The Open Door Policy

by Marivan

Summary

Georgiana Darcy seeks an early morning conversation with her brother. To her dismay, she finds him busy with another, rather embarrassing, occupation.
Remembered

Georgiana Darcy loved the springtime. The sun peeked its timid head over the slowly greening trees a bit earlier each day, and Georgiana found herself awakening in accordance. It was always cheerful to stroll through the halls of Pemberley early in the morning. The candelabras were polished and glinted in the brilliant morning light. The aroma of beeswax and silver polish tingled as it mixed in her nostrils, and a smile crept to her face. It was as if the house, just like the animals that inhabited the forests of the estate, was lumbering out of its deep winter's slumber. In Georgiana's mind, it was a beautiful transformation.

As she quietly ambled through the beautiful corridors of Pemberley, none of the servants paid her much mind. Then again, many of them remembered the erratic behavior of her brother over the past year and a half, or so, and found her own sweet countenance of little notice or worry. Erratic. The word pained Georgiana for some reason, but that was what he had been. One minute the kind and gentle brother whom she had always known, the next, preoccupied, anxious, and short-tempered. No one would have guessed it to be the symptoms of love.

Ah, Fitzwilliam. That was one of the other reasons Georgiana loved the springtime. Her brother also emerged from a sort of hibernation, casting off the heavy burden of work that buried him during the winter months, and also the fatherly disposition that knitted his brow and made him age 10 years before her eyes. He was her brother, not her father, Georgiana would remind him patiently, and should act thus.

Over time, she had noticed that the time of year when the flowers began to bloom was when Fitzwilliam was particularly apt to shed his overbearing sense of duty and join in her company with a livelier disposition that suited him well. Georgiana looked forward to these picnics and carriage rides and meandering walks through the estate in his company.

Of course, now there was Elizabeth. Anyone could see the change she had brought to the mood that surrounded Pemberley. The springtime happiness that Georgiana had so treasured now flowed much more liberally, imbedding itself even in the once dower trappings of winter. And her brother's happiness was highly contagious.

Mulling all this over in her mind, Georgina had the sudden desire to chat with her brother. It was a bit rash, she debated to herself, but early rising was a habit they had long shared, so it was no worry to wake him. When Georgiana had been younger, much younger, it was an almost daily occurrence, these morning conversations, whenever they were both at Pemberley. That was the other time she could count on him being a doting brother, early in the morning.

For some reason, it was just the thing she desired.

Drawing her shawl more tightly around herself, not as much for warmth as for comfort, Georgiana proceeded to Fitzwilliam's study. He had always reminded her of what he liked to call his "open door" policy, which, at the time, Georgiana had thought was a rather misleading name because even if her brother's door wasn't literally open, she was still welcome to come in. Then she had only thought to question the name Fitzwilliam had given it. Now, several years since she had last employed the policy, she dearly hoped it still applied.

Upon reaching the double door at the entrance to his study, Georgiana paused and sighed deeply, assuring herself of her own courage. She raised her hand to the gold plate on the left hand door and pushed ever so slightly. Georgiana peeked timidly through the opening between the doors, expecting to find Fitzwilliam sitting at his writing desk, pen in hand. What she saw instead shocked her greatly.
Before her stood the two people who she revered the most, Fitzwilliam and Elizabeth, pressed tightly against each other and engaged in what Georgiana surmised to be a passionate kiss. The early morning sunlight bathed the couple in a warm honey glow, and Georgiana could not draw her eyes from the scene, though she knew continuing to watch would be most improper.

Yet she stayed there, peering through the crack in the doors, quite entranced by the behavior she was witnessing. Time seemed to slow as Georgiana observed every nuance in their behavior with conflicting awe and guilt. But then she saw Elizabeth raise her hand to her brother's chest, and the acute danger of being caught washed over Georgiana. That was what the heroine always did to persuade her beau to end a passionate kiss in the romance novels Georgiana read by dim candlelight after Mrs. Annesley had succumbed to sleep. She let the oaken door swing closed as quietly as she could and then took off, as fast as her feet would carry her, without breaking into a run, back to the safety of her own chambers.
The scene she had witnessed that morning plagued Georgiana's mind throughout the day, yet it wasn't until after supper that Georgiana's worst fears were brought to reality.

However much she had wanted to speak with her brother earlier, that sentiment had made a complete reversal. She had avoided both Fitzwilliam and Elizabeth all day, her cheeks turning an ever so slight shade of pink whenever she as much as glanced one of them. Her unfortunate aptitude for blushing deeply had a habit of betraying emotions she would much rather have kept to herself. This was no exception.

At dinner she was obligated to be in their company, as her pleas to Mrs. Annesley for a quiet dinner in her chambers had fallen upon deaf ears. Georgiana sat quietly letting the lively conversation stemming from Elizabeth bubble forth. She and Fitzwilliam talked about the horses and then about the upcoming ball they were to attend and then about the well being of Mr. and Mrs. Bingley. The banter between them was musical and Georgiana was content to listen for the vast part of the conversation. For a bit she almost forgot she had been dreading seeing them.

But her anxiety, in all it's intensity, came flooding back when the threesome gained the drawing room, and sat down for coffee after the meal's conclusion.

"Georgiana, your practice on the harp this afternoon sounded lovely," Elizabeth complemented her warmly. Georgiana smiled but could not bring herself to raise her eyes to meet her sister's.

"Thank you," she replied quietly. An urgent desire to blend into the upholstery was manifesting itself in Georgiana's mind.

"I do not hope that it was at the exclusion of your other studies," Fitzwilliam added sternly. Too sternly, for Georgiana's taste, but she let it go, not wishing to attract any more attention to herself than what they were already bestowing upon her.

"Oh, I can assure you that my other studies are not in any manner neglected," Georgiana replied. Her tone was quiet, though a bit less bashful than before. She could not stand to meet her brother's eyes either, and instead found the pattern of the carpet a most interesting design. Silence, unusual silence, fell over them. Georgiana wanted to squirm from the awkward air nestling itself around them.

"Dear me," Elizabeth exclaimed suddenly, shattering the growing silence.

"Are you aware of how much akin to you mother you just sounded," Fitzwilliam teased. Georgiana saw Elizabeth's face work it's way into the "I know your teasing me, but I'm not going to put up with it" face. Teasing was not a newly acquired skill by her brother, but his facility in it had increased rapidly since his union with Elizabeth. It was a constant source of entertainment when in their company.

"Well," Elizabeth continued as if Fitzwilliam had not interrupted her, "If you'll excuse me Georgiana," Elizabeth nodded in her direction and she returned the gesture curtly, "Fitzwilliam, I have a meeting with Mrs. Reynolds. Something about plans for Easter, or such."

Elizabeth set her coffee upon a nearby table, rose and curtsied gracefully to her husband before hurriedly leaving the drawing room. Elizabeth's distraction having been removed, Georgiana knew her brother's full attention was now on her, and her mind raced to try and create a plausible escape.
"My baby sister," Fitzwilliam addressed her playfully from his armchair across the room, "I have been meaning to speak with you all day." Without thinking, Georgiana met is gaze, and immediately regretted it. She felt the color begin to rise in her cheeks.

"Have you really?" Georgiana asked him in response, her genuine surprise apparent. He came to sit on the couch next to her. His presence was always welcome, even if it caused her inside to twist uncontrollably at the present.

"Well, yes." He paused and looked at her rather quizzically, "Does that surprise you for some reason?"

"I mean, no- it's just-," she stammered, coherent thought evading her for a moment. "Why?"

Fitzwilliam smiled fondly at his sister before answering. "Do you remember when you were younger," he began slowly, "and you used to bound into my study each morning, your face all aglow, just because you wanted to talk to you brother?"

"Oh, I remember," she replied quickly, unable to contain a small smile.

"I'm not quite sure what reminded me, but I just wanted to talk with you like that again." The intensity of his gaze increased and Georgiana turned slightly away. "You are such a joy, Georgiana, I hope you know that."

She glanced at him out of the corner of her eyes, but didn't respond. In a way she almost didn't have to; his affection had long been a constant source of joy in Georgiana's life.

Breaking from his slight reverie, Fitzwilliam picked up where he had left off. "You know, for the world of me I cannot remember what name I bestowed on our little morning rendezvous. Do you, perchance, recall?"

"Your 'Open Door Policy,'" Georgiana replied quietly, the color once more starting to rise in her cheeks. Fitzwilliam chuckled, though Georgiana could not find anything at all amusing in their conversation.

"Ah well, now that you say it- and in light of this morning's events-"

"What events?" Georgiana asked anxiously, her gaze snapping back to inspect her brother's face for any hidden meaning. She soon realized her impertinence, and apologized to Fitzwilliam, urging him to continue.

Fitzwilliam noticed her unease, and felt obligated to inquire about it: "Georgiana, is something bothering you? You not nearly as short with me on most occasions."

"No, well, yes." She saw the features of his face crease with worry. "But you need not worry yourself Fitzwilliam. You have enough to take care of as it stands."

"Perhaps your unease stems from an event which transpired early this morning?" Fitzwilliam asked, ignoring her veiled request for him not to do so.

Georgiana saw no reason in being combative. If her brother was going to play detective, she would let him. "Yes, it does."

"Would I be mistaken to say I believe it was your golden curls I spied at the door of my study this morning?" he inquired.

The anxiety nearly doubled in Georgiana as he said this. It was clear she had been caught. "No,
you would not be mistaken," she said so softly it was barely audible. She braced herself for a stern reprimand from father-figure Fitzwilliam. It didn't come.

Instead, there was laughter. Georgiana didn't know whether to be relieved or frightened. With a mischievous smile on his face Fitzwilliam exclaimed, "Well, it seems as if I might have to amend my 'Open Door Policy,' does it not?"

Georgiana joined in his merriment and laughter, knowing full well that he held no slight against her. They laughed together for several minutes and Fitzwilliam wrapped his arms around her in a playful embrace. Georgiana reveled in the happiness.

That is, until she remembered a small caveat from her morning's encounter. Falling silent, Georgiana looked up at him, her eyes betraying her, for once, calm composure. "What about Elizabeth?" she asked, concern in her voice.

"My dearest Lizzy doesn't know a thing," he replied seriously, though with a jovial tone, "and I intend to keep it that way." Georgiana couldn't help but smile. "However," he continued, "I am going to speak to Lizzy about a little, er, self restraint, and I ask you to refrain from coming to my study before, say, nine o'clock in the morning."

"But I thought you wished to reinstate our morning conversations?" she asked him. She was willing to abide by his request, though a bit confused as to its implications.

"I do, Miss Georgiana, but I shall come to you."

No words were needed to show her brother her immense gratitude. She flung her arms around him and nestled her head comfortably on his shoulder. He returned her embrace and placed a platonic kiss on the top of her head.

"You know you're my favorite baby sister, Miss Georgiana Darcy?" he asked after said after several minutes of comfortable silence. She poked him in the side for the use of that endearment.

"Yes, but did you know you're my favorite brother, Mr. Fitzwilliam?" she shot back. He laughed softly before replying; "You know, I would have never guessed."

Georgiana couldn't help but chuckle.

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