Pride and Parabolas

by Belugalumps

Summary

Lizzie Bennet is a junior in high school, plays the violin, is the president of NHS, and hates Will Darcy with a burning passion. She would never be prevailed upon to date that snooty AV prick! Until...
The story follows that of Jane Austen's novel, set in modern day.

Notes

I am leaving out parts of the novel that feel are not completely necessary because I'm not really dedicating myself to an entire book. Sorry if Mr. Collins was your favorite character or if Jane leaving for London left you on your toes :) By the way I don't own anything of Jane Austen or Say Yes to the Dress or McDonalds (both of which I mention). Hope you enjoy! (And sorry if it takes me a while to post new chapters! I'm a total procrastinator!)
Chapter 1

Lizzie hated Will Darcy with a burning passion. He was such a private school prick! As soon as he had entered Hertfordshire High he had seemed to delight in getting on her nerves. She had been minding her own business, tuning her violin before pit orchestra practice (they were putting on the Wizard of Oz) when he had just sauntered up, keys jingling, to tell the person next to her that only whiney girls played violin and that he would never be tempted to associate with someone who deigned to play such a horrible instrument. Charlie Bingley, a flute, had laughed nervously then glanced over at her with a dubious expression. Will’s dark eyes never looked her way but it was clear, since she was the solo violinist of the pit, that the comment was aimed at her. Before she had disliked the new kid, his all black AV clothes and the way he always wore a scowl, but now it was personal.

She only played her strings louder, so the high notes resounded across the performance center. Her director gave her a strange look but stayed silent.

“Oh Liz, I think you’re overreacting,” Jane sighed that night at the dinner table. Jane was a senior this year and had been voted ‘Sweetest Smile’ in the school yearbook.

“Have you seen that guy? He just stands at his locker, not saying a word like some sort of spy in black, watching people…” Lizzie dug her knife deeper into the steak, pretending it was Will’s face. “He said it so the entire pit could hear! He’s being a di…”

“Elizabeth!” Her father lowered his spectacles to get a better look at her.

“Sorry,” she mumbled and let the conversation be taken over by Lydia and Kitty. They recounted the football team’s new uniforms with unprecedented zeal.

“I think the blue of the helmets really brings out Wickham’s eyes,” Lydia gushed.

Kitty nodded, “He’s soo hot…”

“Who’s Wickham?” Lizzie’s eyes peeled away from her plate to meet two very offended sisters. “He’s only the school’s quarterback!”

“And a babe!”

Lydia frowned, “You should really keep up with your own school, Liz. You only get to experience high school once!”

“You’re in middle school.”

“So what?”

Mrs. Bennet shushed them and told the family to eat faster. “I don’t want to miss tonight’s episode of Say Yes to the Dress, girls.”

After dinner, Lizzie went to her room and seethed about her rotten day. After quite a bit of time screaming into her pillow, she fell asleep to the melody Mary was playing on the piano downstairs.
Chapter 2

After school, Lizzie’s mother forced her to pick up Lydia and drive her back to the high school to see the football practice. Lydia wouldn’t shut up about the team. Sitting in the stands next to her little sister, watching sweaty boys tackle faceless dummies, Lizzie could think of a hundred better ways to spend her day. Like stab her eye with a butter knife, for instance. “Look! There’s George!”
Lizzie glanced up from her calculus textbook with boredom. “George who?”
“George Wickham of course!”
She entertained Lydia and looked to where she was pointing. Her hand was trembling with excitement. Surprisingly, Wickham was indeed hot. He had golden hair and biceps to spare. He caught them staring and smiled at the two strange girls making google eyes at him. Lizzie quickly hid her face in her book with burning cheeks. “Can we go now?”
“Come on! Mom said I could stay as long as I wanted!”
“Only because you pulled out the crocodile tears!”
“Hey! I do not fake cry!”
Lizzie stood up and started packing her bag. “I’m going now. You can either come with me or you can walk home.” She tromped down the bleacher aisle and onto the edge of the field. Slinging her backpack over one shoulder, the heavy canvas whacked into the team’s water cooler. She watched with horror as the plastic barrel flipped onto the ground with a thump.
George Wickham glanced at her with surprise, then at the cooler gushing ice water at her feet. “I guess I’m not thirsty after all,” he teased.
Lizzie was seriously contemplating running away and hiding out in a dumpster for a few years at this point but made herself smile. It was more like a grimace. “Sorry…my backpack…”
“No worries,” he ran a hand through his shaggy hair, the evening light glistening on his perfectly toned arms. God what was wrong with her?! “I’m George by the way.”
“Elizabeth…err…Lizzie.”
George dazzled her once again with his perfect, white teeth. “I should get back to practice. See you around Lizzie.”
George was halfway across the field before Lydia made her way next to her, panting. “Did you just talk to George Wickham?!” She had obviously run down as soon as she saw her big sister and her dream guy chatting. “WHAT DID HE SAY???”
“Okay, turn it down a notch! I’ll tell you all about it in the car.” As nonchalant as Lizzie was acting, her stomach was filled to the brim with heartsick butterflies. Stepping over the puddle of ice, she walked through the parking lot with a silly grin plastered on her face.
“Hey, wait up,” Lydia groaned, her unnecessarily high heels stumbling over the gravel. Lizzie walked faster, not wanting to share her moment with anyone else just yet.
Chapter 3

“Are you coming to the dance tonight or not?”
Lizzie pulled her tuner out of her bag with a sigh. “I don’t know!”
Jane plucked the bow from her sister’s hand before she could drown out any talk with her high D.
“Liz, stop being indecisive for once in your life and decide whether or not you’re going to the
dance!”
“I don’t even have a ticket!”
“I bought you an extra one just in case!”
Lizzie slumped in her chair, her lips curled in distaste. Jane was the nicest person Lizzie knew. It
was infuriating. “I’ll pay you back for that.”
“Don’t worry about it. I’m the one with the job remember?” She dangled the bow in front of her
sister tauntingly. “Now are you coming with me or not?”
“Ugh!!! Fine, whatever.”
Jane gave Lizzie back her violin bow and flashed her world famous “Sweetest Smile” as she
backed out of the school PAC. “I have the car again today. Do you need a ride after rehearsal?”
“Yes please mother dearest.” She stuck out her tongue. Jane returned the favor.
“Um hey Jane.” Charlie leaned back on one of the audience seats in an attempt to look
nonchalant. His freckled cheeks were bright pink. Anyone with eyes could see that Charlie had
had a crush on Jane since moving here at the beginning of the school year. Anyone except Jane
herself of course.
“Oh hey Charlie!” Jane’s face scrunched in concern. “Are you okay? You look a bit flushed.”
He tugged a bit on his collar before replying. “Yeah I’m cool. Super cool.”
Super cool? Lizzie wanted to gag at the cuteness level but Jane seemed to be eating it up. She
watched as Jane fussed over him a bit more before leaving for work. Charlie then made his way
over to the pit, his hair and cheeks flaming.
“She’s going to the dance tonight.”
“Oh what?” Charlie looked at her with doe brown eyes. He always kind of looked like a scared
puppy. Lizzie had no idea why someone so innocent would ever hang out with Will Darcy. Why
he would be the one to convince Darcy to leave his old private school for Hertfordshire High.
“Jane is going to be at the dance tonight. Without a date.” Lizzie adjusted her stand, looking at
Charlie out of the corner of her eye. “Just thought you might like to know.”
He grunted in response, trying in vain to mask his growing smile.
They were practice running the show that day. During intermission Lizzie left the PAC for a
bathroom break. The halls were quiet this late after school, the way she liked it. That is, until she
ran straight into George Wickham.
“Oof!” Lizzie looked up at George’s dazzling smile in horror. “Maybe you should join the football
team,” he teased, “You sure managed to knock the wind out of me, and I’m the quarterback!”
Lizzie pondered over the two possible meanings of her making George Wickham breathless
before lamely replying, “Uh sorry. Hi again!” Her voice squeaked like a mouse.
“The famous Lizzie Bennet! We meet again…”
“Yeah. I was just on my way to…my locker.” Nice save Lizzie, nice save.
“I had practice again today. Why are you at school so late?”
“I’m uh…part of the pit orchestra for the…musical.”
“Let me guess…” George tapped his chin in mock thinking. It was adorable. “You play the…
saxophone? What? Are you laughing at me?”
“No!” She smiled. “Guess again.”
“Upright base.”
She shook her head.
“Fine. I give up, what do you play?”
“Violin.”
“Would you believe me if I told you that that was my guess all along and I was just testing you?”
“Not even a little.”
He laughed. It sounded like a chorus of songbirds.
Lizzie tried to think of something else to say so he wouldn’t leave. “Um…are you going to the dance tonight?”
“Why? Are you?”
Her heart skipped a beat. “Oh, I wasn’t implying…”
“I would never think such a thing.” He blinded her with another smile. “And to answer your question I actually can’t. It’s sort of…complicated.”
“I’m okay with complicated,” she replied.
He started to walk away, his head turned to say goodbye. “Another time. See you later Lizzie Bennet.”
He was around the corner before she remembered why she had left the PAC in the first place. Hurrying to the bathroom, she prayed that ‘another time’ happened sooner rather than later.
As much as Lizzie hated to admit it, she did actually enjoy school dances. Hertfordshire High, despite being just another public school, threw some pretty decent parties. The music tended to be top 20 but the gym was always renovated like a dream. Tonight, the lights were dimmed and candles (probably fake but classy nonetheless) rimmed the walls. The theme was Cabin in the Woods. She thought she smelled pine tree.

“Oh, look at the candles,” Jane gushed, “And that smell! Don’t you just love dances Lizzie?” She twirled her sister round in the doorway, almost knocking over a couple entering behind them. Once the spinning had stopped and Lizzie had regained her balance, she conceded, “Fine. It is pretty nice.”

“It’s magical!”

She laughed, looking about the room in the hopes of seeing Charlotte. Instead she found…

“Charlie!”

Jane looked to where Lizzie was waving and smiled at the shy boy now crossing the room to join them. “Liz, I didn’t know you were close with Charlie Bingley.”

“I’m not.”

“Then why…”

“Hi, Elizabeth…uh Jane.” Charlie had obviously taken Lizzie’s hint to heart and had put on his nicest suit. He bowed a bit when making his greetings and Lizzie didn’t know whether to laugh or curtsy in return. “Have you danced yet,” he asked.

Lizzie knew he was trying to include both of them in this question but he couldn’t seem to take his eyes off Jane. Garbed in a silver 20’s-esque dress, with her blonde curls done up in a bun on the top of her head, and her eyes rimmed in a thin line of black, Jane was by far the prettiest girl in the room. She would be jealous if she weren’t so happy for her sister’s budding romance.

“We just walked in but I’m sure Jane wouldn’t mind a partner,” Lizzie butted in before her sister could say a word. “I was just going to go get a drink.”

Charlie smiled gratefully in her direction and politely asked Jane if he might have the first dance. Jane nodded, throwing Lizzie a perplexed glance while he wasn’t looking.

Happy with her accomplishment, Lizzie dutifully made her way to the refreshments, in the hopes of backing up her story in case Jane asked. To her delight, she ran straight into Charlotte.

“Charlotte! I’m so glad to see you! Look who’s dancing with Jane…”

Lizzie’s friend looked over at the floor and smiled knowingly. “Gosh, they’d be such a cute couple. Wouldn’t they?”

Looking at them across the room, basked in candlelight and awkwardly trying to dance to techno music, they seemed not only cute but…perfect.

“So Lizzie…any boy catch your eye tonight?” Charlotte grabbed a cookie and scanned the room as if she didn’t already know every single person there. “Hey where’s the hottie…George? Is that his name?”

Lizzie’s smile fell a bit as she replied. “He can’t come tonight.”

“Wait, don’t tell me…you talked to him again!!! Dish please!”

After spilling all of the not-so-juicy secrets of her romantic pee break to her best friend, they each settled in the bleachers and tried to determine who would be sleeping with whom tonight. “I don’t know that guy with the scraggly mustache is looking awfully friendly towards the girl in the yellow dress…”

Charlotte gagged. “I think that’s his sister!”

“Aw gross! Get off her you pervert!”

Charlotte slapped her arm, giggling hysterically. “What about her? In the purple? She already looks drunk. What time is it? Like 8:00?”

“Yeah…she looks…oh my god.”
“What?”
“That’s Lydia.”
“No…"
“That is definitely Lydia. What the hell is she doing at a high school dance?! And flirting with Weed Smoking Wes?!”
Lizzie stormed down the bleachers, grateful for having chosen to wear flats. “Lydia! Lydia!”
Her little sister looked up, her smug face replaced with horror. “Shit, shit, shit,” she mumbled as she attempted to flee out the back door.
“Oh no you don’t!” Lizzie grabbed her arm before she could escape. “You know Dad would be furious if he knew you snuck into a high school dance! And you were drinking! What were you thinking?”
“Get off me!” Lydia’s scrawny arms hardly scratched her as she struggled. After a few moments she slumped in defeat. “I just wanted to have some fun. Kitty’s here too!”
“Well then go find her and meet me back here. And wipe that sparkly gunk off your face while you’re at it,” Lizzie called at her back as Lydia stormed away.
“Was that Lydia?” Lizzie turned to see Jane, flanked by Charlie. She nodded. “What is she doing at a high school dance?!"
“Exactly my question. Kitty is here too.” Jane’s frown deepened. “I know; I sent Lydia to go find her and meet me back here. I’ll drive them home before Dad finds out.”
“No, I’ll do it.”
“Jane now’s not the time to be…”
“I’m not just being polite. I want to. Plus, you haven’t even danced yet!” Jane glanced over at Charlie, the question clear in her big blue eyes.
“Uh, I already sort of reserved the next dance for my sister but my friend Will is here! Hey Will!”
Lizzie’s whole body went into panic mode. “No, no that’s fine…”
“Will, over here!”
“I really don’t like dancing much. And hey, if you insist I can always ask Charlo…”
Charlie seemed not to have heard a word she said. He took his friend by the shoulder, turning him to face Lizzie. She looked pleadingly over at Jane who shot her an apologetic look before leaving to find Lydia. Charlie followed her like a puppy.
“Uh…hi.” Lizzie forced herself to look at Will Darcy, as much as she wanted to simply walk away. He was the mean one, not her. He was also dressed in a suit, and obviously an expensive one, but it was thrown on haphazardly as if it was just another thing he owned. His dark hair was cropped short but still somehow managed to shade his eyes in darkness. She couldn’t tell if they were black or brown or just a really deep blue. Lizzie looked away quickly, having forgotten herself.
“Hi.” He never stopped looking at her, despite all her attempts not to meet his gaze ever again. “I think my friend wants us to dance.”
“Yeah well they sort of left so we don’t have to…you don’t have to…” Her voice faltered as Will Darcy took her arm gracefully, leading her onto the dance floor like a man with the purpose. What the fu…
The previous song ended and a slower piece drifted in through the speakers. Just her luck. She was about to once again insist that this was not necessary, but Will had already placed his hands on her waist. He waited expectantly for her to place her own on his shoulders. She did so, feeling vulnerable.
Will Darcy’s hands were on her waist. His hands were... were... her brain seemed to be overloading. Her hands were touching his shoulders. They felt broad…sturdy.
“So…” she started “…you used to go to private school?”
He was silent a moment. “Do you always talk when dancing?” His voice was a deep bass, joining into the song’s soft chorus. What? Where did that come from?
She rolled her eyes. “No, I prefer to be silent and use my eyes to bore into people’s souls…”
“That was a joke at my expense.”
This guy was unbelievable. “We don’t have to talk.”
He was silent a moment, giving her time to just feel the sways of their bodies. He stayed a respectable distance from her, but she could still feel the warmth of his body. “Yes, I used to go to private school with Charlie. His parents were moving him here for his senior year, to expose him, as they said, to different kinds of people. He then convinced me to switch too. I had no attachment to St. Joe’s Academy and the only difficulty was convincing my parents.”

She nodded. She now knew more about Will Darcy than three quarters of the kids in the school. “I’ve gone to school here all my life.”

“I know.” When her eyes widened he quickly added, “It’s just that I’ve heard things. I’m quiet and people tend to forget that I’m there.”

Lizzie didn’t know whether she was more distraught that people were apparently talking about her, or that Will cared enough to actually listen and take note of what they said. “We don’t have to talk.”

And they didn’t talk anymore. The song ended quickly enough, Will disappeared back into the throng without another word, but her body still seemed to be swaying even without his hands upon her waist. His eyes were so dark…

“Did you just dance with Will Darcy?!”

She turned to face Charlotte. “I can hardly believe it myself.”

Charlotte took her arm and started to pull her back to the bleachers. “Okay. Spill. I want every detail.”
Chapter 5

“I hear you were the only girl Will Darcy danced with the entire night.”
“Can we please stop talking about this?!”
“He is pretty cute, you have to admit, once you get past the whole brooding ‘I hate you all’ thing.”
Lizzie took the pillow and threw it at Lydia’s head. Lydia still owed her one for not telling their parents about the dance, yet she seemed to have forgotten.
“Oh isn’t that one pretty girls!” Lizzie grudgingly removed her gaze from her younger sister and looked at the wedding gown her mother was referring to on the television. “Jane would look especially pretty with all that lace,” she sighed.
Lizzie ran with the momentum. “Yeah, why don’t we talk about Jane? Charlie was either dancing with her or staring at her the entire night!”
Jane leaned over their mom to look at Lizzie. “He did not!”
“Come on! He likes you and you didn’t seem so unwilling yourself.”
“I was being polite!”
“Yeah, yeah. Whatever.” She leaned back on the couch and stared unseeingly as countless girls tried on countless dresses on the screen. Her father had been hiding out in his study for over an hour. She was tempted to join him; this whole Bennet girls bonding night wasn’t her cup of tea.
“I’d say Will Darcy is maybe the second cutest guy in the school…next to Wickham of course!”
She was going to strangle Lydia.
To Lizzie’s relief however, and Lydia’s luck, Mary changed the subject once again. “Lizzie, I hear you signed up to be a math tutor at school.”
“Thank you Mary. I did. I figure I could use the money since all the part time jobs seem to be taken.”
“Do you know who you’re going to be tutoring?”
“No, not…”
“Elizabeth, darling? Could you please walk Pumpkin?”
Lizzie looked from her mother to the fur ball on her lap. “But…”
“The only butt I want to hear about is this woman’s! The way she fills out the back of that dress… the tool really accentuates her…”
“Fine, I’ll walk the flipping dog.”
Jane stood up with Lizzie. “Do you want me to take him? It’s no bother…”
“How about I take the dog and you take this time to go up to our room and call your boyfriend while you have some privacy?”
“He’s not my…”
“I’ll take the dog. It’s fine.” It was a long shot anyway. Lizzie scooped up Pumpkin, his tiny body practically vibrating as she grabbed his leash and stepped outside. The dog was a new development. Her dad had been just as disgusted by the little rat as herself, but her mom had insisted it was to calm her ‘poor nerves’. How Pumpkin, a dog who still peed in the house and never stopped shaking, could somehow calm her mother’s nerves was beyond Lizzie.
“Who’s this little fellow?”
She whirled around to see George Wickham leaning on a car (presumably his) in front of her house. Her house! “George! Hi! This is Pumpkin.” Looking down at the monstrosity she added, “He’s my mom’s.”
“I’m sorry I couldn’t come to the dance last night. I actually drove here to finally give you that explanation you asked for.”
Lizzie’s heart fluttered. “Do you want to walk with me?”
“I’d love to take a stroll with you any day Elizabeth Bennet.”
She looked away to hide the blush creeping up her neck. “So what was this complicated reasoning behind not going to the dance?”
George was a quiet a moment. “I hear you danced with Will Darcy.”
Was that...jealousy? Her heart did a little skip. “Yeah but I didn’t want to and…”
“The reason why I’m asking is because Will Darcy is the reason I decided not to go.”
They stopped to let Pumpkin pee, the momentary distraction giving Lizzie time to process this statement.
“You see, Will and I go way back,” he began, “Like, my mom was his dad’s maid when she was still pregnant with me, way back. I was raised as his brother practically; we used to play with toy armies after school. Then when my mom died his dad took me in.
“Will has always been awkward and brooding and even his family has a hard time with him. I had always been Mr. Darcy’s favorite. Will couldn’t stand it. When his father died he left me enough funds to go to four years of college, but Will wouldn’t give it to me. His jealousy got the better of him. He hired an expensive lawyer and after the court case I was left penniless.” He kicked at the dirt with his sneaker. She watched the way the light played with his hair.
“I now live with my grandmother, with no expectation of an education beyond high school. I’ve thought about trying to get a football scholarship but so far no one’s been interested. My only hope is to join the army after graduation.”
George looked at the ground as they walked, his hands shoved deep in his pockets. “At school I avoid him but I knew if I went to this dance...the gym is small enough that we were bound to run into each other.”
Lizzie watched Pumpkin sniff at some grass, her elation at seeing George earlier replaced with an overwhelming sadness for George and an even more potent hatred for Will Darcy. “George, I’m so so sorry. You didn’t deserve any of that.”
“I didn’t tell this to you to make you pity me! I just needed you to know that it wasn’t you that I was avoiding.”
“I understand.” She grabbed his hand. His fingers were delicate yet strong as they held on to hers. “Thank you for being honest with me.”
"You’ve got to be kidding me!"

"Excuse me?"

"I’m sorry… I don’t mean to be ungracious it’s just that this has to be some sort of mistake!"

Mrs. Mott looked at Lizzie sternly. “Do you have a problem with your assignment? Before you answer Ms. Bennet, let me remind you that there are many students just as bright as yourself who would be more than happy to take your place.”

Lizzie clenched the paper into a fist, her good mood crumbling before her eyes. “There’s no problem Mrs. Mott.”

The math teacher nodded, leaving Lizzie to stew while she dealt with the other tutors.

Will Darcy?! She was assigned Will Darcy to tutor in math of all the people in this godforsaken school?! She cast her disdainful gaze at the crumpled sheet once more, eyes falling on Will’s cell number. She was supposed to call him to schedule their first study session. As she walked out to her car, she used her fingernails to dig into his inky black name printed on the paper.

Once home, she was greeted by Jane, her usually sunny disposition at an all-time high. “Liz, would you care to join me in our room?”

She nodded and followed Jane upstairs, curiosity dampening her fury. “What is it?”

Jane shut the door behind them with a grin. “Charles Bingley asked me out today.” Lizzie’s sister was practically jumping.

Lizzie smiled. “I thought you didn’t like him.”

“Oh, don’t be smug! Help me pick out what to wear tonight!”

“You guys are going out tonight?! What time?”

Jane started rifling through her closet. “7.”

“That’s in an hour!” Lizzie sunk into her bed, forcing herself to forget her Darcy predicament for the moment. Jane deserved to be happy and Lizzie hadn’t even told her about Wickham’s confession yet.

“Do you like the pink or the blue?”

“Definitely go for pink, it’s your color, but not that one. Yeah, that; it’s softer.”

Jane gave the pastel sundress an appraising look before turning to look at Lizzie. “You don’t think this is a mistake do you?”

“Do you actually like him, or did you just say yes to be polite?”

Jane gingerly settled herself next to her sister on the bed. “I really really like him Liz.”

“Then why on earth would it be a mistake?! Jane, he’s super cute- you always liked redheads- and he’s the nicest person I know, next to you. You guys are perfect for each other. Where is he taking you?”

“It’s a surprise.” Jane’s pale complexion revealed the subtlest of blushes. “I should probably start getting ready…”

“Go get dolled up darling.”

Lizzie buried her face in her pillow as soon as Jane left for the bathroom. She wanted to scream. What was she going to do?! She needed the money, but helping Will pass his classes seemed to go against her moral code. Beyond that, tutoring him would mean actually talking to him… several times a week.

“You look dead.”

Lizzie plucked her face from her pillow, swiping the hair from her face. “You really need to start knocking, Kitty.”

“Have you seen Lydia? We were supposed to do each other’s nails…”

“No.”

“Could you do my nails then? The old polish is chipping and I have a science presentation tomorrow.”

Lizzie nodded, not even attempting to question Kitty’s reasoning behind the importance of her
nails for her presentation. Chances were, this was taking precedence over actually doing the project itself. As much as Lizzie loved her baby sister, Kitty wasn’t the sharpest tool in the shed. “Do you like Will Darcy,” Kitty asked once she was settled on the bed, Lizzie putting the first coat of nail polish on.
Lizzie scoffed. “No way. Why?”
“As Jane was herding me and Lydia out of the gym I saw you two dancing. He seemed to be interested in you.”
She threw up a bit in her mouth. “What makes you say that?!?”
Kitty shrugged. “He didn’t dance with anyone else and he never stopped looking at you.” She looked down at her purple nails. “I want someone to look at me like that…”
Lizzie nudged her chin. “Okay Kit. First off, Will Darcy likes me no more than I like him. Second, you’re only in 8th grade! You’ve got plenty of time to date boys. Look at me, I’m a junior and I’ve never dated anyone!”
If Kitty thought her sister’s situation was slightly pathetic she wasn’t working very hard not to show it. Tears welled in her baby blue eyes. Lizzie felt helpless; Jane was the therapist, not her.
“Done. Careful not to smudge them, okay?”
Kitty nodded, disappearing out the doorway, presumably to continue her search for Lydia. The two were attached at the hip despite their year age difference.
After a few more minutes procrastinating, Lizzie made herself get up and go outside. This call required some true privacy. Also, she didn’t want to contaminate her bedroom with Will Darcy’s sulky voice.
Opening up the front door, Lizzie stumbled upon her sister sitting on the step. “Jane?! Shouldn’t you have left like an hour ago? Did Charlie postpone the date?”
Jane’s head fell onto her knees, petite frame shaking slightly. “He…I think he…”
“He what?”
“Stood me up!”
Lizzie moved to sit beside her, rubbing her shoulder as the sobs came. She couldn’t believe it! Charlie Bingley did not seem a boy capable of standing a girl up on their very first date. He had asked her out just that day! It was unbelievable… However much she tried to rationalize the situation though, the facts stood. “Come on, let’s go inside. It’s getting cold.”
Lizzie spent the night at Jane’s disposal, completely having forgotten to call Will.
Will called her. They met up in the library the day after Jane’s heartbreak. Despite how vulgar she found him, Lizzie tried to be civil, she really did. She wasn’t going to stoop to his level…Also she needed the money. “What are you doing?”

“Excuse me?” His features twisted in confusion.

“Math. What are you working on in your math class?”

“Oh.” Will shuffled through the contents of his folder. It was the first time she had seen him genuinely uncomfortable. No, uncomfortable wasn’t the word. He was always uncomfortable. Nervous? “We’re graphing…parabolas specifically.”

She looked down at the notes in front of them. Who would have thought that Will Darcy wrote his algebra notes in cursive? Was it a rich kid thing? “What don’t you understand?”

Not nervous, embarrassed? Her harsh tone in combination with its implication of his own incompetence was making him squirm. Guilt started to trickle through her veins, making her squirm too; she could almost feel the pity spreading through her body like a virus.

“I…I have a good memory. I’ve already memorized all the equations and everything…I just don’t quite…It’s hard to…apply.”

“Well, have you tried picking apart each section of the equation and applying the transformations separately…” Lizzie watched him struggle through problems, watched him sit staring at the page, afraid to ask questions. After an hour poring over their work, she began to be able to sense when he was stuck. She helped him before he had to ask and watching comprehension dawn on him, slackening the tightness of his jaw, it actually felt good.

“Good! That’s the hardest question on here!”

Will leaned back in his chair and glanced apathetically at the freshman girl staring at him. The girl quickly looked away, trying to hide her blush with a chunk of curly hair. Was Lydia right? Did people really think Will was hot?

“Thanks.” The word sounded painful leaving his lips. “My parents tried to hire a professional tutor but I’m pretty sure she’s in her 80’s. Back in the day she apparently discovered some impossible equation…today all she can claim are the longest old lady chin hairs I’ve ever seen.”

Lizzie smiled before she could stop herself. Will saw and looked away after meeting her eyes for a moment. She remembered his eyes as they had danced. Then they were a warm brown in the fading candlelight, but now they seemed glossy black. Were his dark spikes of hair endearing or just unkempt? Were his pursed lips like cupid bows or just another sign of his apparent superiority? She couldn’t quite say. She thought of that freshman girl’s stares.

“How do you want a snack? They’ve got peanut M &M’s.” Lizzie pushed her chair back and walked over to the vending machine, trying to ignore Will’s eyes on her back.

“I…I should probably head home. The session was only supposed to be an hour, remember?”

She let her gaze linger on the package of hot fries placed directly at eye level behind the cheap glass rather than attempting to turn around. “Oh. Yeah, of course.” She turned her head to the side but kept her eyes on the ground. “I guess I’ll see you around.”

“Yeah…Bye, Elizabeth.”

Lizzie bought the package of M & M’s, taking her time so that once she had her candy in hand he had already left. Trying to suppress any thoughts about Will, she ate the entire pack, the details of his face melting away alongside the chocolate in her mouth. She was just debating if she should buy another one when Jane texted that she was in the parking lot.
After hearing George’s account of Will’s indecencies Lizzie had thought it impossible for her ever to despise someone as much as she did William Darcy. After an entire weekend of listening to Jane crying herself to sleep at night, however, Lizzie found that she had been wrong. She was beginning to understand why Charles Bingley was so close with Will. Casting aside any doubt-inducing memories of Charlie’s shy smiles or Will’s dark eyes, she braced herself for battle.

Monday.

“Why any boy would stand up my darling Jane is beyond me!” Lizzie’s mother ranted as she paced the kitchen in a pink bathrobe and kitten slippers. Twice Kitty had to tug their backpacks out of her path for fear of her hurting herself. “I always knew that boy was trouble! It’s as I’ve told you girls: never trust redheads. That’s the truth of the matter!”

The scene might have been almost humorous, thinking back on Mrs. Bennet’s utter delight when Jane had initially told her mother of Charlie’s intentions, if it weren’t for Jane’s red rimmed eyes. After listening to her mother curse Charlie and his entire damned family a few more minutes, she could take it no longer. “We’re going to be late for school,” Lizzie cried on her way out the door. Her sisters followed her lead with relief. “You girls should listen to me more often! I’m always right in the end,” Mrs. Bennet preached from the window as the car backed out of the driveway. Lizzie was surprised she even noticed they had left.

“I’m fine, Lizzie,” Jane insisted as soon as they had dropped Kitty and Lydia off at the middle school.

“You haven’t been fine for days! I have half a mind to go talk to him myself…”

“No! Either something detained his coming or he never liked me in the first place! Either way I have no cause for anger.”

“No cause for anger?! God Jane, you can’t defend everyone!”

Jane frowned. “Let it go Lizzie. I mean it.”

She leaned back in her seat, watching the school loom ahead, silhouetted by the rising sun. She hated Mondays.

Charlotte met up with her in the hall. “How is Jane?” They had seen each other Sunday and Lizzie had filled her in on the recent drama.

Lizzie didn’t meet Charlotte’s gaze as she responded. “Not good.”

“She’ll bounce back! Right…?”

“I don’t know…and there’s the culprit now!” She spied Charlie’s red hair across the hall and picked up her pace, leaving Charlotte far behind.

“Lizzie wait!” The voice of reason was too little and too late.

She knew that Jane had told her to stay out of it but Jane’s mind was so one-tracked that sometimes she couldn’t see what was for her own good. Jane dealt with the delicate matters and Lizzie dealt with the conflict; it was what made them such a good team. This definitely fell on the side of conflict.

“Charlie! Yeah you!”

The poor bastard looked like an animal ensnared in some sort of trap. His eyes were saucers serving up a fat plateful of guilt.

“How dare you stand up Jane?! What the hell gives you the right…”

Lizzie was cut off abruptly as Charlotte grabbed her arm and dragged her away. “You’re making a scene,” her friend hissed in her ear as her feet began to slip on the linoleum.

“I’m sorry” was all Lizzie was able to make out from Charlie’s weak plea before he slipped back into the crowd.

“Why’d you do that?! I had him cornered yet I hardly got two words out!”

“Good!” Charlotte looked Lizzie hard in the face. “First of all, it’s not your battle…”

“She’s my sister…”

“…and second of all, I doubt yelling at the kid is going to make him want to date Jane.”
“I don’t care if he wants to date her or not so long as he feels like scum!”
“Based on his expression, I think he already felt like that before you jumped in.” Charlotte’s expression spoke more than her mouth. It was saying that she should have expected as much from her best friend. It spoke disappointment. She picked her bag up off the floor and began to lead the way to first period. “Come on we’re going to be late.”
Listening to her footsteps echo through the now sparse hallways, it did dawn on Lizzie the extent of guilt that was written across Charlie’s face. He had seemed sad… Despite her best efforts, his innocent image was beginning to slip back into place. His soft spoken plea kept ringing in her ears. But if Charlie was truly innocent why on earth had he stood Jane up?
“So I hear you attacked Charlie Bingley.”
Lizzie smacked her pencil on her desk in frustration and whirled in her seat to meet her accuser’s eyes. Lizzie didn’t know the girl but her fire red hair suddenly made her uneasy. “I did not attack him.”
“Well tell that to the rest of the school. It’s all anyone is talking about!” The girl leaned forward. Lizzie’s eyes strayed from her snarling pink lips to the breasts nearly leaping out of her skimpy tank. She leaned away in disgust. “What on earth,” the girl continued, “did a peach such as Charlie do to make you so mad?”
“It’s none of your business.”
“I think it is my business when I’m the one with information of use to you.”
Lizzie struggled to keep her composure. “What information?” There was a pause. “You’re not going to lord it over me until I tell you why I was mad are you?”
“Oh God, I already know all about how Charlie stood up your precious Jane on their very first date. I also know that William Darcy was the one who convinced him to do it.” The girl smiled at the shock she had managed to evoke. “That’s all.”
Lizzie turned back to the front of the classroom feeling utterly conflicted. She was ashamed that such a girl had shaken her up so much. She was also beginning to feel the flames of her hate for Will being fanned with a fury. Then more shame crept in as she remembered the past three tutor sessions with him. No matter how much she had tried to keep the Wickham affair at the forefront of her mind as she pored over numbers, Will had always managed to distract her from his past. He was quiet and stiff but there was still something about his manner that softened her resolve. Now that Jane’s misery was added to his acts of cruelty, however, she could not let herself slide. It was in this moment, listening to Mr. Pratt drone on about checks and balances in the U.S. government, that Elizabeth Bennet swore a solemn oath to forever loath Will Darcy.
In her fury, it did not dawn on her that the girl had asked for nothing in return for her disclosure.
Chapter 10

Lizzie spent the next day and a half seething. Then she remembered that she still had to tutor Will on Thursday. With her doom in sight, she curled up in her living room bearing a stress ball and a pint of ice cream.

“You look like you’re going to kill that poor stress ball,” Mary deadpanned. Her voice rarely changed octaves except when ranting about the patriarchy and the horror of school dances. “Is there something on your mind,” she asked.

Lizzie tore into the stretchy orange ball with a fury. “Shouldn’t you be at knitting club or something?”

“It was cancelled.”

“Good for you.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Fudge off,” she said as she shoved a mountain of Fudge Ripple in her mouth.

Mary stood up and spread her hands along her ankle length skirt. She looked like she was headed for Sunday school. “I don’t know who you’re infuriated with this time and I don’t really care but you need to stop sniping everyone who walks into the line of fire.” She left the room and took Lizzie’s anger with her.

She sat still for a moment, contemplating her situation with a clear head for the first time in what seemed like weeks. She didn’t simply dislike Will, he had hurt her family. Jane had stopped crying, replacing sorrow with a stone cold facade. When her sister hadn’t gotten over Charlie after a day or two, Lizzie had realized the extent to which she had cared for him. Jane could hide her feelings even better than Mary. Cradling her ice cream close to her chest, she knew what she had to do. The next day, Lizzie went to the library resolved to tell Will that she could no longer tutor him. Screw the income; she would get a job at McDonalds if she had to.

“Hi Elizabeth.” Will was waiting for her at their usual table. He had bought her a bag of chips. Lizzie didn’t sit, but stood across the table, her arms crossed over her books. “Will, I can’t…”

“Wait.” He stood up too, his eyes widening as they cast their gaze furtively around the room. They were alone. “Before you say anything there’s something I…have to tell you.”

Lizzie felt she should stop him but she was too shocked to say anything at all. What was he doing? She had never seen Will like this.

“I’ve really enjoyed our study sessions together…”

“Will…”

“Just please let me finish or I fear I won’t ever get my courage up again. I’ve really liked studying with you and these past few weeks have been torture! I really like you Elizabeth. You’re nothing like the girl my mother envisions me dating.” He ran his fingers through his dark hair and paused a moment. “I mean they only really like wealthy families and your family is quite scandalous besides but…”

“My family is scandalous? What the hell is that supposed to mean?!”

He replied to her outburst bluntly. “I mean your mother is the joke of the PTA and your youngest sisters literally throw themselves at the football team…Even you can’t deny…I mean you and Jane are of course not included in this and that’s really my point…I’d like to date you despite all of this!”

“How dare you! You insult my entire family, imply that I’m impoverished and then profess that you want to date me? This isn’t even the first time that you’ve insulted me!” She paced the floor, her clear head vanishing behind the clouds.

“How dare you! You insult my entire family, imply that I’m impoverished and then profess that you want to date me? This isn’t even the first time that you’ve insulted me!” She paced the floor, her clear head vanishing behind the clouds.

“Okay I was wrong with the violin comment and maybe that came out wrong but…”

“I wouldn’t date you even if you had serenaded me with the entire Hertfordshire High orchestra!”

He was nearly trembling by this point. “I…I don’t understand…”

“You convinced Charlie to stand up my sister! You also ruined George Wickham’s chances at a happy life! Do you care to explain yourself?!”
Now he stood up a bit straighter, his words placed heavily on the table before them. “You truly loathe me don’t you?”
She stopped pacing and stood firm. “I loathe you to the very core William Darcy and I would never, even if you were the last man on earth, ever date you. I also came here to tell you that I am officially resigning as your tutor.”
Will looked her squarely in the eyes. His were black pits. “Thank you for enlightening me.” And with that he left, leaving Lizzie alone in the library, a hurricane of both hatred and complete and utter confusion.
Chapter 11

“What’s up with you? You’ve been acting wonky for weeks now!”
Lizzie showed Charlotte the cover of her novel, muttering, “Shoot me for reading…”
Her friend scoffed. “Based on the fact that you’ve been staring at the same page for ten minutes, it seems to me…”
“Would you like to say something?!” She set her book down on the couch between them with a thud.
Charlotte scooched closer, eyebrows furrowed in that way that Lizzie knew meant business.
“Would you like to tell me something?! You’re up in the clouds!” Her voice softened, pleading.
“Did something happen?”
“Nothing happened Charlotte.”
“I’m your best friend, I should know when…”
“As my best friend you should really stay out of my…”
“You need to talk about it! Whatever it is!”
Lizzie stood up, banging her shin on the coffee table in her haste. Trying to mask a wince, she replied, “I’m going home. Call me when you stop trying to be some sort of TV detective, prying into my personal life.”
She stormed down the walkway, ignoring Charlotte’s retorts yelled from out her front window.
“That’s what friends are for,” she screamed. “I’m supposed to pry! Call me when you screw your head back on!” The shutters closed with a slam.
Everything seemed so screwed up lately. Lizzie sat on her bed, eyes picking the lock to her top dresser drawer, hands too fearful to actually open it and lay eyes upon its contents. She flung herself across her covers, head spinning.
It had been three weeks since Will had professed himself to her. That incident alone had left her reeling for about a week. Total douche had a crush on her. Surprising but she could get over it. She had gotten over it until the letter had shown up, shoved in the slats of her locker. She remembered her surprise at finding it. Who even wrote letters anymore? Once she had seen the meticulous cursive scrawled across the front, however, she had known exactly what sort of prick would be pompous enough to do so. With a groan, she sat up and made her way over to the dresser. Her hands hovered over the key.
The letter had changed everything. Once again doubt had begun to take hold of her. She hated doubt! Lizzie Bennet, the girl with such strong convictions, was being thrown for a curve by the one boy she thought she loathed he most. She just needed to calm down. It was only a letter.
Turning the key, she brought the wrinkled paper back to her bed. The paper hadn’t been crumpled at first; it had actually been in pristine condition considering that it had been shoved inside a locker. It was after first reading it, having taken it home with great trepidation, that Lizzie had crumpled it into a ball, tossing it across her bedroom into the waste basket. Ironing out the creases with her hands, she tried to ignore the water stain where an old piece of gum had stuck to the corner.

Elizabeth,
I am fully aware that you hate my guts and that at the sight of my –probably to you- obnoxious cursive you most likely threw this letter away. My hope is that—and if you are reading this, my hopes have come to fruition—once the initial shock has run out, you will give me one last chance to explain myself.
I’ve been a total dick, and coming to Hertfordshire High, I’ve started to become painfully aware of my own flaws, the most prominent being my seemingly infallible pride. Well, Elizabeth Bennet, you will be happy to know that you have taken this pride and rubbed it in the dirt. For that I am eternally grateful.
Let me just start by saying that you make me nervous. That’s the source of my completely unprecedented comment about the violin, one of several backhanded comments I have been
known to utter. Some inane part of me thought that if I shoved you away and made you hate me then my own feelings for you would fade. Unfortunately, I have succeeded in making you hate me yet I care for you none the less.

In reference to my judgements upon your family, I apologize. I had no right. And I know that you probably think that I tried to split up Charlie and Jane due to my opinions of your family but this was not the case.

I am very protective of those closest to me and did not see Charlie’s affections returned in your sister. To me, her manner toward him appeared obligatory rather than affectionate. When I heard that the two were supposed to go on a date I told him such and stupidly advised him not to follow through. I do need to say that Charlie is not the sort of guy to stand a girl up and the only reason he did so was at my prying. On this account I have little excuse, except that I was acting in what I thought was the best interest of my friend.

In the matter of George Wickham, I can defend myself. Wickham finds great pleasure in telling others the sad tale of how he was left penniless. He always conveniently forgets, however, some key details. Like how he had, and most likely has, no intention of going to college. My mother set up an account for him for when he turned 18. It didn’t take long for me to be duped, thoroughly convinced of his honest nature, into allowing him access to this account. He spent the entirety of the fortune within the year. When I made it clear that he wouldn’t get a penny more from my family he seduced my sister Georgiana in a last ditch attempt to win the family’s favor. She was only 13. I made a quick end to the relationship as soon as I was made aware of it. George has since stayed away from the Darcy family. I did not know that you were acquainted with him or I might have warned you. I hope you believe me when I say that Wickham is not someone to be trusted.

I shouldn’t have bombarded you with my emotions all at once like I did. I had, with misplaced optimism, convinced myself that you knew how I felt and that you felt the same. I see now that before ever having any sort of relationship with you I would have to explain my past actions. I hope I have done so effectively.

I am sorry for all the distress that I have caused you.

Yours,

William Darcy
Chapter 12

Lizzie stared at Charlotte, utterly shocked. “You want to do what?” She was starting to regret her decision not to be angry at her best friend anymore.

“It’s just a party Lizzie.”

“We’ve never been to a real party before.”

“What do you mean real party?”

Lizzie shook her head. “I mean a party not thrown for any particular event. One that does not include presents and Twister. One that does include drinking and probably pot.”

Charlotte swatted away her friend’s fears with a wave of her plastic spork. “It’ll be fun! You don’t have to smoke anything if you don’t want to.”

“And you, Charlotte Lucas, do want to smoke weed…?!?”

“I never said…”

“What’s this about a party?” Mary scooted onto the bench next to her sister, fruit cup sloshing.

“Charlotte’s lost it.”

She scoffed. “I have not lost it! It’s just that we’re juniors in high school and we need to go to a party at least once. Don’t you agree Mary?”

Mary smoothed her maxi skirt with a look of disdain. “Quite the contrary. I think parties are a poor way to socialize. Better conversation than wild dancing and vomiting in stranger’s shoes.”

“Thank you, Mary.”

“I stick by my decision,” Charlotte said. “I’m going to this party and you can either join me or spend your Friday night moping by yourself.”

“But moping is what I do best!”

“Don’t I know it…”

Lizzie shot her a silencing look before facing the tuna sandwich her mother had made her with defeat. Mrs. Bennet was no cook. If only they could afford a chef…

“You look fancy,” Jane mused that night as Lizzie contemplated her wardrobe choice.

She gazed sullenly at her reflection in the bathroom mirror. “What do you mean? I’m wearing jeans and a t-shirt.”

“Yes, but you also put on makeup. You never wear makeup.”

“That’s it. I’m taking it off.”

Jane stilled her arms at her side with a smile. “No, don’t! You look pretty!”

“Thanks,” she said, tearing her eyes away.

“It’ll be fun, Liz.”

She turned to face her sister with a pout. “Then why won’t you be there?”

“You know why! Someone’s got to watch Lydia and Kitty! Dad’s on that trip for work and Mary’s locked in her room knitting…or something like that… and we both know Mom will be in bed by 9:30.”

‘Whatever, flake.” She smiled. “See you later. I’ll try to text you if I get assaulted, etc.”

“You’re such a drama queen.”

“How did I get dragged into this again?” Lizzie waved goodbye from Charlotte’s passenger seat, feeling the dread sink to her gut. “I have a bad feeling about this.”

“You have a bad feeling about everything,” her friend retorted.

She nodded, letting herself be convinced for the moment. She was actually starting to feel like she wasn’t going to vomit, but then they turned the last street corner.

The Darcy Family Mansion. The party was at the freaking Darcy Family Mansion. As they drove closer she saw it wasn’t actually a mansion, but it could probably fit at least two of her own houses in its front yard alone. It had a pond and gardens. What the hell… This wasn’t the 19th century!

“Why didn’t you tell me Will Darcy was throwing the party?!”

Charlotte shrugged. “You didn’t ask. And there are going to be so many people, I doubt we’ll
Lizzie was now also regretting not informing Charlotte of her current Darcy situation. What was her current Darcy situation? She had the letter but had not yet formulated any sort of response. He liked her and she… she…

“Here we go! Booze and pot here we come!”

Lizzie felt like she was going to vomit again. Charlotte already looked like she was having the time of her life.

“Ooh look they have a movie theater,” her friend squealed, meanwhile obtaining her first solo cup of the night.

The house was…amazing, to say the least. They had a game room, tennis courts, an infinity pool… It was obvious, from the pictures on the wall, that the home had been the family’s for a while. The pictures of Darcy descendants in early 1800’s garb sort of explained the front yard. A signed note framed next to the photo mentioned the name Pemberley…

“Do you think Wickham will be here,” Charlotte giggled, interrupting Lizzie’s reverie.

Her mind strayed to the letter hidden in her dresser. “I doubt it. George and Will aren’t on the best of terms.”

Charlotte looked at her, knowing that she was on the edge of the secret her friend was hiding, but respectfully dropped the subject.

She wished Jane could have come. It didn’t take long for Charlotte, her usually rational best friend, to get roaring drunk. She didn’t know who else to talk to. The partiers were all the people who frequented these kinds of gatherings, the kind of people she had zilch in common with. At one point she thought she glimpsed the red headed girl from that day in class, but she disappeared before she could approach.

She did see Charlie. Lizzie hadn’t consciously decided to forgive him, but once she saw him she knew that as stupid as he was about the whole Jane thing, he wasn’t a malicious person. That was all Will. Maybe. “Hey Charlie.”

“Lizzie?” He turned around, eyes widening just as they did the day in school when she had practically attacked him.

“I’m not going to fight you, it’s okay. I actually wanted to apologize.” She took a deep breath. “You were a jerk to Jane but I know it’s not your fault.”

Charlie’s face slackened from fear to sadness. Tears began to well in his eyes. “I felt so bad afterwards…I’ve been trying to make it up to her ever since but she won’t answer my calls and every time I bring flowers to your house, I just see them in the dumpster later that day!”

Lizzie didn’t know what to say. “Wait…you’ve been calling and leaving flowers?”

“I’ve also left her notes but I’m pretty sure she’s thrown those out too.”

“I had no idea…she never said a word!” This convinced her. “I’ll talk to her.” Tell her it was Will, not you, she thought.

“Thanks, Liz. You’re a really loyal sister. I don’t blame you for wanting to beat me up at first. I would have done the same.”

Lizzie tried to imagine Charlie Bingley fighting anyone and had to stifle a laugh. She started to leave, in pursuit of some solid food, when Charlie stopped her. He seemed unsure of himself.

“I…You should talk to Darcy. I know he’s been ill mannered but he’s the best friend to me…just like you are to Jane or Charlotte!” He smiled weakly. “He was really hoping you might show up tonight.”

Lizzie smiled in return, too embarrassed to admit that she hadn’t even known the party was at Will’s house, and if she had she definitely wouldn’t have shown up at all.

“Hey Charlotte, I’m going to take you home.”

“No way hose,” she slurred, “This is the most fun I’ve had in my entire life.” She stumbled, caught by a member of the football team. Meeting the eyes of the hunk holding her in his arms, she began to giggle uncontrollably.

Lizzie knew she should probably force her friend back to the car, but she figured a couple more minutes wouldn’t hurt. She had an overwhelming urge to explore more of Will Darcy’s home. It was a ridiculous notion, but one she couldn’t shake since she knew that this was probably the last
She stepped outside, witness to the beauty of the back gardens in the setting sunlight. The gardens here were far larger than those in the front. She followed the dirt path snaking its way around rose bushes and willow trees. Her fingers trailed the petals of a flower, its sap sticky to the touch. Minus the couples making out in the shadows, she could almost be in paradise. If only she had brought her book!

She took back her comment from before. It seemed to her that every family should have its own garden.

“Elizabeth.”

Lizzie whirled around, nearly tripping on her own feet. Will Darcy was gazing at her as if she was the only other person on earth, his hair and eyes glistening in the darkness. A chill crept up her spine. “I…” She recalled how she had last seen him, his face red with fury. “I’m so sorry. Charlotte convinced me to come to a party and I had no idea it was at your house or I never would have…”

He looked at the ground, fingers fumbling with his pockets. “Would you…” He glanced up at her before tossing his head back down. “L…lovely weather.”

She would laugh if her heart wasn’t slowly tying itself up in knots. “I’ll go.”

“No! I mean, you don’t have to go on my account.”

Why was it that even after admitting to several atrocities in a pretentious letter, the sight of him still didn’t anger her as it did just a few weeks ago?! “No…not on your account. My friend, Charlotte, needs to be put in bed before she does something she regrets.”

He nodded. “Would you like any help? I could give you a ride home!”

“I actually drove myself.”

He smiled, as if mocking himself. “Of course. I guess I’ll see you at school?”

“Yeah, see you.” She began to walk away, but stopped a moment more. “You have the most gorgeous gardens,” she said before leaving him in the shadow of a willow tree.

“Come on Charlotte! Move your feet!” She was struggling to hold her friend up, still a few hundred feet from the car, when her phone rang. It was Jane.

“Lizzie, Lydia’s missing.”

“What! I thought you were watching her!”

“I was but she went up to bed and when I went to check on her she was gone!”

Her stomach sunk. “I’ll be right home.”
“How could she do this to me?! Hateful child! She has no respect for my poor nerves!” Mrs. Bennet wept into Pumpkin, whom she was holding hostage on her lap.

Lizzie sat down next to her mother with a sad smile. “It’s hardly been an hour. I’m sure Jane and Mary will find her. She can’t have gone too far.” She tried to embody Jane’s unending optimism, but images of Lydia dead on some drug dealer’s floor kept rising in her mind. She wasn’t even sure if Lydia did drugs. She probably would if the drug dealer was hot.

“Your father will be forced to leave his trip and be fired, leaving us destitute…!”

“I hardly think they would fire him for searching for his missing daughter,” she reasoned.

“My daughter! Lydia! Missing!” She once again broke into sobs, Pumpkin leaping from her clutches just in time.

Lizzie wished that Jane had let her go and search instead. Anything was better than trying to comfort Mrs. Bennet when she was distressed. She resumed pacing the living room, after tugging her cell out of her purse. Lydia still wasn’t answering her phone.

“Jane?”

“Still no sign of her. I’ve already visited all the bars in town. Got strange looks from a lot of drunken men.”

“She’s still not answering her phone and none of her friends have heard from her.” Lizzie looked over at her younger sister, who was sitting on the couch looking sullen. “I’ve also thoroughly interrogated Kitty, who has no clue where she is either.”

“Why would Lydia go out on adventure and not bring me along,” Kitty exclaimed after Lizzie had hung up the phone.

“She’s not on an adventure Kit, she’s missing.”

Kitty sniffled. “We’re supposed to tell each other everything.”

Lizzie looked from her mother to her sister, feeling outnumbered by the crazy.

Suddenly Pumpkin began to bark at the door. His little body was wriggling with excitement.

“Pumpkin, baby! Come to Mommy!”

Pumpkin ignored his owner’s calls and persisted in the entryway.

“Maybe it’s Jane,” Lizzie said doubtfully. Hope began to rise in her chest as she swung the door open. Her hopes were not in vain as it was in fact Lydia on the step, but she was accompanied by the last person Lizzie expected. “Will?”

Will was supporting Lydia with one arm and half-carried her into the house. “She’s rather drunk. Would you like me to carry her upstairs?”

Mrs. Bennet scurried from the couch to Lizzie’s side, her arms going out to her youngest daughter. “Lydia!”

Lydia smiled lazily, her eyes struggling open. “Mama? Guess what…” She broke off to swallow what was most likely vomit. “I have a boyfriend!”

Mrs. Bennet relieved Will of his duty and guided Lydia up the stairs. “That’s wonderful darling! I can’t wait to hear all about your adventures!” Kitty tromped up the stairs behind them, just as eager to hear the scoop.

Lizzie was dumbstruck. Neither of them seemed to care at all about the last hour in which Lydia had so irresponsibly run away. They were also ignoring her blatant underage drinking. Lizzie was finally seeing the extent of the ridiculousness of her family, and the boy who had so rudely pointed it out in the first place was right there to be witness. “How did…Where was she…”

“Jane stopped by my house, wondering if Lydia had snuck into the party. I told her that I hadn’t seen her but that I would keep an eye out.” Will rung his gloves in his hands. “I did end up finding her there…she…I brought her right home.”

“Thank you so much. I don’t know how we’ll ever repay you!” She faltered. “What was she saying about a boyfriend?”

He admired their tiled floor. “George Wickham has just made their relationship official.” He
looked just as pained to say the words as Lizzie was to hear them. “I…” She had so many questions. “I should go,” he said before she could respond. He gave her a parting smile before leaving as suddenly as he had come. She watched his slick, black car pull out of the driveway and disappear in the night. “Jane,” she said over the phone, “Will Darcy found Lydia. Come home…we have a lot to discuss with our youngest sister.”
Chapter 14

Over the next week, Lizzie was too busy gawking at Lydia and George’s public displays of affection to think much of the party or her promise to Charlie. That’s why she was so surprised to find out that Jane had accepted Charlie’s offer of another date, an actual one this time, without any interference of her own.

She tore her eyes away from the lovebirds making out on the bench in the backyard long enough to give Jane a dubious stare. “You did?! I thought that you were in the habit of rejecting his advances!”

“I do admit that he has approached me many times before to both apologize and try to go on a date but…” She looked out the window with a love struck grin. “…someone convinced me.”

“Who convinced you?”

“Does it matter?”

“Well, when is this date?”

“Tonight. I should probably be getting ready, now that I think of it!” Jane took her sisters hands and spun her around. “I feel light as air! Charlie and I are a couple! And he knows if he tries anything funny this time I’ll rip his balls off.”

Lizzie stared at her sister, not sure which was more shocking: the fact that after months Jane was forgiving Charlie or that her sister had actually uttered “rip his balls off”. She felt like she was looking at a stranger. “I feel like the world is turning upside down,” she said, cringing at the sight of George sticking his hand up Lydia’s shirt.

Jane seemed not to have heard her. “Aren’t they cute,” she said in reference to the couple before walking away.

Lizzie shook her head, utterly perplexed.

“I don’t know if I should be happy that someone has finally taken Lydia off my hands or if I should cut his hands off for touching my 13 year old daughter like she was some common prostitute.” Mr. Bennet put an arm around Lizzie’s shoulder.

“Did you hear about Jane,” she asked him.

“Yes. I think she’s punished the poor boy long enough.” He looked down at her, his bushy eyebrows lifting in amusement, “Did you know that he even came to me to ask my permission? I respect that... He’s a good kid. I’ll never understand why he stood her up in the first place though.”

She did.

Mr. Bennet sighed. “Okay, I can’t watch this anymore.”

Lizzie watched her father march outside and tear the two apart. She knew it wasn’t a permanent solution to Lydia’s lack of self-respect, but at least she didn’t have to watch that jack-ass desecrate her. The sound of the doorbell, accompanied by a wail from Jane, caused her to turn from the scene.

“I’m not nearly ready,” Jane called down the stairs. “Lizzie, can you let him in and have him wait in the living room?!”

She dutifully answered the door, escorting a heavily perspiring Charlie into the house. “Where are you taking her,” she asked after a moment of uncomfortable silence.

“I reserved a private room at an Italian restaurant I know.” He looked to Lizzie for her approval.

“That sounds romantic.”

He nodded, obviously pleased, and said, “Everything needs to be perfect.” Then, he looked at her, as if searching for something. “You still haven’t settled things with Darcy.”

Lizzie cast her gaze to the window again, in order to hide her sudden, overwhelming sense of vulnerability. “He knows I no longer want to murder him, and we’re on friendly terms…”

“We both know he doesn’t just want to be on ‘friendly’ terms. And I don’t think you want that either.” He paused. "He’s been working to deserve your affections, Lizzie.”

She met his doe brown eyes with uncertainty. “What do you mean?”
“I thought you knew… He’s the one who convinced Jane to give me a second chance. He’s also the one who saved your youngest sister.”
“I know, he found her and brought her home to us…”
“Not just that,” he replied. “He found them…in a…a… compromising situation. George has been known to use younger girls and then toss them aside, leaving them to the ridicule of their peers.”
Lizzie’s breath began to catch in her throat. She thought of Lydia’s youthful naiveté. Poor, stupid Lydia.
“Will found them together and made it clear to George that if he were to disgrace Lydia, the entire school would know his true character.”
“I should have told my family what I knew about him,” she whispered.
Charlie shook his head. “You couldn’t have anticipated this. And you wanted to believe that Wickham was good underneath it all, just like Will has for so long.”
“Thank you for telling me.”
“I’m only doing my duty as a friend… to you and Darcy both.”
Lizzie would have hugged Charles Bingley right there if the realization of their friendship hadn’t been interrupted by the appearance of Jane at the foot of the steps. Her sister was wearing a simple white sundress, covered by a navy blue sweater that shone silver in the sunlight.
Lizzie stood aside as they left for their date, glad to see Jane so happy. As soon as they were gone, however, her thoughts returned to Will. He had done so much for her family! For her…She began to wonder what it was that she had done, deserving of so much devotion. Maybe, in the way that she was now seeing something in Will, he had always seen something in her.

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