Summary

My take on what could have happened just after Episode 97 ends. Costume theatre is included. One-shot.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

A startled reflex made her jump up when Darcy uttered, "Excuse me, Lizzie."

Lizzie Bot malfunction... She stood there gaping for a while. The pause seemed to go on entirely too long, before she exclaimed breathlessly, "Darcy!"

She pictured her viewership typing I-told-you-so's in the comment sections. Everyone had expected that Darcy would turn up for several videos already. Why had she sounded so surprised?

"I thought you were Charlotte."

"No... I'm not..." he said.

"No, you're not," she said, equally lamely.

"Sorry about that." Darcy shifted his weight nervously, wearing an expression that she might previously have called snobby or douchey but now mostly just looked awkward and uncertain.

"No, I'm glad you're here."

"Good..."

For Pete's sake, think of something sensible to say, she directed herself. It seemed like every time they talked it tended to be weird - self-conscious and embarrassed and full of pauses in the wrong
places but this just might be the most inarticulate and inane conversation they had ever had.

"I thought you would call."

"I'm sorry I didn't. I was going to, but we have never spoken on the phone before and I was afraid it would be weird."

"Right, like we've never had weird conversations in person," Lizzie scoffed.

"Oh but those I am used to."

It was difficult to decipher his meaning. Was he saying that he did not mind their strange, awkward exchanges? She did not like the uneasiness and the fear of saying the wrong thing but she had missed seeing Darcy and talking to him so much. Go figure. Perhaps there was such a thing as good awkward.

Eventually he broke the silence by asking her how she was.

"I'm fine." Better now that you came, she thought, but couldn't quite bring herself to say it out loud.

"And your sisters?"

"Jane is blissful. Lydia is getting better."

"I'm glad."

He looked more handsome than she remembered, dressed in his customary non-casual manner, his hair a little mussed. She became aware that she was staring, but she could not look away. Would not look away. Not that he seemed to mind.

"Happy birthday."

"Thank you. How did you know it's my birthday?"

"Charlotte told me just now. I'm sorry I didn't bring you a birthday gift."

"Oh, that's okay. We were going to get Chinese delivered and watch movies with fancy costumes in them."

"Yeah, well, about that... I think Charlotte decided to abscond with your takeaway when I arrived."

"Ooh, sneaky Charlotte."

"I'm sorry for spoiling your birthday plans."

"If you say you're sorry one more time I'll give you something to be sorry about," she threatened, only half-jokingly.

"Sorry... Actually I'm not sorry that Charlotte left. I was hoping we could have a private conversation."

"Well, here we are..."

"Here we are... What did you wish to... chat about?"

He stared at his shoes and his question sounded as clumsy and hesitant as her voicemail had.
Apparently the two of them were well matched.

"I wanted to thank you for what you did for Lydia."

Darcy shook his head. "I did not do anything for Lydia."

Lizzie took a step closer and took a hold of his elbow, as if preparing to shake some sense into him. It was an impulsive gesture. "Please don't try to deny it, Lydia told me everything you did. I just don't know how we can even begin to thank you enough."

"We?"

"Lydia and I, and Jane, and our parents, we all owe you such a huge debt of gratitude for what you did to assist Lydia."

"Your family does not owe me anything. I haven't done anything in order to make them indebted to me, I just hated to see you so unhappy and wanted to help." She remembered the way he had jumped into action mode immediately when he heard the phone call that portended doom and disaster. "Help you, that is," he said, emphasizing the pronoun.

"You just may have saved my little sister's life. I was so worried about her."

"I know you were." Slightly inconsequentially, he added, "I have a little sister too."

"Darling Gigi... Is she OK?"

"Gigi's splendid. I was afraid hearing about George Fu... uhm, WICKham's newest exploits would upset her but she might actually have benefited from it because it reinforced the notion that the man, and I use the term loosely, is definitely not worth any regrets."

"I'm so happy to hear that. Maybe she and Lydia should trade notes."

"I would be honored to invite you and Lydia to stay with us whenever it is convenient for you two so Gigi could make Lydia's acquaintance."

It meant a lot to Lizzie to hear that because it seemed to prove that Darcy had not completely washed his hands off her when he heard of her family's connections to porn industry after all. "I would like that."

She sat back down and Darcy followed suit. That's when he noticed the camera was on. "Oh, you're in the middle of filming again."

"Yes."

"So much for having a private conversation."

"I don't have to post this. I can stop the recording." She made a move towards the camera.

"Oh, it does not matter. Everything else is on the internet so why stop now?"

"Are you being straightforward or sarcastic? I can't tell."

"Possibly a bit of both. But honestly, I don't mind. Besides, your viewers will want to see this. The videos featuring me always have the most views."

"You've noticed." She wasn't sure why she'd thought he wouldn't have. Of course he would.
"So what is this video about?"

"Just stuff... Charlotte and I were talking about..." She trailed off.

"About...?"

She suddenly found that there was something wrong with her clothing and started fiddling with the fabric. He waited.

"Never mind, I suppose I'll find out when the video comes out." He shrugged. "Sorry, I seem to be constantly barging in in the middle of your videos. A bad habit I can't seem to overcome."

"It was you, actually."

"What was me?" He looked adorably confused.

"We were talking about you. In the vid."

"Oh, what about me?"

Lizzie looked away from him, away from the camera too. "Um...."

He didn't say anything, just waited expectantly. Was there any other way to wait, anyway?

"Er..." Somehow she just couldn't find the words. She had rehearsed the little chat she had wanted to have with Darcy in her head so many times, imagining perfectly worded lines, witty comebacks and logical arguments to express her meaning and he would always respond the right way and the conversation would just flow from the brilliant beginning through somewhat sensible twists and turns to a total understanding, a most desirable outcome. But now that he was here and she had her chance to say everything she had wanted to say she was reduced to meaningless monosyllables.

"Do you want to do costume theatre?" Darcy suggested helpfully. "Maybe it would assist you in articulating whatever you were going to say."

Suddenly she felt so mad at herself her next words came out so angrily that Darcy winced a little, probably thinking her ire was directed at him. "No, not this time. Damn costume theatre!"

"What?"

"Why can't we just have a normal conversation as ourselves? Why can't we ever talk if no one is wearing a funny hat?" She threw her hands up in frustrated despair.

Darcy seemed thoughtful. "I suppose it is a safety blanket. One can say stuff that one's afraid to say otherwise but there is plausible deniability since it was just acting. If it all goes wrong you can pretend it wasn't real."

"Exactly." She made a disgusted face. "I am such a coward."

"No, I think you're quite brave. Some things are hard to get out. But we can try. What would you like us to discuss?"

Oh, come hell or high water. There was nothing to it but to get straight to the point. What did she have to lose? And he had come all the way here to meet her, and it had to mean something. It just had to.

"I am wondering if your feelings about me have changed since you saw my videos."
"I suppose they have..." He fell silent, and momentarily she had a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. But his smile, his darkening blue eyes, the way he looked at her -

"I am now more certain than ever that I know what I want."

"Oh."

"One thing you should know about me, I still love you and there is nothing I would not do to try to make you happy."

"That's two things," she said, rather randomly. She felt more stunned than ecstatic, hearing his declaration. Could it even be true? "How can you still love me after all the hateful things I said about you?"

"How can the sky be blue? Why is water wet?" A shrug. "I just do. It comes naturally."

"I feel so dreadful about the videos I don't even know how to start apologizing."

"Then don't. I probably deserved most of it and it was educational to hear what you thought."

"No! No, you didn't deserve any of that crap, you deserved my friendship and respect and I gave you toad droppings."

Darcy shrugged again. It was a shrug festival. "How else am I going to find out what I do to annoy you unless you tell me?"

"But I didn't have the guts to say anything to your face, I just vomited bile all over the internet, never caring if you would be hurt by it."

He shook his head and made a silencing gesture. "Stop it, I think I needed to hear it. It's so rare that you're able to find out what kind of first impression you really make. I've learned a lot about myself and I'm hoping it will help me to become a better person."

"Just shut up, won't you?" She was getting exasperated. "You said you would do anything to make me happy, but let me tell you, it's not going too well right now. I need to beg and grovel and prostrate myself at your feet full of shame but you won't even let me apologize to you."

"OK, fine, fine. But be quick about it."

"I'm really sorry that I mocked and insulted you in my videos and I hope that you can find it in your heart to forgive me one day."

"Done."

"I'm sorry I gave you such a hard time."

"Forgiven."

"I apologize for totally misunderstanding you. I think you were right and it was at least partially wilful misunderstanding but I was also completely and utterly clueless, absolutely unable to comprehend you, too silly to acknowledge your worth and too damn stupid to read the freaking writing on the wall."

"Agreed... You probably were the last to know that I liked you. Everybody else had caught on a long ago."
"I suppose I would have seen it if I had wanted to. But I had too much fun interpreting everything you said or did in the most hateful judgmental way imaginable and ascribing human motives to you would have spoiled everything." She closed her eyes. "Oh God, I'm a terrible person."

"Water under the bridge and all that." Darcy seemed uncomfortable. "I don't really want to talk about the videos."

"I'm sorry, bringing it all up again must be painful."

"I know everything that is in those videos and I don't care anymore. I just think there are more interesting matters for us to talk about."

"Like what?"

"Well, for one thing, I have got the notion recently that you don't hate me quite as vehemently as you used to."

She nodded.

"So, the situation we have at hand is as follows," he said in his CEO voice. "I have told you how I feel about you. The question is, what are you going to do about it?"

Cut through the case and go straight to the point. Do not pass go, do not collect $200.

She could have told Darcy that her emotions had undergone major evolution since the day she had told him off or that she received his assurances of his continued regard for her with happiness or that she had indeed reconsidered her former position and now, more than anything, wanted to have wild sex with him in the Pemberley Digital rooftop pool. But in the end she said none of those things and just kissed him, and it seemed like he was quite satisfied with that answer.

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The following day, Charlotte would notice that the majority of their first makeout session happened out of the frame and most of their conversation during those initial minutes was unintelligible and boring anyway, in the cute and disgusting way familiar to most blissful new lovers. So, cut to a lot later:

"I wasn't sure if you still watched my videos. I thought you might have stopped. I think I probably would despair and give up if someone I love posted as much nonsense about me."

"Well, it wasn't fun at once but after a while your videos made me feel more optimistic and think that I might yet have a chance to redeem myself in your eyes. I think it's partly because Gigi forwarded me a fan video."

"A fan video?"

"Yeah, somebody had edited together all the insults you had directed at me in your videos."

"Really?"

He considered it. "All right, you're right, probably not all of them. But there were a whole lot of clever invectives in the edit."

"No, I mean, really, a video full of crap about you made you hopeful?"

"Maybe hopeful is too strongly put. But you said I was not worth of anyone's time, and yet you
spent so much of your time talking about me. Here, do you want to see it?"

He started the video on his phone, and Lizzie heard herself telling Fitz that she had said some not so nice things about Darcy in her videos.

"That was the understatement of the year." She grimaced. "I'm so sorry, I have described you in the most horrible terms and you deserved much better."

"Hey, some of it is way funny even if if it was about me." Her own voice was in the background calling him stuffy, boring, nauseating, stuffy, rude, arrogant, stuck up and so on and so on and so on. He gave her the tiniest of smiles but it made her feel a lot better. "As odd as it may sound, it would have been a lot worse if you had said just a couple of nasty things. But there were so many insults it made you seem absolutely obsessed with me. You thought about me all the time, and it was much better than you not thinking about me at all."

"I was sure you would hate me after watching those videos. I can't believe you took it so well."

"I'll admit that it took some time to see the positive side but I could never hate you. The way he looked at her, she could not understand how she'd ever thought he was cold and robotic and unfeeling. "It would be totally out of character."

Then he grinned and it was like the lights came on in the room. "Besides, have you read your comment sections? I got certain comfort from perusing them because so many of your viewers seemed absolutely convinced that we would end up together sooner or later."

"Oh, I know... I think you've got quite a few fangirls. They even write fan fiction about you, and let me tell you, some of it is steamy..."

"Yeah, actually Fitz and Brandon forwarded me some links to stories... They thought it was a hoot."

"Don't read the one about a ham sandwich, it's just too bizarre."

"I already did and I will never think about ham sandwiches the same way again."

They shared a glance that was half appalled and half aroused, knowing the other had read what happened before the ham sandwich part.

"The less said about it the better."

"But we might try it out one day," Darcy winked, and they both erupted in laughter.

"I'm so happy we can laugh about stuff now. We have been so tense..."

"Do you think the past will hang above our heads? Are we be able to forget the bad stuff and move on to the good stuff?

"Hope so..."

There was another long silence.

"I changed my mind, I want to do costume theatre after all," Lizzie said and started rummaging her bag for the costumes.

"What would you like to portray?"

"We have done so many things in a totally misguided way and put the wrong foot forward so
many times I think we should start all over again, from the beginning and do everything right this
time."

"Okay... Is there a script?"

"There's never a script in a relationship. We'll just have to wing it."

Darcy looked apprehensive but nodded gamely. "Any particular requests? What should I do
differently? I know I should have done lots of things differently and I'll try not to screw it up this
time but I'm not quite sure what is it that you want Costume-Darcy to do exactly so that everything
would be all right this time."

Lizzie thought about it for a moment. "Don't you worry about Costume Darcy. I think I should be
you and you should be me."

"Fascinating." Darcy eyed Lizzie's trusty old chequered shirt. "I don't think that costume fits me."

"Right..." Lizzie tried to remember if her dad had any similar shirts that they could have borrowed
but it wouldn't be the same. "Just put it on your shoulders and knot the sleeves in the front. It's the
Casual Friday Lizzie."

It took only a moment to get ready. The hat and bowtie in place, Costume Darcy intoned, "Oh,
Bing is dancing with a pretty girl."

"It's my sister Jane," said Casual Friday Lizzie. "She's lovely."

"So it would seem," said Costume Darcy. "How about you? I normally dislike dancing but I am
willing to make an exception for you since I think you're totally decent and I would like to know
you better."

"Oh, all right." Casual Friday Lizzie sighed and whispered to the camera conspiratorially: "It's not
the prettiest compliment I've ever heard but I suppose I had better to give this weirdo the benefit of
the doubt. If his friend and my sister hit it off I'm probably forced to meet the guy from time to
time and it would be easier if we tried to get along. Besides, he's tall."

"Fast forward to Carter's bar," said Costume Darcy and made strange hand gestures that were
probably intended to illustrate fast forwarding.

Casual Friday Lizzie whacked some moles. "Take that, you small subterranean mammal! We
could call this an evening of awkward and face palming, but luckily we don't have to talk while
we're playing video games."

"Yeah, it's okay I guess. It's not particularly my cup of tea but if people are having fun, what's the
harm?"

"Well, I was in pain the next day." Casual Friday Lizzie held an imaginary ice bag on her
forehead.

"I hope Bing didn't mind the fight we had with Caroline," Costume Darcy lamented.

"No, I think Bing was getting kind of annoyed with her as well. If that's possible when we're
talking about Mr. Congenial. But when she was insulting the town and everybody in it it included
his girlfriend and he didn't like that."

"You were right, if she hates the place so much she could just leave. And she did. Hooray!"
"That is one less person to try and increase the bad blood between us." Casual Friday Lizzie waved an imaginary flag. "Yay for Caroline!"

"That is one less person to try to mess up Bing and Jane," Costume Darcy said. "Those two look cute together, I really hope that they can work things out between them."

"Yeah, hopefully they will." Casual Friday Lizzie paused. "Nothing to do with us though. They're both adults, so."

"Yeah, so." Costume Darcy made typing gestures. "Hey there, I google stalked you and it has come to my attention that you have a video log in which you say some not so polite things about me. I assume that this is not a good time to declare my undying love for you just yet."

"Yeah, you know, it is generally customary to ask a girl out first," Casual Friday Lizzie said. "What did you think of my vlog?"

"Nice editing, interesting topics, funny imitations. But you are totally wrong about two things. First that I don't like you and second that George Wickham is a good guy. If I was you I wouldn't believe a word out of his mouth."

"By the way, he's not that hot either," Casual Friday Lizzie noted.

At that, Costume Darcy broke character, took off the hat and started to laugh.

"You know, it would make a nicer story to tell the grandchildren if we hadn't screwed up such a lot but now that you are here I can't think of anything that isn't just perfect."

"What grandchildren?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

Lizzie punched him lightly in the arm. "Do you think I'm running ahead of things?"

"I don't mind..."

"You know... if you wanted to be the last man I could ever fall in love with... I think it could be arranged."

Finis

End Notes

The story is unbetaed so all the mistakes are mine alone.

The insult video that inspired part of this is here: youtube.com/watch?v=HY_HmQg4uvo

If there is really a FF about a ham sandwich, any similarity is purely coincidental and accidental.

Posted as Katja on another board (couldn't get the same username everywhere)

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