisioned," Elizabeth responded tersely, "I am probably not the woman you envisioned either,"

Darcy's eyes widened and his hand slid down and brushed Elizabeth's own only to rest once more at his side. He felt no desire to try and explain the feelings he had already professed, he felt that it would serve no purpose and the only possible outcome would be to hurt him even more. His confession had not been welcomed and thus he could not bring himself to press on. He sighed in frustration and made a fist with his hands, he could feel his nails dig into his skin.

"You are most certainly not like anything I could have ever envisioned," he whispered softly.

"You have no right to say such things," Elizabeth replied angrily, her eyes shone with emotion and Darcy felt he momentarily lost, "You have no right to speak to me in such a manner, not after everything you have said…not after everything you have done," and she stepped closer to him, she was defying him, as if trying to push him away with her mere presence.

"I do not think I understand what you mean," Darcy replied with a confused look.

"You have done things which would have led any reasonable person to hate you," Elizabeth stared directly at the gentleman, her gaze would not yield, "you have done things which have prevented me from creating any solid judgement on your character."

"You mean the affair with Bingley and your sister and… Wickham too," Darcy replied, his eyes were fixed on Elizabeth, they shone brightly and he felt himself drown in the depths of the emotion.

"No," was Elizabeth's reply, "No, there is more than that,"

Darcy's heart sped up overwhelmingly and suddenly he felt he could not breathe. He was sure, Elizabeth was speaking of the brief interludes they had shared in Netherfield Park; she was speaking
about it, she was acknowledging them…she remembered…and Darcy did too.

"I remember," he said as he looked at Elizabeth, on the inside he felt the words get caught in his throat, his heart beat wildly.

"I dare not make any judgement of a person whose character remains a mystery to me," Elizabeth stated plainly, "you must know that if there is any confusion in me…it is because of the events that have transpired between us."

"I…" Darcy began but he was quickly cut short by Elizabeth's distressed discourse.

"I deserve some sort of explanation, I want to understand, I want this situation to be clear and thus be able to move on…but with what you have said to me today I feel that my heart is torn between battling arguments and I just cannot side with either…I do not know you, I do not know what to think of you."

Darcy lunged forward and embraced Elizabeth in the same manner he had done when he arrived at the clearing. He breathed in and exhaled as he felt his heart tighten in his chest. This woman had seen him at times when passion was all he could feel, when his self-control seemed to have taken leave to far distant lands, when he had let go of every possible social constraint and given in to the raw desire which had driven him to kiss her in a hidden room.

"What I said today was no lie, Miss Elizabeth," Darcy whispered in her ear, "I have been torn between this aggravating feelings, I still remember what happened in Netherfield vividly and there is also the duty I felt I owed to my friend, to protect him from his often misplaced feelings."

"You have taken away my sister's happiness and it pains me to think that it is not the first time you have done such a thing for Mr. Wickham's account reflects a very similar situation,"

"Please, Miss Elizabeth, I beg you not to base your judgement of my character on that…gentleman's stories," Darcy replied as he tightened his grip slightly and then moved back to look directly at Elizabeth, "I…the man has done unpardonable things, he has hurt innocent people…"

"I wish I could understand, Mr. Darcy," Elizabeth said as she looked down, "but I must confess that in my current position it proves to be extremely difficult,"

"Miss Elizabeth, please I need you to believe me when I say that the very last thing I wish do in this life, is hurt you," Darcy insisted as he inched slightly closer, his voice desperate, almost breaking mid-sentence, "I lack the words to express the effect you have had on me…"

"I beg you, please stop," Elizabeth said looking directly at the humid ground, "Please do not speak to me in such a manner…it makes everything harder"

Darcy remained quiet and everything stood still for what seemed like an eternity, the wind would not blow and the branches would not creak, the only sound was the sound of their breathing and as Darcy stood, no more than a foot away from Elizabeth, he noticed that she was shaking.

He raised his hand slowly and brought it to Elizabeth's cheek, his thumb ghosted over it, leaving the hint of a caress, aching to touch more. He took a deep breath and gently moved her visage to make her look up to him. She was breathtaking. Her eyes were moist, they shone with unshed tears and desperation, they made him want her so much more; he wanted to ease them, to end this entire situation. As he looked into her dark eyes, he felt himself being drawn back to the days they had spent in Netherfield, to those brief moments of bliss in which he had succumbed to his feelings, to this woman's power over him. Oh, her rejection had not changed a thing…his heart was hers and
hers alone.

He leaned down slowly and whispered:

"Please,"

Elizabeth's eyes widened immediately and she was yanked back to the stone temple where Darcy had confessed, she could see him there before her, his eyes begging and his lips inches away from her own…and he had pleaded, pleaded for her to take him, to accept him. She had leaned in too, she had inched closer, and something had tugged at her heart when she had seen him move away.

But he was not moving away now.

Darcy leaned his forehead against her own, their noses were brushing very slightly and she could feel his breath on her face. They both felt as if their hearts would beat out of their chests. Elizabeth released a shaky breath and she felt more than heard Darcy's own choked one; she felt his hand move its light caress away from her cheek and towards her lithe neck, she unconsciously tilted her head up slightly.

They were no longer in the middle of a clearing near the Collins' cottage, they were back in a hidden room, with no Bingley, no Bennett family, no Lady Catherine and no Miss Bingley to disturb them, there was only them. Darcy was a great man, but no man would ever be strong enough to stand so close to the object of his desire and not reach out. Darcy was a great man, but when in Elizabeth's presence...he was simply another man in love and thus he did the only thing he could do: reach out.

His lips rested lightly of Elizabeth's, it was the softest embrace and he wished it would last forever. He felt the soft touch of her mouth as it slid ever so slowly and slightly against his own, it felt more like a caress than a kiss. His breath came out slowly through his slightly parted lips and he heard Elizabeth's breathing hitch.

Elizabeth's arms rested on her sides, relaxed, completely disconnected from the rest of her body. Her mind swayed with thoughts, memories, sensations, she was losing herself in the feeling of Darcy's lips. There was such intensity beneath it that she felt overwhelmed, she could hear his deep voice in her head as he had confessed to her, as he had pleaded not once but twice.

Darcy pressed his against Elizabeth a little harder, he loved her, he loved her lips and he knew that he would never get enough of them. The kiss they had shared in Netherfield had inspired such intense emotions, dreams, feelings that he felt somewhat overwhelmed by the outcome this kiss would have on him afterwards. This kiss was his comfort, was his last option to show, actually show Elizabeth how deep his feelings for her were.

At this new intensity something in Elizabeth's mind clicked and she stepped back, bringing the chaste kiss to an abrupt end. She took another step back as she brought her hand to her lips, she looked at Darcy and saw confusion and sadness in his eyes and behind that, the ever-present intensity that shone in them whenever he looked at her. It was too much, it was too much for her to take and thus she knew she had to get away…

"I must go," she took another step back just as Darcy stepped forward.

"I...Miss Elizabeth," Darcy began, "I should…"

"No, please...stop," said Elizabeth as she cut Darcy short and turned her back towards him, "this is complicated enough as it is..."

"I did not mean..." Darcy tried again.
"Enough…please, that is enough," Darcy could see her shoulders shaking and he took another step towards her, he moved his hand as if to touch her but she turned her head slightly, muttered a quick "Goodbye Mr. Darcy," and sprinted away.

Darcy stood in the middle of the clearing, the newly risen moon shining above him and no trace of the gray clouds that had hidden the afternoon sky. A few droplets continued to fall from a couple of leaves and the wind began to blow gently. The gentleman stared at the patch of dark forest through which Elizabeth had disappeared, his senses still overwhelmed by her scent, the taste of her lips and the broken sound of her voice.

He shook his head and turned to walk away from the clearing, he felt heavy with the weight of his emotions and his actions. He had given into his feelings, his mind had whipped all consideration that would drive him away from Elizabeth, as he had looked down at her face he knew that the only thing he could do was lean into her, walking away or stepping back were no options, he was in a trance and he could not and would not fight it off.

In the midst of the events of the day Darcy had seen Elizabeth's confusion and he determined that even if she found his feelings for her revolting, he knew that she deserved to know the truth. As he approached Lady Catherine's mansion he understood that he owed her that, it would give her an understanding and at the same time it would give her closure.

Once he was back in his room, Darcy splashed water onto his troubled features and looked himself in the mirror. What he had done could not be undone, the cards had been laid and there he was… entirely open to the volition of a woman who could not seem to bear the thought of his love towards her. He shook his head as he splashed his face once more, he turned towards his desk and a half-written letter for Elizabeth, he re-read the parchment and then turned towards the largest window in his room.

As he approached the fine glass he noticed that the rain had started again, he held back a bitter laugh as he thought about the fact that all the moments he had shared with Elizabeth had been in some manner caused by the rain. It seemed strange to be rejected under the rain as well. He could not help but feel pathetic because even after Elizabeth's evident rejection he could not bring himself to erase the memory of her lips, the feel of her body in his arms, her scent and her soft voice. He closed his eyes and saw her, looking at him at saying…"Enough,"

He reopened his eyes and whispered to the empty chamber:

"Remember when it rained."

Later that night the letter laid folded and sealed, he had placed it back on his desk, his heart beating rapidly with the knowledge that he would be delivering it the following day.
Landscapes In The Firelight

The candlelight flickered in the dark, she'd felt her sister's body next to her on the bed, she'd heard her slow breathing and without giving it another thought, she had said:

"I saw Mr. Darcy when I was at Rosings."

Her sister had barely taken a breath before replying:

"Why did you not tell me?"

And as she took a small breath in search of an answer, her sister continued:

"Did he mention Mr. Bingley?"

Of course, Elizabeth had thought to herself as a tear escaped her, of course that is all there is.

"No, no he did not,"

And the light was gone.

-/-

As he stepped through the tall entrance doors that led the way to his estate, Darcy became the centre of attention of the largest part of his house-staff and he realised that he had left far too much to be done, when he had made way to Rosings without a second thought.

Good, he thought to himself, the very last thing I need right now is time for myself and my wretched thoughts.

He made for his bureau, but not before stealing a couple of minutes to greet his beautiful sister and her warming smile. She had jumped into his arms, with that juvenile and carefree charm of hers and he had felt at home and safe. He kissed her forehead lightly and caressed her cheek softly with his thumb. She looked back at him with nothing but undying affection.

Darcy put his mind to his work, he signed various letters and administrative papers that had been lying on his desk for far too long, and he made sure to add the appropriate apologies for the tardiness of his responses. He'd immersed himself so deeply into his duties that when he raised his eyes once more the sky had darkened and various torch lights had been lit in the garden just below his window, casting various shadows over the white stone of his terrace.

He undid his cravat and took off his coat, stretching his back around his shirtsleeves as he made way to the doors that granted access to the terrace. There was not a sound to be heard apart from the calming hum of some of the fountains and Darcy's deep sigh. If he were to be honest with himself,
and he often was, he was exhausted both physically and emotionally and the problem seemed to be that he could not bring himself to determine what he would do about the situation he currently found himself in.

He had forced himself to stop thinking about the encounters that had transpired between him and Elizabeth but in moments like this one, when he was left alone, when he was exhausted, with no defences and no strength in him to fight his own heart, she came back. She always came back.

*Enough*, she had said, and here he was, never getting enough of her. Sometimes he wished for the rain, if only to step out for a few minutes and try to bring back the sensation of touching her while the sky fell around them. She had felt warm, warmer than anything Darcy had ever felt, he had wanted to have her, all of her, all of her warmth and thus never have to even *consider* the thought of letting her go again.

But she had walked away. *Enough*, she had said.

Darcy hit his fist against the stone and cursed under his breath; he wanted to take his heart out in the hope that it would stop this persistent hurt, that it would take away the dull ache that had settled in his chest and to which he had, sadly, grown used to. It became one of the few constants in his life.

"Please," he said to no one in particular, "stop".

-/-

She reckoned that being anywhere but at home was what she needed in order to shake herself off the gloom she had fallen into since her return from Rosings. She had kept the letter and sometimes she reread it if only to remind herself of how naïve she had been, how utterly childish and predictable and *proud*. It brought her down from the ivory tower she had unconsciously placed herself in. Mr. Darcy had been wrong but by God, she had been so too, far more than him in fact.

In truth, she felt that she would not be able to face Mr. Darcy, at least not in the near future. She found that the alleged facts on which she had based her judgement of his character were completely false, and thus she was left adrift and lost in the myriad of her own thoughts and the effect his actions had had on her. She was only too glad to be way away from his presence.

"I think we are quite close to Pemberley," her aunt said easily.

Oh, dear.

Elizabeth tried to device an appropriate argument that would convince her aunt and uncle to forgo the visit to Pemberley but she had been caught so completely off guard that all she could manage was a very feeble:

"He's so rich".

Which only allowed for a very mocking comment from her uncle and the decision that Mr. Darcy's home, with its very well stocked lake, would be their next stop. Elizabeth felt absolutely nauseated and put up what she believed to be a resigned smile which in turn might have actually looked more like a grimace. Oh dear, indeed.
Darcy stepped out of the carriage and let out a deep breath. It had been a rather exhausting journey all the way from London and he felt quite relieved to be back home early. He smiled to himself at the thought of surprising Georgiana and thus made his way through the main entrance. His housekeeper informed him that the manor had visitors that had arrived not long before him and that if he wished to greet them, he had only to let her know and she would bring them to him. Darcy only nodded his head slightly and made his way to the music room, where he knew he would find his sister.

As the sound the pianoforte drifted through the halls of the house, Darcy allowed himself a small smile that reflected the calm that had finally decided to be a part of his life once more. Oh, he still thought about Elizabeth but it had been such a long time since the last time he had seen her that he had managed to school himself into a state of aloofness and practiced calm.

When he entered the room, he took care to do so quietly so as to avoid spoiling the surprise, he then realised that it really did not make a difference as Georgiana was absolutely engrossed in her music and would have hardly noticed his presence in the room. He took a step closer to her, to bring himself right behind her where she did sense him. The music came to an abrupt end as she almost flew into his arms and he, not being to contain the wave of affection that came over him, let out a small laugh as he spun her around.

It was then that a sound at the other end of the room caught his attention and he turned towards it as his sister continued to smile. He could have sworn his heart had stopped, that his eyes were cheating him, and his mind was playing foul tricks on him, for it was not possible that Elizabeth Bennett was standing right beside the slightly opened door.

She disappeared from his view in the space of a second and it was the sound of her retreating steps that brought Darcy back onto himself and made him realise that she was running away. He smiled briefly at his sister and followed Elizabeth's steps out towards the stone steps that expanded to give way to one the magnificent gardens of the estate. As he descended he saw her standing there, out of breath and completely unreal. He walked directly towards her, his heart pounding rapidly in his chest but not affecting the decision in his stride; it felt to him as if she was drawing him in and there was nothing he could have done to prevent it.

She was here; in the home he had offered her. Here, where he had dreamed her countless times and the gardens had not seemed quite so vast or the night quite so dark of only she was there to share them with him. Here she was, not meeting his eyes and fidgeting with her hands and by God, Darcy had never loved her more.

She berated herself mentally and under her breath as she descended the stone steps and walked towards the green fields. That was by far the hastiest and certainly the rudest retreats in the history of escapades. Sadly, it was the best she could have done considering the situation. There she had been, so sure of being miles and miles away from Darcy only to find herself staring into his eyes through a half opened door as he held another woman in his arms.

Pathetic, was the only word that could come to mind. Their feeble attempt at easy chatter had only
unsettled her more, and not to mention the manner in which Darcy regarded her, so intent and anxious and expressive. He had been nervous but he did his best to hide it and then as Elizabeth announced their departure the following day, it would have been impossible for her to miss his slight disappointment.

She wanted to put miles and miles between them again for she had not expected to be thrown so off balance by his mere presence, heavens, by his mere gaze. And thus, she made her own way back to the Rose & Crown where her aunt and uncle would probably be expecting her with questions on her abrupt disappearance from the magnificent house. Oh, they could ask away, her entire focus was on trying to will the night to pass swiftly and thus bring her the tomorrow that would find her long gone from Derbyshire.

Elizabeth had barely regained her composure when she spotted Darcy's tall figure amongst the crowd of the Inn's dining room. In her panicked reaction she hid behind a thin curtain and felt her heart drop as she realised Darcy was speaking to her aunt and uncle.

He wanted to dine with them. He wanted her to meet his sister. His sister. Elizabeth touched her fingers lightly to her lips and did her best to appear nonchalant at the new change in their travelling plans. She did her best to ignore the feeling that had sprouted in her chest that seemed to be too close to relief.

Her pounding heart would not allow her a moment's respite during the long night; all she could do was try to breathe.

Elizabeth felt rather proud of herself and how she managed the conversation with Darcy and the introduction to his sister. She was an incredibly pleasant girl who stole easy smiles away from Elizabeth and from her brother as well, Elizabeth had to blink when she saw the unknown expression in the man's face. She thought to herself that no matter how much time passed or what events transpired between them, there was always a new, unknown side to Darcy; Elizabeth could not read him.

He looked at her, and she looked back. That gaze, that gaze in which she had been lost under so many different circumstances and yet, each time it shone brightly Elizabeth could not help but think of soft-spoken words, soft caresses and the memory of lips hidden away in a dusty cupboard. Darcy's eyes softened and then his attention went to her uncle and the moment was gone.

-Darcy disliked fidgeting. He disliked other people doing it but most importantly he detested it when it was he who did it. It made him feel out of control, it made him feel exposed and vulnerable… considering Elizabeth was in the same room as he was, that meant the sensation was only heightened to almost unbearable levels. Luckily, his sister's presence calmed him and allowed him to behave like a civil, welcoming man towards his guests and took off some of the weight that had settled on his shoulders at the thought of Elizabeth's visit.

However, he determined that his approach needed to be different; he did not want Elizabeth to feel cornered or pressured. He decided he'd take the chance to let her breathe around the house with complete ease and in the company of his sister while he accompanied her very enthusiastic uncle to the lake. Before he left the room, he glanced and Georgiana and Elizabeth and smiled wistfully, shaking his head and the thought that this was the image he had envisioned for his life in various
occasions and there they were… it was so very much like it and so very distant from it.

It made his heart ache.

He lost track of time as he stared into nothingness, as he stared at the window of the room where the young ladies were and suddenly he remembered himself and mentioned that dinner was to be served soon and they ought to head back. Elizabeth's uncle smiled happily and nodded his head, clearly satisfied with the results of the fishing time.

As they rejoined the ladies and headed towards the main dining room, Darcy offered his arm to Elizabeth and he perceived the slight hesitation in his eyes before she smiled lightly and placed her hand gently on his sleeve. It felt as if his arm was burning.

The gentlemen waited while the ladies seated themselves and Darcy did not miss the shared glance between his sister and Elizabeth, suddenly when he looked around him at the sitting positions, he realised that her sister had taken a seat on the head of the table, rather than beside Darcy as it was her habit. He quirked and eyebrow at Georgiana, but the young girl only smiled innocently and motioned for him to be seated, as he did so, he realised that Elizabeth was right beside him. His heart caught in his throat for the umpteenth time that day and mentally berated himself for such childish reactions.

Conversation flowed easily around the table and he felt very proud of his sister for being able to keep up with each subject that they fell upon, he touched her hand lightly and when she smiled he saw her eyes flicker briefly to his left, where Elizabeth was and as he turned his head slightly he caught Elizabeth's gaze as it rested on the spot where he was touching his sister. Suddenly she looked up and they were staring directly at each other, and for the briefest second Darcy felt that there was no one else there, in the room, in the house, in the world…there was only her. Elizabeth's gaze shone intensely and before Darcy could make out what it meant, she turned her head away and returned to the conversation.

Darcy flexed his hand under the table.

-/-

After dinner they retired to a different room with a smaller pianoforte, and Georgiana confessed it to be her favourite.

"It was a wedding gift," she said with a small smile, "from our father to our mother."

"If you're not too tired maybe you can delight us with some of your favourite tunes as well?" Darcy suggested as he placed a gentle hand on his sister's shoulder.

"It would only give me pleasure to play for you!" she exclaimed as her juvenile face broke into one of her heart rendering smiles.

Elizabeth smiled at such an open display of undying affection, in truth, despite of the dread she had felt at having to return to Pemberley and face Mr. Darcy once more, she realised that she was glad their plans had changed. She felt that this man, this man who was gazing so lovingly at his younger sister was the same man who had held Elizabeth in a hidden cupboard, who had mended her hand and kissed it in a moonlit terrace; the man whom she wished she had not rejected.
She turned her gaze away and walked towards one of the large glass doors that opened up to the darkened gardens. There were various torches lit up around one of the fountains and their flickering light was beautifully reflected in the still water. This place was beyond beautiful; it was **glorious**. Elizabeth thought that with the size of the estate it would have been impossible to give it the sense of warmth and welcoming that made it feel like a home rather than a mansion decorated elegantly but void of any sense of belonging. Oh, how wrong she had been yet again. As she toured some of the rooms with Georgiana she felt as if the house was wrapping itself around her, accommodating to her, there was warmth everywhere...but what was most striking was how much love had been put into the place, the place seemed to glow with it and Elizabeth was left breathless.

Suddenly she saw Darcy walk towards her and he stepped forwards and opened the glass doors, the night was warm enough that the night breeze was not unwelcome and Darcy motioned for Elizabeth to step out onto the terrace. She looked around the large stonework and the terrace seemed to be shared with a series of rooms that were no doubt continuous to the one they had found themselves in.

Darcy started walking towards the farthest end of the balcony; he turned his head and smiled at Elizabeth's unmoving figure.

"Please, come," he said in the softest voice and Elizabeth could do nothing but comply.

Darcy leaned forwards, laying both hands on the cool stone and gazing at the night sky with a slight contented smile on his face. Elizabeth could not shake her gaze off him and she realised that she had been staring for quite a while but before she could shake herself Darcy turned to her, his eyes glowing in the soft flickering light and Elizabeth could not find it in her to look away. Darcy smiled once more and it seemed to her that he had moved closer, but she could have been imagining things...everything seemed so unreal.

"I am so very glad you were able to stay another day," his voice broke the silence and Elizabeth turned away from his gaze.

"You have been exceedingly kind to us," was Elizabeth's somewhat tight reply, "I must thank you for your invitation."

"Please, there is no need to thank me," Elizabeth risked a sideways glance at him and she saw how he looked at his hands, there resting on the stone and a small almost non-existent smile decorating his face, "it gives me great pleasure to be able to show you my home, and most of all am I delighted that you have been able to meet Georgiana."

"She is wonderful," Elizabeth replied honestly, "she is what every young lady ought to be."

Darcy nodded his head and looked up once more, however his smile was gone and his gaze seemed fixed on some point beyond the darkened landscape. Elizabeth did not know if she should talk about the letter, about how sorry she was for the foul things Wickham had done and her terrible error in judgement. She opened her mouth to say something but nothing came out, so she closed it again and laid her hands on the stone, right beside Darcy's.

"There is no way to undo what has been done," Darcy said after a few minutes of utter silence and Elizabeth turned her head, stared at him and waited, "but I cannot help but wish that it could be so...for us."

Elizabeth gasped and Darcy turned to her, touching her hand lightly with his fingers but not grasping it, just the mere hint of an almost non-existent caress.

"I am more than aware of the mistakes I have made regarding you and your sister; and it is for that..."
reason that I understand why you probably hold me in contempt…” Darcy paused and shifted slightly, he had lost the calm countenance which had surrounded him slight minutes before, Elizabeth felt his hand shake against her own. He took a deep breath and continued: "but I am thankful for the possibility of showing you who I really am, even if it is too late."

Elizabeth was absolutely speechless, her eyes were wide and they shone in the light, as if trying to absorb what was happening through her gaze. This man was a completely mystery and somehow, since the moment their eyes had met they had began a dance than resulted in them being completely tangled up in one another and without the slightest clue as to how to step away.

-/-

Darcy's heart was trying to fight its way out of his ribcage, he thought he could feel his bones vibrating with every beat, he did what best he could to control his breathing if nothing else. He had no more secrets, he had shown this woman everything, she had seen the worst of him and now all he could do was attempt to show him a bit of what he imagined could be his best.

"You must know that you shall always be welcome in Pemberley, should you care to visit us again," Darcy said softly, almost shyly, "I'm certain Georgiana would be delighted to see you again."

"And you?" was Elizabeth whispered reply. Darcy turned fully towards her and cocked his head slightly to the side, he let out a small sigh and a longing smile touched his lips.

"Always," was all he said and he took her hand in his. Her beautiful and lithe hand, he had caressed it, nursed it, kissed it, dear Lord, he loved her hand.

Darcy kept his gaze centred on Elizabeth's hand and then he felt her move and he thought that he had overstepped their ever shifting boundaries and as he raised his eyes to her face yet again, he found it a mere step away from his own.

"I think…” Elizabeth said as she looked up into his eyes and her gaze shifted briefly to his lips before continuing, "I do not think it is too late."

Darcy tightened his grip on her hand, brought it to his chest and as his lips parted to voice his reply…

"Elizabeth, dear, we must head back now," and Elizabeth's aunt face popped at the crystal doors just as Darcy turned hastily away from the woman beside him and cleared his throat softly. Elizabeth smiled and nodded her head at her aunt and gazed hesitantly at Darcy, who was looking at her from the corner of his eye. The man stayed still until Elizabeth's aunt had returned into the room before grabbing Elizabeth's hand gently but rapidly and raising it towards him and brushing his lips against her knuckles.

The gentleman dropped Elizabeth's hand gently at her side, and looked at her with such longing and desire that he felt he was certainly on the verge of impropriety but Elizabeth smiled warmly at him and said nothing, she returned his stare with passivity and for some unknown reason, Darcy felt calm again.

He stepped back so that Elizabeth made her way into the room and he followed closely behind, with the strange sensation that he was surrounded by her intoxicating aroma, he felt he could drown in dry land, he could drown in her.
The four of them stepped into the carriage, Elizabeth's aunt and uncle with wide satisfied smiles on their faces, Elizabeth with a small wistful one and Darcy with an almost unnoticeable one. As Elizabeth's relatives chatted away, commenting on Darcy's hospitality, the man in question was lost in thought, lost in thoughts of the woman sitting beside him and how it had seemed that there was, after all, a possibility to make amends, to prove himself worthy…to finally, finally, love her as she deserved.

Elizabeth was likewise succumbing to the thoughts spinning around in her head, she was willing to let Darcy in, there was no way she could have denied him again, they had stood there, together and alone and Elizabeth had said not too late. He had understood, he had touched her…maybe; maybe things would work out for the best from now on. She came to realise how badly she wanted to have a second chance, to do it right…they deserved more than a few minutes in a hidden cupboard or in a clearing in the middle of a downpour, they deserved the opportunity to try.

And so, they decided, separately in their heads that try they would.

Sadly, they could not have foreseen the terrible news that awaited them at the Rose & Crown.
Elizabeth's hands clenched on the tablecloth she was holding. Wickham and Lydia had left a couple of hours earlier and she had insisted on aiding Betsy with the cleaning up of the dining room. The truth was that she need to do something, anything, any banal action that would permit her to concentrate on the movement of her muscles and not on the continuously growing dread that had found a home inside her chest.

She could not erase Mr. Darcy's face from her memory. Oh, not his smiling face from the afternoon they had spent in Pemberley, but the heavy gaze he had thrown her way as she recounted the devastating tale of Lydia's elopement. Elizabeth could almost see him drawing back into himself, taking back both the words he had said and those that had not left his lips as well.

"I must leave you, goodbye".

No truer words had ever been spoken.

He had turned his back and left and Elizabeth could only wonder if she would ever see him again. The evening's events seemed dreamlike and absolutely detached from reality; they were once again torn from each other and she had absolutely no idea what to do about it except to try and keep calm and carry on.

A crystal glass half-filled with wine crashed onto the floor, Elizabeth could only stare at the shattered pieces and the flowing liquid as it filled the cracks of the floorboards.

-/-

"It's him!" cried Kitty as she launched herself at the window, "he's at the door…Mr. Bingley!"

And suddenly the Bennett household sprung to life, Elizabeth barely managed to shut the book she held in her hands and stand and stare at her sisters for a second. Her heart beating happily for Jane, here he was once more, one more chance at happiness for her beautiful sister who had silently ached for the silly, silly man.

Ribbons flew across the sitting room whilst Mary arranged the chairs and Jane held a laced pink ribbon to herself as her mother approached to tie it. Elizabeth arranged a couple of papers and suddenly she heard Kitty say:

"Look! There's someone with him!" a grimace took over her face as she continued, "Mr. What's-his-name-the-pompous-one-from-the-ball".

Elizabeth felt the wall against her back immediately and for a brief second she felt as if she had fainted but she could feel the scratching paint against her fingertips, she let out a ragged breath as the room continued to move around her. She looked up at her sisters and her mother and tried to will herself into action and for a moment she managed to reach towards of the tables but her hands were shaking so badly that all she managed to do was to tear open a drawer and shove whatever nonsense she found within her reach inside it.

Elizabeth wished she could be elsewhere with all her might and at the same time she wanted to stand
still and just be in his presence. She had missed him, there was no point in denying it any longer, she had dreaded and craved this moment and now, now…she managed to stumble onto her chair and force her hands to straighten her dress as best as she could.

The maid came in.
"Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley m'am".

/--

Despite the gut-wrenching ache that had settled within him, Darcy could not help but spare a small smile and a chuckle at his friend's evident turmoil. He could not deny that he was quite stunned as he saw Bingley literally flee the Bennett sitting room, he had thought that there was no way this visit would not go according to plan…but then again so few things do work out as one wishes them to.

Take Elizabeth, for instance or to be more precise Elizabeth's gaze. Had Darcy known that she would be fixing him in such a manner…Dear Lord, he had no words to describe what those eyes conveyed or what it meant, all he knew was that it was most certainly not expected. This, however, did not mean that it was unwelcome, Darcy knew that he would give anything to have her look at him, and look at him, and then look at him a little more.

Darcy knew he was a fool.

He left, he gave his advice to Bingley and he walked away. He could feel the ache in his chest that tugged at him, at some empty cavity within that could only be filled by the soft touch of Elizabeth's hand against it, and God was he a fool.

Walk away old man, he said to himself, walk away.

His dark boots stood out in contrast against the golden glow of the growing wheat. He extended his hand and it hovered over golden leafs as his feet continued to drag him away from his heart, eve as he imagined he could still feel its residual fluttering inside him. He could not help but be glad about his friend's newfound happiness, and it helped him calm his own aching longing for a while. Then again as he turned towards the house he stood for a while gazing at it, at the place where she had lived, where she grew, where she breathed and bathed and slept. He had been there; he had been there with her. And he tries with all his might to convince himself that he could not have hoped for more.

He imagined her in there with her family, with her new brother, smiling. He imagined her happy and for a moment he felt happy as well, but it was only a moment, he knew was not strong enough, well, not when it came to her. In his mind it was clear that happiness existed only with her beside him, against him, always. He blinked against the sunlight as he tried to ignore the ache in his bones, in his soul if you would call it that.

Since his hasty departure from Pemberley Darcy had done little else but to think of Elizabeth, then again this had been true since their first meeting but on this occasion it was quite different. Her words: 'I do not think it is too late', oh how they had shaken him! How they had shaken him! How they had turned inside his head for nights on end, how he wished he had reached out to her and prevented her from leaving, how he wished they had had more time to explore whatever it was that seemed to exist between them. But was it too late now? Had all his chances been exhausted? Had he failed? He wished for
some sort of clarity or understanding but it seemed he would get none.

But no, he thought to himself, he had not failed or at least not entirely. He had, in a small way, managed to help young Lydia even if she chose to stay married to the shameless scoundrel. Never had Darcy harboured such strong feelings of disgust and naked rage against a person; but this man, this man brought out the very worse of him. How dare he to try to harm yet again that which Darcy held most dear? The man seemed to have a knack for it.

He had given Wickham the money and that was that; the crisis had been averted. The newlyweds had departed and Elizabeth would never truly know what had happened, there was no need for her to know, all that mattered was that she was safe and happy and well. And now, as he marched on and away he thought of the wrong he had managed to correct, of how he had persuaded Bingley to try once more and though the first attempt did not provide the expected result he was certain that the second had worked out magnificently.

The wheat field came to an end and his hand came back to rest lightly beside him, if he turned back he would not be able to see the house, he made a fist and continued to walk on.

*Carry on.*

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Elizabeth felt the other side of the bed dip under her sister's weight; she faked sleep by breathing deeply and keeping her eyes firmly shut. She could feel Jane's eyes on her, expectant, hoping for an explanation on what had happened in the sitting room but Elizabeth would not open her mouth, she kept on breathing slowly. Eventually her sister lay back on the bed and drifted to sleep and Elizabeth did not feel any guilt, after all to keep one more secret from her made no difference at all.

She willed herself to sleep.

The next morning an eerie silence took over the breakfast table of the Bennett household. The servants watched with surprised looks for this was quite the unprecedented occurrence, no giggles from Kitty, no haphazard comments made by Mary, no conversation between Mrs. Bennett and her husband, not a single word exchanged between Jane and Elizabeth. Nothing.

Elizabeth raised her eyes and perused the table slowly, her entire family looked at her but their mouths remained shut; her own gaze remained blank as she regarded her father and he raised a white hairy eyebrow as if asking: *Will you tell us? Will you tell me? Are you well?*

She answered with a slight shake of her head and she went back to her cup of cold and bitter tea. Elizabeth nibbled at her toast for a while and she decided that whatever had transpired between her and Lady Catherine the previous evening should not ruin Jane's happiness at her engagement. Elizabeth would rather break her own hand before being the one to sully her sister's newfound joy.

As she turned her head towards Jane she forced a small smile to her face as she asked:

"So I hear we shall celebrate this wonderful engagement with a glorious ball in Netherfield Park?"

Her eldest sister looked back at her and for a second she could see how Jane was looking for something in her expression, in her eyes, but she found nothing and thus only smiled in that gentle, loving way of hers whilst replying:
"Indeed, Charles promised me quite energetically that everything would be ready within a fortnight".

And Kitty, quite anxious after staying silent for such a prolonged time, asked eagerly:

"Will the militia be coming?"

-/-

Elizabeth stared at her reflection on the mirror and wondered about time and its strange and relative nature. A fortnight had come and gone and here she was, yet again in a large room in Netherfield Park, except this time she was not here to keep her sister company while she convalesced but rather to stand beside her and her future husband with a smile and words of encouragement.

A beautiful white dress lay on the large bed, with the right shoes to match beside it, it had been her sister's engagement present to her and Elizabeth had been unable to hold back a laugh as she explained to Jane that she was to receive the presents, not give them. And her sister had replied with her glowing smile, a long embrace and a whispered: 'Exactly'.

Elizabeth shook her head at the memory as she tied her hair so that it only flowed gracefully over her right collarbone; it was held together by a small plate in the form of a rose that had been adorned with glowing stones, the glowing candlelight reflected on them.

She felt heart beat faster as she descended the stairs to meet her sister and Mr. Bingley at the entrance. It had been a fortnight since she had last seen Mr. Darcy and though Mr. Bingley was not sure of his presence tonight, Elizabeth could not help but feel a slight glimmer of hope and dread at the possibility of seeing him. She was quite at loss on how to act when in his presence, they had long ceased to be acquaintances but they were certainly not friends and for the life of her she could not come up with a word that could describe their present situation. She would have no choice but to wait and see, but if she were to be honest with herself, all the waiting and doubting was carving away at her heart leaving behind a dull ache.

"Lizzie! Mr. and Mrs. Collins have just arrived!" exclaimed her blushing elder sister, "come, come to meet them."

Elizabeth took the hand she had proffered and followed her lithe figure to the door, wishing with all her might she could put all these murky thoughts behind her.

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Darcy had not meant to be late to the ball but then again therein lay the point, he had not been certain if he would be attending the ball until a few second prior. He descended from the carriage and nodded at the driver and as he took the first step towards the entrance of Netherfield Park he was certain he could swear on any God and any Bible that he felt as his heart ascended towards his throat.

He dug his fingernails into his palms and straightened his back, he could hear the music played by the orchestra and the conversation that flowed through some of the open windows and drifted away into the starry night sky. As he crossed the threshold one of the butlers announced his presence and several heads turned in his direction, none of which were of any interest to him, he knew Bingley would be too busy with his guests and his fiancée so he drifted towards the drinks table in the hope of finding himself a fortifying beverage.
As he stepped into the dancing hall he was glad to find his friend dancing with his bride to-be, they looked gloriously happy and Darcy could not help but wonder how he could have ever doubted the love between these two...then again he had been a different man at the time.

How strange was it to be standing in this same room again, yes the decorations, the crowds and even the music had changed but it was the same room. He had stood here and gazed upon the crowd, he had danced with Elizabeth and argued with her and stared at her and...so much more.

It was more than a little overwhelming.

He took a rather large swig of his wine glass.

As Darcy deposited the empty crystal on a passing tray he caught Bingley's eye. The dance had just concluded and his smile got even wider, which Darcy had considered to be impossible, the man grabbed his fiancée's hand and gently dragged her through the multitude towards Darcy. A second later there they stood smiling, glowing and slightly out of breath looking up at him and Darcy could feel as a small smile stretched his lips.

"Old chap!" exclaimed Bingley and he clapped him lightly on the arm, "It is good to see you, we did not know if we were to expect you!"

"I would not have missed it for the world," Darcy said and he placed a gentle hand on his friend's shoulder, "I do hope you will excuse me for the delay."

"Nonsense, my dear man, I see you have had a drink," Bingley waived at one of the men carrying a tray, "I am in grave need of one myself, will you join me?"

Darcy shook his head and extended his left hand towards Ms. Bennett as he bowed his head lightly.

"Ms. Bennett, I would be honoured if you would allow me the next dance."

He did not miss the widening of her eyes and the surprised glance she shared with his friend, however he remained calm and offered a small smile as he awaited her response. She, in turn, smiled widely at him and nodded her head gracefully, with a bow and a curtsy they left Bingley's side and walked towards the dance floor.

As they swayed slowly Darcy felt the need to speak his mind and said:

"I have not congratulated you properly on this happy union."

"Well Mr. Darcy, my sister and I are firm believers of the principle that there is no time like the present."

At her words Darcy looked directly into her eyes and thought he saw a knowing glint, it felt like he had been handed the key to a door and it was up to him to decide whether or not he wanted to open it. She looked directly into his eyes and Darcy noticed that there was only one other woman that had been capable of that feat. And suddenly, as he held Jane Bennett, as they swayed and danced and moved in the room all Darcy could think was Elizabeth, Elizabeth, Elizabeth.

The music halted and he stood in front of Ms. Bennett who gazed directly at him, her clear blue eyes held no judgement but instead they were filled with wisdom. She smiled once more at him and curtssied and suddenly Bingley was besides her, bestowing a small kiss on her blushing cheek. Darcy smiled at them and walked towards a fresh glass of red wine.

*No time like the present.*
Elizabeth loved dancing…She loved it, loved the music, the movement, the crowd around her, the contact, all of it. Elizabeth loved dancing, but right now she could not think of something she would rather do less. Her chest was aching, she wanted to smile and be there for her sister, to share her smiles and her glowing moment but she could not and the guilt was eating away at her.

She had danced a couple of merry melodies with her sister but after a while it had been too much and she excused herself. She fled towards one of the garden doors and took one of the wine glasses that had been proffered by a butler. The night air served as a small comfort as it caressed her skin, she sipped at her drink and then walked away from the mansion and towards one of its massive gardens.

After a few minutes of walking she reached a small wooden bridge, it went over a small flowing river that probably led to one of the lakes in the state. She rested her forearms against the humid woodwork and turned her head towards the large mansion, she could see the glowing torches in the terraces, she could hear the music from the orchestra and the loud chatter of conversation and she knew that she wanted no part of it.

She had not seen Mr. Darcy and had decided that she would rather not see him at all. It would be hard, he was her new brother's closest friend but she would somehow devise a way to avoid him, for his sake and hers as well. Dear Lord, she had hated every word that had come out of Lady Catherine's mouth but could she deny them? Even if she did want Darcy, she knew that his family's name would only be sullied by her family's mistakes. She spared a thought to Georgiana, how could she possibly concede to be Elizabeth's sister knowing of her connection to Wickham's new wife? It was all too complicated, too broken and unnecessary. Surely there would be someone else, someone better, someone…

"Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter! Now what have you to say?"

Nothing.

There was nothing to be said.

"I have been looking for you," a voice uttered behind her.

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Her back stiffened at his words, he saw it. She let out a ragged breath and then he saw how she tried to regain her posture, to will away some of the tension in her shoulders, and she did manage it somehow but he had already seen.

"Ms. Elizabeth", Darcy said as he stepped closer to her, "good evening."

As he stood beside her on the bridge he saw a very small and almost perfunctory smile adorn her face and she uttered his name in reply. They stood together in silence as they gazed into the shifting waters, the slight glow of the moonlight and the firelight adorning its movement.
"Are you well?" he asked after a while.

"Quite well, thank you," was the quick reply.

He gazed at her, her lovely and graceful profile, her neck that seem to call at him; her hair that seem to beg for his fingers to caress and card through it. It was only until she looked back at him that he realised that he had not uttered a single word for quite a while and when he opened his mouth all that came out was:

"I am so very glad to see you…and if I may, I would like to say that you…"

"Please stop."

Darcy was caught off guard by this remark and he cleared his throat as he looked away from Elizabeth's face and tried to excuse himself.

"I apologise, I did not mean to…"

"Stop, please."

Darcy turned his head back as he heard Elizabeth's voice catch in her throat and there, there he saw tears glistening in her lovely brown eyes. Why were there tears there?

"Ms. Elizabeth please tell me what is wrong, has something happened?"

"I said stop!"

She did not shout, it had been uttered in single broken whisper, it had taken her breath away and she was now clutching at her chest and breathing heavily. Darcy reached towards her without thinking and she flinched away from him rapidly.

"Ms. Elizabeth I…"

"You have done enough," was her choked reply, "you have done more than enough, sir"

Darcy stood up straight, his heart pounding wildly in his chest and his mind filled with the turmoil that was his thoughts. He attempted to organise them so that he could attempt some sort of response but Elizabeth's voice continued as she turned to look straight at him.

"I know what you have done," it sounded like an accusation but he decided to wait for the conviction, "And I can barely look you in the eye after all you have done for Lydia and I suspect for Jane as well".

Darcy felt his eyes widen at this, how could she have known? Oh dear, it must have been Lydia, that young girl and her ever chatting mouth, he should have known that the word 'secret' held absolutely no meaning to her. But this was not the time to bristle at young non-present girls, this was the time to finally, finally utter his mind.

"You must know, surely you must know it was all for you," he said with a small smile.

She did not smile back, on the contrary a sad grimace took over her lovely features and Darcy could not help but wish there was a way he could soothe them.

"If it was then I am very, very sorry, Mr. Darcy" she said as she lowered her gaze, "you had no reason to take on such a burden, I do not see why I should deserve such kindness from you."
"How can you- surely you have not…" Darcy was out of words, he had not expected this at all. "Last April I professed my feelings to you and though I am quite aware that they were unwelcome, I must confess that they remain true."

"Please sir, obliterate those feelings and embrace that which had been destined for you long before you knew me," Elizabeth's knuckles turned white on the wooden rail, her shoulders were shaking but her voice remained steady.

Darcy felt genuinely confused, where were these words coming from? What fault had he committed to deserve such a refusal? He found himself at loss yet again, and had no idea as to where to direct the conversation and before he could find a solution Elizabeth's voice carried on:

"Your aunt, sir," she said, "she came to see us on the night of Jane's engagement."

And Darcy's heart froze.

Why would she? How could she? What had she said…?

"You are to be married to her daughter…" Elizabeth added with a shaky voice as she slid one of her arms around her waist, "and at this instance, after all that has occurred, I cannot stand and declare myself worthy."

Darcy could not help bust gasp.

"What!"

"You have done too much and I have nothing to offer in return…" Elizabeth uttered, and it seemed to him that she shrunk into herself, her right hand still held tightly against the wood of the bridge.

He stared, he stared and stared. Dawn was approaching, the voices and music inside the mansion had dulled to a low murmur but he barely noticed them, all he could see was the morning light as it caressed the contours of Elizabeth's figure and all he could hear were her sadly whispered words as they rung inside his head. Oh, but she was perfect. She was everything he needed and wanted and desired and he had no idea how to live life if she was not present. What did his aunt know of happiness or love or trust or intelligence? It did not matter, none of it did, all that mattered to Darcy was this young woman, this strong woman that had been hurt by absurd words and nonsensical judgements.

He took her hand and gently stirred her body towards him, and as she faced him he made sure to be looking straight into her eyes as he said:

"I love you," and he raised her beautiful hand towards his face, he opened the palm to his cheek and laid it there, and to him it felt as if it had found its home, "Elizabeth, we stand here at the place where everything started and all I can say is that I love you."

She gasped and backed away slightly but he held on, he ghosted his lips lightly onto her palm as he turned his gaze once more on hers.

"You are too generous to trifle with my feelings," he said as he smiled softly, "So I beg of you to tell me if you do not feel as I feel, for one word from you will silence me forever."

Darcy took her hand and placed it on his chest, on his beating heart and he smiled at her, suddenly filled with certainty, with the absolutely knowledge that there was no room for hesitation or doubt, this was the time and he had better take hold of it and shape his future as he desired.
"You have made of me a better man," he said as he raised his other hand to caress her soft cheek, "You have me a man deserving of you, and I am so very thankful. And so I ask you now, now at the end and the beginning of all things that matter…if you would have me as your own…"

Elizabeth stared back at him with her lovely lips slightly open, he could feel her hand shaking and so he strengthened his hold lightly in the hope of reassuring her and then as a stroke of courage hit him, he tugged her towards his chest. His right arm held her around the waist and his left one against the lovely skin of her face. He caressed it once, twice, and he thought of the first time he had held her and in his mind all he could think was yes, yes, yes.

He touched her chin lightly and raised her face towards his own, he looked into her eyes, those eyes that had haunted and enchanted him and all he could see there was a desire that reflected his very own feelings. They had been trapped inside their own hearts and minds and now all they needed was a word, a single word that would finally set them free. He grazed his lips against hers in what could not have been called a kiss, and neither was it a caress…it was shared air, and in it their shared hearts and their shared souls. They both held their breath for a second and then he heard Elizabeth whisper brokenly:

"Yes."

End Notes

Well, this was my very first fanfic, it is unbeta'd so all mistakes and typos are mine (do feel free to let me know if something's wrong). I hope you liked these scenes, which in a way comforted me by giving me a chance to create more interactions between Darcy and Elizabeth. Thank you for reading and all feedback is welcome!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!