Out of Love and Duty

by AvengersBarnes

Summary

Lady Anne Darcy gives a young Mr Darcy some advice before she dies. Darcy makes a promise to follow this throughout his life. Follow Darcy as he grows from a young boy to the handsome man we all know and love.

Notes

Welcome to my story. This is also posted on Fanfiction under the same name so if you wish to read more chapters then head on over. I decided to post it here as well because I know some people prefer the formatting here. I must confess I'm a little confused but I'm sure I'll get the hang of it. I hope you enjoy this piece of work and please leave a comment to let me know what you think. There are currently 9 chapters written up (and posted on Fanfiction).

I also have a tumblr account, Hollibella, in which I reblog a fair amount of fanart because I envy anyone who can draw that well. I mainly blog about Sherlock, Dr Who and cute animals. But I follow a whole range of fandoms, including robin hood, merlin, pride and prejudice, Once Upon a Time, Gotham, Castle, Animal blogs and Food blogs. Anyway! I hope you enjoy the story and will continue to enjoy it as I post more chapters. Don't forget to comment/kudos!

Much Love -Hollibella_Short
Darcy's Promise

‘Mrs Reynolds, I believe it is time for me to say my goodbyes to my son’ Anne said to her housekeeper. ‘Please bring Fitzwilliam to me.’ Mrs Reynolds nodded and curtsied to the older woman before leaving the room.

Lady Anne Darcy had been growing weaker every day since young Georgiana had been born and it was clear that she would not be on Earth very much longer. Mrs Reynolds held back the tears that threatened to fall as her gentle mistress lay on her death bed and went to find young Master Darcy. After searching the house, the boy was eventually found in the woods within the grounds of Pemberley. He was playing with the steward’s son, George. The pair were duelling with sticks they had found lying around and Mrs Reynolds quickly saw that Master Darcy had the upper hand.

She sighed and called Fitzwilliam from his game to inform him that his mother requested his presence in her room. The young boy’s face fell, he was a bright lad and knew his mother was dying, he understood why she wanted to see him. Master Darcy dropped his makeshift weapon and ran towards the great house. Mrs Reynolds followed sombrely hoping that Lady Darcy was wrong and that this would not be the last time Fitzwilliam would see his mother. Behind her, George stood with the wooden stick he called his sword, glaring after his playmate, it was not fair that Fitzwilliam should get to see Lady Darcy and he did not.

Fitzwilliam ran into his mother’s room. His mind was racing. She can’t die, I can’t lose my mother. When he reached her bedside he saw how weak she had become in the last day, the deterioration of her condition had excelled greatly. Tears started rolling down his cheek. ‘Mother, you wished to see me?’ his voice cracked as he spoke.

‘Fitzwilliam, my sweet boy, I’m so happy to see you.’ She smiled weakly at her son and took his hand in hers. ‘Now, William, I have to tell you something of the utmost importance. I had wished to discuss this with you when you came of age but I think we both know that will not be possible.’ She stopped here to stroke her son’s hair trying to provide some comfort.

‘You will live Mama, we must just think positively.’ But even as Fitzwilliam said this he knew that no amount of positive thinking could save his mother from her ailment. He looked into his mother’s eyes, trying to remember the shape and colour and as she spoke he took care to remember the soft sound of her voice.

‘William you know better than that, we must prepare ourselves for the worst. But know this my son, I will always be watching over you and guiding you towards the right path.’ She reached up and kissed his forehead gently. ‘I asked you to come here for I have one last piece of advice to impart on you before I leave this life. Come now Fitzwilliam, I have made peace with my fate, as must you.’

‘But Mama…’ he cried desperately as the time of her death drew closer by the second.

‘No buts William, you must look after your father and sister, make sure she knows me. But now we must speak of love.’ Her green eyes softened at the last word as she thought of her husband, George Darcy.

‘Love Mama?’ The young boy hung on every word his mother said, knowing he would not hear her speak again soon.

‘Yes, my son, Love. You must know that when you were born and your cousin Anne was born
that your Aunt Catherine and I often talked of you marrying when you came of age.’ Here Fitzwilliam’s eyes widened in shock and slight fear at thought of marrying his sickly cousin Anne. *Surely Mother does not think I could ever love her, she doesn’t even talk!* He thought to himself. ‘However, now that you are slightly older I don’t believe you could ever be happy with her’ She chuckled weakly at the relief on her son’s face and squeezed his hand comfortably.

‘No Mama, I think you are right’ he agreed, smiling at his mother’s laughter and wiping some of the tears that were running down his cheek.

‘I believe that your Aunt won’t be as understanding though William. My sister married for money you see, and I married for love. However, I was fortunate that I didn’t have to choose between money and love. But you must know that I would have married your father even if he hadn’t had a single penny to his name. Do you understand that William?’ Fitzwilliam nodded, he thought he understood what his mother was saying. ‘I am glad. Now William you were born out of love, and look at you now. You are a strong, handsome and intelligent young lad and I’m sure you will continue growing after I am gone. Your cousin Anne was born out of duty. Catherine didn’t love her husband and only bore him a child because she believed strongly in doing her duty to her husband. Once the child was born she believed she had done her duty and therefore they never had more children. It is my belief that Anne is such a sickly child for she was not born of love. Love is the key to happy marriage and strong children William. Do not be swayed by your aunt to marry Anne for duty, no good will come of it my son. Your father and I love each other very much and we have been happy in life. I only wish the same for you.’ As her speech went on her voice got weaker and the fire in her eyes faded fast but she found the strength to finish her final advice to her son. Fitzwilliam listened to every word and held her hand tight, hoping with all his being that if he held it tight enough that she would not leave him. ‘Marry for love, my son’ she whispered quietly as she took her final breath.

‘I promise Mama’ he said as all light left her eyes. He sat next his mother crying and praying to God to let her live but she never woke again.
In Heart and Soul

Chapter Summary

Young Fitzwilliam Darcy holds his sister for the first time and Pemberley is thrown into a shadow of grief.

Chapter Notes

There is no time-lapse between this chapter and the last, However as we see Darcy grow older there will be some jumps in time and age. Sorry this chapter is so short. They do get longer in length. I promise. Please comment and let me know what you think :) - Hollibella_Short

Fitzwilliam stayed at his mother’s side crying and praying until he was found by Mrs Reynolds. The young boy had been in his mother’s room for an hour before she went to check that both mother and son were well. When she entered the room Fitzwilliam startled and looked at her, his eyes glistening with fresh tears. He implored her to understand the situation with his eyes, not wishing to admit his mother’s death out loud.

‘Come now Master Darcy, let us leave your mother in peace’ she said gently to the grieving boy and with that led him from the room, telling the nearest servant to fetch Mr Darcy.

As Fitzwilliam sat in his room he clutched onto the blanket he had had since he was a baby. The blanket was now small compared to the boy and could provide little warmth, it was delicate and made of a soft white fleece onto which his mother had stitch his initials F.D in a deep blue thread. Fitzwilliam had watched his mother stitch a similar blanket for his baby sister Georgiana before she had grown too weak to sit up in bed. He closed his eyes and pictured the smile on her face as she lovingly stitched G.D onto the soft fabric. Her hands had held the fabric so delicately and every stitch had almost caressed the fabric, like the way she would stroke his cheek before saying goodnight. Fitzwilliam sighed sadly; he would miss his mother greatly. *If only she hadn’t had Georgiana then she would be alive.* The young boy shook his head and tried to forget that line of thought. His mother had been so happy to hold his sister and Fitzwilliam knew that she had gladly given her life for that of the new-born. Even so he found it difficult to forget that it was Georgiana’s fault that his mother was gone.

There was gentle knock on the door, before his father, Mr Darcy, entered the room. Fitzwilliam could see his father too had been crying and the happiness that once sparkled in his father’s eyes had gone. Silently the elder man crossed the room and embraced his son. Neither father nor son cried during this embrace, nor was any word spoken between them but both were comforted as they shared their grief for the loss of Lady Anne Darcy.

After what seemed like a lifetime to young Darcy his father pulled away and looked him in his eyes.

‘How will I survive this William?’ he asked desperately. Fitzwilliam knew in that moment that his
father was a broken man. He was no longer the strong and light-hearted man that Fitzwilliam had always known as his father. His heart had broken the moment his mother’s soul left her body and Fitzwilliam doubted that his father would ever be the same. I must be the strong one now. Young Darcy felt obliged to follow through with this thought, after all his mother had asked him to look after his father and the baby.

‘We shall survive this together Papa’ he said trying not to let his voice crack as he spoke.

‘I cannot even look at the child William, she has her eyes. I do not see the beautiful baby girl that I saw when I was first given her to hold. I see your mother, cold and lying in her bed’ Fitzwilliam’s father began sobbing again as he thought about his now dead wife. To young Darcy, seeing his father’s grief was almost unbearable but he drew comfort in the obvious truth that his father did love his mother greatly. The words true love flitted through his mind.

‘Papa, Mama gave her life for Georgiana, we must honour her death by loving the baby and raising her to be a woman Mama would be proud of.’ Even as young Darcy said these words he felt his heart warm, he took it to be his Mother confirming that this was indeed the right thing to do. He smiled, comforted that he could still feel her soul guiding his heart towards the path of good. Unfortunately, his words of wisdom fell upon deaf ears as his father was so far gone into his grief that nothing could ease his aching heart. Very well, I shall honour Mama myself; Georgiana will have the best big brother she could ever ask for.

Young Darcy left his room and headed in the direction of the nursery, as he entered he saw the beautiful and intricate wooden cradle that he himself had slept in as a young boy. He quietly approached the cradle and nervously peered over the top. His eyes met with a pair of soft yet sparkling green eyes, his mother’s eyes like his father had said. However, unlike Darcy senior, Fitzwilliam felt a surge of happiness as he realised the similarity. To him Georgiana was not a painful reminder of his late mother, but a celebration of her life. A piece of his mother lay within the young baby’s heart and Fitzwilliam would treasure that, not abandon it like his father. Georgiana giggled in her cot and reached up to the future master of Pemberley. He was enchanted by the young baby in the cradle and in that moment he knew he could not resent her for the death of his mother any longer.

Fitzwilliam called for the wet nurse and asked her if she could show him how to hold the infant. For how could he care for her if he could not even hold her? Sarah, the wet nurse, smiled hopefully at the young boy and agreed to show him. Soon Fitzwilliam was holding young Georgiana in his arms, under the supervision of Sarah, supporting her head carefully and telling her the same stories his mother told him as a boy.

As Sarah watched Master Darcy cooing over his baby sister who swiftly fell asleep in his arms, she smiled. This was a ray of hope breaking through the darkness that had swept over the halls of Pemberley.
As the years passed young Fitzwilliam Darcy grew to a fine man. He did everything he could to be a loving brother, and at times a father to his sister, Georgiana. In turn the young girl loved him dearly. As the young girl grew older she grew to be more and more like her late mother, she loved everyone she met, trusted them within seconds of making their acquaintance. She had the same spritely laugh as her mother and the golden locks of hair that fell down her shoulders reminded Mr Darcy of his wife so painfully that he grew more distant to the child each day. He had been known to retreat to his room for days if he caught the eyes of his youngest daughter, the soft green eyes that were so full of life; the eyes that belonged to his wife.

Georgiana spent many an hour sitting in the gallery staring at the portrait of her mother. At just ten years of age Georgiana could not comprehend why her father despised her so much. He’d rather spend a day teaching that Wickham boy to fish than spend a little time with her to read her a story. She giggled to herself quietly, that George Wickham was funny and he didn’t care if she paddled in the pond in just her petticoat. Fitzwilliam would never allow it, she thought to herself. However, she knew he always did what he thought was right for her, he did read to her which was more than her Father. Georgiana sighed and stared longingly at her mother’s portrait, how she longed to have a mother or a sister. She needed someone who would help her to know what clothes to dress her doll in, or attend her tea parties. She needed someone like her, a girl. She clutched the small blanket, with the letters G.D embroidered on it in a delicate pink thread. The blanket was the only thing she had from her mother and she never left it anywhere. When she had it with her she knew that the beautiful lady in the portrait was watching over her.

‘Georgie,’ a voice said softly from the door way. She looked up to see her brother leaning on the frame. She ran to him and hugged him around the waist, for she could not reach any higher.

‘Brother!’ she smiled up at him brightly. Fitzwilliam smiled back, she may have their mother’s eyes and blonde hair but her smile was his father’s; except his father never smiled anymore.

Fitzwilliam had just come from a meeting with his father in his study. Mr Darcy had wanted to teach his son more about running an estate, especially one so grand such as Pemberley. They had spent at least two hours going through finances, repairs, lists of tenants and the condition of the animals and crops on the Darcy’s farm nearby. His father had tested Fitzwilliam’s knowledge of
the estate and its affairs, correcting him and praising his efforts. Fitzwilliam had pleasantly surprised his father when he had named all the servants, both from the house and grounds; this was impressive due to the large quantity. After, they had talked extensively about Pemberley affairs, Darcy’s father had then questioned him on his schooling and where he wished to study at university. After much discussion about his education Fitzwilliam was dismissed. As he left his father’s study he passed his good friend George. Fitzwilliam nodded briefly before going in search of his sister. As he left George gave a low bow in his direction, then smirked before entering the old man’s study. *I will be just as much a gentleman as you one day Fitzwilliam.*

When Fitzwilliam found Georgiana in the gallery he smiled softly. Even though his sister never knew their mother she was just as fond of her as he was. He’d often heard her prayers at night as he passed by her room. They were not directed to God as maybe they should have been, but to her mother, an angel of God. She prayed, like he did, for his father to be well again, for the Master of Pemberley to smile as he once knew how to and for him to forgive the young girl for their mother’s death. But something that Georgiana prayed to her mother for, that Fitzwilliam did not know of, was that he find a kind and loving wife. She should be someone whom he loved, and loved him in return, someone who could the in turn love her as a sister. She so craved a female companion and she longed to see this love that she had heard so much about in stories. She knew her father had loved her mother deeply, Fitzwilliam often told her stories of when he was young, and even to the young girl it was clear that her father suffered from a broken heart. She made a pledge to herself and to her angel mother that if William was to ever fall in love that she, Georgiana, would do everything in her power to make the girl fall in love with him too. It would be a fairy-tale ending just like in her stories.

‘Tell me about Mama and Papa again brother.’ She pleaded, her green eyes widened as she looked him in the eyes; a look she knew he could not resist. Young Darcy chuckled at his sister, he had told her the stories more times than he could count but she never grew tired of hearing about her mother, especially stories that also involved her father. The stories were the only way she could feel close to their father. He frowned briefly at that, the one thing he could never do for his younger sibling was get their father to love her. ‘Please William!’ she whined, misinterpreting his frown for meaning he was not going to tell the story.

‘Very well Georgie.’ He launched into the story, telling her of how his parents would go for long walks in the grounds, ‘Mama would always pack the picnic basket herself, she said the sandwiches had to be made with love.’ He told her of how, sometimes, they would invite him to join them on the walks, and they would all sit under the shade of the great oak tree in the grounds by the streams. ‘Mama would always take her shoes off and walk barefoot in the shallow water, and sometimes tiny fish would swim past her toes and she would laugh so brightly, like the angels themselves were sharing her enjoyment. She laughed just like you Georgie, it is so comforting to hear you laugh,’ he smiled widely, but his sister suddenly saddened. She had been so entranced by the story so far, laughing and smiling the whole time, like she’d never heard it before. Fitzwilliam was instantly worried for his sister, had he said something out of line. He could not think of anything. He was so busy trying to think of what may have upset his young sister that he doted on so dearly that he started when her soft voice, laced with sadness, interrupted his thoughts.

‘Papa doesn’t think so.’ Her eyes were cast down as she said this, her fingers subconsciously tracing the letters on her blanket. ‘Why does Papa not love me William?’ She looked up her eyes silently pleading for an answer as tear threatened to fall.

Young Darcy faltered, he knew his father’s reasons as to why he didn’t love the beautiful young girl, but Fitzwilliam could not justify them. They were selfish reasons, and Georgiana would not understand his father’s depression and anguish as a result of a broken heart. *I hope she will never have to suffer from the same ailment; I cannot lose my father and my sister to heartbreak.* Not being able to admit to his father’s selfish follies, William drew his sister into a tight hug. He hoped
that this would give her some comfort, knowing that he loved her even if his father did not. But what would he do once he went to university, his sister would have no one to love her as she so deserved.

Fitzwilliam sighed as he hugged his sobbing sister and prayed silently to his mother. He prayed that she watched over Georgiana when he left and that she may find someone to help comfort her in times of need. He prayed that all the angels in heaven could mend his broken family.
A Flash of Red Hair

Chapter Summary

Darcy enters his final year at Cambridge

Chapter Notes

Hope you've been enjoying this so far :) Please kudos/comment :) Don't forget you can view the up to chapter 9 on fanfiction.net :) - Hollibella_Short

Fitzwilliam sighed as he loaded his trunks onto the carriage, or rather as he watched the footman load his trunks. The last two years had been difficult. He had started his final stage of his gentleman’s education at Cambridge University and the following year George Wickham had joined him thanks to the funding of his father. The childhood friends had grown more estranged in Fitzwilliam’s second year of Cambridge than ever before. George had been acting aloof with young Darcy for a few years now. Darcy assumed that this was due to the lessons he had with his father about running an estate and the natural respect he gained from the servants and tenants in Lambton.

When George arrived at Cambridge, he had expected to be treated as an equal to Darcy; after all they had been childhood friends as long as he could remember. They were also both funded by the Darcy family fortune. In Wickham’s mind, they were equal in society; he was even getting a gentleman’s education at the top university. However, upon arrival George knew instantly that he would not be as respected as Fitzwilliam. The other boys called him Darcy, or even Mr Darcy, whilst they often just called him George. So George quickly learnt to charm his way into his peers’ friendships, and into the beds of their sisters.

Fitzwilliam had tried to mend his friendship with George; he remembered their games and follies as children very dearly. He had tried that is until George had started using their friendship to gain money. Fitzwilliam used his high status and respectability among his fellow students to work out the reasons as to why George was burning through his allowance, as well as the extra money he himself had given him. He soon discovered that George Wickham was a gambler, and not a very proficient one at that. He had soon gotten himself into debts among the local shop and inn keepers as well as amongst his fellow students. Fitzwilliam covered George’s debts, he knew it would break his father’s heart to learn the truth about the man he loved like a son, but he kept his association with Wickham to a minimum. Now, as the pair travelled back to Cambridgeshire, Darcy wondered what his final year would be like. His goodbye with Georgiana had been emotional, he always hated to leave her behind when he travelled to Cambridge but it was a great comfort to him that he had managed to persuade his father to hire for her a governess and companion, Mrs Young.

When Wickham and Mr Darcy arrived at the familiar site of the great buildings in Cambridge, the tension that had been present throughout the long carriage ride disappeared. It faded as a sense of excitement and anticipation filled its place. Darcy was excited by the prospect of finally graduating and leaving his education behind, allowing him to stay with his sister more frequently and for
longer periods of time. George, in contrast, was keen to discover what new pleasures he could find this year in the grand halls and bedchambers of Cambridge. He chuckled to himself darkly as he thought of his last conquest; she had been a pretty naïve young girl. Most importantly however, her brother had completely cleared Wickham of all the money he possessed, including the pocket watch that old Mr Darcy had given him on his eighteenth birthday. When Fitzwilliam gave him an inquisitive look, as to why he had laughed out loud all of a sudden, he responded ‘I am merely excited about the prospects of a new year.’ Darcy nodded, accepting this explanation then turned again towards the window.

As the boys were heading towards their rooms, a flash of red hair collided with Mr Darcy sending a pile of books flying down the corridor and knocking a young boy off his feet. Darcy, being a gentleman, helped the boy off the floor and began to pick up the scattered books.

‘I am extremely sorry sir, I was not looking where I was going one bit. I must confess I am lost you see, I was trying to find my way and did not see you until, well until I crashed straight into you!’ the ginger boy exclaimed. ‘Here let me help you with those!’

‘That’s quite alright,’ Darcy hesitated, unsure of what to call this youth.

‘Bingley! Charles Bingley!’ the boy shook Darcy’s free hand vigorously, excited about making a new acquaintance. Darcy was taken-back by Bingley enthusiasm. Fitzwilliam had not been addressed so informally by a stranger since he was a young boy of sixteen. However, he found Bingley’s excitement and enthusiastic energy infectious; he only wished he could be so carefree and easy around strangers himself.

‘Mr Darcy of Pemberley, in Derbyshire.’ He returned Bingley’s handshake and gave a small smile, he could not help it when the boy in front of him was almost bouncing off the walls with excitement. ‘Do you need some help in finding your room Mr Bingley?’ He remembered his first day at Cambridge; it had taken many second and third years to help him find his way around, and he was happy to finally repay the favour as he had always been too shy in the past. He looked around for George but found that he had already left the corridor.

As he walked he smiled, hoping that he could one day learn to talk with the same ease that Bingley had. Maybe he could befriend the boy, he seemed a nice chap and Darcy was convinced he could not hurt a fly. Darcy had always prided himself on being able to read people well. Being shy he preferred to stand back and watch the socialisation of others rather than participate and through this had learnt to get to know people through observation rather than conversation. So he believed that this Bingley fellow would make a fine friend. He could tell that the young man was new to his wealth, he lacked the refinement of a man who had been groomed all his life to run an estate, but his clothes were stylish and of fine cut. Darcy decided he would take the young red head under his wing, helping to tutor him in becoming a fine gentleman, whilst hopefully
becoming more adept at conversation and the ease of manners that charmed so many people. *Then again, I never learnt the skill of charm from George, maybe I am a hopeless case.* Darcy sighed, at his situation. He may be rich and wealthy, but he had heard the whispers in the halls. He is proud, they say. He is cold, they say. He thinks he is so superior to all of us, they say. Not one person in Cambridge understood that he was just painfully shy and had no idea as to what to say to the many extrovert young gentlemen around him. Darcy sat on his bed in despair. *How am I ever going to find love if I cannot even find a friend?*
The wind rushed past Darcy’s ears, sweeping the soft brown curls on his hair back off his face. If the young man had been wearing a hat it surely would have flown off his head. The adrenaline was pumping through his veins as his spurred his horse on faster. There were few things in life that Darcy enjoyed more than riding fast through the English countryside. In fact, the only thing Darcy could think of that he enjoyed more, was listening to Georgiana play on the pianoforte. He smiled to himself and thought about his dear sister knowing that every second he was flying closer to her. He could not wait to see her face when he surprised her at Ramsgate.

She had been begging him to let her see the coast for years. He had told a story about how their mother and father had taken him down to the coast when he just five years of age. Ever since he had told her about it she had been asking every year to visit, but their father had always refused to leave the halls of Pemberley. It was Fitzwilliam’s earliest memory and he often looked back on it fondly. He remembered the sheer delight and overwhelming wonder he had felt when he first set eyes on the great ocean. It had been a beautiful bright day and the sunlight was sparkling off the water deep into the horizon. He had broken away from his parents as soon as the carriage had stopped; he and George had run down to the beach together and swiftly taken their shoes and socks off. The sand tickled beneath his toes and he wiggled them in delight; burying his feet into the golden sand. George had called him to get his attention and dared him to get his feet wet. Both boys ran towards the water, only to be chased back by a breaking wave. Oh they had laughed and splashed about. Lady Darcy had scolded them for going into the water before she and her husband had reached the beach as neither boy were strong swimmers at that time. Later on that day they had all walked along the pier whilst eating fresh ice-cream and watching the sunset before heading back to the inn where they had stayed.

Darcy loved that memory. George had still been an innocent young boy, friendly and charming but without his dark side; his lust for money and women. His mother too had been healthy and full of life; her laugh was heard often chiming out over the ocean waves whilst her husband smiled lovingly at her. His father had been happy then. Fitzwilliam sighed. Last year his father, George Darcy, has passed away. Fitzwilliam was now sole owner of the great Pemberley estate and co-guardian of his young sister, who was now the tender age of fifteen. His cousin Richard had been of vast help to the young Master of Pemberley. He was an officer in the army, just starting his career, but he was always cheerful and humorous; something that Darcy struggled with during the mourning period. Richard had been able to lift the spirits of both the Darcy siblings and reminded
them that his father had not been happy on earth whilst his wife had lived up above with God. This had been of great comfort to Fitzwilliam and his sister; knowing that their parents were finally reunited and their father no longer suffered from a broken heart.

Darcy smiled as the familiar coastline of Ramsgate came into view and the ocean once again sparkled as rays of sunlight bounced off the ever-changing surface. It was just as he remembered. He wished he’d be able to share his sister’s joy as she first saw the brilliance of the great body of water below but, at the last minute, he’d been called to London by most urgent business. Not wanting to disappoint his sister he had allowed her to take the trip without him but assured that she would be joined by her governess and companion, Mrs Young. He had told her that he would join her in a couple of weeks into her visit but, as luck would have it, he had been able to finish off in London faster than he had ever anticipated and was now eager to surprise the younger sister he doted on so much.

He dismounted from his horse, Hermes, and led the beast down to the beach. The pair walked a while, before Darcy stopped to remove his socks and shoes as he had done as a child. He relished at the feel of the sand between his toes whilst he faced towards the sun, his eyes closed as he basked in the evening warmth. He inhaled the soft salty air that he remembered so vividly from his childhood and smiled gently to himself. He wondered if he would ever watch his own children running down towards the beach with his wife stood proudly by his side. Fitzwilliam had tried to be open minded about his choice of a wife; he knew the only criteria he had of his potential lifelong companion was her heart and to be able to give his to her in return. Why is that so difficult to find?

Darcy had spent three seasons in town with Charles Bingley and whilst his friend found love in every pretty pair of eyes he laid eyes on, Darcy just had not made a connection to any women he had met there; much to their despair. He was convinced that every female in London was determined to make themselves the Mistress of Pemberley, and he was probably right. The problem was that he wanted more than a pretty face that could throw the party of the season, or play pianoforte with more skill than any other. He wanted more than thirty thousand pounds of dowry to add to his vast fortune. He wanted love. His parents had found it and he would not settle for anything less. But each and every lady had just batted their eyes, talked of accomplishments and agreed with every word he said, even if what he said contradicted something they had just said! It was hopeless. Unfortunately, Charles sister, Caroline Bingley, was such a woman and even more unfortunate was that she just would not leave him be. However, Darcy was a gentleman and was determined to be civil to the leach, for that is the only way he could describe her, so he put up with her more than obvious attempts to woo him, for the sake of his friend. If only there was a woman out there who did not care about wealth and society. He laughed at this thought as the only female he could think of was his sister; such cruel irony. Of course, he did not love his sister in any way more than a brother or father would, but she did at least understand the ridiculous nature of the ton. The constant flattery and simpering was simply unbearable. No, I will not find love in town, of this I am certain.

‘William!’ Georgiana’s shout snapped him out of his reverie. He looked up to her running towards him with a wide grin on her face. She threw her arms around him and the two siblings embraced each other on the sandy beach. ‘Oh William, I am so glad to see you!’ He noted that her eyes were sparkling, much like the water in the sunlight.

‘Georgie,’ he spoke softly ‘I have missed you.’

‘And I you, brother, but I have the most wonderful news!’ she let out a giggle after this, not like her usual charming laugh that so reminded Darcy of their mother. He looked at his sister, trying to work out what she could possibly mean. He suddenly noticed that Mrs Young was not nearby, panicked he began to such for the elder lady.
‘Where is your governess Georgiana?’ He said frantically, surely she was not out on the beach alone, especially at this time in the evening and in a town she was not familiar with!

‘She stayed at the inn William. Did you not hear what I said?’ She looked disappointed at his lack of reaction to her good news.

‘Stayed at the Inn!’ he roared, quickly regretting his outburst as his sister looked ready to runaway crying. He hugged her again and kissed her forehead gently. ‘I’m sorry Georgie. I am merely concerned for your safety. You could have been kidnapped, or compromised! Your reputation ruined Georgie. You know that men will take advantage of your wealth and young age. Mrs Young should never have left you alone out here.’

‘Fitzwilliam Darcy, do you not trust me? I would never allow a man to take liberties. And anyway dear George would never allow any harm to come to me.’ Her eyes softened as she spoke his name, and Darcy was reminded of how his mother used to speak of his father; with absolute love and devotion. Then it clicked. He suddenly realised what his young sister had said. *George, who on earth is George!* He did not realise he spoke this thought out-loud.

‘George Wickham brother, you remember him of course.’ As Georgiana spoke he felt the blood drain from his face. What was that rake doing here, in Ramsgate, and with his sister of all people!

‘Wickham?’ He said, alarmed to the situation. ‘You’ve seen him here?’

‘Of course brother, he and I are engaged.’ She giggled again.

‘Engaged! Why did you not write to me? Georgiana what foul lies has he told you?’ Fitzwilliam was angry; very angry. George Wickham, the same George Wickham that had ruined the sisters of so many of his fellow students at Cambridge, was here with Georgiana! As he said this, he noticed a tall young man walking over to where he stood with Georgiana. As the figure came closer, Fitzwilliam recognized him to be his estranged childhood friend.

‘Is something the matter my love?’ he said in soft, seductive way. His eyes trailed over the young girl’s body as they darkened with lust.

‘Not at all George, I was telling my brother of our engagement.’ She sighed and looked at him, all doe-eyed and her cheeks flushed and slight pink.

‘But Georgie,’ He spoke in a quiet tone and Fitzwilliam could barely make out the words. ‘We agreed not to tell anyone until we are married.’ He brought his hand up to her cheek and stroked it gently.

‘George Wickham, you will accompany me back to my room at the inn. Immediately!’ He took the man’s arm and dragged him quite forcefully off the beach, handing his Hermes’ reins to a stable boy at the inn. Georgiana ran after the two men frightfully, she could not understand why her brother was so cross with dear George.

Once they had reached his room Fitzwilliam told Georgiana to wait outside with Mrs Young; he also asked one of the staff at the inn to stay with them for he no longer trusted the governess. He slammed the door shut and turned to confront his old friend.

‘You marry her, George, and you won’t get a single penny of her fortune. I shall make sure of it!’ He felt his cheeks flush with sheer anger at the cad in front of him. ‘Of course,’ he continued in a lower tone ‘if you love her like she seems to think you do, that won’t be a problem.’ He looked Wickham right in the eyes angrily, hoping to frighten and intimidate the younger man whilst gaging his reaction. What Wickham said next was not a surprise to Fitzwilliam, but difficult to
‘You owe me her fortune after you denied me the living promised to me by our father.’ He said, sneering at Darcy, clearly implying that old Mr Darcy had been unfaithful to his wife.

‘He was not your father!’ Darcy roared, furious at the idea of his father having an affair with this disgusting man’s mother.

‘Why do you think he loved me so much eh Darce? You aren’t the only Darcy heir.’ Darcy barely refrained from knocking Wickham unconscious after this insult to his father. However, he was able to contain himself and paused to gather his thoughts, aware that George was trying to get a rise out of him.

‘My father was the best man that ever lived, and you will not sully his name. In regards to the living, I gave you three thousand pounds to compensate after you rejected the role. What you did with the money is and was never my concern. I fulfilled my father’s wishes, unlike you.’ George was taken aback by Darcy’s calm reply, when had the shy boy become so, so formidable. He knew he had lost the upper hand, if indeed he had ever had it, so he started to back out of the study. ‘And, Mr Wickham, if you dare come near Georgiana again, I swear to God you will not live to see another day.’ His voice was deep and threatening’ his whole persona changed and was overridden by a darker being. No one would want to encounter him in a dark alley in his current state, and for good reason.

‘I’m sorry for taking up so much of your time, Mr Darcy. Send my regards to your sister. I shall bother you no more.’ And with that, Wickham ran from the study, nodding to Georgiana as he went past. He stole a horse from the stables and fled the county as fast as the steed could carry him.

Georgiana was confused as she entered her brother’s room. Why did he leave so quickly? And without even saying goodbye to me, Perhaps he went ahead to prepare for the wedding.

‘Brother, what is going on?’ Her heart was pounding and her whole chest began to ache; tears had started to well in her eyes. ‘Why has he left?’

Fitzwilliam heard the heartbreak in his sister’s voice and sighed. He had failed her. He had broken his promise to never allow her to suffer like their father. ‘He did not love you Georgie.’ He could not think of how to soften the blow to her heart.

‘He loved me William! He told me he loved me!’ She said frantically, tears now falling freely down her cheek, but even as she spoke the words she knew they were not true. How could I be so stupid!

‘He loved your money,’ he said softly, he moved so he could hold his sister. He had to try and comfort her and her heart bled from the wounds that rake had inflicted. ‘And I am truly sorry sister, but he was using you to get back at me. You were his revenge.’ He said sadly as her body began to shake violently as her crying increased. ‘He never forgave me for denying him the living at the church. Nor do I think he ever forgave me for being the son of our father. He hated his situation in life, especially as he had grown up in my shadow. He had tasted the life of the gentry, and he could not accept that he was not part of it. He wanted to be me, he wanted my life. He knew you are my only close family Georgie. He knew the best way to hurt me is through you. I am truly, truly sorry that you had to be hurt in his sick plan for revenge. You never deserved this Georgie.’ By the end of this speech both Darcy siblings were in tears. Darcy began to hate himself for not protecting his sister and she began to hate herself for not seeing through Wickham’s lies, and so the siblings began to build a wall around them. He would not let anyone hurt his sister again and she closed off her heart to the world.
Lady Anne Darcy watched her children, nestled in the arms of her husband. She knew that it would take someone very special to break down this wall they had created. She only hoped that she could guide her son to the right person in time.
Darcy looked out of the window as he thought about the events of the last year. Since that fateful day at Ramsgate, he had noticed a great change in both Georgiana and himself, and not for the better. They were both naturally shy people, each preferring the company of a book to a person. Georgiana, now 16, had thrown herself into her studies. She barely spoke to anyone save Darcy and Mrs Reynolds. Her new governess, Mrs Annesley, had struggled to get any response out of the girl unless it regarded her lessons. Darcy, similarly to Georgiana, had focused immensely on his estate and tenants. He had skipped the season in London in favour of staying home to watch over Georgiana. It would not have made any difference to the ton even if he had been there, as he had decided long ago that he would not find a wife there and he found no pleasure in dancing. It had been Darcy’s wish to stay with Georgiana until she was old enough to be introduced into society, and then he would join her in London for the season. However, Charles Bingley had written to him a few weeks back. Charles was considering buying a property in the country for he tired of being in London all year round and longed for the country air. So, he had asked for Darcy’s assistance in choosing and managing the estate for as long as Darcy was able to be away from Pemberley. Darcy had been reluctant to go whilst leaving Georgiana behind but she was a bright girl and reasoned with him that perhaps they could both do with a change of scenery since neither of them had spent much time away from the great estate in Derbyshire. And so Fitzwilliam Darcy found himself staring wearily out of the library window of Bingley’s chosen estate; Netherfield.

Darcy had taken to the library as sanctuary from two things; first and foremost was Caroline Bingley. He just could not get away from that woman and her constant simpering and fawning over the most trivial things that he did. The second reason for Darcy’s hiding in the library was the neighbours. They had all decided to visit and Darcy, not being a great socialite, had quickly retreated. He had, however, watched the neighbours all arrive through the window and was able to gather first impressions of the neighbourhood. It was similar to Derbyshire, the gentry mostly consisted of gentleman farmers with the exception of one man who seemed to have more class than the other men; he was shorter but held himself with more pride and grace. Despite lacking the refinement that was found in the people of the first circles of London, Darcy felt as if these country folk had more spirit and personality than anyone he had met in the ton. He found this to be quite refreshing. Although this was not enough to prevent him wishing that he was back at Pemberley with his dear sister. He missed her terribly already and spent most of his time worrying about her. She had gone to Bath with Mrs Annesley, and whilst there she was to learn more about the Romans and spend time relaxing at the baths. He knew that Mrs Annesley was nothing like her former governess, Mrs Young, and that Georgiana would be quite safe with her but he could
not help but be concerned for her welfare.

‘Oh Mr Darcy!’ A shrill voice exclaimed ‘This is where you have been hiding. Not that I blame you of course, the society here is nothing compared to the elegance and grace of London. Would you not agree Mr Darcy?’ Darcy grimaced, he had not heard the library door open and was unwilling to stay in Miss Bingley’s presence for long.

‘Indeed.’ He nodded and then bowed shallowly to the lady. ‘Now if you will excuse me, the weather is quite lovely and I wish to stretch my legs in the gardens’

‘Mr Darcy, you are quite right. One cannot be found inside on a day like today. I shall join you on your turn in the garden.’ She grasped onto his arm and went to walk with him out of the library.

‘Miss Bingley, you misunderstand my meaning. Let me clarify for you, I wish to take a ride. Hermes has become most restless after spending this week in the stables. Good day Miss Bingley.’ He removed his arm from her grasp and heading swiftly towards the stables. He heard her begin to follow him so he increased his pace knowing that she would have to break into a run to catch up and Miss Caroline Bingley did not run.

When he reached the stables he helped Peter, the stable boy, saddle his horse quickly before galloping out into the Hertfordshire country side. He was safe from the leech at last. He loved feeling the wind on his face as he rode and he enjoyed his new surroundings. He was reminded of the days when he could easily get lost in the grounds of Pemberley. These unknown woods and fields were nothing to the vast grounds of Pemberley of course, but they were still new to him and consequently just as pleasant to explore. When he had been riding for a good ten minutes through the woods around Netherfield, the trees broke into a clearing and he almost knocked someone flying but thankfully she was able to avoid the flying horse. Darcy pulled hard on the reins and managed to stop Hermes. He quickly dismounted, hitting the ground with soft thud.

‘Please excuse miss, I did not see you. Are you alright?’ He flushed red at his embarrassment of almost knocking a young lady to the ground. She turned to look at him; her bright blue eyes shone with fear and he resisted the urge to take her in his arms and comfort her. But ever the gentleman he stayed by his horse, holding the reins tight so that Hermes could not spook the girl further.

‘Yes yes, quite alright sir. I hope you do not make a habit of thundering into young ladies who have yet to make your acquaintance. Now I should really return to Longbourne, Mama has probably finished her wedding plans for Jane by now.’ She went to turn away from him but Darcy could not allow that. He had to be sure that he had caused her no injury. Secretly, he admitted to himself that he was not ready to let her go for more selfish reasons. Those eyes were truly enchanting.

‘May I ask your name miss?’ He knew that he should not be talking to her without a proper introduction but the way she spoke was so free and so different to those of his acquaintance. She spun round, looking him directly in the eyes. Hers were sparkling and her face was flushed, he presumed from her recent exercise. She held her bonnet in her hand and pieces of her brown hair were flying in the wind as they escaped her bun. He saw her eyes flicker to the beast next to him with suspicion and a fragment of fear re-entered her eyes.

‘You may ask sir, but I will most certainly not answer.’ She smiled, but this time made no attempt to leave. ‘Mr Bingley, I presume. There has been much talk of your coming. You must settle something for me; will you be wearing a black or green jacket at your wedding sir?’ She laughed to herself. It was a beautiful sound; so carefree, so natural, so full of life.

‘My wedding? I was not aware that such a happy event was to take place.’ He found himself drawn into the conversation, quite amused by her humour. He had quite forgotten about how shy
he normally was around new company.

‘But of course Mr Bingley. Mama has the whole event planned, you will fall in love with dear Jane and we shall be saved from the hedgerows when our father dies and of course who could forget the five thousand pounds a year, the exquisite gowns, the fine carriages and all the pin money Jane will get.’ She rolled her eyes at her mother’s antics. Obviously this is something she had heard about considerably in the last few days at least. Apparently the mothers of the country were even worse than the mothers of the ton. He laughed at that, his spirits had been lightened by this woodland nymph.

‘Mr Bingley you must know that my mother is deadly serious and this is not a matter to be laughed about.’ Her tone was also serious, but her eyes were still playful and he knew she was joking.

‘I’m sure Bingley will be thrilled to know of his engagement. I shall endeavour to inform his as soon as return to Netherfield.’ His tone matched hers in playfulness as he revealed that he was not the man she thought he was.

‘Inform him sir? Why then that means you are not Mr Bingley at all! Why did you not correct me sir?’ Her cheeks flushed in embarrassment and her eyes blazed with anger. He chuckled to himself. If looks could kill, he would surely be dead in that moment.

‘A name for a name my lady.’ He hoped she would tell him but she turned tail and ran out of the clearing, still embarrassed by her mistake.

‘Not without a proper introduction sir!’ he heard her call back.

He sighed, it was worth a shot, but he already missed her company. I was very refreshing to be Bingley, without the high expectations and reputation that being the Master of Pemberley carried. She had treated him like any other human being, they had laughed together, teased each other and not once had she batted her long eyelashes or flattered him. He decided in that moment that he greatly enjoyed the being in Hertfordshire and no longer held any regrets for leaving Georgie with Mrs Annesley. She had been quite right about the need to have a change of scenery. He would have to thank her in his next letter. He decided not to ride back to Netherfield; it would reunite him far too quickly with Miss Bingley. Instead he walked slowly back through the winding paths of the woods, leading Hermes over the roots and stones of Hertfordshire. For the first time since he had arrived at Netherfield, he thought not of Georgiana but of the woodland nymph that he had encountered and of her sparkling eyes.

He did feel nervous about meeting the people of the surrounding village; they were obviously gossips as knowledge of Bingley’s fortune preceded him already. What they do when they found out that he was worth more than his friend. He circulated reports of his wealth being ten thousand pounds, it had been true when he first took over the estate, but his fortune had almost doubled that. He decided that the best way to avoid the scheming mothers, and his case aunts, was to make sure the reports stayed at ten thousand and nothing more. He got enough grief from the ton as it was, being an eligible bachelor of great fortune, Master of Pemberley, Son of Lady Anne Darcy, Nephew of Lady Catherine de Bourgh and the Earl and Lady Matlock. He did not need to stoke the fire any more. He envied Bingley and his lower expectations of life. He was able to live comfortably whilst enjoying the balls and assemblies of the ton without being hounded by unmarried heiresses and their mothers. He hoped that he could escape people’s notice in the country but it was highly doubtful. He knew the rumours would start soon enough but for now he just thought back over his anonymous conversation and the freedom it had provided. He wondered whether the nymph was thinking back on the conversation with as much pleasure as he was. Probably not, she did seem highly embarrassed when she left.
When he arrived back to the house Miss Bingley, predictably, rushed out to greet him. However, even her leech like qualities could not dampen is mood and he greeted her with a smile and escorted back inside.

‘Oh Mr Darcy, I was very worried about you. You were gone for much longer than expected and I was about to send out a search party for you. I had the most dreadful images of you being thrown from your horse and losing all consciousness. I am so very glad you have made it back to Netherfield in one piece. I would hate for dear Georgiana to lose her brother of course, how would I have broken such terrible news to her?’ She clung onto his arm, leaning on it and gazing up at his face. Darcy thought that if she batted her eyelashes any faster she would take flight, soaring far away from him and his sister. He laughed at the thought of Miss Bingley flying over London, batting her eyelids. ‘Oh Mr Darcy, how can you laugh? Poor Georgiana would have been devasted.’ She looked truly shocked at his laughter and Darcy realised he had never laughed in her presence before. He quickly thought of an excuse to prevent her from taking his laughter as encouragement to her attentions.

‘I am merely laughing at thought of me being thrown from my horse. I can assure you that it is a highly rare event’ He knew he sounded arrogant but it was the best excuse he could think of on short notice. He did his best to look displeased with her but of course he could not shake the picture of Miss Bingley and her batting eyelashes and he cracked a smile.

‘But of course Mr Darcy! I am sorry that such a thought even crossed my mind, for you are a superior rider. I have never seen a gentleman ride with such elegance of you, but of course that is to be expected from the Master of Pemberley. The grounds are so beautiful and vast, making it perfect for long rides. Would you not agree Mr Darcy?’ She ended by batting her eyelashes again and smiling in a way she must have thought seductive but to Darcy it was anything but that. Of course, one look at her eyelashes and he was lost in laughter.

He quickly excused himself, between laughs of course, and went up to his room leaving a very shocked but happy Caroline Bingley. She thought that his laughter and good mood was of course due to her attention and flirtations. The servants as well were shocked as they saw, the usually sombre, Mr Darcy in hysterics on his way to his room. He decided to tell Georgiana of his private joke for she would find it just as amusing. Whilst writing his letter he realised that he could not remember the last time he had laughed so freely. It must have been before Mama died. I am certain of it. He wondered what had brought on such a release of good spirits and a pair of bright blue eyes flashed in his mind. He smiled to himself. He would find her again, hopefully with a proper introduction so that he could learn the name of the nymph.
The Introduction

Chapter Summary

The Netherfield party attend the Meryton Assembly.

Chapter Notes

As always please comment/kudos to let me know what you think. Hope you enjoy! - Hollibella_Short

‘I say Darcy! I have the most splendid news!’ Bingley’s excitable voice filled the usually quiet library. Darcy had spent the afternoon in deep thought about the girl from the woods. Who is she? The question never left his mind. He looked up from the book he was pretending to read as his younger friend approached; curious to know of his good news.

‘Well then, please enlighten me Charles for I can see you are dying to tell me.’ He smiled at his friend’s exuberance.

‘Sir Lucas, of Lucas Lodge, has informed me that there is to be an assembly in Meryton this very evening! It will be a perfect chance to be introduced into the society here in Hertfordshire. We shall dance with so many lovely young ladies and I dare say the conversation will be more invigorating than that of the ton, how the talk of lace and bonnets bores me so.’ Bingley grinned widely at his friend; excitement emanated from every fibre of his being.

Bingley loved to dance and he loved to make new friends and acquaintances, not to advance in society but merely for his own pleasure, thus any form of ball or assembly was of great joy to him. Darcy suppressed a grimace. Unlike his friend, he loathed to dance. In Darcy’s mind it was a trivial activity, it held little opportunity for intelligent conversation and if he danced with any lady that was not in his party then the rumours flew round the ton that he admired his dance partner and a marriage would surely follow. However, he would not ruin his friend’s mood with his now rather sour one so he forced a smile and said he would also attend the assembly of course. Maybe she will be there, my nymph. He thought to himself. When had she become his? He did not even know her name; he had not even known of her existence until a few hours ago. Darcy sighed to himself; he hoped the odd feeling would pass soon enough.

‘Charles! Charles! What is this about going to an assembly tonight?’ Caroline Bingley stormed into the library. ‘Surely we are not to socialise with the savages of this dreadful place!’ It was here she noticed Darcy sitting in his usual chair by the window. ‘I am certain Mr Darcy would agree that we have no business in country assemblies.’ She simpered at him, her tone lowered from the shrill shrieks that she had previously filled the halls of Netherfield.

‘On the contrary Miss Bingley, I believe it is absolutely necessary to gain these people’s good opinion. If we are to get along well with the shopkeepers and tavern owners then we must not snub them by not attending the assembly.’ He had spent enough time in Miss Bingley’s company to know that she would now completely change her own opinion just to agree with his. It amused
him no end, had this woman no opinion of her own? Or did she simply live to try and please and agree with him?

‘Of course Mr Darcy! How right you are! It would be most unfortunate to be unable to procure the food and drink we want due to misunderstandings in the village. How clever you are to think of such a thing. We shall always have the finest of menus here at Netherfield now thanks to your good sense. Of course I would expect nothing less from the Master of Pemberley, how I long to visit again. Shall we be travelling to Pemberley for Christmas this year Charles?’ Bingley’s face turned the colour of his hair and he was lost for words. For how should he know whether they would be invited to his friend’s estate? He turned to Darcy, his eyes begging for help.

‘Your brother is always welcome Miss Bingley and if you have not found a husband by Christmas I shall of course extend the invitation to you.’ Darcy loved Bingley dearly, like the brother he never had but it was most unfortunate that he had a sister like Caroline. His other sister Louisa, who now resided with her husband Arthur Hurst, was more amiable, but like Darcy she was quite shy and preferred to agree with her sister’s opinions rather than cause a confrontation. Darcy found Louisa amiable enough when Caroline was not around but, unfortunately for both of them, this was not often. Darcy made a note to also extend the invitation to Mr and Mrs Hurst; hoping this would lessen Caroline’s on-going and unwelcome attentions.

‘Mr Darcy! You are so kind! I should hope that I am still unattached by Christmas, if only to see the wonderful grounds of Pemberley again. They are quite beautiful during the winter months would you not agree?’ She shrilled again in excitement of spending Christmas once more in what she thought of as her future home.

‘Indeed they are. Miss Bingley, Charles, you will excuse me. I must go get dressed for this evening’s event.’ And with that he left the room as swiftly as possible. He heard Miss Bingley’s exclaims of agreement as she too remembered they had a dance to attend.

Charles jumped down from the carriage first, eager to attend the dance and meet as many new acquaintances as he could during the course of the evening. He then helped his sister down from the carriage who glared at him fiercely as she had hoped that Darcy would assist her because of course then he would have to escort her into the room. How grand she would have looked in her fine silk gown and the Master of Pemberley on her arm. Finally Darcy exited the carriage. He nodded thankfully at Bingley before the trio entered the room. Almost as soon as they entered silence fell over the room. The band stopped playing, the dancers stopped their dance, and all talking ceased for just a moment. Then the whispers began.

‘Five thousand a year!’ he heard one onlooker say.

‘Who is that other fine looking gentleman? I say he is quite the catch!’ Another said

‘I heard he owns a large estate in the north!’ How did they even find out such things?

‘Five thousand a year is nothing to his fortune. They say his is worth twice that much!’

‘Oh two fine young gentleman! They will make such good husbands for my girls!’

Darcy sighed to himself. The night had not started well and even Bingley seemed slightly disturbed from the attention. Bingley was not so used to the stares and whispers. They bowed to Sir Lucas who welcomed them to the assembly and waved to the band to keep playing. With the music filling the hall once more Bingley was able to relax and Sir Lucas introduced them to several nearby families. Darcy scanned the room, looking for the pair of bright blue eyes that had plagued his thoughts all day; eyes that sparkled with life and fire.
‘And over here is the wonderful Mrs Bennet and her lovely daughters. The jewels of the county I dare say.’ Darcy turned around to greet the next new family. His head was spinning with all the new names and faces he had met. There were the Lucas’, Miss Charlotte Lucas and Miss Maria. He thought that was right. He had made an effort to pay attention to that family as it was the family of their host. The other names just faded quickly into a sea of faces. However, as he turned round to politely greet the Bennets, he was met by the eyes he had been searching for. She blushed as their eyes met and cast hers down toward the floor. Darcy began to listen attentively to Sir Lucas; not wanting to miss her name.

‘Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy. May I introduce you to Mrs Bennet and her daughters? The eldest Miss Jane Bennet, Miss Elizabeth Bennet, Miss Mary Bennet, Miss Catherine Bennet and Miss Lydia Bennet.’ Elizabeth. It was a beautiful name. He saw Bingley bow to the eldest, Miss Jane Bennet, and ask for the next dance. He laughed to himself as he remembered that Jane was Bingley’s new betrothed, according to Elizabeth’s mother. She would be very happy at his dancing with Miss Jane for his first dance of the evening. Darcy decided to follow Bingley’s example and ask his nymph to dance.

‘Miss Elizabeth, Would you care to dance the next set with me?’ He asked, trying to catch her eye so that he might admire them. He was rewarded as they flashed up to meet his gaze in bewilderment. She obviously had not expected him to ask her for a dance but how could he resist?

‘I would not care for it Mr Darcy.’ He felt a slight pain in his heart at this response and was about to turn away to nurse his wounds when she continued speaking. ‘However, I am not ill nor am I engaged for the next set so I cannot politely refuse so I shall accept your offer to dance’ He noticed her eyes were soft and playful and she did not mean any offense. So he smiled at her as he led her to join Bingley and the other couples on the dance floor.

‘Elizabeth Bennet! You must not be so impertinent to poor Mr Darcy! I am very sorry for my daughter’s remarks sir. You must know that she meant no harm!’ He heard Mrs Bennet’s shrill voice echo behind them.

‘Of course Mr Darcy, Mama would never forgive me if I rejected a man worth ten thousand a year.’ She quipped.

They danced in silence for the first few steps of the dance. He admired her grace and elegance as they weaved between the couples on the floor. Her dress was quite plain in comparison to those of the ton but he found that he liked it much better. It highlighted her figure quite perfectly without the added accessories and finer fabrics that he felt detracted from the natural beauty of a lady. He could admire the way her dark brown curls contrasted perfectly with the soft cream colour of her skin without the garish colours of fabric so sought after in the first circles. He remembered the bright orange colour of Miss Bingley’s dress and grimaced. It was quite a sight.

‘Is there something the matter Mr Darcy?’ he heard Elizabeth’s soft voice call him out of his thoughts. ‘You have not said one word to me during our dance so far and you have the most displeased look upon your face.’ Her eyes were bright with curiosity as she engaged him into conversation.

‘I was merely noting how, umm, bright Miss Bingley’s dress is this evening. She insists that it is the height of fashion but I cannot understand why. The colour does not compliment her natural beauty in the slightest’ He frowned again. Normally he avoided talk of dresses and bonnets and fashion but here he was bringing the subject up quite willingly. However, Elizabeth just laughed and this in turn made him smile once more as he returned to admiring his nymph.

‘It is quite ugly I must admit. I agree that I cannot understand the fashion of the upper class sometimes. I believe it is more fashionable to have ugly yet expensive dresses than beautiful less
extravagant ones.’ She shook her head in disbelief and laughed once more. ‘The feminine sex is really quite silly, all we can talk of is of our accomplishments and fine dresses. It is wonder we ever find husbands’ Darcy joined in her laughter. He had never met a lady who berated the fairer sex like she had just done, she really was quite different to any woman he had ever met.

‘Well Miss Elizabeth, what would you talk of?’ He was so curious about her nature. What did she take pleasure in in life? He wanted to know everything about this strange nymph from the woodland.

‘I would talk of farming, of estates and of the fine walks in the country.’ She smiled at him. He looked at her in shock as their dance came to an end. He escorted her back to her family and as she crossed the room to talk to Miss Lucas, he was left staring at her in wonder.

‘Why Mr Darcy! How good of you to dance with that country chit! You must be careful or the whole village will be spreading rumours of your imminent engagement to the girl. Of course it would be a most advantageous match for the family but we both know you would never consider attaching yourself to someone whose station in life is so below your own.’ Miss Bingley clung onto his arm and smiled blithely at him. Mr Darcy was not in the mood to put up with her inane flattery and he removed his arm from her grasp.

‘Miss Bingley. I wonder why you constantly insult these people; especially the Bennets. Miss Elizabeth is the daughter of a gentleman and you, Miss Bingley, are the daughter of a tradesman. Yes you have more fortune than her but her place in society is above your own. You will do well to remember that.’ And with that he went to find Miss Jane Bennet. He decided that he should become more acquainted with Bingley’s unknown betrothed so that he could judge her character and hopefully discover more about Elizabeth. He left a seething Miss Bingley behind him as he went to enjoy the rest of the evening with the people of Hertfordshire.

Caroline's eyes followed Mr Darcy as he travelled across the assembly room; one recurring thought continuing in her head. *I will ruin that country chit. I will expose her for what she truly is. I will have my Mr Darcy!*
Darcy and Bingley deliver an invitation to Jane Bennett at Longbourn.

Chapter Notes

As always I hope you enjoy the chapter. Please leave comments/kudos if you like it.
I'd love to know what you guys think. -Hollibella_Short

Darcy’s dance with Jane Bennet had been rather splendid. She was a gentle woman of great beauty. She lacked Elizabeth’s vivacity and sharp wit but Darcy could sense a quieter intelligence to the girl. She was more sensible than her younger siblings, including Elizabeth, and their mother. Darcy wondered how such a genteel lady could come from such a lively and, at times, silly family. Jane was shy and did not talk as much as her younger sister during the dance but Darcy recognised this shyness almost immediately as he had seen it in both his sister and himself. He had gently questioned her about her dance with Bingley after sensing that his friend had quickly formed an attachment to the blonde beauty. She blushed and averted her eyes quietly saying that Bingley was ‘very pleasant company’. He hoped that Bingley would not get bored with Miss Bennet as a wife, if they did indeed come to an understanding, for even though she was undoubtedly kind-hearted she was almost as shy as he was. *Maybe Bingley’s never-ending energy will be good for her and indeed maybe her quieter nature will calm his excitement.* He thought to himself. He smiled at the thought of Bingley finding his match in Miss Bennet. They would be the most loving couple in the history of England; their two kind souls deserved each other. He looked down at the letter he was writing to Georgiana. He must tell her about Miss Bennet and Bingley, she would be delighted.

‘But Caroline’ Charles whined to his sister, ‘If you invite Miss Bennet round for dinner this evening then Darcy and I will not be here. We promised to dine with Sir Lucas and his family tonight. You must invite them to dinner tomorrow!’ Darcy looked up from his writing desk at the two siblings. He wondered why Miss Bingley was inviting Miss Bennet to dinner at all. She had made no secret of her dislike to the Bennet sisters; especially Elizabeth.

‘No Charles. I should like to get to know Miss Bennet and I will hardly get a moment with her if you are here. We both know you shall want her full attention. You will tell Sir Lucas I am unable to attend for I have prior commitments.’ Caroline’s tone made it clear that she would no longer argue about this and she swept out of the room to write the invitations.

‘Can you talk to her Darcy?’ his friend implored. Darcy looked at him in confusion. He was sure that nothing could convince Miss Bingley to change her mind on this matter.

‘I can talk to her Charles, but I do not think it shall make the slightest of difference. Her mind is quite made up, and I do think she has a point. You should encourage her interest in Miss Bennet as it is clear you are rather smitten with the lady and it surely wouldn’t harm to have your sisters approval.’ Darcy hoped that this would be enough to convince Bingley that he did not need to
approach Miss Bingley on the situation. He really did not relish in her company. He was thankful that Bingley was just as easy to convince as sister; both siblings looked up to his opinion and often regarded it higher than their own.

‘I guess you are right but I do want to see her again. Why do you think I asked Caroline to invite her to Netherfield?’ Bingley looked like a lost puppy as he realised his plan to see Jane Bennet had failed. Darcy took pity on his friend and quickly began formulating a plan that would end in them meeting both the elder Bennet sisters. He smiled to himself.

‘What if we delivered the invitation ourselves?’ Darcy’s response caught Charles off guard as he had begun to sulk whilst staring longingly out the window.

‘You mean we go to Longbourn?’ Bingley’s face lit up at the suggestion. Darcy chuckled quietly at Bingley’s sudden change of mood. He had seen his friend fall in and out of love many times whilst at Cambridge and in the ton but never before had a woman affected him so violently in such a short time.

‘Yes. We can deliver Miss Bingley’s invitation to dinner whilst explaining to Miss Bennet that we shall not be there.’ And I can see Elizabeth ‘Just let me finish my letter to Georgiana then I will join you. I am sure Miss Bingley will have finished the invitation by then.’

‘Yes yes, of course Darcy. What a splendid idea! I shall inform Caroline at once!’ and with that he rushed off to find his sister. Darcy was left alone in the drawing room to finish his letter in peace. Once he had finished he read over it to ensure he had not made any mistakes.

October 16th 1811

Dear Georgiana,

I hope you are enjoying Bath as much I am enjoying Hertfordshire. You were quite right, dear sister. I find a change of scenery suits me very well indeed. You would be proud of me little one. The Bingley’s and I attended an assembly last night at Meryton, the local village, and I danced at least half the dances; not one of them with Miss Bingley. My first dance was with Miss Elizabeth Bennet, a beautiful young lady with the same wit and intelligence that our mother had. You will love her Georgiana. She said she preferred to talk of farming and estates than of dresses and bonnets. She may not have the same refinement of those ladies in the town but her manner is much more engaging; she would be a good friend for you. As for Bingley he danced three sets with Elizabeth’s elder sister, Miss Jane Bennet; the man is quite smitten. Miss Jane is mellower than her sister. I would say she is much like you in temperament. I think she could be a good match for Bingley if he is willing to overlook her low wealth and connections. I doubt Caroline will ever forgive him if he does.

I must admit I lost my temper with Miss Bingley but after three years of her following me around like a puppy, can you blame me? After she insulted the Bennet family, saying they were unrefined and country savages with no money or place in society, I swiftly came to Elizabeth’s defence by reminding Miss Bingley that she is only the daughter of a trade man. I hope you can forgive me for my un-gentlemanlike behaviour in humiliating Miss Bingley in a public place. I just hope no one heard our conversation. I should not like to make a bad impression on the people of Hertfordshire.

You must tell me all about your trip to Bath so far. I look forward to your reply.

Your loving brother,

Fitzwilliam Darcy
He hoped that she would not read too much into his writing about Elizabeth and her family. He had not realised how much he had spoken about her until he read it back. He sighed. There was not much chance that Georgiana would not pick up on his infatuation with Miss Elizabeth; his nymph from the woods. No, Georgiana was much too bright to see past that. He hoped that it would not raise her hopes of him marrying the girl; they had barely had two conversations to her.

‘Have you finished Darce?’ Darcy jumped as Bingley’s voice cut through his thoughts. He had not heard the man re-enter the room.

‘Yes Charles. I shall send it on the way back from Longbourn. Do you have the invite?’ He already knew that he did as his friend was still grinning like a mad man. Bingley chuckled.

‘Caroline was not happy to relinquish it, especially after I said you would be joining me. I believe I heard her mutter “that Elizabeth Bennet!” under her breath. She was rather jealous that you danced with Miss Elizabeth twice at Meryton and not once with her.’ Bingley gave Darcy a knowing look as he hinted to Darcy’s fondness to the second eldest Bennet girl.

‘I danced with her the second time to ask her about her sister Jane. She seemed very shy and guarded with her feelings when I talked to her so I wished to get a deeper understanding of Jane and the rest of her family.’ Darcy suddenly felt worried, had he not danced with any other girl twice at the assembly? As he thought back to the evening before he realised that he had not. He groaned internally as he realised that Elizabeth’s scheming mother would probably be half way through their wedding plans already. He hoped she was still distracted with Bingley’s and Jane’s wedding plans.

‘Oh come off it Darcy! Your eyes never left her. I feel sorry for Miss Lucas and Miss Mary. You were the most inattentive dance partner. Although I will admit you did seem quite engaged with Miss Bennet. If you had not been so taken with Miss Elizabeth I would be worried.’ Bingley laughed again. Everyone who knew Darcy thought he was doomed to be a bachelor as not a single woman had ever captured his attention. It did not matter if they had wealth, a title, good connections and a high number of personal accomplishments. Nothing like that ever mattered to Darcy but this Elizabeth Bennet, who had none of those things, had certainly made a favourable impression on the young man.

‘Are we going to see Miss Jane Bennet or not?’ Darcy snapped. He hated that he had shown his infatuation of Elizabeth so clearly on their first known meeting. He would have to be more guarded in future.

‘Why yes of course! We shall go at once! Before Caroline detains you at Netherfield with some silly excuse.’ They both laughed at that before heading to the stables to saddle their horses.

‘Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy.’ Mrs Hill announced in Darcy and Bingley as they entered the small estate. Darcy looked around Elizabeth’s home as he entered. It was nothing like his childhood home, Pemberley, but it had a certain charm to it. It was homely, rustic and well-furnished for a house of its size. Mrs Bennet clearly had an eye for décor as, although the furnishing was made of many different styles and looks, they seemed to blend seamlessly to create a lovely overall finish. His mother would have been proud to have this room in the halls of Pemberley.

‘Why Mr Bingley! Mr Darcy! How good of you to visit Loungbourn! We are most honoured to have you staying here! Will you sit down? I shall have Hill fetch some tea. Hill! Some tea for our guests!’ Darcy winced as Mrs Bennet shrieked to her housekeeper. It was no way to treat a servant but he could see Mrs Bennet was flustered at their presence in her house. He and Bingley had had no intention of staying for tea but, as they looked at each other, they both realised it
would be too impolite to leave after the tea had already been summoned.

‘Thank you Mrs Bennet. You are too kind.’ Bingley said as he sat in the chair nearest Miss Jane Bennet. Darcy remained standing; not knowing where to sit. He was torn between wanting to sit near his Elizabeth and not wanting to encourage her mother in her matchmaking schemes. He felt his walls come up as they often did in social situations. He noted that he had not felt them before in the presence of Elizabeth. She had always prevented his discomfort just by being there but today he felt self-conscious. He was unsure whether this was because he was now in her house or because Bingley had mentioned how obvious his affections had been before.

‘Mr Darcy.’ Elizabeth’s soft voice broke through his musings. He looked up to see her smiling at him with a familiar sparkle in her eyes. ‘I believe my mother invited you to sit down. It would be most rude to ignore such an invitation, unless of course you do not intend to stay.’ She looked almost disappointed as she said her last statement. He hoped this was because she wanted him to stay. He sat down in the nearest chair; near Miss Mary.

‘I was just admiring your lovely home Miss Bennet. I did not intend to be rude.’ She laughed at this and he instantly relaxed; regretting his decision to not sit with her on the sofa.

‘Why I am sure it is nothing compared to Pemberley sir. Tell me about Pemberley. From what I have heard it is a grand estate indeed.’ Her eyes were filled with genuine curiosity. He smiled as he remembered she would rather talk of estates than dresses.

‘Pemberley is certainly very grand. I feel very fortunate to have grown up there. The grounds are simply amazing.’ He smiled to himself as he thought about his childhood home. ‘We are currently re-furbishing the dining room. My sister, Georgiana, she had… a difficult summer last year. So I thought the project would be a good distraction for her. She has taken to it quite well.’ He hoped that he had not revealed too much about Georgiana. He had not meant to mention her at all but Elizabeth had a way of making him open up. She looked sad at his revelation about Georgiana.

‘I hope your sister recovers quickly from her difficulties sir. I remember when my favourite dog, Peter, died a couple of years ago. I would not leave my room for weeks. Papa eventually lured me out by promising me I could help train the new pup. Of course Henry, quickly became the most disobedient dog of the pack.’ She laughed at this. Darcy was thankful for her compassion and quick change of subject. He looked over at the rest of the party. Jane and Bingley were in their own conversation over by the window, Lydia and Kitty were comparing lace and bonnets whilst Mary was reading a book. He looked at the cover; ‘Fordyce’s Sermons’. So Miss Mary was the more subdued intellect of the family. Mrs Bennet sat by the door pretending to embroider but he saw that she was watching Bingley and Miss Bennet.

‘I am sure Henry is a dog with great personality and liveliness’ He said with a smile; remembering he had never responded.

‘Oh he is, perhaps he is too much like me; too lively and disobedient.’ She laughed again. ‘Disobedient Miss Elizabeth?’ He joined in her laughter. She really was a bright and vibrant young lady.

‘Oh yes. Mother could never get me to embroider as a child. I much preferred to climb trees and paddle in the local stream.’ She grinned widely and laughed ‘I was always being told off for being covered in dirt and being too tanned for a young lady.’ She flashed a playful smile to him and smiled back in return.

‘Well I must have been disobedient as well as a child for I confess I was also much at home in a
tree. Though I cannot say I ever shirked my embroidery duties.’ They both laughed again. They
admired the other in silence from the on until Bingley’s loud and excited voice drew everyone’s
attention. Elizabeth blushed deeply and looked down at her lap as the moment was broken.

‘Why I forgot to say! The reason Darcy I came to visit your home here was to deliver this.’ He
took the invitation from his jacket and handed it to Jane who blushed as their hands brushed. She
smiled and took the letter. ‘It’s from Caroline. I believe she has invited you to dine at Netherfield
tonight. Darcy and I wanted to express our deepest regrets as we cannot attend. We promised to
dine with the Lucas’ tonight.’ Bingley really did look highly disappointed that they could not be
there.

‘Oh Mr Bingley, Jane would love to accept of course! It is such a shame that you cannot be there
but I will forgive you if you and Mr Darcy accept our invitation to dine at Longbourn a week
today.’

‘Well I would be more than happy to accept that offer. Darcy?’

‘I would be honoured to dine at such a fine home.’ He smiled at Elizabeth as he spoke. He was
happy that he would get to see her again so soon.

‘Mr Darcy you are too kind! We are the ones who should be honoured by the presence by such
fine, young gentleman.’ Mrs Bennet beamed at the compliment. Elizabeth just shook her head and
smiled to herself.

‘I believe we should be on our way now that we have delivered the invitation. Thank you for your
company Mrs Bennet, Miss Bennets.’ He bowed, looking at Elizabeth, and then left the estate. He
heard Bingley says his goodbyes and follow him. They both grinned at each other and mounted
their horses. Darcy headed to Meryton to post his letter whilst Bingley rode back to Netherfield.

Darcy hoped the ride would help clear his head of his nymph from the woods but he could not be
more wrong. Her eyes did not leave his mind for the rest of the day. Not even dinner with the
Lucas’ could take his mind off of Elizabeth and he barely spoke a word throughout the whole
affair. He knew he would dream of her that night.
Darcy awoke with a smile. He had the most wonderful dreams of Elizabeth at Pemberley. They had walked for hours in the vast grounds, talking of so many magnificent books and visiting the tenants together. He shook his head to clear the sleep induced haze and readied himself for the day. He hoped he would not have to deal with Miss Bingley too much today. He thought he might see Elizabeth on her morning walk again if he hurried. He knew that this thought was bordering on improper as this would mean he would be alone with her in the woods once again but he could not bring himself to care. He just wanted to see her again.

He skipped breakfast in his hurry to get to the stables. He greeted Hermes who nuzzled him gently. Darcy smiled at his stallion fondly; he had known the beast since he was a young boy and they had in many ways grown up together. He quickly saddled the creature and galloped out of the stables and back to the woods. As he reached the clearing where he first met his nymph his slowed to a trot in case he startled her again; if she was there at all. His heart sank as he realised that she was not there. He was too late. If only he had not been so immersed in his dream this morning, he might have seen her; the beautiful Elizabeth. He dismounted from Hermes and sat on a nearby log. He let go of Hermes’ reins and allowed him to graze in the clearing. He imagined that she was sitting with him, maybe reading a book or just holding his hand.

‘Mr Darcy!’ He looked up, startled.

‘Miss Elizabeth, How do you do?’ He smiled at her. He had not been too late after all.

‘I am very well, thank you. I wish I could say the same for my sister. Do you know how she fares this morning?’ He noticed the worried look on her face and looked at her in confusion.

‘Your sister?’ He did not know how he was supposed to know how any of her sisters were feeling. Surely she had just seen them before she left.

‘Yes sir, my sister. She is tall, blonde, blue eyes. She has the kindest nature I have ever known in a person and, Mr Darcy, she has taken ill. She has currently residing at Netherfield until the doctor says she is well enough to return to Longbourn.’ She spoke quickly with a hint of irritation amidst layer of concern. He knew that the concern was only for her sister, which left the irritation to be directed at him. He instantly felt regret at upsetting her.
‘My apologies Miss Elizabeth. I was unaware of your sisters presence at Netherfield. When Charles and I returned from the Lucas’ last night, the ladies were already in their chambers. I take it you are on your way to Netherfield?’

‘I am Mr Darcy.’ Her tone was still clipped and he hoped profusely that was just due to her concern.

‘Allow me to escort you back to Netherfield then. You shall get there much faster on horseback.’ He was already imagining the feel of her body pressed against his as they rode swiftly back towards Netherfield together.

‘Mr Darcy, I cannot accept that offer. We both know that would be highly improper. However, if you were to ride ahead to make sure my sister is not fatally ill I’m sure that will rest my mind a little. I will carry on with my walk swiftly and join you soon.’ She curtsied and walked quickly out of the clearing. He stared at the direction in which she had left longingly. He knew now that this was much deeper than an infatuation. He needed to see his sister. He knew that he needed her advice on this matter. He decided he would talk to Bingley and ask if his sister could join the party at Netherfield. He was sure that she would not mind cutting her trip to Bath short.

He mounted Hermes once more and set off back to Netherfield as fast as he could. He waved at Elizabeth as he went passed her, not wanting to miss a chance to see her. He wished fervently that it had not been so improper for her to ride with him. He knew that it would have been more comforting for her to be reunited with her sister as soon as possible. He thought that if Georgiana also joined them at Netherfield then Elizabeth would have a more welcome female companion when she was not tending to her sister. He could not imagine that she would enjoy Miss Bingley’s company very much. As he flew back across the English countryside towards Netherfield he relished at the feel of the wind brushing against his face and the familiar feel of his blood rushing fast. He spurred Hermes on faster; determined to reach Netherfield and fulfil his promise to Elizabeth as fast as possible.

He leaped off his horse as he reached the stables, patted Hermes quickly before handing his reins to the stable boy and hurrying towards the house. He was greeted by Miss Bingley who had seen his arrival through the window in the drawing room.

‘Mr Darcy, How good it is to see you. I hope you are well sir.’ She leaned towards him and rested her hand on his arm. Darcy sharply pulled his arm away and nodded.

‘Quite well. Miss Bingley it has come to my attention that Miss Jane Bennet is currently residing at Netherfield due to a sudden illness. She is not grievously ill I take it?’ He spoke in a clipped tone; not wanting to encourage her delusions of his affections. Miss Bingley looked taken aback by his less than gentlemanlike behaviour.

‘It is just a chill Mr Darcy. May I ask how you came to know of her situation so early in the morning?’ Darcy faltered. He knew he could not reveal the truth behind his knowledge for it would put Elizabeth’s reputation at risk. He quickly formulated a lie and hoped that Miss Bingley would not see past it.

‘I heard the servants talking about Miss Bennet as I readied my horse this morning before my ride. Does Charles know that Miss Bennet is here at Netherfield?’ His tone was even and steady showing no signs of his falsity but still Caroline narrowed her eyes suspiciously at him. However, she let it go and responded to his question.

‘He has not yet risen for breakfast. I am most certain he will be informed as soon as he has woken. Even the servants talk of his obvious attachment to the girl. He really shows no subtly in his affections. I have not seen that Jane returns the sentiments at all but it seems everyone wishes for a
union between them which of course would be most advantageous to her and her family.’

‘Indeed, Bingley’s wealth would be of great comfort to the Bennets. However, as we have already established, Miss Bingley, they are of equal standing in society. It would not be too disadvantageous to Bingley. He has enough money to support both himself and Miss Bennet without a large dowry from her family. Hopefully with the right guidance his fortune will only increase with years to come. You can hope to have large dowry for the daughter of a tradesman.’

He hoped this was a gentler reminder that she must remember to respect the Bennets. He did not wish to be uncivil towards her again but she really did try his patience. Miss Bingley flushed a bright red and averted her eyes.

‘Of course Mr Darcy, I shall go attend to Miss Bennet now. Good day sir.’ He was not sure whether she had left due to embarrassment or anger but he was grateful to be relieved of her presence. As one Bingley sibling left the room, another entered, still rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

‘Good morning Charles. I trust your head is pounding sufficiently.’ He laughed at his friend. Bingley was not known to hold his alcohol well and the man had drunk a fair few whiskeys over the course of the previous night. He was quite drunk by the time they left Lucas Lodge.

‘It was a good night was it not? Cards, whiskey and good company. I am grateful the Lucas ladies were not aware of my intoxication. I hid it quite well I think.’

‘Charles you were singing Miss Bennet’s praises all night. I do believe you attempted to play the piano-forte and literally sing. The ladies were politely ignoring your merriness’ Charles’ face flushed to match the colour of his hair.

‘I was unaware I was so blatant of my feelings towards her. Was I truly awful on the poor instrument?’ Darcy laughed at his friend. Charles obviously did not recollect the whole evening’s events.

‘Dreadful, Charles, Dreadful.’ Bingley laughed at that. ‘Talking of Miss Bennet, Have you heard that she has taken ill and residing at Netherfield til she recovers. Oh don’t look so happy about it Bingley. I doubt you shall see her until she is recovered.’

Bingley face had been comical as Darcy revealed Miss Bennet’s presence at Netherfield. He had looked worried sick at the news of her illness then just moments later giddy with happiness when Darcy revealed that she was staying here in his house. Then with one last sentence his face fell and severe disappointment covered his features. Darcy laughed at his friend. He was easily affected by Miss Bennet.

‘Well I shall make sure she is given the utmost care. Has the doctor been called for?’

‘You should ask Caroline. She may have had the doctor called for last night when Miss Bennet first fell ill. She is currently attending Miss Bennet.’ Bingley’s care for the young Bennet lady was heart-warming. His attachment to the girl was clearly genuine and Darcy was convinced Miss Bennet felt the same. The Bennets were not too forward to hope for an attachment between the two. Bingley nodded and ran to find out where Miss Bingley and Miss Bennet were.

‘Mr Darcy, Miss Elizabeth Bennet has arrived.’ The servant announced. Darcy spun round so he was facing the door and his Elizabeth. He closed the gap between them as much as propriety allowed.

‘I asked about your sister. Miss Bingley said it was nothing but a cold however she does appear to be bedridden. I am unsure whether the doctor has been called for but rest assured knowing that
Charles will do everything to assure your sister has a quick recovery.’ He wished fervently that he could hold her close or kiss her hands; her lips. He decided to settle for staring longingly into her beautiful eyes. Her face was flushed from the exercise. Darcy thought this complimented her soft pale skin beautifully. He noted that the playful spark that normally was present in her bright blue eyes was gone; replaced with worry for Miss Bennet. Darcy felt warmed by her clear affection towards her sister which reminded him of his own relationship with Georgiana. He thought, once again, how well Elizabeth would get on with Georgiana and smiled softly to himself. Georgiana would welcome Elizabeth as a sister.

‘I thank you sir.’ She curtsied briefly before turning to the servant. ‘Would you please show me to my sister’s room?’

‘Very well Miss, this way.’ And with that his Elizabeth was gone. Darcy stared longingly after her. He remembered the worry in her eyes, the eyes that normally shone so bright, and decided he would do all in his power to make her laugh again. The worry that dampened the usual playful nature of Elizabeth reminded Darcy of the dark times at Pemberley after his mother passed away. He shook his head and attempted to forget that line of thought. He knew that of course Elizabeth’s sadness was neither not nearly so great nor as permanent as the grief that darkened the halls of Pemberley. Miss Jane Bennet would recover quite swiftly and Elizabeth would be laughing again in no time. *She has the most beautiful laugh of an angel; my Nymph, my Elizabeth.*

Darcy was not sure how long he stood in the hall to the Netherfield thinking of his Elizabeth and the beautiful melody of her laugh. However, he was soon rudely taken away from his thoughts by the shrill voice of Miss Bingley.

‘Why, Mr Darcy!’ A flurry of bright orange came strutting down the stairs into the entrance hall. ‘Whatever are you still doing here?’ Darcy took a deep breath and turned to face his friend’s sister. ‘Miss Bingley, I believe I got caught up in my thoughts. Forgive me. How is Miss Bennet?’ He strained to keep his tone civil whilst she fanned herself; in what she obviously thought was an alluring way. His mind started to plan his escape; a letter to his sister perhaps. He remembered he had only written to her yesterday and grimaced. That excuse would not seem at all right. Maybe he could retreat to the study in pretence of doing some work for his estate, or to aid Bingley’s with his. *Yes that will do nicely.* Darcy was too busy planning that he almost missed Miss Bingley’s reply but he was drawn back to the conversation by her mentioning his nymph.

‘… and Miss Elizabeth Bennet is with her now so I am sure that both sisters will be well and back at Longbourn soon enough. Oh but Mr Darcy! Did you see how Miss Eliza looked when she arrived? I am quite frankly embarrassed that a gentleman’s daughter would ever allow herself to be in the presence of such fine gentleman looking like that! Her petticoat, Mr Darcy, I daresay it was six inches deep in mud!’ Miss Bingley shrilled so high that Darcy almost winced. He was furious. He had tried to be calm with Miss Bingley, admittedly not always successfully. Her constant berating and insulting of his Elizabeth was wearing him down. Miss Bingley took a breath, clearly intending to continue her barrage of complaints towards Elizabeth. Darcy took this as an opportunity to interrupt.

‘Miss Bingley, I do believe I had not even noticed the state of Miss Elizabeth’s petticoat. I was, I confess, distracted by her fine eyes. I am afraid you must excuse me, I have some work to do.’ He bowed swiftly and headed towards the Netherfield library. He hoped that the works of Shakespeare or Milton would soften his temper and distract him from the leach that is Caroline Bingley.
Dinner at Netherfield

Chapter Summary

Elizabeth joins the Netherfield party for dinner as Miss Bingley desperately tries to fight for Darcy's affection

Chapter Notes

This is the last chapter I have pre-written (it is already posted on fanfiction.net) I have some real life third year university work I need to do so I'm sorry if this has taken a back seat. I swear I will finish this. It's just not my top priority right now. As always please leave comments/kudos. I love to know what you guys think. Feedback is really inspiring as any writer will know. Also my tumblr is bisexual-lady-di if anyone want to follow me or message me with writing requests (I'll still be writing shorter stories to stop myself going insane). Enjoy!

Darcy looked in the mirror in his room. His reflection smiled back at him. His eyes shone with a happiness that he had not seen since his mother passed away. He sighed; he was in too deep with his Elizabeth. They were barely acquaintances and he was already falling for her; her bright blue eyes, sharp wit, and gentle laugh. He combed his hair one last time before heading down to dinner; hoping that Elizabeth would dine with them tonight. As he made his way down the stairs he heard a door shut behind him.

‘Darcy! Have you heard any news about Miss Bennet?’ His ginger haired friend called out to him. Like Elizabeth, he looked exceedingly worried about his current angel. Darcy hoped that his infatuation with Miss Bennet would last longer than the angels of the Ton. Whilst the Bennets did not have the best connections and wealth; their affections and intentions seemed to be true.

‘I have not heard, no.’ Darcy waited for his friend to catch up before they headed down the stairs to dinner together. ‘I was hoping Miss Elizabeth would inform us at dinner. I do believe your sister retreated from Miss Bennet’s room when Elizabeth arrived.’

‘I have not heard, no.’ Darcy waited for his friend to catch up before they headed down the stairs to dinner together. ‘I was hoping Miss Elizabeth would inform us at dinner. I do believe your sister retreated from Miss Bennet’s room when Elizabeth arrived.’

‘Yes. Whilst I am happy that Caroline is making an effort to become more acquainted with Miss Bennet, she does not seem overly fond of the younger Miss Bennet.’ Bingley looked distressed at this. Darcy smirked. He knew his red headed friend did not understand how a person could not like another. He truly was the most kind-hearted fellow Darcy had ever met; naively kind-hearted.

‘I find Miss Elizabeth to be quite charming company Darcy. I just cannot fathom why Caroline should take a dislike to her.’ Darcy laughed.

‘I believe your sister is rather envious of Miss Elizabeth’s fine eyes, Charles’ Darcy said quite light-heartedly. Bingley looked at him in astonishment.

‘Fine eyes? Darcy I cannot remember Caroline ever referring to Miss Elizabeth’s eyes as fine. In fact I do believe I overheard her stating that “Miss Eliza has the dullest eyes in England!”’ Bingley’s voice went up several pitches as he imitated the shrill squeaks of his sister. Darcy
laughed again.

"'Fine eyes' were not Miss Bingley's choice of words, Charles.' The look of complete bewilderment on Mr Bingley's face caused Mr Darcy to laugh a deep hearty laugh once more. With that the two gentlemen entered the dining room at Netherfield.

Miss Elizabeth and Miss Bingley were already seated. The tension in air between the two ladies was palpable. Caroline was glaring daggers at his Elizabeth unashamedly; all pretence of good manners gone. Elizabeth was smiling brightly back at Miss Bingley. Darcy felt a swell of pride at Elizabeth's ability to not let Miss Bingley's foul manner get the better of her.

'Why, Mr Darcy! Pray tell us, what is it that you find so funny? I must say I have never heard you laugh quite like that before.' Darcy tried to think fast. He did not want to humiliate both Bingley siblings by revealing the whole truth behind his sudden good humour.

'I was just talking with your brother about the affects a pair of fine eyes can have.' He could feel the normal playful nature he felt in Elizabeth’s presence start to fill his heart.

'Fine eyes!' Miss Bingley almost screeched. Both Bingley and Elizabeth visibly winced at the pitch and loud volume of the cry. 'Why! I do not think that fine eyes are something to be laughed at so heartedly Mr Darcy.'

'On the contrary, Miss Bingley, a pair of fine eyes can brighten even the darkest of days and that I find is something to be enjoyed to the fullest.' Darcy quickly retorted. He knew that Caroline would not be able to keep pace with his quick remarks; unlike his Elizabeth whose mind was as sharp as his own.

'But… But. Mr Darcy!'

'Surely you cannot wish Mr Darcy to be in ill humour instead Miss Bingley. If he has found something that can make him laugh in such a light-hearted manner you must not begrudge him for it.' Elizabeth chimed in. Her eyes were not quite as worried as they had been earlier in the day. This fact warmed Darcy’s heart.

'Indeed, Miss Elizabeth. For in a world full of greed and hate, one must try and find good and happiness in all they can.' He smiled softly at her. For a moment he was lost in her bright blue eyes and the soft features of her face. Her dark brown curls fell softly by her cheek; contrasting her pale skin to perfection. He wondered how she would look with her hair completely free of all ties; gazing up at him from their bed. He blinked quickly; banishing that thought. He felt his cheeks grow warm in embarrassment at the impropriety of his thoughts. Remember Darcy she is not your wife; yet. He berated himself. ‘Forgive me, Miss Elizabeth. I forgot to ask. How is your sister faring?’ He felt proud that he did not let any hint of his previous thoughts seep into his voice as he spoke.

'Not as well as I would like. I thank you for your concern’ Elizabeth smiled sadly at him. Before Darcy could ask her elaborate on her statement, dinner was served. The first course to be brought out to the dining room was a clear soup. A brief silence came over the room as the diners began to eat. Naturally, Miss Bingley was the one to break the quiet.

'Mr Darcy! How do you like the soup? I supervised the seasoning myself.’ An intense layer of pride laced Miss Bingley’s voice. She obviously felt confident in her abilities to impress Darcy through her accomplishments as a hostess. Charles sent Darcy a look across the table; a warning not to humiliate his sister so openly at the table. Darcy refrained from rolling his eyes at his friend. I may not be fond of his sister but surely he knows I have more tact and good manners than that.
‘The soup is quite satisfactory Miss Bingley. I am sure the others would agree as well. Would you not Charles?’ He hoped that this would distract her from her one tracked mind of pursuing him and his estate.

‘Why yes! Of course. Very well done Caroline. I thank you for acting as a hostess for Netherfield until I find myself a wife.’ Bingley’s face lit up a bright red. Darcy chuckled to himself. Charles was almost certainly picturing a certain blonde angel as his wife.

‘I thank you brother. Mr Darcy you certainly are in good spirits this evening! Pray what has amused you this time?’

‘I think, Miss Bingley, that we must allow Mr Darcy to have some privacy. What amuses him is no business of ours unless he chooses to divulge it of his own freewill.’ Elizabeth quipped quickly. Her eyes flashed to meet Darcy’s. He gave a small nodded to show his gratitude at her intervention.

‘So Miss Elizabeth, You said your sister was not as well as you hoped. I do hope it is nothing too awful.’ Darcy inquired gently. Miss Bingley had begun to sulk and ate her soup in silence. For the first time since she had made his acquaintance she appeared to understand she would never be the object of Fitzwilliam Darcy’s affections. *Elizabeth will suffer for taking my Mr Darcy and Pemberley away from me.*

‘I am afraid she has come down with a mild fever. I hope that it will not worsen; Miss Bingley has kindly summoned the doctor for me. I must say I am concerned that he has not arrived yet.’ Elizabeth glanced anxiously towards the door.

‘A fever! That is indeed worse than I feared. I shall call for one of my servants to go to town and hurry the doctor. Please excuse me!’ Charles exclaimed and rushed from the dining room.

‘Miss Bingley’ Darcy stated; straining to keep his voice civil. Her eyes flew up to meet his; surprised by his attention.

‘Yes, Mr Darcy. Everything is to your liking I hope.’ She batted her eyes at him and leant closer towards him.

‘Yes, Yes of course. You did send for the doctor like Eliz… Miss Elizabeth said. Did you not?’ His face flushed as he almost referred to Elizabeth so informally. He saw that she also blushed quite beautifully and averted her eyes.

‘The doctor? Oh yes. I umm. Of course. I am most concerned for Miss Bennet’s health.’ Miss Bingley stated quite unconvincingly.

‘Miss Bingley if I may be so bold. I suggest that you did not send for the doctor. Of course, I am certain that you most likely just forgot.’ Elizabeth retorted. Her eyes were aflame with fury but like the good natured creature that she was, she was allowing Miss Bingley the benefit of the doubt. However, both Mr Darcy and Elizabeth were not fooled by this pretence.

‘I er. Yes. Forgive me. I was quite embarrassed to admit to my folly.’ Miss Bingley said calmly. Her eyes told another story. Elizabeth and Miss Bingley were both glaring at each other across the table. Darcy felt a familiar feeling of discomfort as the tension permeated the air. Thankfully Charles chose this moment to re-enter the dining room. He faltered slightly as he entered; sensing the tension in the room. He shot a questioning look at Darcy who shook his head once.

‘Well. I had sent my best servant to deliver the message as swiftly as possible. I am sure the Doctor will be here in no time.’ He sat down just as the servants came to clear away the soup.
‘Forgive me, Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy. I am most worried about my sister. I fear I have lost all appetite. I must return to her immediately.’ Elizabeth got up quickly and made to leave the room.

‘Miss Elizabeth!’ Darcy spoke before he had even realised he meant to stop her. Elizabeth paused and glanced back at him.

‘Mr Darcy?’ Her eyes showed nothing but worry for her sister and hurt at the betrayal of Miss Bingley.

‘Please stay.’ He pleaded with her; looking into her blue eyes with his brown ones.

‘My sister…’ She started.

‘Will be well until the doctor arrives. If you are truly concerned, one of the maids can sit with her. Charles?’

‘Oh yes! Of course. Anything to aid Miss Bennet’s recovery.’ He called a servant and quickly informed them to send a maid to Miss Bennet’s room.

‘I would truly feel better if I could look after her myself Mr Darcy, Mr Bingley. I thank you for your kindness.’ She started to leave once more. Darcy felt a dull ache in his chest; he knew he could not let her leave in such a sad mood. He just had to make her stay. He needed her to stay. You selfish bastard; this is not for her good but for your own desire to be in her company a little longer.

‘Miss Elizabeth, please. You cannot look after your sister if you cannot look after yourself. I would hate for you to get ill in your attempts to tend to her.’ He looked deep in her eyes; imploring with her to stay.

‘Mr Darcy! If the lady wishes to leave then let her go’ Miss Bingley chimed in. Darcy smirked. He knew Elizabeth would stay if only to annoy Miss Bingley with her presence.

‘No, Mr Darcy is right. I must tend to my own health before my sisters. However much it pains me. It would not do if both Bennet sisters were too ill to leave their chambers. Heavens, Mother might even send Lydia to keep us well!’ She laughed softly at Miss Bingley’s sudden expression of pure horror. Darcy too chuckled, unable to resist the beautiful bells of Elizabeth’s laugh. ‘However, I shall leave after the main course, if you will allow me, Mr Darcy?’ Her eyes lit up once more as she gently teased him. Darcy felt relieved to be back into their normal routine of playful teasing and spritely conversation.

‘Of course, Miss Elizabeth. Dessert is a luxury that I am sure your health will not require.’ He smiled at her. The main course came out; a lovely spread of pheasant and winter vegetables. It smelt delicious. He was loathed to admit it but Caroline had done well with the menu plan for the evening.

‘Caroline, I must say this looks absolutely divine!’ Charles cried enthusiastically.

‘Thank you Charles.’ Miss Bingley beamed at his praise. It was the first genuine smile that Darcy had seen the woman give. The previous tension in the room was slowly evaporating as the four diners began to feast on the succulent meat and rich flavours of the sauce covered vegetables.

‘Mr Bingley is quite right, Miss Bingley. I cannot remember the last time I saw such an exquisite spread of food.’ Elizabeth agreed. Darcy could not quite tell whether she was goading Miss Bingley or being rather genuine. The food did indeed look exquisite; perhaps too much for a simple evening meal.
‘Thank you Miss Eliza. You would do well to take notes of the fine choice of flavours and wine. I daresay you could use the help.’ Miss Bingley quickly retorted. Her voice was dripping with menace and pride.

‘That’s enough Caroline!’ Charles burst; quite out of character. ‘Miss Elizabeth just gave you an honest compliment. There was no need to turn it into an insult to her accomplishments. You have been nothing but uncivil and quite horrid to her since she arrived. I have no idea what has gotten into you but it has got to stop!’ Both Bingley siblings flushed bright red; Bingley in shock at his outburst and Caroline in embarrassment.

‘How dare you Charles!’ Miss Bingley stood up and slammed the table with the palms of her hands. ‘You dare to chide me at my own dinner table in front of guests! I have never been so embarrassed!’ She screeched.

‘Mr Bingley, Miss Bingley. Please. Do calm down. I am not insulted by Miss Bingley’s comments. I am quite sure she meant well. Let us dine in peace.’ Elizabeth’s gentle melodic voice cut in. This dinner seems condemned to be full of fights and rife with tension. Mr Darcy thought solemnly to himself.

‘Miss Elizabeth is right. Let’s try and enjoy the wonderful food and company.’ Darcy agreed with Elizabeth. He hoped the subtle compliments would ease Caroline’s anger. Of course, he was quite correct in that assumption. Miss Bingley quickly turned back to her normally simpering self; batting her eyelids at him and smiling too sweetly.

‘Oh why yes. Mr Darcy. Of course. Forgive me for my outburst! It was most unladylike. I hope I have not ruined our dinner.’ She smiled with false humbleness.

‘And I apologise Caroline. I should not have scolded you like that in front of our guest. I believe I must have had too much wine.’ Mr Bingley said remorsefully. He hung his in shame; his cheeks still blazed red, matching the locks upon his head.

The rest of the meal passed quite uneventfully. Darcy gazed adoringly at his Elizabeth and they exchange light-hearted comments about the weather, his estate and the limited collection of books at Netherfield. Miss Bingley often attempted to join the conversation by showering praise on Mr Darcy but he only ever thanked her and resumed his conversation. The doctor soon arrived to tend to Miss Bennet which seemed to relax Elizabeth. The beautiful spark had returned to her eyes; eyes which remained locked with Darcy’s for the majority of the meal. Caroline and Charles soon faded away as the pair was enraptured with one another. Mother was right; love is truly the most wonderful feeling. Charles and Caroline looked on in envy at the pair. Miss Bingley was still fighting for Darcy’s attention and affection.

‘Mr Darcy! I say, when shall we see dear Georgiana again? I do so miss her company. She is truly a dear friend.’ Miss Bingley simpered quite loudly. Her voice cut through Darcy’s trance with his Elizabeth. My Elizabeth; for I shall make her mine. He thought fondly.

‘I hope that she shall join us soon. In fact, Bingley, I meant to ask you. May I write to Georgiana and invite her to stay with us here at Netherfield? I do believe the country air will fare well with her. It has for me.’ He shot a bright smile as he said the last statement. She blushed gently and smiled softly in return.

‘Why of course Darcy! Your sister is always welcome at Netherfield. I thought she was visiting bath currently though?’ Bingley’s enthusiasm was heart-warming. Darcy knew that his friend loved Georgiana as a sister almost as much as he did.
‘I do miss her. I was hoping she might consider cutting her trip short to join us here.’ Darcy said sheepishly. He felt guilty that he was asking his sister to leave Bath just so she could meet his fair Elizabeth but he could not help but think of how famously they would get on.

‘I certainly would not leave Bath for the country. I long to be in London. No offence Miss Eliza but I find the country so very dull!’ Miss Bingley shrilled.

‘I assure you Miss Bingley. I do not take offence. I personally prefer the peace of the country and the long morning walks. Now Mr Darcy, Mr Bingley, Miss Bingley, I have stayed here too long. I must go join my sister to see how she fares. I shall keep you updated on her condition of course. I thank you for the pleasant evening.’ Elizabeth looked directly at Mr Darcy as she said this but gave Mr Bingley a quick nod as she got up to leave.

‘Give my best to your sister, Miss Elizabeth’ Bingley said gently. ‘I hope she will be well enough to join us soon. She is most pleasant company.’ Bingley’s voice was wistful as he thought of the fair Jane Bennet.

‘I shall tell her you are thinking of her Mr Bingley. She will be glad to hear it.’ Elizabeth teased him gently. It was obvious to everyone at Netherfield that Bingley and Miss Bennet held each other in quite high affection. Mrs Bennet had predicted quite accurately that Mr Bingley would fall quite in love with her eldest daughter. Mr Darcy chuckled quietly to himself as he recalled his first meeting with Elizabeth in the woods. She had spoken of Mrs Bennet’s plans for her daughter’s wedding to his dear friend. He remembered quite fondly her embarrassment at her mistaking Darcy for his friend. Her cheeks had flushed quite delightfully; the wind blowing her chocolate brown hair gently in the wind. She had truly looked like a woodland nymph.

‘Thank you Miss Elizabeth.’ Bingley replied sincerely. The care and worry for Miss Bennet was quite evident in his voice.

‘Please send my wishes of a swift recovery to your sister, Miss Eliza! She must know she has a dear friend in me.’ Miss Bingley said too sweet.

‘I shall. I must bid you goodnight now.’ She left swiftly; *Probably to avoid any more conversation with Miss Bingley.*

‘Dear me, Darcy I do hope Miss Bennet recovers swiftly.’ Bingley stated. ‘Caroline, I do hope you will have some soup for Jane. I would hate to see my guests neglected. I think that the soup will aid her recovery.’ Darcy smiled to himself at the obvious affection is Bingley’s voice at the mention of his angel.

‘You refer to Miss Bennet quite informally, Charles.’ Darcy teased his friend. The red head blushed brightly but retorted quickly anyway.

‘Oh come off it Darcy, I know you think of Miss Elizabeth in quite the same way.’ Now it was Darcy’s turn to blush. He smiled as he thought of Elizabeth; dressed in white and smiling lovingly at him. ‘See, look at you. Lovesick fool!’

‘I do believe I have lost my appetite. Excuse me!’ Miss Bingley shrilled quite abruptly and quickly retreated from the dining room.

Darcy knew he should feel bad about the sudden exit of his dear friend’s sister. However, he could only feel relief. The atmosphere relaxed as he and Bingley talked of their respective angels until quite late in the night. The beautiful blue eyes of Miss Elizabeth Bennet graced his thoughts until he slipped into a deep and happy sleep.
Darcy once again found himself staring out the window of Netherfield’s library. The rain was pouring down outside and Darcy found it to be quite mesmerising watching the droplets trickle down the glass. Mrs Bennet had bustled in that morning with her younger daughter in tow to visit Miss Jane Bennet. The whole affair had left Darcy feeling quite drained, whilst he adored his conversations with Elizabeth, the simpering and shrill voices of the Bennet matriarch were just too much for Darcy to handle; even in small doses.

Following the tense dinner with Elizabeth and the Bingley siblings, the doctor had arrived; treating Miss Bennet’s fever with ease. Her voice was still a little rough from her ailment but she was finally well enough to return to Longbourn, after only another two nights at Netherfield. Darcy was selfishly disappointed that Miss Bennet’s recovery meant that Elizabeth would be leaving him. He had very much enjoyed spending time in her company around Bingley’s country estate. Charles and Darcy had joined Elizabeth in a walk around Netherfield’s ground that morning. Charles had insisted they give the younger Bennet sister a tour of the grounds.

It had been a very pleasant walk indeed; Elizabeth had enquired about Charles’s plans for the Netherfield Estate and they spoke at length of dogs and horses. Charles was eager to discuss his plans with someone other than Darcy and Elizabeth, having grown up in the area, was happy to share her knowledge of Hertfordshire. Darcy for the most part had observed the conversation, he delighted in listening to Elizabeth talk of such adventures with passion. He could hardly draw his eyes away from hers as they sparkled with excitement and he admired the faint blush that painted her cheeks. His mind, once again, wondered as he imagined walking with Elizabeth through the grounds of Pemberley, her hands entwined with his, the sound of a child’s laughter following them. About half way round their walk Charles had become suspiciously interested in the stream that ran through the grounds. He told Elizabeth and Darcy to carry on with their walk and he would catch them up. Charles had given Darcy a knowing look and they continued their walk; Bingley soon followed a few steps behind. Darcy offered Elizabeth his arm, which she gladly accepted, and they strolled leisurely through the grounds of Netherfield.

“So Mr Darcy” She started with a soft smile and twinkling eyes. “Tell me, How are you finding Hertfordshire?”
“I must admit I was not overjoyed when Bingley first asked me to join him on this adventure.”
She raised her eyebrow in surprise. He chuckled at her expression.

“I imagine it must be terribly… what did Miss Bingley say? Savage.” She giggled at the choice of words. To Darcy, her laughter was music; the most beautiful kind he had ever heard.

“Yes. I thought it might be. I was pleasantly surprised so do not judge me too harshly, Miss Elizabeth.”

“I would never. I am only ever fair and kind.” Her eyes sparkled with a mischievous grin.

“Did you know that I had only danced with three women before Meryton?” He asked. She gaped up at him in disbelief.

“Three? Oh how dreadful Mr Darcy. You must be seen as quite unsociable in London. It is such a shame that the young ladies of the Ton have been denied such a pleasure. The conversation was riveting.” He laughed.

“Do you mock me Miss Elizabeth?” She laughed freely and Darcy noticed a wisp of hair escaping her bonnet. It found it quite distracting.

“Would I dare mock the great Mr Darcy of Pemberley? Perhaps I mock those who fall at your feet.” She retorted and Darcy chuckled.

“Yes, your impression of Miss Bingley is quite accurate. Although you do not flutter you eyelashes enough.”

“My mistake, Mr Darcy.” She turned to face him. Her blue eyes bored into his and he could not tear his gaze away. He noticed flecks of green melting into the ocean blue of her eyes. The world stopped spinning for a moment and all he saw was her. She let out a shaky breath as their gaze was locked. How he wished he could kiss her in that moment. The snap of a twig breaking behind them broke the spell and they pulled apart, not realising how close they had been standing.

Elizabeth blushed brightly and averted her eyes whilst she regained her composure. When she looked back up at him it was with a bright mischievous smirk. “Oh Mr Darcy, how kind you are? Dancing with such country chits, you are truly an inspiration” Elizabeth shrielled, her long eyelashes batting furiously. Darcy laughed heartedly at her impression. He knew it was wrong of him but it tickled him. They laughed together until his ribs hurt and Bingley managed to catch up with them, a curious look on his face. Darcy promised to explain later after dinner.

All too soon they had returned to the house and Darcy’s happy mood was dampened by the shrill tones of Mrs Bennet. After a quick tour of the house Elizabeth and Miss Bennet had gathered their belongings and all six Bennet women had squeezed into the carriage. Soon after Darcy had retreated to the library for some peace.

“I say Darcy, they are quite a lively bunch of young ladies.” Bingley mused as he entered the library. Darcy turned to greet his friend with a tired smile.

“Lively is certainly one word for it.” He replied; resisting the urge to roll his eyes. His friend was kind to a fault. He never once spoke ill of any person.

“Mrs Bennet is particularly…” Bingley paused looking for the right word. His brow furrowed as he struggled.

“Excitable?” Darcy supplied. Bingley shook his head, his red locks falling gently in front of his eyes.
“No… that’s not it. Determined?” Bingley questioned himself. Darcy chuckled. His friend wasn’t wrong. If Mrs Bennet had her way Jane and Charles would be married by the end of the day. Luckily for Darcy that seemed to have distracted the elder Bennet lady from Darcy’s budding courtship of Elizabeth.

“Unbearable?” Darcy offered with a chuckle. Bingley flushed bright red; obviously thinking similarly to Darcy but too gentle to admit it.

“Now now, Darce. You shouldn’t say such things about a lady.” Bingley admonished him. Darcy just laughed again.

“You are always so good Charles. You deserve an angel.” He grinned as the blush on his friend only grew darker.

“I think I have found one. Jane truly is an angel.” Bingley smiled; his eyes glazed over as he started to daydream about the eldest Bennet sibling. Darcy wondered if that was how he looked when he thought about Elizabeth; surely he wasn’t quite so obvious.

“What brings you to the library this fine afternoon Charles?” Darcy prompted. His friend was not one for spending his day reading. Charles had always found reading quite a challenge. His talents lay elsewhere and Darcy had often found himself helping his friend with their studies at Cambridge.

“Ah yes!” Charles shook himself out of his daydream; grinning sheepishly. “You have a letter. It’s from Georgiana I believe. I thought it was best kept away from Caroline’s prying eyes.”

“Thank you, Charles.” He took the letter from Charles’s outstretched hand. Bingley nodded his head as a goodbye and bounded out of the library. Darcy wondered what Bingley could possibly have to do with such excitement on such a dreary day. Nevertheless he began to read. It was dated from 2 days ago. He pondered on how much had happened in those two days, it had been the evening of the disastrous dinner.

October 18th 1811

Dearest Brother,

Bath is simply splendid. It is full of such wonders and I have learnt so much. Did you know that the Romans invented a system to heat the floors and water in the baths? It’s truly amazing. There is a furnace below the baths that is able to heat the water to different temperatures. I would not have believed it if I had not seen it myself. The city itself is beautiful, not quite like the rolling hills of Derbyshire but there is a certain type of beauty to be found in the structure of the buildings. Mrs Annesley has been quite wonderful company. Nothing like Mrs Young at all. You will be proud of me Brother, I have not spent all my allowance on ribbons and sheet music, although it was sorely tempting. I have found something I think you shall like but it will have to wait until you have returned from Hertfordshire. I won’t spoil the surprise.

I am so glad to hear that you are enjoying your time in Hertfordshire. I cannot believe that you danced half the dances. Are you sure you are my shy Fitzwilliam? You have not been replaced by an imposter? Forgive me if I am wrong but I suspect Miss Elizabeth Bennet had some influence
on your sudden change of heart. You accuse Mr Bingley of being smitten. Do you not recognise this in yourself? Perhaps I will have a sister soon after all. I do hope you will tell me more about the woman who has somehow charmed you.

Caroline has never been tactful in her advances. It is clear to anyone that knows you that they are quite unwanted. I am sure I would have lost my temper long before you brother. I find her companionship quite pressing at times. You would think she is trying to woo me instead of you. Obviously she thinks that I am the way to your ever cold heart. I only wish I had been there to see you finally put her in her place. You are quite forgiven though and from what I can tell, the people of Hertfordshire would have been quite proud of you defence of Miss Elizabeth.

I miss you terribly.

Your loving sister,

Georgiana Darcy

Darcy smiled softly as he read the letter. His sister’s curiosity over the Roman baths was wonderful to read about. Her mind was as sharp as a whistle and she devoured books and knowledge with an insatiable hunger. Georgiana was the only girl he had known to fawn more over the structure of buildings than the newest lace found in the shops. He chuckled as he read her response to his admonishment of Miss Bingley. Like Darcy, Georgiana’s only regret about her brother’s friendship with Charles was Caroline. They both tolerated Louisa but Caroline had attached herself to the Darcy siblings like a leach. Darcy reread the letter a couple of times before tucking it in the pocket of his jacket. He would respond later that evening with an invitation to Netherfield.

He wondered, as he stared out the window at the bleak English countryside, how his Elizabeth was? She was most at home in the meadows and woods of the countryside so the rain probably infuriated her. Perhaps she would join her sisters in embroidery or sit by her own windowsill reading a book. He wondered whether she thought about him when they were apart, whether she ever pondered on the colour of his eyes. Did she think about the way he laughed? Did she wonder what their children might look like? Did she ever wonder what his hand would feel like in hers? Darcy sighed. He was too far gone, to be rejected now would be the most painful experience. He glanced up at the ceiling and sent a quick prayer up to his mother. He hoped that she was happy watching his inner turmoil with love. Lady Anne Darcy had insisted that love was the greatest force on this earth. Darcy felt the all consuming power of it but he rather wanted to run away. It had been far easier when none of the ladies had taken his fancy. He ran his fingers through his hair, his hand resting on the back of his neck. He was sure his mother was delighting in his first attempts of love.

“Mr Darcy?” A new voice startled him from his inner musings. He glanced up at the doorway. Louisa Hurst had joined them at Netherfield. Darcy’s brow furrowed in confusion. Charles had not informed him that his other sister would be joining them. Perhaps it had been Miss Bingley who had sent out the invitation.

“Mrs Hurst.” He gave a small bow to the lady who curtsied respectfully in return. “Your brother did not tell me of your arrival.”

Mrs Hurst smiled apologetically. “It was Caroline who sent for me.” Darcy wondered what the younger Bingley sister was planning. It wasn’t unusual for Louisa to visit her two siblings but the
“I suspected as much. What brings you to Netherfield, Mrs Hurst?” Darcy kept his voice cool. He enjoyed Louisa’s company when she was not being influenced by her sister but he could not help but feel like Caroline was setting this up.

“Caroline is… concerned.” Her voice was hesitant. Darcy maintained his distant and gestured for her to continue. “About you, Mr Darcy. It is bold of me to discuss this with you but we are friends are we not?” Her green eyes were narrow and a small blush crept up her neck. Darcy let out a deep breath, at least he was not the only one in the room that found the conversation awkward.

“And what exactly is so concerning that she could not discuss it with her brother. I assure you Charles is more than happy to talk to me about these matters, Mrs Hurst.” Darcy raised his eyebrow at his friend’s sister. She was flustered. Good.

“Charles’ behaviour is apparently equally concerning.” Darcy smirked. So it was the Bennet girls that had the Bingley sisters up in arms. That he could handle easily, as long as Caroline was not about to tie him down and force a marriage proposal out of him.

“I am not sure I understand Mrs Hurst” Darcy said feigning innocence.

“Apparently, forgive me if I’m wrong, you have both seemed rather infatuated by two country chits.” She spoke softly, her face was fully red now and she wrung her hands together; a nervous twitch that all the Bingley siblings shared.

“They are ladies, Mrs Hurst, not chits” Darcy’s voice was firm, he would not stand for anymore insults to the Bennet sisters. “Furthermore, and god help me if I have to say this one more time to you or your sister, they are the daughters of a gentleman. Not a tradesman. You would do well to remember that.”

“Of course, Mr Darcy.” Louisa started to retreat from the room. Darcy felt a twinge of guilt at his words. He was sure that she was only relaying a message from her sister.

“Mrs Hurst.” She spun round to face him, struggling to make eye contact. “I am sorry. I spoke too harshly.” She nodded and left the room once more.

Caroline paced in her room. The situation was getting out hand and nothing she said or did seemed to weaken Fitzwilliam’s resolve. He and Charles were utterly besotted by the two elder Bennet sisters. She hoped her sister had better luck as Fitzwilliam had always treated Louisa with kindness. Eliza Bennet would pay for taking her love away. Fine eyes, they are barely tolerable.

“No!” She shrieked. It cannot be. It could not be love. He was supposed to love her. She was going to marry a gentleman, that’s what her mother always told her. She would be a fine lady of the upper class. When Charles had first brought Fitzwilliam home from Cambridge, Caroline had known in that moment she would marry him. She would be Mrs Caroline Darcy of Pemberley;
lovely extravagant Pemberley. Oh how she longed to walk freely in those halls, to have her portrait hung in the gallery, to throw the finest balls Derbyshire had ever seen. She was a natural host and a perfect fit for Fitzwilliam.

“Caroline, you must end this madness. It is embarrassing.” Louisa tried to take her hand but Caroline pulled away. Her own sister was turning against her.

“I cannot do that Louisa. I love him! Do you not understand that? I love him!” She cried, tears falling freely down her cheeks. She had always loved him but he had never even seen her there. She let herself cry, for the first time since their parents died, it was long overdue. Finally, Caroline let her sister hold her. They sat on her bed whilst she wept for a love that was never meant to be. She vaguely heard her sister whispering words of comfort in her ear but she paid no attention. It was too much, her heart was breaking. It has been breaking since Fitzwilliam walked into her life but she had been comforted by his lack of interest in any girl. Elizabeth Bennet had changed that and with her brother’s infatuation with Jane she knew she would be confronted by her lost love every day. So she cried, for minutes, for hours, for seconds. She could not tell but like all things it came to an end. She sagged against her sister in exhaustion, her head pounding and her throat sore.

“Louisa…” She whispered dejectedly. “Please, help me. There is still time.”

She knew what others thought of her. She was desperate. She was cruel. Caroline had always been the Bingley sibling that others looked over. They saw Charles’ money, his charm, his boyish good looks. They saw Louisa’s gentle kindness, her angelic beauty, her grace. Caroline was dependant on her brother’s money, she lacked the easy comfort her siblings had around strangers, she was prickly, more ambitious, less kind, and her beauty was not as striking as her sister. So she fought for what she wanted and she always succeeded. Now what she wanted was Fitzwilliam; her Mr Darcy.

Chapter End Notes

Tada! I wanted to try and give Caroline a little depth at the end there. Not sure how successful it was. Mr Collins will be making an appearance in the next chapter. Kind of excited for that. I think it will be fun to write. Hope you liked it. If anyone still actually cares about this story. I'm pretty sure I started it like 6 years ago?
A Visitor to Longbourn

Chapter Summary

In which Mr Collins comes to visit and Hermes is a stubborn pain in Mr Darcy's butt.

Chapter Notes

There is some highly improper behaviour by regency standards... I know. It's intentional. I hope you can enjoy it because I actually really love writing this now I've gotten back into it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lizzie frowned as she looked down at the fabric in her hand. The linen was puckered and the stitches were uneven and messy. It was not her finest piece of work to say the least although it was her own fault for not paying much attention to the stitching. She had, as usual, been daydreaming when she should had been focussing on what was in front of her. She tucked the embroidery away out of the sight of her mother; heaven forbid Mrs Bennet saw the offending attempt at embroidery. Lizzie had no intention of listening to her mother’s cries about how she would become an old maid if she did not focus more on her accomplishments. Mrs Bennet was in a particularly fragile state since her father’s announcement over breakfast that morning. Their dear cousin Mr Collins would be visiting Longbourn for a short period of time. Poor, sweet Jane had unfortunately shouldered the weight of Mrs Bennet’s panic and displeasure at Mr Collins’ visit. Mrs Bennet would always return to the fact “At least Mr Bingley will be kind enough to take us in when your dear father is dead.” Mr Bennet had quickly retreated to the study following his announcement and Lizzie had been sorely tempted to join him but for Jane’s sake she’d stayed nearby.

“He’s here! Girls! Mr Bennet! Mr Collins has arrived!” Mrs Bennet shrilled from her bedroom.

Lizzie shared a look with Jane. They both wished they could be anywhere but at Longbourn, preferably in the presence of two fine young gentleman currently residing at Netherfield. Alas, that was not the case and so they Bennet family assembled outside their house to greet their guest. Mr Collins was a plain young man. He held himself with pride and bowed deeply as he descended from his carriage. He greeted Mr Bennet enthusiastically and gazed over Loungbourn house causing Mrs Bennet to bristle next to her.

“Mr Bennet, Mrs Bennet. You have a truly wonderful home, it is not nearly as grand and exquisite as Rosings but that cannot be expected but of course, that is to say, I hope my presence here has not cause you any distress.” He bowed again as he spoke. Lizzie could barely hold back a laugh. What a ridiculous man! She thought to herself.

“Oh Mr Collins, it is such a grievous affair. My poor girls! Mourning the loss of their father, will have to move out of their home!” Mrs Bennet cried.

“Mama! Perhaps we should invite Mr Collins inside before we discuss such topics.” Jane soothed
their mother and started to lead them inside.

“Mr Collins, my wife often forgets that I am not dead yet, and I hope not to be for many more years. Forgive her silly outburst” Mr Bennet shook Mr Collins hand and gestured for him to follow them inside the house.

“But of course. It is quite understandable. Lady Catherine de Bourgh often tells me I must be sensitive to the woes of others around me.” Mr Collins responded with a grave nod. Lydia guffawed behind them and whispered to Kitty. Lizzie shot her youngest sisters a warning look and wondered if she had been quite as boisterous as a young girl. Her father often said she was but had been guided by her gentle elder sister.

“Sorry Lizzie!” Kitty hissed and Lizzie just rolled her eyes as she followed her parents into the house.

Once inside Mr Collins delighted in comparing every detail of Longbourn house to that of Rosings in Kent; the grand home of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. They had been in Mr Collins’ company for all of ten minutes and Lizzie was quite sure she never wanted to hear the name Catherine again; suddenly very grateful that her younger sister went by the name of Kitty. Within an hour, Lizzie thought she could probably make her way around Rosings without getting lost.

“You must be wondering, dear cousins, why I have deigned to visit your fine home here in Hertfordshire?” Mr Collins asked once they had completed the tour of the house.

“I imagine that Lady Catherine de Bourgh instructed you to do so.” Lizzie replied dryly and even Jane turned away to hide her smile. Her mother glared at her for the impertinent comment but thankfully Mr Collins took no notice of the malice behind it.

“Why quite right cousin Elizabeth!” Lizzie scowled at his familiar greeting but it went unnoticed. “Lady Catherine, quite wisely, suggested that it would be a great benefit to my parish and my own happiness if I were to find a wife!” Mr Collins gestured to the five Bennet daughter who stared at him in great dismay. Lizzie could not believe her ears. This strange ridiculous stranger intended to marry one of them, and he seemed to think they should be grateful for his offer!

“Were you unable to find a wife suitable in Kent Mr Collins?” She spluttered, still shocked by his revelation.

“Lizzie Bennet! Hold your tongue!” Her mother scolded firmly. Lizzie grinned mischievously she caught Jane’s eyes twinkling with amusement.

“I only wondered why such an esteemed gentleman, favoured by Lady Catherine de Bourgh herself, would make the journey to Hertfordshire just to find a wife.” Mr Collins nodded solemnly.

“Quite right, quite right cousin Elizabeth. Lady Catherine is kind enough to take an interest in those living by Rosings. She knows all about the entailment of Longbourn and that I will eventually have to leave her side to take up residence in Hertfordshire. It was she that suggested, quite generously, that I find a wife from the family that I will be throwing from their home. As a way of expressing my sincerest apologies for this unfortunate situation.” Mrs Bennet shrieked with delight at Mr Collins’ words. Lizzie looked to Jane in horror, the thought of marrying this odious man was enough to make Lizzie feel quite sick. Jane squeezed her hand in comfort but looked just as shocked at his revelation.

“Oh Mr Collins! How kind of you! We are most grateful. I am sure the girls will be most accommodating.”
Lizzie opened her mouth to protest but she was interrupted by Hill calling them for dinner. Her mother went into a frenzy as she tried to work out who should be placed next to Mr Collins. Mr Collins himself was gently pushing towards Jane but her mother was unrelenting on that matter. Eventually, to Lizzie’s dismay, he ended up sat between Mr Bennet and herself.

“Miss Jane Bennet, I must say when I heard of the Bennet sisters’ beauty I could not imagine that an angel lived among them” Mr Collins stared simperingly at Lizzie’s eldest sister.

“You are too bold sir.” Jane rebuffed his advances with an embarrassed blush.

“Why Mr Collins, you are quite right. My dear Jane is indeed an angel, in fact one of the gentleman, Mr Bingley is quite taken with her. I imagine there shall be an announcement any day now!” Mrs Bennet shrilled, Lizzie could not work out whether she was grateful for her mother’s intervention or embarrassed. Jane decided on the latter option.

“Mama!” Jane looked like she wanted to run from the room but dear kind Jane would never behave as such.

“Mama, we cannot be certain of Mr Bingley’s intentions towards Jane. Although I dare say he is rather fond of you Jane.” Lizzie took her sister’s hand across the table causing her to smile shyly.

“Yes well I dare say I am rather fond of him too, Lizzie.” She replied quietly.

Unfortunately for Lizzie, this admission by Jane only turned Mr Collins’ attention onto her as the second eldest Bennet daughter. Lizzie desperately wanted to mention Mr Darcy but somehow nobody, apart from Jane, had even noticed the budding friendship between them. Jane, dear intelligent Jane, was the first to notice her discomfort at Mr Collins’ attention.

“Say Lizzie. Do you think Mr Bingley will hold a ball at Netherfield soon?” She interrupted her cousin’s ongoing speech about how the dinner at Rosings was to die for and how the place settings were always done ‘just so’ as to highlight Lady Catherine’s ‘humility and grace’.

“Oh yes Lizzie! I should love for Mr Bingley to have a ball! I do so love to dance.” Lydia cried with excitement.

“Maybe Mr Darcy will dance with us twice this time instead of you Lizzie!” Kitty joined in, happy that the conversation had taken a more interesting turn.

“Oh no, I am sure Mr Darcy only has eyes for Lizzie. Caroline Bingley could not stop telling me how he admires you Lizzie, although I do not think she was quite as happy as I was with the news.” Lizzie blushed deeply, struggling to keep the smile off her face.

Mr Darcy admired her, a county girl with little money. She was sure he could have any of the ladies of the ton but for some brilliant reason he had seen something better in her. She thought back to the day in the woods when she had first encountered the brilliant man. It was a moment she had relived many times over the last couple of weeks since she’d last seen Mr Darcy. Of course, when she relived it she did not assume he was Mr Bingley. She liked to imagine his soft chocolate coloured eyes staring back into hers, his hand resting against her cheek as he leant down to kiss her. She flushed brightly as Mrs Bennet’s voice pulled her from her daydream.

“Why Lizzie! You sly thing. I had no idea! Mr Darcy… oh my. Ten Thousand a year… oh yes Lizzie he will do nicely!” Lizzie resisted the urge to roll her eyes at her mother. It had been for this exact reason that she had hidden her feelings behind Jane’s budding romance with Mr Bingley.

“Mr Darcy you say?” Mr Collins interrupted her mother’s joyous wittering about how fine the wedding would be. “Of Pemberley?”
“The very same.” Lizzie muttered. Oh how she longed to be back at Netherfield with Mr Darcy. She would even prefer Miss Bingley’s company over this strange, talkative, inappropriate man.

“Why it is a small world!” Mr Collins cheered “Mr Darcy is the dear nephew of Lady Catherine de Bourgh! I have not had the pleasure to meet him myself but she does talk of him so fondly. I heard that he was betrothed to her daughter Anne so surely Mr Darcy cannot have any intentions towards you Cousin Elizabeth.” Lizzie’s heart sank.

He was betrothed to another, one of much finer standings. She had been foolish to think that Mr Darcy would ever look at her and yet her heart protested. She had seen the way he looked at her and she always looked forward to their easy conversations about horses and dancing and Derbyshire. She had been certain that he had sought out her company whilst she stayed at Netherfield, he had cared enough that he asked her to stay for dinner when she so desperately wanted to see her sister. He had defended her and her family against Caroline Bingley. She blushed as she remembered he had almost called her Elizabeth on several occasions and even Mr Bingley had given them space to be alone as they walked through the grounds of Netherfield. Yet Mr Collins swore he was betrothed.

“You must excuse me. I am afraid I have the most dreadful headache.” She stammered out and she almost ran from the room ignoring her mother’s cries behind her.

She had meant to go straight to her room but her feet led her in another direction. She fled the house and found herself deep within the woods between Longbourn. She blinked the tears from her eyes as she glanced around, it was the same spot that she had first met Mr Darcy. She let out a heavy sigh as she sat down on the damp grass. She breathed in the fresh scents of the forest and relished the feeling of the cool winters breeze on her face. She had not realised how trapped she had felt in the house. Mr Collins’ presence had been almost unbearable even though he been with them for less than a day. She wondered how she would ever make it through two weeks with the man in their house especially if he had decided that she would be his wife.

“What a ridiculous man!” She yelled at the top of her voice, comforted by the isolation of the trees.

“Miss Elizabeth?” Mr Darcy’s deep voice startled her. She blushed and quickly pulled herself up from the ground, brushing off the damp grass. She had been alone, she could have sworn it and yet here was the handsome man that had caused her so much pain. She wanted to hate him so leading her heart on but looking at his face, so full of concern, she could not. He was standing at the edge of the glade with the reins of his horse in his hands; his brown hair tussled and windswept.

“Mr Darcy.” She curtsied and stared down at the ground, unable to make eye contact less her heart betrayed her. “I am sorry. I did not know you were there.”

“Are you alright Elizabeth?” His voice was soft and her heart fluttered in her chest. Her eyes met his and suddenly everything seemed alright. She was hurt but for some reason when he looked at her like he was now everything seemed to melt away. His eyes were a soft chocolate brown and full of kindness, dare she say even love. She could not bring herself to tear her gaze away from him and felt herself step closer; her heart pounding in her chest.

“I…yes… I am” She said dumbly unable to think with him standing so close to her. He chuckled as he took her hand, bringing it up to his lips. Lizzie felt like her whole world was spinning.

Mr Collins’ words came back to her like ice water over her body.
Lizzie gasped as she came back to her senses and pulled her hand away; blushing furiously. She took several steps back to ensure a proper distance between them.

“Mr Darcy. You should not be so bold!” She scolded him. Mr Darcy’s eyes were quickly filled with pain at her sudden change of emotion.

“I am sorry Miss Bennet. I will leave you now.” His voice was cold and unyielding and he started to make his way from the clearing, his horse had other ideas. Hermes stood still, refusing to follow his master. Mr Darcy groaned. “Hermes, please not now. We cannot stay any longer.” Lizzie could not contain the laugh that escaped her lips at the stubborn horse’s antics.

“It appear Hermes is just as bold and stubborn as his master” Mr Darcy blushed at her words and gave her a sheepish smile.

“My apologies Miss Bennet” He said with a quick bow and tugged harder at the horses reins. The horse just stomped his hooves and whinnied loudly. Lizzie giggled and moved to pet the horse on its muzzle.

“Hermes, you really should go with Mr Darcy. It is not proper for us to be here alone. I am not ready to return to the house.” She spoke quietly as Hermes nosed her hand fondly.

“Is something the matter at Longbourn Miss Bennet?” Mr Darcy asked her again. Lizzie sighed and tucked a stray piece of her behind her ear.

“I was not honest with you before Mr Darcy. I admit I was caught off guard by your presence.” She blushed furiously and his eyes twinkled happily as he smiled down at her.

“You were not the only one I assure you.” His cheeks flushed pink and Lizzie felt a rush of warmth flood her body.

“My cousin is staying at Longbourn” She started.

He looked confused so Lizzie explained the entailment of Longbourn and Mr Collins’ wish to find a wife within the Bennet sisters. She avoided his gaze when she spoke of Jane’s fondness of Mr Bingley as she remember their first conversation but Mr Darcy only laughed as he heard that the wedding plans were still very much ongoing. She skimmed passed Jane’s suggestion that Mr Darcy admired her, she was not ready to confront that just yet.

“Mr Collins is rather enamoured by your aunt.” She said with giggle as she remember how much the man fawned over the great Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

“My Aunt?” Mr Darcy replied looking very confused.

“Oh yes. He speaks very highly of Lady Catherine de Bourgh.” She laughed.

Darcy groaned and ran his hands threw his hair. “What has he told you about that woman? She is quite despicable; a dragon of a lady.”

“Well, he did mention that there was a certain arrangement between you and Miss Anne de Bourgh.” Lizzie raised her eyebrow as Mr Darcy buried his head in his hands. He had gone bright red in embarrassment.

“Miss Bennet -” He started.
“Elizabeth” Lizzie interrupted before she could even realise what she was saying. His eyes brightened as he processed her words.

“Elizabeth, you must know, I have absolutely no intention of marrying Anne. I promised my mother that I would not marry her unless I truly loved her” Darcy took her hands once more and Lizzie’s heart pounded in her chest. It was improper and vastly inappropriate for them to be alone like this. If her mother saw her now she would be insisting they get married by morning but Lizzie just could not tear herself away from this handsome, funny and caring man that she’d begun to get to know. She thought she could spend a whole life time getting to know him and still never reach the bottom.

“I should go…” She whispered through the heavy silence that had fallen between them. Her voice was embarrassingly breathless.

“Yes I suppose you should.” Mr Darcy gazed at her with dark eyes and Lizzie felt warmth pool in her stomach. “Elizabeth” He breathed as though her name was the only thing that mattered.

With a deep breath she pulled her hands from his and turned from him. It was easier to breathe without the weight of his brown eyes staring deep into her soul. She heard Hermes whinny behind her and she laughed, with a final glance back she left the clearing to return to Longbourn.

“Goodbye Mr Darcy.” She called as she ran back home.

Chapter End Notes

Mr Collins is fun to write, Mr Darcy and Lizzie interacting is my favourite!
Kudos/comments make me happy! Until next time - AvengerBarnes (also on tumblr if you want to say hi)
Mr Darcy revelled in the freedom he felt as he rode briskly towards the quaint village of Meryton. Charles was by his side chattering happily about how bright the day was and how they ought to make the journey to Meryton more frequently. Darcy found himself quite happily agreeing with his friend but only if they rode on horseback rather than carriage. Miss Bingley had been quite insistent on joining them for the outing until she realised they would not be taking the carriage. Darcy was beginning to think he would have to spent the rest of his life on top of his fine steed, Hermes, just to avoid Miss Bingley’s talons.

Darcy thought back to his chance meeting with Elizabeth in the clearing the other day. The clearing was quickly becoming their place but he couldn’t explain why he’d been out there. It was obvious that she had been running from Longbourn and her cousin but what had brought him to the same place. He had been reading a book in the library, by himself and quite content. Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst had been in the parlour taking turns on the piano forte. So Darcy could not pretend that he had been running from their less than obvious attempts to woo him. He just remembered the sudden overwhelming desire to ride. At first he had tried to ignore it, after all it had almost been time for supper, but the feeling would not budge. He had closed his eyes in an attempt to shake the feeling but he could not stop thinking about the clearing where he had first encountered Elizabeth, his nymph in the woods. So with a huff he had strode to the stables and saddled up Hermes. The stable boy had given him the most peculiar look, obviously not used to the gentlemen riding at such an odd hour.

The ride had been brisk and the air was cool but even as he rode he could not shake the feeling that he needed to get to the clearing. Of course when he had arrived Elizabeth had been sat on the ground, shouting to the trees about her cousin. He wondered, as he saw her, if his dear mother, may she rest in peace, was still looking down on him from above and guiding him to where he needed to be. It had been an enchanting encounter, even if she had, and quite rightly so, been cross with his improper behaviour. Darcy smiled dopily as he remembered her soft, beautiful voice asking him to call her Elizabeth.

“Why Darcy! Is that not the Bennet sisters?” Bingley called from his horse as he pointed to a group of young women by the shops.

Darcy smiled as he recognised the soft curls escaping one of the bonnets. It was his Elizabeth. The
four girls were joined by two unknown men in red military uniform. He heard Elizabeth’s musical laugh as one of the men made a joke. Darcy instinctively pulled on Hermes’ reins and rode towards the sound of his heart. As he drew closer to the Bennet sisters, he recognised one of the men who stood with them. His heart sank and rage filled his soul. It was the villainous George Wickham. He cursed under his breath as he remembered he had already sent Georgiana’s invitation to Netherfield. The last thing he needed was for his sister to be faced with the demon that was Wickham. Every part of Darcy’s soul wanted to turn away and run from the man who had caused his family so much hurt but he was determined that his Elizabeth would not fall under George’s ever so charming spell.

“The Bennet sisters, some of the most beautiful women in Hertfordshire.” Darcy called as he and Bingley approached the group. Elizabeth spun round to face him, her eyes sparkling and a beautiful blush stained her cheeks.

“Fitzwilliam Darcy. What a pleasant coincidence!” Wickham bowed to greet his old playmate. Darcy’s skin crawled as he saw the sinister smirk on the man’s face.

“A coincidence indeed. What brings you to Hertfordshire, Wickham?” Darcy did not attempt to hide his displeasure upon seeing the other man. This earned him several curious looks from the group around him but he had put up with George Wickham for longer than any man should have to and his patience had worn thin.

“Why, I am here with the Militia. I should have thought that much was obvious Fitz. It’s not the living I had hoped for but I am sure our father would have been proud. We cannot all be the Master of Pemberley.” Wickham countered with a smirk. Darcy’s hand were gripping onto Hermes reins so tight that his knuckles had gone white.

“You should leave here Wickham. You are not welcome.” Darcy hissed at his former friend through gritted teeth. It took every ounce of will power he had not to strike the soldier before him. He would have to explain to Elizabeth why this man caused such a vicious reaction from him.

"Oh but Mr Darcy, Denny and Wickham haven’t caused any harm and they do look so dashing in their uniform” Lydia, the youngest Bennet sister whined as she batted her eyelashes at the two soldiers.

“Lydia, show some respect.” Elizabeth hissed at her sister. “Perhaps, Mr Darcy you had better leave.” Elizabeth’s beautiful eyes glanced up at him apologetically. Darcy frowned, had Wickham’s lies already poisoned his Elizabeth against him. George’s easy charisma had fooled many before her. “Perhaps, Mr Darcy, a ride before supper would help to clear your head. You do seem out of sorts if I should be so bold.” Darcy’s heart soared, if he was not mistaken, Elizabeth was suggesting that they should meet in the clearing. She was giving him a chance to explain.

“Run along now Fitz. You would not want any trouble.” Wickham sneered.

Charles looked curiously between the two men and pulled on the reins of his horse and turned away. “It was a pleasure to see you all Miss Bennets”

Darcy reluctantly followed them, he glanced back a Elizabeth who smiled softly as they rode away.

“So,” Bingely started as they began their ride back to Netherfield. “Are you going to explain what that was about?”

“We grew up together.” Darcy stated coldly. He trusted Bingley but it wasn’t just his story to tell. He had to think of Georgiana, it was her honour that was at stake. He glanced over at his friend
who gave him a curious look but did not question any further.

“Well, then I can understand; siblings can be challenging. I believe you have already met Caroline?” Bingley chuckled and Darcy could not help but smile. He was grateful for his friend’s easy approach, he knew that Darcy would tell him when the time was right.

“Is it rude if I say that unfortunately I have made Miss Bingley’s acquaintance?” He smirked as the wind rushed passed his face and Netherfield’s grand house came into view.

“Tremendously so but sadly it’s understandable.” Bingley cast him an apologetic grin. “I daresay my dearest sisters are scheming on how to land you as my brother-in-law Fitzwilliam.”

“I think you may be right Charles. Perhaps we should launch a counter attack?” He quipped.

He never quite got over how easy talking to Charles was. They had been friends for many years now but even at the beginning the redhead had a certain way of drawing him out of his shell, something that Elizabeth’s presence only seemed to enhance. He thought back over his childhood and the friends he had made. He could only really seem to remember his cousins and George. Hardly a wide circle of friends. He was naturally shy, that had not changed a bit. He still hated to dance with the fawning ladies, especially when they were spending the season in London but now he felt less petrified by their presence. He did not feel the need to hide away in the corner of the room. He knew that those who did not know him often called him proud, haughty and unfriendly but really he was just painfully shy. He was always very conscious that people saw him as a means to Pemberley and it’s wealth. He was more than that, he always wanted to be more than that and then he’d met the younger Charles Bingley. He was looking to better himself, of course he was, but unlike others he saw the young Master of Pemberley as a friend. As the boy who helped him find the right dorm room on his first day at University. It helped that Bingley had not known who he was at first but Darcy had an inkling that it would not have mattered regardless.

“A counter attack on Miss Bingley’s seduction?” Darcy laughed at his friend’s outlandish suggestion. “How on earth do you propose we do that Charles?”

Bingley flushed a bright red, almost matching the colour of his hair. “Well, suppose that we are no longer eligible bachelors?” He muttered through his clear embarrassment.

“Why, Charles, Are you thinking about proposing to Miss Jane Bennet?” Darcy asked with delight. It was no secret that his friend favoured the eldest Bennet sister and Darcy was happy that his friend had finally seemed to settle on one angel. Bingley had been known to fall in love too quickly with many beautiful ladies.

“I had considered it. You do not think it is too soon?” Charles asked as they trotted nimbly into Netherfield’s stables.

Darcy dismounted Hermes with ease and led the stallion into his stall. The stable boy looked up from where he was shovelling hay and Darcy shook his head with a smile. It had taken the poor boy some time to get used to the Master of Pemberley’s insistent that he look after his own horse. It was one lesson that his father never let him forget. If one wishes to bond with his horse then he must put in the effort to care for it, otherwise the horse will never learn to trust it’s master. Hermes was far more than just a horse to Darcy. He trusted Hermes with his life, they had spent many hours riding together across the fields of Derbyshire and more recently Hertfordshire. He had never once let Darcy fall, he never spooked at the noise of a dog barking and he always seemed to know exactly where Darcy needed to be. That being said, Hermes was also a trickster. He had escaped his pen more times than Darcy could count, he could always be found in the apple orchid and Hermes had a stubborn habit of not listening to a word Darcy said but Darcy was sure that was because the horse knew he was more intelligent than any Master of Pemberley.
“I think that perhaps you should try courting Miss Bennet formally. My heart, I must admit, would say it is never too soon for love but we must at least attempt to be reasonable.” Darcy answered as he started to pull at the leather straps of Hermes’ saddle. The smell of the stables mixed with the musky leather reminded him of Pemberley and his father. The stables would always be home to Fitzwilliam Darcy no matter how far from Pemberley he found himself.

“I guess you are right Darce but I do so wish to be not reasonable. She is the one you know. My angel.” Charles sang wistfully and Darcy had to resist rolling his eyes at his friend. As much as he knew how taken Bingley was with Miss Bennet, this was a conversation they had had many times in the past.

“You have had many angels Charles. Are you sure this is the one for you?” Darcy asked cautiously patting Bingley on the shoulder to show he meant no harm by his question. Charles blushed bright pink and looked so affronted by the question that Darcy almost felt guilty. Charles followed Darcy’s lead and gave Darcy a firm pat on the shoulder, all hints of playfulness faded from his eyes as he spoke.

“She is the angel of all angels. She is the one. I know.” His tone was bordering on harsh and cold but Darcy did not take offence. He knew he had upset Charles with his question, no matter how valid it had been, but then again tact and social etiquette had never been Darcy’s strongest point.

“If you are sure then I believe you. I ask only out of concern for Miss Elizabeth’s favourite sister and I would not wish for your own heart to be broken.” The two men nodded at each other in wordless understanding. Charles handed his horse over to the stable boy and made his way up towards the main house, leaving Darcy in the stables to take care of Hermes. His horse whinnied at him and pressed his muzzle against Darcy’s shoulder. He laughed at his mischievous stallion’s antics and stroked Hermes’s nose softly, pulling an apple from his pocket. It was tradition after all to treat the stubborn horse after a ride and Hermes had been patient throughout his and Bingley’s conversation. “There you go boy.” He murmured against the warm fur of his horse’s neck. “Good boy, Hermes.”

Caroline watched her brother and Mr Darcy from the window of her bedroom as the rode towards Netherfield. She was rather entranced by the older man sat astride his horse. Mr Darcy was the most handsome rider she had ever seen, it almost tempted her to learn the skill of riding herself. Unfortunately, the stables disgusted Caroline, the smell of manure and ratty old hay strewn around the ground left much to be desired. She took no pleasure in being near the creatures themselves either. Caroline thought they were quite brutish. Even Mr Darcy’s esteemed stallion would kick and whinny whenever she got too close. Caroline sighed. It was such a shame, Fitzwilliam did look so elegant whilst riding. She contented herself to admire his riding skills from afar.

“Caroline” Her sister’s voice broke through her thoughts. She turned to face Louisa who was watching her cautiously.

“Louisa. To what do I owe the pleasure.” Her sister was a small creature, rather plain if you asked her and she had married the first man that had asked. Caroline almost envied her sister’s willingness to take the easy path. It was something Caroline had never managed. She constantly fought for everything she had in life, from the vibrant fabric that made her dresses to the extravagant menus she insisted upon at Netherfield to her hopeless pursuit of rich and handsome bachelors. Louisa was nervously fidgeting, tugging at the ring on her hand. “Oh for god’s sake Louisa, spit it out.” She snapped.

“Marcus has news Caroline. About our brother and Mr Darcy.” Louisa spoke softly. Marcus was one of the stable boys at Netherfield and Caroline had taken to paying him a few extra shillings on
the side for him to relay any conversations Mr Darcy had in the stables.

“What news Louisa?” It could not be good news, not with the anxious manner of her sister. This could only mean that the Bennet sisters were involved. The two eldest sisters were quickly becoming the endless source of Caroline’s nightmares. Not only was Miss Eliza seducing her prize away from her, Miss Jane Bennet was stealing her brother’s heart. It would just not do. Her brother was worth more than the crass country chits of Hertfordshire. Caroline was determined that her brother would marry an heiress with a title. Then Mr Darcy would truly see that The Bingley siblings were worth far more to his fortune than the poor daughters of Hertfordshire that he so fancied.

“Charles wishes to propose to Miss Bennet and it appears that Mr Darcy feels the same about Miss Eliza.” Louisa took a step back as she spoke. She was used to Caroline’s temper. Caroline spun around in frustration knocking her water glass from beside her bed onto the floor. The glass shattered as it hit the wooden boards and Caroline saw her sister flinch from the doorway.

“Propose!” She shrieked. “Unbelievable! After everything we’ve done for Charles. This is how he repays us! And poor Mr Darcy, seduced so unwittingly and influenced by our brother’s poor choice.” Deep down Caroline knew she was overreacting but her words gave her an idea. To stop Fitzwilliam’s mad descent she would first have to split up her brother and Miss Bennet. It was the only way, once Miss Bennet was out of the way then Fitzwilliam would realise how inferior the Bennet’s really were. She would host the most spectacular ball that Hertfordshire has ever seen and then they would return to London, away from the Bennet girls and their apparent irresistible charm.

Chapter End Notes

Tada! Mr Wickham has arrived. Hope you enjoyed it. Any Marvel fans out there join me on tumblr @avengersbarnes. I recently remade so please follow my new blog if you followed my old one. No pressure though. I love getting asks and stuff about my writing though :(
Lizzie practically ran all the way to the clearing. It had taken her longer than expected to get away from her prying mother’s eyes. Jane had noticed her leave but gave her a knowing smile. Lizzie grinned, knowing that Jane would cover for her. She knew exactly who Lizzie was going to meet, Jane was not stupid and she’d seen her interaction with Mr Darcy. Lizzie just hoped that she had not kept the man waiting for too long. When she burst into the clearing, cheeks flushed red and out of breath, Darcy was waiting for her. He was pacing anxiously amongst the trees. He was wearing a dark forest green riding jacket and Lizzie thought that he looked very handsome indeed.

“Elizabeth” Her name rolled off his tongue like a prayer. She smiled as butterflies filled her stomach. Her mother would have fit if she saw them like this. Darcy crossed the clearing in two long strides and took her hands in his. Oh how she wished that she had not worn gloves, to feel his skin against hers. “My nymph”

“Mr Darcy” She breathed. The tension between them was almost unbearable. It had been a mistake for them to meet like this, unchaperoned. The desire was too strong. He gave her the most beautiful smile and brought her gloved hands up to his lips. He brushed a kissed against her knuckles and Lizzie felt a little giddy and lightheaded. She wondered how it was this amazing man had come into her life.

“Fitzwilliam, please.” He whispered as he dropped her hands. She blinked as she tore her eyes away from his, desperately trying to regain some control over her heart and sensibilities. She took a deep breath and put some distance between some. Darcy looked a little disappointed but seemed to understand as the hunger slowly faded from his eyes. He cleared his throat nervously. “I suppose you want to hear about my history with Mr Wickham.”

Lizzie nodded and the fiery anger was once again clouding Darcy’s features. George Wickham had spun his own tale on his past with Mr Darcy. A tale of betrayal between brothers that all seemed very out of character from the man she had grown to love very much indeed. The man she knew was kind, thoughtful and cared deeply for those around him. She knew he was shy, particularly in large groups of people and ladies fawning over him appeared to make him highly uncomfortable. It was a wonder that Lizzie had snuck passed his defences without really even trying. She supposed it was because she had not tried to gain his affections that she had succeeded in doing so. She was probably the first lady, in quite some time, that had treated the Master of Pemberley as no more than just a man. It was probably quite refreshing.

Darcy’s version of the events that occurred between the two young boys from Pemberley were very different. He told her of how his old friend had been plagued of jealousy, how he was desperate to keep a hold of the Darcy reputation and income, how he had lured poor Georgiana away from her brother in an attempt to get hold of her dowry. Darcy had hesitated before telling...
her about Georgiana’s involvement. She gently reminded him that not a word of their encounter would leave the clearing, that he could trust her to keep her silence. His brilliant eyes softened and he took her hand in his, holding onto her gloved fingers like they were a lifeline. The haunted look in his eyes when he told her about finding Georgiana in Ramsgate was heartbreaking and Lizzie could not help but close the gap between them as she found the urge to try and comfort him irresistible. The air was certainly starting to cool by the time he finished his story and the stars were beginning to sparkle above the canopy of the trees.

They were sat close together, too close but his body was radiating warmth and Lizzie was starting to feel the chill. She knew it was time to leave. Her mother would be worrying about her and dinner would be ready soon, if it wasn’t already. It had become awfully dark whilst they were sat in the woods. Time had rather slipped away from them.

“I should go. We have stayed too long.” She whispered into the darkness. Her heart felt heavy as she thought about tearing herself away from Fitzwilliam’s company. She thought perhaps one day she would not have to.

“Thank you Elizabeth. For giving me a chance to explain. I know that Wickham has always managed to charm those around him with far more ease than I.” She blushed as the starlight reflected in his eyes. He was so earnest, so caring, so desperate for her to understand him. It was a devotion that she had rarely felt before.

She gave his hand a squeeze and turned to walk towards the house before her feelings got the better of her. Behind she heard the sound of Darcy mounting his horse and the trot of hooves breaking the sticks on the forest floor. She could barely conceal the beaming smile on her face as she rushed back towards the house, hoping that her absence had not been noticed. Unfortunately, luck was not on her side. She slipped through the back door of the house to find Lydia and Kitty staring expectantly at her.

“Why hello Lizzie.” Lydia grinned mischievously. She had her hands on her hips and a sparkle in her eyes that Lizzie did not like.

“Mother has been so awfully worried. She was about to send a search party out for you.” Kitty added quietly. Kitty’s voice was less scornful than her younger sister’s; she actually seemed concerned.

“But then dear Jane was not concerned at all. I thought that seemed awfully suspicious. You are her favourite sister after all.” Lydia smirked.

“What do you want Lydia?” Lizzie crossed her arms and scowled at her youngest sibling. She was all too conniving for her liking; always after something.

“Where have you been? I said that you were out visiting Mr Wickham and the militia. You really should have invited us. It is only fair!” Lydia whined. Lizzie almost let out a sigh of relief. Her younger sisters were so enamoured by the militia that they failed to comprehend Lizzie’s true feelings. However, since Jane’s admission over supper with Mr Collins, her mother had been incorrigible. Lizzie was half convinced that their wedding was half planned already.

“I merely went for a walk Lydia. I lost track of the time. You would have been quite bored, I assure you.” She hoped her voice would not give her away as she twisted a loose strand of hair between her fingers. Her sister leered at her with suspicion but seemed to accept her excuse.

“Lizzie, how dull you are. You will never catch a man when all you do is read and walk. I cannot imagine how boring your life will be.” Lydia giggled and ran off to the dining room for supper.
Kitty did not immediately follow her sister which was unusual. Lizzie tilted her head and raised her eyebrow. “You should be more careful Lizzie.” Kitty squeezed her hand and followed her sister to supper. Lizzie stood in shock as she watched Kitty’s disappearing figure. A wave of guilt flooded over her as she realised she had never even tried to see Kitty before. She always behind Lydia’s boisterous personality. She had not even attempted to get to know who Kitty was without Lydia.

Lizzie took a deep breath and proceeded to make her way to supper as she braced herself for the inevitable questioning from her parents. Jane was comforting her mother when she entered the room, gently assuring her that Lizzie was not in any trouble. Her father was steadily ignoring Mr Collins’ everlasting speeches about Lady Catherine, and subtly encouraging the middle Bennet sibling to steer the conversation away from his end of the table. Mr Bennet gave Lizzie a wink as she entered the room. She smiled apologetically back, she had not meant to cause any fuss. Mrs Bennet shriiled happily and starting spinning tales of how Lizzie could have been hurt, or dead in the woods and how it was far too late for any sensible young lady to be out alone. Apparently Mr Darcy would never marry someone so careless. Lizzie smiled and looked down at her hands, if only they could know the truth.

Supper was, as always, a noisy affair at Longbourn. Lizzie had not realised how hungry she was until she took the first bite of the fish that the cook had so expertly prepared. Mr Collins praised the food for almost three whole minutes by which time everyone else was halfway through the course. Lizzie was unfortunately still the object of his affections and he spent a large portion of dinner trying to gain her attention. He was so convinced of the betrothal between Anne and Mr Darcy that it did not matter what Lizzie’s feelings were towards Fitzwilliam; she was the second eldest Bennet sister and so she would become Mrs Collins. Lizzie almost shuddered at the thought. Luckily for Lizzie, Jane kept managing to divert her attention away from Mr Collins’ ridiculous wittering.

“So, I take it that there are two sides to the tale of Mr Wickham and Mr Darcy?” Jane whispered under her breath so that only Lizzie would be able to hear. Mary sensed that the elder siblings wanted to talk more privately and began to ask Mr Collins about his sermons and parish in Kent. One mention of Rosings was all it took for him to launch into a soliloquy about the great Lady Catherine. Mary shot Lizzie a shy smile and Lizzie nodded gratefully.

“There are indeed. It is not my story to tell though dear Jane.” Lizzie replied in a hushed voice. She blushed as she remembered the feeling of Fitzwilliam taking her hand in his, the way he said her name like a prayer and the burning desire in his eyes as he gazed at her. It was all too much, too improper but Lizzie was addicted. “We must not trust Mr Wickham though.”

“Did you say Mr Wickham Lizzie?” Lydia piped up, Lizzie resisted rolling her eyes, of course Lydia would hear that name out of everything she had said. “He is ever so dashing. He seemed rather taken with you. Lord knows why.” Lydia giggled.

“I do not think he is very handsome at all.” Lizzie replied scathingly. She prayed it would do something to discourage Lydia’s obsession with the militia.

“Oh Lizzie, you poor thing. Imagine being so in love with an engaged man that you cannot even see a handsome man when he is right in front of you.” Lydia nudged Kitty and cackled at her own joke. Lizzie sighed and looked despairingly at Jane. Lydia would clearly never learn.

“I think has more to do with Wickham’s personality than his looks Lydia.” Jane interjected softly which only made Lydia laugh harder.

“Oh well you would say that Jane. I can hardly imagine Mr Bingley would look handsome even
in a red coat!” She giggled.

“Lydia that is enough!” Mrs Bennet shrieked. Lizzie was shocked, Lydia had always been their mother’s favourite daughter but then again Lydia did not earn five thousand a year and own her own estate.

“Oh mama, you know I am only teasing.” Lydia whined in between bouts of laughter.

“You are a very silly young girl. Kitty what say you of all this?” Mr Bennet added. His sharp eyes turned onto Kitty, expecting her to agree with Lydia as she always does.

Kitty blushed brightly at the sudden attention. “I think” She hesitated “that it was unkind.” Lydia’s eyes flashed to her sister. She looked hurt and almost betrayed. Lizzie was proud of Kitty but there was a deep feeling of concern for her youngest sister.

“Oh boo. It was only a joke. I thought you would understand. I think I will go to bed early. Goodnight.” Lydia stormed out the room. Lizzie sighed as his family were left in a shocked silence. Naturally, Mr Collins’ was the first to break the silence as he began to speak of the hardships of families and black sheep. For once in her life, Lizzie was inclined to agree. It wasn’t long after Lydia’s departure that the rest of Longbourn’s residents made their way upstairs. No one really felt like socialising that night.

George Wickham took a long sip of his scotch as he perused the cards in front of him. He desperately needed a win, he was almost completely out of money and the shop owners of Meryton were beginning to catch on to his bad luck. His charm was starting to lose its effect on everyone but the silliest of girls. The whore he had taken to bed the night before had been lacking, she was a pretty young thing with hair like gold and lips the colour of blood but there had been no fire and certainly no money. He was more than happy never to see her again. He scowled as he looked around the table. The money pot in the middle was far more than he could ever pay for and his cards were beyond dismal; still he refused to fold. George Wickham did not fold. Predictably this meant that he lost yet another round. He sighed as he family were left in a shocked silence. Naturally, Mr Collins’ was the first to break the silence as he began to speak of the hardships of families and black sheep. For once in her life, Lizzie was inclined to agree. It wasn’t long after Lydia’s departure that the rest of Longbourn’s residents made their way upstairs. No one really felt like socialising that night.

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“Mr Wickham. It is a pleasure to meet such an exquisite angel.” He lied. She was plain at best but she had at the very least some money, and he was oh so intrigued by revenge.

“Do not attempt to flatter me Mr Wickham. I know who you are.” The mysterious woman raised her eyebrow but made no attempt to introduce herself. George scowled and straighten his back, on guard, not quite trusting the lady in front of him. “You have debts. I will pay them but I need your help.” She stated cooly. Wickham grinned, she apparently spoke his language.

“You seek revenge.” He chuckled darkly.

“I seek what’s mine” She replied “and you will help me or I tell the town of your trail of debts” He scowled but nodded.

“What do you know of my debts?” George wondered whether this was some form witchcraft. Had he drunk too much scotch?
“We have a common acquaintance and I have informants.” She smiled dangerously. He narrowed his eyes at her, he got the feeling that he was being blackmailed. That was his trick, how dare this creature try to use his best plays against him. “Oh do not look at me like that Mr Wickham. I can assure you that this will be a mutually beneficial agreement.”

He sighed as he considered his options. “What did you have in mind?”

As she revealed her plan, George’s heart sang with glee. If this plan went according to plan then he would have his own revenge on dear old Mr Darcy.

Chapter End Notes

Well I hope you enjoyed it! Comments/Kudos are appreciated. I'm on tumblr at avengersbarnes if any of you guys like marvel and I love to talk about my writing. I will be looking to wrap this up soon because... if I'm being honest. I don't really love writing this anymore. I've moved on but I want to try and do this justice.

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