Elizabeth and Darcy's Excellent Adventure

by Elizabeth (anghraine)

Summary

After the Netherfield Ball, Elizabeth and Darcy literally fall into an alternate universe.

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The night of Mr Bingley's ball was hardly the unqualified success the neighbourhood declared it to be. Indeed, as far as Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy were concerned, the entire affair was an unmitigated disaster. They retired as early as possible, full of vexation and anxiety.

Elizabeth decided that nothing could possibly compare with the parade of humiliations she had just endured, and walked across the dark room in a slightly improved frame of mind. Unfortunately, Lydia had left a pile of novels near the foot of the bed. Elizabeth stumbled over them, reached out to steady herself, and instead struck her head on the bedpost. Everything seemed to spin - the room faded - and Elizabeth fell to the floor in a crumpled heap.

At Netherfield, a knob rattled.

Darcy, vacillating between several dull books, paused. Then he turned and stared at the door.

Not even his most admiring friends would call him attentive to his surroundings, and he himself acknowledged - sometimes - that he was not precisely a noticing kind of person. Yet he felt reasonably certain that the door before him had not been there before. Perhaps something had covered it - yes, that must be it. He did not remember anything doing so; indeed, he clearly remembered that the room was bare of anything but a very ugly painting above his bed, but he must have deceived himself. Doors did not make a habit of appearing and disappearing at their own discretion.

It rattled again, harder. Plainly he would get no peace until the matter was resolved. Darcy sighed, gathered his pile of books (several of which were rare editions he had discovered during his last
journey through London) into one arm, and stretched out the other to grasp the knob. Feeling absurdly like the heroine of a novel, he pulled the door open.

He could see nothing but darkness - only to be expected at this hour, but someone had certainly been here. Really, this was all very inconvenient. “I beg your pardon?” he called out, then stumbled. One of his books, an early printing of A Wealth of Nations, fell to the floor, - and Darcy stepped across the threshold.

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“Miss Bennet? Miss Bennet!”

Elizabeth came to, groggily. Then she raised a hand to her throbbing temple and sat up. Shining floors and rows of paintings met her eyes.

“What on earth?” she whispered, looking with some desperation for anything familiar. Then she stared. “Mr Darcy?”

“Miss Bennet,” he said, offering his hand. “I hope you are not seriously injured.”

Elizabeth hesitated, then accepted it. Try as she might, she could see nothing villainous in the offer. “No, I only tripped. At least, I thought - yes, I fell, but that was at Longbourn. I have never seen this house in my life. Did you bring me here?”

“Not to my knowledge,” her companion said, depositing several books in his disengaged arm. “As far as I recall, I walked through a door in my room at Netherfield. I found myself here, and you, swooning on the floor.”

She winced. “It is a lovely house - I only wish I knew how I came to be in it!”

“Thank you,” said Darcy.

“I beg your pardon?”

He never had a chance to reply; at that moment, a scream pierced the air and, seconds later, a sobbing maidservant rushed into the gallery. She took one look at Darcy, screamed again, and ran the other way.

“What excitable servants you have,” remarked Elizabeth. “The poor thing looked like she might swoon at any moment. Is this Pemberley, sir?”

Darcy walked to one of the windows and pushed the drapes aside. When he turned back to her, his lips were compressed to a thin line. “In a manner of speaking,” he said grimly. “The grounds are not quite right, and I have never seen that girl in my life, but - Come this way, Miss Bennet. We shall make some sense of this.”

“What sense is there to be made?” Elizabeth enquired of his back; he was already stalking in the direction the maid had come from.

While she certainly felt not the slightest inclination to meekly follow a man as cruel and depraved as this one, simply because he ordered it, she had the sense to realise that he must know his way around his own home rather better than she did.

They had only been walking about a minute when yet another girl wandered across their path.
This one, however, could hardly have posed a greater contrast to the first. She walked unhesitatingly towards them, her head high, as if she were not wearing the most preposterous gown Elizabeth had ever seen - a madwoman’s idea of their grandmothers’ attire, perhaps.

“Hello there,” she said, staring at Darcy.

He and Elizabeth exchanged puzzled looks.

“I don’t remember seeing you,” the young lady went on. “Though heaven knows that’s hardly astonishing. I can hardly keep track of us all when it’s just Darcys.”

Darcy twitched. “I am - ”

“- Mr Fitzwilliam,” said Elizabeth hastily.

The girl’s face brightened. “Oh, that explains it. Nobody can ever keep track of all the Fitzwilliam cousins. Say, did you hear Martha screaming?”

“Heard, and saw,” Elizabeth told her. “At least, I do not know her name, but certainly a maid ran towards us - and away, after one glance. She looked like she’d seen a ghost.”

“She probably thought she had, the credulous little thing.” She nodded at Darcy. “You’re the spitting image of my great-grandfather Darcy” (he turned grey) “if you look at his portrait, you’ll see. You gave me a start, and I’ve got splendid nerves. Oh, where are my manners? I’m Harry, if you’ve heard complaints about me from your side of the family. No? Oh, it’s Henrietta Darcy, then. You must go to the gallery while I manage Martha.” She flapped her hands at them. “Run along, now.”

Henrietta whirled away, Darcy staring after her.

“A relative of yours?” said Elizabeth. “She looks like you.”

“I - do not - know,” he replied jerkily, his face still ashen. “I beg your pardon - I must see - ” With as little warning as ever, he turned back the way they had come, Elizabeth almost running to keep up with his strides. They passed a queer little door between two windows, both curtains still ajar, then stopped dead.

Before them was a portrait of a young golden-haired man, strikingly like Darcy, but hardly enough to inspire the reactions they had seen. His mouth was stern and unsmiling, almost grim, his flat painted eyes blazing in his pale face.

“Charles Darcy,” said Elizabeth. “Your Christian name is not Charles, is it?”

“No. There was several children who died in infancy, before I was born - the others were stillborn, but Charles lived a full six hours.”

“He looks like he lived rather longer than that.” She turned her head; to Charles’ right were two more portraits: one of a pretty, dark-eyed girl, the other of - Darcy. There was no questioning it; he was a little younger, perhaps, but the features, the colouring, even the amused smile which annoyed her so much, had all been captured on canvas.

Lawrence? she wondered vaguely, as Darcy stared at himself like Narcissus in a cravat.

“Apparently you lived - will live? - to eighty. Oh, and this must be your sister.” She nodded at the dark-eyed girl.
“No. She is - her name is Eleanor Tilney. I went to school with her younger brother.” He swallowed. “I believe we exchanged seven words once.”

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