"What’s not to like, Darcy?" Elizabeth grinned at him saucily and then turned, sweeping a hand grandly to the festivities below. "Tell me- the flashing, epilepsy-inducing lights? The music mix that some pretentious asshat from Bushwick made in his basement apartment at 4 AM? The over-priced drinks and lack of bar food? Or is it all the girls who keep 'accidentally' knocking into you every time you get up and get drinks at the bar, and thus subjecting you to- horror of horrors- flirting with a side of small talk?"

He blinked at her. "You enjoy my discomfort, don't you?" He said flatly.

Because there are more ridiculous places to fall in love. Modern AU

11 PM

He was muttering to himself again.

Elizabeth Bennet rolled her eyes and took a sip of her drink-- then winced. Holy fuck, it was strong. Then again, it better be for the amount that she paid for it. She couldn’t believe that Jane didn’t want to pre-game before hand. What, just because they were “adults” now suddenly they were too cool for things like chugging 2-Buck Chuck so they wouldn’t spend all their money on overpriced drinks at pretentious clubs owned by their best friend’s shitty boyfriend?

Of course, the two guys who accompanied the Bennet sisters tonight certainly didn’t have that problem. Charles Bingley and William Darcy embodied the Wall Street asshole type down to a tee if Elizabeth had ever seen it, except they were actually all right-- “the softest of soft bros” was how she put it, to Jane’s disgust, but Jane was besotted with the former, so for the sake of her favorite sister Elizabeth put up with the latter.
--Who was currently muttering to himself again, his dark, straight brow in a fierce scowl.

“I fucking hate clubs,” Darcy grumbled, just loud enough for Elizabeth to hear.

“Of course you do,” she murmured. Great, now she was talking to herself, too.

Snap out of it, Elizabeth! Don’t let Grouchy Grouch McGrouchster’s mood get to you.

Deciding that she let him quietly brood to himself for long enough, Elizabeth bumped her shoulder into Darcy’s, startling him and knocking him out of his grumble party. “What’s not to like, Darcy?” She grinned at him saucily and then turned, sweeping a hand grandly to the festivities below. The club was a loft style, the bar upstairs with a view to the dance floor below. Somewhere in the writhing masses were her sister and his best friend. She was glad that, despite snagging a small table at the edge of the area, they couldn’t clearly make out the activities on the dance floor. “Tell me-- the flashing, epilepsy-inducing lights? The music mix that some pretentious asshat from Bushwick made in his basement apartment at 4 AM? The over-priced drinks and lack of bar food? Or is it all the girls who keep ‘accidentally’ knocking into you every time you get up and get drinks at the bar, and thus subjecting you to-- horror of horrors-- flirting with a side of small talk?”

He blinked at her. “You enjoy my discomfort, don’t you?” He said flatly.

She winked at him. “Only because it’s so easy to do!” She said merrily, noisily sipping out of her straw. Then, primly, she put her drink down. “Discomfort you, I mean. I can’t even tell you if I’ve ever seen you at ease.”

“Probably because you haven’t,” he admitted with a sigh, tugging at his collar and tie uneasily.

It was a Friday night, and he and Charlie had met Elizabeth and Jane for dinner right after work at some swank (read: too crowded, too small, too loud, too expensive) place in the West Village. Everyone was planning-- hoping, really-- (and by everyone, Elizabeth and Darcy,) that after dinner they could call it a night, but Jane got a text from Charlotte inviting them to her boyfriend’s new club in the Meat Packing District, which had been open for a couple months and to which Elizabeth had been avoiding going. Yet, once Charlie caught wind of the invitation, soon the two mild-mannered blonds overpowered them. Elizabeth and Darcy even tried pleading exhaustion, but neither Jane nor Charlie bought it, and away they went.

In this particular instance, Elizabeth sympathized with Darcy’s plight because she too hated clubs-- had never liked them, not even in college-- and she hated Charlotte’s slimy boyfriend more (Charlotte didn’t know that he’d hit on Elizabeth multiple times before he got together with Charlotte. She’d spotted him, with Charlotte at his side a couple times already that night, but quickly hid; not even seeing her best friend could induce her to stomach Collins. The less interaction she had with him, the better.)

To be honest, Elizabeth wasn’t even sure why she and Darcy were here. Jane and Charlie-- wherever they were-- were doing just fine without them, and she had some episodes of Brooklyn 99 burning into her DVR that she was itching to watch. They could probably leave at any time and no one would notice.

But Darcy, for all his brooding stares, awkward silences, and monosyllabic conversational skills, wasn’t terrible company. Well, okay, he totally was, but there was something about him that kept Elizabeth from completely writing him off and sticking him into the “Constipated Asshole” box in her mind, even if he blew her off when she, completely out of awkward politeness, asked if he wanted to dance earlier that night. He was a human turtle, with a tough shell that she wanted to crack; she had this theory that underneath that shell was a really smart, interesting guy. She’d
caught glimpses of this buried personality in the rare, wry jokes he would slyly insert into conversation; the way he was reading a different book every time she saw him; the intense way he looked at her when she spoke— unlike other guys she knew it seemed like he actually listened to what she was saying and was thinking about it, not just nodding along listlessly. He rarely responded to her, but she wished he would; conversations were so much more interesting than her usual one-sided ramblings.

So, she stayed. And he stayed, although, admittedly, Elizabeth couldn’t work out his reasons why. She knew why she was still there, but why was he?

“I don’t... it’s difficult for me feel comfortable with people I don’t know,” he said, drawing her attention back to him. He looked around, blue eyes flitting to different groups before focusing back at her. “This isn’t my scene.”

Elizabeth shrugged. “It isn’t mine either,” she said. “But, you know, you just have to make the best of things.” She rested her chin on her hand, looking at him beneath her lashes. “I mean, come on, Darcy, what really is your scene, anyway?”

He straightened, scowling at her. Uh-oh. She got him defensive.

She almost felt guilty-- her tone was impertinent at best, rude at worst-- but, in typical fashion, all attempts to intimidate her just caused her to be more brave-- or stupid.

“Excuse me?” He said lowly.

Elizabeth rolled her eyes and took another sip of her drink. “Darcy,” she said, deciding, to hell with it, “I’ve known you what, a few months now? How many obnoxious ‘double dates’ have we had to play chaperone on?”

“Far too many,” he said bluntly.

“Exactly,” she said, feeling only slightly offended. I mean, please, she’d met Charlie’s sister-- he could’ve been in far worst company during all those dates. “And nearly every place we’d gone-- Brooklyn Brewery; Smorgasburg; the flea market; bowling; Broadway, MoMA, you name it! You stood there like a lump, scowling at everyone and everything, and just generally looking like you’d rather scoop your own eyes out with a grapefruit spoon. So sorry if I’m not exactly surprised to find out you hate clubs, too.”

“So this is what you think of me,” Darcy said slowly, “that I’m a boring snob.”

Elizabeth sighed. Well, he wasn’t entirely wrong. “I don’t think you’re boring,” she said. “I think you have a lot to say and that you’re really interesting, but you never make any effort, so most people-- myself included-- will never know.”

His scowl grew bigger; apparently he caught on that she didn’t deny that she thought he was a snob. Whoops! Sorry (not sorry.) His wounded pride notwithstanding, Elizabeth didn’t care for his petulant look. “It’s not easy for me like it is for you,” he said. “I’m shy.”

“For a long time,” Elizabeth said, refusing to feel sorry for him, “I was, too. Ask Jane. In high school, she was considered the outgoing sister.”

Darcy cocked his head at her, slightly, and, to her surprise, his scowl vanished and he smiled at her. Did the body snatchers switch him with a robot while she blinked? And, holy shit, was that a dimple in his cheek? “I don’t believe you,” he said, but his tone was playful.

Elizabeth shook her head. “It’s true!” She protested with a laugh, eager to dissipate the awkward
tension. “It wasn’t until I went to college that I decided that I was tired of feeling like I didn’t fit in or that I didn’t have friends. I made an effort to get to know other people, and people appreciated that, and soon, most of the reciprocated. Especially in the beginning, I had to constantly remind myself to keep asking questions, to be actively interested and engaged. And it paid off.” She shrugged. “I can’t claim that I’m a total social butterfly; I mean, look, I have a lot of acquaintances but not a lot of friends-- I really only count Jane and Charlotte as really good friends, along with a handful of people from college-- but I actually really like meeting new people. It’s one of my favorite things to do, actually. People can be really interesting, if you only pay attention.”

She looked at Darcy and was surprised to see him staring intently at her, blue eyes thoughtful, as they usually were. It was like he’d never seen her before.

“Oh, okay,” he said, finally.

Elizabeth raised an eyebrow. “Okay?” She queried.

“I’ll try,” he said slowly, “to be more... friendly. Engaged. Open.”

She beamed at him. “Good!” She said encouragingly. “I believe in you.”

He continued to stare at her, almost dumbfounded, and Elizabeth felt herself flush. Oddly, she didn’t feel creeped out; his gaze was appreciative, to be sure, but he wasn’t leering.

All of the sudden her own shyness overtook her and she fell silent, dropping her own gaze to her drink.

It seemed that her silence unnerved Darcy, because he cleared his throat awkwardly and gestured at her empty glass. “Would you like another one?” he asked, and for some reason it came out lower and in a scratchier voice than he intended.

“Um,” she blinked. “Sure! Why not?” She gave him a smile. “I started a tab, so--”

He shook his head and stood up. “Don’t worry about it,” he said abruptly. “Honestly, I shouldn’t have let you start one at all.”

“Excuse me?” She frowned up at him at the words ‘let you.’ He should know enough about her by now to understand her hardcore feminism. Rookie move, Darce.

Fortunately for him, Darcy fidgeted, clearly feeling his error. “That was... a wrong choice of words,” he said, “what I meant was that I should’ve bought you your first drink, too.”

Elizabeth raised an eyebrow. “I can pay for my own drinks,” she said coolly. Arrogant Wall Street jerk, she thought.

“No, I...” he rubbed his neck in embarrassment. “I know that. Look, I know you’ll probably write me off as a condescending misogynistic asshole, but I’m just trying to be nice. My parents raised me with some pretty traditional ideals, and one of them was to not let a girl-- woman, woman-- buy her own drinks. That’s all. I swear.”

Well, that certainly didn’t make everything magically better, but Elizabeth supposed she appreciated that he made the effort for her to understand where he was coming from; she knew he wasn’t a Nice Guy™. And shit, wasn’t she complaining earlier how expensive these drinks were? Darcy could afford it.
Let go of your pride for one damned second, Bennet, her inner broke girl pleaded.

“Okay,” she said finally, smiling up at him. “Thanks, Darcy.”

He nodded and left, thankfully not sprouting the line, “Gee, was that so difficult?” Because if he had, she knew she would’ve punched him then and there.

12 AM

Darcy was gone much longer than Elizabeth expected, and, for half a moment, she thought he saw his chance and high-tailed it out of there. But after his impassioned “let me pay for your drink because I have the sensibilities of a nineteenth century gentleman” speech, she immediately dismissed that notion. She assured herself that this was a packed club, and he was probably in a long line at the bar. She was surprised—he wasn’t a busty blonde, to be sure, but he had the sort of commanding presence that she doubted most bartenders would overlook.

And of course, in his absence, some slime ball slid into his seat. Elizabeth wished fervently she had more than her empty, ice-filled glass to keep her occupied. Not to mention she was far too sober to be dealing with guys like this. Still, it kept her hands busy.

To be fair, the slime ball was handsome—slim, fair-haired, great green eyes. He gave her a charming smile. “This seat taken?”

Elizabeth raised an eyebrow. “Would you believe me if I told you it was?” She asked, coolly.

“Well, I’ve been over at the bar for a while,” he said, “and I haven’t seen anyone, so to be honest, no, I wouldn’t have.”

Elizabeth gave him a tight smile. She didn’t care for his presumptions. “Watching me, have you?”

The man made a face. “I wouldn’t say that,” he argued. “I noticed you, and, while I went about my business, may have glanced over here a few times while I was gathering my courage to come over here.”

Despite herself, Elizabeth was a little charmed at this omission. “You sure know how to flatter a girl,” she drawled.

He shrugged. “Well, you know, there have been a lot of misses.” He laughed. “Practice makes perfect, right?”

Thinking of her conversation with Darcy, Elizabeth smiled. “You’re absolutely right,” she said.

The man held out a hand. “George Wickham.”

She took it. “Elizabeth.”

He gave her a look as he released her hand, sitting back in the chair. “No last name, huh?”

“Let’s see if you’re smooth enough to get it out of me by the end of the night,” Elizabeth smirked.

His green eyes became heated, promising to get much more out of her than her last name.

Elizabeth was flattered, but not particularly touched. There was no tingle down her spine, no spark
of awareness. If anything, she was amused. But he seemed harmless, and she could take care of herself. “Tell me about yourself, George.”

He spun his glass. “What’s there to tell? I’m from North Carolina, originally. Moved here for a job in finance. That didn’t really work out and now I’m managing a restaurant in SoHo until I figure out a new plan.”

“Finance, huh?” Elizabeth was intrigued. He looked like a surfer boy from California and had the air of a West Coast person—laid back, easy going. He looked and acted like the antithesis of William Darcy. Shit, he wasn’t even like Charlie Bingley, for all his easygoing charm. “I can’t imagine.”

“Neither did my boss,” George said, all smiles gone. “Lost my job to some wunderkind, the boss’s son.” He snapped his fingers. “Thought I was doing okay and then, bam! Next minute I was out.” He shook his head. “Fucking nepotism.”

“Hmmm,” Elizabeth said. Holy shit, this guy was bitter—she had read him totally wrong. She would hate to be that wunderkind, whoever he was. This was a man who, underneath his charm, held grudges. She wondered, briefly, if George was a serial killer. He fit the type, right?

And where the fuck was Darcy?

As though she mentally summoned him, he appeared at their table, two drinks in his hands.

“Hello,” Darcy said, looking at George with a furrowed, though not scowling, brow. He looked more than a little curious and perhaps, Elizabeth thought, a little jealous?

Hmm. She didn’t know how she felt about that.

“Darcy, this is George. He didn’t believe me when I said that seat was taken. George, this is Darcy. My…” Well, shit. What the hell was Darcy? Half the time she was convinced he didn’t even like her, but calling them acquaintances seemed not… enough, somehow.

“Friend,” Darcy finished for her, and he looked over at her meaningfully.

If there was anything Elizabeth had learned about Darcy over the past several weeks, it was that the man never said anything he didn’t mean, so if he said they were friends… well, she supposed she’d just have to take his word for it. And she liked the sound of it, anyway.

“Exactly,” she beamed at him.

George looked between the two of them. “Hmph,” is all he said. Turning to Darcy, he said, “You look familiar. Have we met before?”

Darcy stiffened, and Elizabeth was curious; it was an innocuous enough question. “I don’t think so,” he said, clearly striving to sound casual and not use that frosty tone that Elizabeth had heard so frequently over the past few weeks. Oddly, it was the first time she’d heard it tonight.

“Well,” George said, standing, after a moment of awkward silence, “I know when I’m not wanted. See you around, Elizabeth, Darcy,” he said, nodding at them both before sauntering off to the bar.

Darcy sat, handing Elizabeth her drink, which she accepted with a quiet, “Thank you.”

Darcy nodded, then turned to the bar, a raised eyebrow. “Well that was… interesting.”
“He gives me the creeps,” Elizabeth said bluntly. “But he does really well at hiding it behind smarmy charm.”

Darcy cocked his head. “You seemed comfortable enough,” he said. “I thought you would’ve liked him. He seems… outgoing.”

Elizabeth shrugged, feeling uncomfortable for some reason. “I guess,” she said, “but he’s just… disingenuous. It helps when you’re first meeting people if they’re outgoing, but if they’re not sincere, it’s nothing worth pursuing.” She paused. “Speaking of outgoing, you seemed unsettled when he asked if he knew you previously. What’s the story there?”

Darcy eyed her in that intense, searching way, before he relaxed, marginally. “It’s nothing to do with him,” he said, with a trace of that pompous dismissal, “I just…” he looked at her again, curiously. “You don’t know?”

Elizabeth shrugged. “Know what?”

Darcy shifted in his seat. “About—erm. I feel like no matter how I say this I’m going to sound like an asshole.”

“No worries!” Elizabeth said cheerfully. “It’s not as though you haven’t sounded like one before.”

Darcy eyed her, as though wondering if she was serious or just kidding. If he’d asked she would’ve said both.

“Right,” he said, apparently deciding she was joking. “My family is, um, pretty well known. You—uh, you really don’t know them? Well, okay, never mind, I guess that makes sense. It’s my mother’s family, really. The Fitzwilliam’s.”

Elizabeth narrowed her eyes in thought. “Oh!” She said after a moment. “The entrepreneurs. Like, Vanderbilt and Rockefeller status, right? You—your family has their own gallery in the Met.”

He grinned at her, knowing, through previous conversations, how much she loved the Met. “Among other things,” he said, but it wasn’t in an arrogant way. “But yeah. Don’t let my aunt hear you compare us to the Rockefeller’s or the Vanderbilt’s—we’re not quite at that level, but she desperately wants one of us kids to marry into either family.”

Elizabeth winced with him. “Yikes. And let me guess—you’re the forerunner she’s gunning for.”

Darcy rolled his eyes. “Right in one. My aunt would prefer my cousin or myself, but mainly me, since the last name Darcy isn’t as prestigious. There’s even a Vanderbilt my age named Anne.”

Elizabeth frowned. “But I don’t understand how people know of you? Your last name isn’t Fitzwilliam, after all.”

Darcy’s intense gaze went to his drink. “My last name isn’t,” he said, “but my first name is. And there’s, you know, Google.”

She blinked at him. “But I thought your name…”?

“William is a nickname,” he said, grimacing. “Fitzwilliam is my full first name.”

Elizabeth gave him a wide smile. “Oh, really?” She said. So much potential for so many delightful nicknames that she was sure he’d dislike…

Darcy sighed. “I knew you’d be like this,” he said, but he was smiling, too.
“Does anyone ever call you Fitz?”

“That would be my aforementioned cousin,” he said, “Richard Fitzwilliam. People call him ‘Fitz.’” He appraised her. “You two would get along well together, I think. He’s outgoing, but… sincere.”

Actually, he didn’t know how well he liked that idea, and that made him squirm. Darcy, despite being rather uptight and formal, wasn’t a jealous man. And yet there was something about this woman that turned him into a bumbling, possessive mess. The thought of Elizabeth and Fitz, probably laughing and conversing much more easily than Darcy ever had with her… it stung.

“You’ll have to introduce me sometime,” Elizabeth said off-handedly. “Ok, well, so your family is super rich and prestigious and you’re slumming it on a Friday night in this cheesy club with lil’ ol’ me. I feel so honored, Darcy.”

“On the contrary,” Darcy said, “it’s I who’s honored that you’re here with me. I know I’m not your favorite person, yet you’ve stayed here far longer than I thought you would.”

Elizabeth was caught off guard and rather charmed by his comment. “I wanted to get to know you better,” she said, deciding to tell him the truth. She liked the rapport they’d been building, this simple, straightforward honesty. “That’s why I stayed.”

Her honesty was rewarded with the widest, beatific smile she’d ever seen from him, and she discovered that he had not one, but two dimples, one in each cheek. She blinked, a bit star struck.

Elizabeth cleared her throat. “And you?” she asked hoarsely. “Why did you stay?”

“I was already planning on staying for as long as you were,” he told her, all casual chivalry, and something felt charged in the atmosphere, more intimate, despite the pounding bass and the flashing lights, the noise and the crowds. “But even if I hadn’t, I would’ve stayed to—to practice. Being more friendly.”

Feeling restless, unsure of the mood they were creating, Elizabeth laughed loudly, delightedly. “Now I’m really honored,” she said, “that you would take my advice so seriously!”

“It’s what took me so long to get the drinks,” he admitted sheepishly, running a hand through his dark curls. “I was waiting by the bar and decided to make conversation with the woman next to me…”

Elizabeth groaned, taking another swig of her drink. “And she thought you were hitting on her, and it took you forever to extract yourself, am I right?”

He grinned. “Yeah,” he said. “You are.”

Elizabeth mentally rubbed her hands together in glee, cackling all the while. Arrogant, know-it-all Darcy admitting she was right! For the second time that night! Would wonders never cease? “Well,” she said, about to tease him some more, “I—”

“William? William Darcy, is that you?”

Darcy stared at Elizabeth; Elizabeth stared at Darcy. They wore matching expressions of horror.

Caroline Bingley.

1 AM
Darcy hadn’t yet recovered from the trauma of seeing Caroline, so Elizabeth took it upon herself to respond first. You owe me, Darce-Face. “Caroline,” she cooed in that false, high-pitched voice she tended to use whenever she had to interact with the woman. “What a surprise!”

For all her flaws, the woman knew how to dress, wearing a tight, tasteful black dress with shoes that had heels that looked to kill. Her make up was overdone, to be sure, but, you know, as goddess divine Amy Poehler once said, “Good for her, not for me.”

“…And Eliza,” Caroline said, her tone clearly indicating her distaste. “What an unusual pair you two make. I thought I saw you here earlier, Eliza, but with a different man.”

Elizabeth’s inner feminist bristled; fuck her, she could be with as many guys as she wanted! But she took great satisfaction in saying, “Yes, someone who thought I was here by myself.” She flashed a grin at Darcy, not noticing, perhaps, the possessive quality it had. “But he was mistaken. I was just waiting for Darcy to get us drinks.”

“Hmph,” Caroline sniffed, turning her back on Elizabeth completely and concentrated solely on whom she really came over here for: Darcy. “Tsk, tsk, William! I expected such forgetfulness from my brother, but I was so surprised that you didn’t think to text me to come meet you here. You know how much I love cute little venues like this.”

“How did you know I was here, Caroline?” He asked coolly, ignoring her pouting all together. “Well,” Caroline said, moving a platinum blonde strand of hair out of her face with a manicured hand, “I was trying to get ahold of Charles to talk to him about our parents anniversary gathering next weekend—you are coming, aren’t you? – And he texted me saying you were here and he couldn’t chat, so I thought we’d drop by,” she said, her head indicating at the bar where her entourage—ahem, her friends Lou and Hurley were, who were yawn-inducing turkeys as far as Elizabeth was concerned.

Darcy gulped. Elizabeth finally understood why he didn’t like clubs: bad associations. It all made sense now. Besides being as fake as Kraft Mac ‘n’ Cheese, Caroline Bingley was infatuated with—nay, obsessed with—one (Fitz)william Darcy.

And judging by the constipated look on Darcy’s face, he figured out her motives, too. Of course, besides being painfully fucking obvious, Elizabeth doubted this was the first time the guy had been subjected to Caroline’s antics. And bless Charlie Bingley’s soul, as nice as he was he was also dense as a brick, and Darcy wasn’t the type to bring it up.

Darcy’s eyes caught Elizabeth’s, and then he managed to pull himself together, (mostly) wiping off the deadened look on his face. He cleared his throat. “And how are you, Caroline?” He asked politely.

Bless, he was really taking her words to heart, wasn’t he? Elizabeth rather admired him, and was incredibly flattered, but she definitely would’ve understood if he had kept up his aloof demeanor with Caroline. Give her an inch and the woman would run a 5k with it when it came to Darcy.

Caroline chattered on brightly, standing awkwardly next to Darcy, touching his arm, batting her eyelashes. There were no available chairs, otherwise Elizabeth would’ve suggested Caroline drag one over (not that she would’ve; she would’ve expected Elizabeth to get up and do it, promptly stealing her seat. She wasn’t going to subject Darcy—or herself, for that matter—to the permanent presence of Caroline Bingley.)

After about fifteen more minutes of Caroline monopolizing Darcy and completely ignoring Elizabeth, the latter had had enough. It was amusing for the first ninety seconds, but seeing the
misery on Darcy’s face quickly got old. Perhaps a week ago, hell, even earlier tonight she would’ve had a shit-eating smirk on her face in the face of Darcy’s extreme discomfort. She would’ve thought he, an arrogant, entitled Wall Street asshole, (intriguing qualities aside,) had it coming to him, but even though he was still a bit of an arrogant, entitled Wall Street asshole, Elizabeth had to admit she liked him a hell of a lot more than she did earlier. Shit, he considered her a friend now, and hell, she considered him one, too.

That settled it. She needed to save Darcy. But how?

Suddenly, the indecipherable bass and techno that had been blaring all night gave way to a familiar beat that Elizabeth inadvertently found herself bopping along to. Was Collins’ DJ actually playing a song people would know? Granted, it was probably done ironically, which was too bad; Usher at any club was pretty much a prerequisite as far as Elizabeth was concerned.

A sudden smirk coming to her lips, Elizabeth turned her eyes to Darcy. Oh, she would save him all right, and hell, if she could mess with him at the same time, it was just killing two birds with one stone, really.

She stood up suddenly, and Darcy couldn’t stop himself from looking outright horrified. Don’t leave me, every line in his body screamed out at her.

Skirting around Caroline, Elizabeth put her hands on Darcy’s shoulders. Ooh, tense. This guy really needed to get a massage (or five.) “Will,” she said in a slight whine, and his head jerked at the unexpected nickname. “You’ve promised me a dance tonight, and I pick this one! It’s one of my favorites.”

She put her hands onto the sides of his triceps (Ooh, someone works out, she thought, before banishing that thought away rapidly--) and made a jerking motion upwards. Darcy, seeing what she was about, rose quickly, and it was all Elizabeth could do not to be barreled over by him.

He nodded at Caroline briefly, “Excuse us,” and was already gone, to the blonde’s shock. Her mouth was open and everything, Elizabeth thought smugly. “Great seeing you, Caroline!” she called over her shoulder with a little wave of her fingers.

It was later in the evening and the crowd was tighter, and Darcy looked over his broad shoulder to see her struggling behind him. His hand fumbled for hers and held on tight, and at the contact Elizabeth felt a jolt up her arm and unthinkingly her fingers tightened around his. In response he laced his fingers with hers.

Oh, Bennet, she thought, what the hell are you getting yourself into?

Too late to back down now, was the immediate answer, and when Darcy stumbled onto the dance floor and then froze, she took the lead, her courage rising, and led him to a spot, not quite on the outskirts, but nowhere near the throng of people in the middle.

Taking initiative, she took his arms—and oh, shit, he had nice forearms, too—and wrapped them around her waist, and wrapped hers around his neck. He was stiff, and it was like she was dancing with her cardboard cutout of Justin Timberlake from seventh grade.

“Come on, Darcy,” she reached up on her tip-toes and murmured in his ear, “at least pretend like you aren’t physically repulsed by me.”

Settling back down on her heels, she saw his Adam’s apple bob. Darcy then bent down, breath in her ear and curling down her neck, and said, “I assure you, Elizabeth, that that won’t be a
problem.”

And then they started to move.

The beat wasn’t slow-dance slow, but there was something leisurely, unhurried about it, a subtle sensuality that reminded Elizabeth of morning sex and slow spreading, hard-won grins earned from men with two dimples and bright blue eyes. She swayed slowly, holding her hips carefully away from his, so he could feel the hem of her dress against his slacks, but not much else.

Her confidence only getting her so far, Elizabeth ducked her head from those blue eyes, feeling shy, and saw, to her shock, his hands, carefully clasped together in the small of her back where she placed them, sliding so they each held a hip in their wide palms. He began to guide her movements, pushing each hip into the other hand and vice versa, fingers spanning her sides, and when his fingers curled in, ever so slightly, it was to pull her closer into his orbit.

Her breath caught in her throat, Elizabeth looked up at him and saw his eyes, half-hooded, stare into hers. She felt her hands unclasp themselves from behind his neck and span its sides, her thumbs caressing his pulse points, feeling his heart race.

In retaliation he spun her smoothly, so that her back was pressed against his front, but they both resumed their former positions, her hands curled around his neck, his cradling her hips, as he initiated a slow grind, and it was all Elizabeth could do to keep her knees from buckling, from curling into him, from sliding her hand down his neck, down that delectable tricep and to his thigh and squee—hey, she thought. Why the hell not?

So that’s what she did, and he hissed, and Elizabeth couldn’t help it, she felt a surge of feminine pride at the thought that she of all people was making the cool, impenetrable Fitzwilliam Darcy lose control.

She craned her neck, pressing her lips to his ear. “You should dance more often, Darcy,” she said, “you’re pretty good at it.”

He turned his head towards her and she felt his exhale on her lips. The danger and anticipation made her tighten her hands on him. “Perhaps,” he said, “but I’m pretty choosy about my partner.”

“Snob,” she said good-naturedly.

“I might not make any attempts to understand people,” he said reproachfully after a moment, but with a mischievous glint in his eyes, “but you willfully misunderstand them—particularly me.”

“Perhaps,” she said, not feeling stung or defensive, surprisingly, “but I’m learning.”

Darcy licked his lips and she had to fight back a groan. “And what are your findings so far?”

“I don’t know yet,” she admitted, hyper aware of his left hand bunching up the side of her dress, “but I’ll let you know when I conclude my study.”

“Good,” he murmured as the song finished and transitioned into another. “I look forward to it.”

Elizabeth was content to dance with him, be close to him, for the rest of the night, but they both stiffened when they heard someone calling his name.

“Darcy! – Darce!”

Darcy dropped his head to Elizabeth’s shoulder and groaned. “Fucking Charlie,” he muttered—or at least she thought he did. She was too distracted by the feeling of his lips on her shoulder.
Absently she ran her hand through his curls once, twice, and felt his deep exhale and the relaxing of his shoulders.

All too soon, Darcy straightened and Elizabeth stepped out of his hold. She didn’t see his hands curl into fists and then flex. He counted on that famous Darcy control to ensure he didn’t do something even more stupid than grind up on his best friend’s girlfriend’s sister, such as grab her and do it some more.

Trailing off to the edges of the dance floor, Darcy and Elizabeth waited for Charlie and Jane, red and breathless from dancing, to make their way towards them.

“Earlier,” he said, his eyes pointedly focused on the crowd and not on Elizabeth, “you called me Will.” There was something, a question, a sense of wonder in his statement that caused Elizabeth to study his profile closely.

“I’m sorry,” she said slowly, “I just did it to create a—a false sense of intimacy to Caroline. It was petty, and I apologize.”

He shook his head. “Don’t be,” he said, “I liked it.” He looked at her now and gave her a small, crooked smile. “Everyone calls me William or Darcy. My… my mother used to call me Will. I haven’t heard it in a long time.”

Elizabeth opened her mouth to reply, but Charlie and Jane were upon them.

“Hello, you two!” Charles greeted them, red-faced and happy. His hand clutched Jane’s. “Elizabeth, you must be a miracle worker to get Darcy on the dance floor!”

Jane caught Elizabeth’s eye with a slightly raised eyebrow. Elizabeth gave her a cheeky shrug in return. “Elizabeth Bennet, miracle worker,” Elizabeth announced. “Two more of those and they’ll make me a saint!”

Darcy rolled his eyes. “The Catholic Church has certainly lowered their standards, haven’t they?”

“Good job, Darcy,” Elizabeth cooed. “That was almost a joke!”

He side-eyed her.

Charlie and Jane looked on, wide-eyed, at this new rapport. Like a dog sometimes did, Charlie tilted his head. The words they were saying to each other were, on the surface, just as hostile as they’d ever been, but somehow the tone was different… but how?

Jane patted his arm absent-mindedly as though to say, There, there, Dear. “Anyway,” Jane said brightly, “we thought we’d tell you that it’s possible that Caroline might be here! She told Charlie that she might drop by.”

“Oh, we saw her all right,” Elizabeth smirked. “Why do you think we were dancing in the first place?”

Darcy scoffed. “Oh, please,” he said, “You’ve been trying to get me on the dance floor all night to see these moves.”

Elizabeth laughed in delight. “An actual joke!” She said. “Well done.” Then, before Darcy could bask in her approval for too long, “Although, puh-lease. Don’t pretend you weren’t grateful. Would you rather I’d have left you to Caroline’s clutches instead?”

This was venturing far too closely into “throwing shade” territory for the non-confrontational
Charlie and Jane, the former who said cheerfully, “Erm, well, we’re both rather thirsty, so we’re going to get a drink! See you all later!”

And they high-tailed it out of there before you could say, “It’s the remix to ignition.” (Which was, incidentally, being remixed along with some yodeling. Don’t ask.)

Despite this cowardly move, it didn’t stop Elizabeth from sighing dreamily after them. “They’re so cute,” she said. “Jane is so gone on him.”

Darcy turned to her, puzzled. “Really?” He asked. “If you ask me, it’s Charlie who’s gone on Jane.”

Elizabeth rolled her eyes. “Well, yeah, but they’re both gone on each other.”

Darcy shrugged. “Huh. Couldn’t tell about Jane.”

Elizabeth turned to him, her jaw dropping. “Are you serious? Jane is totally head over heels for him! It’s obvious.”

“It’s obvious that Charlie is head over heels for her; it’s not obvious that Jane likes Charlie as much as he likes her.”

“How can you say that?” Elizabeth was getting beyond annoyed now. “The way that Jane looks at him—I’ve never seen her look at a guy like that before.”

Darcy’s lips were in a flat line. “But that doesn’t make it obvious. Jane is a lovely, friendly person with everyone. I don’t think she treats Charles any differently than she treats anyone else. Look, if Charlie asked me today if I thought she cared for him as much as he cared for her, I’d tell him no.”

Elizabeth froze. She looked at him closely. “But you were going to, weren’t you?” She said. “Whether he asked for your opinion or not. You were going to tell him what you thought.”

Darcy put his hand over his mouth, rubbing his stubble, jaw clenched. “Yeah,” he said finally, pulling his hand away. “I’ve been planning on it. I’m just trying to be a good friend—save him from heartbreak he’s experienced so many times before. Save him from girls who take advantage of his good nature, of his success and good name. Surely you can understand that—you would do the same for Jane.”

She was seething with rage. “I can’t believe you,” she said, disregarding his last statement, “that you felt you had to stick your fucking Patrician nose into Charlie and Jane’s business!”

“Hey—” Darcy protested darkly.

“I’m not finished,” she hissed at him. “Jane isn’t overly demonstrative or—or forward or overly flirty. But that doesn’t mean she doesn’t feel deeply.” She looked at him in disgust. “You of all people should understand that.”

“Me of all people?” He loomed over her.

In defiance Elizabeth stuck her chin up. “Yes, you,” she said. “You project this image of being an unfeeling robot to the world, but you—I have you pegged, Darcy. You’re as sensitive as Jane, perhaps even more so. Hell, I’m sure that if you’ve ever been in love with someone that the woman has no fucking clue because you bottle it up inside! Because heaven forbid if someone actually can see that you actually like them!” She poked him in the chest. “So don’t fucking condemn Jane for holding her feelings close to her chest. Charlie’s not the only person who’s been hurt in love before in this relationship, you know. And furthermore—how dare you insinuate that
Jane’s only with Charlie because of his money. You must live a sad life, Darcy, if you’ve become so cynical.”

Despite not having spoken, Darcy was breathing heavily, his eyes cold and mean as he glared upon her. “Are you finished?” He asked frostily.

“I am,” Elizabeth snapped, turning around and leaving before he could say another word.

Asshole.

2 AM

“God, she’s trashy,” came a disdainful voice from Darcy’s left. “Making a scene like that—with you, of all people!—in a club like a common wh—”

“That’s enough, Caroline,” Darcy said sharply, internally groaning. The night was going from bad to worse.

Caroline sniffed from beside him. “At the very least, she’s finally left you alone,” she sneered. “I’m sure you’re thrilled about that. If I recall correctly, you think she’s an immature bitch.”

Darcy clenched his jaw, unsure who he should be most angry with—Caroline, Elizabeth, or himself. He had said such things about Elizabeth to Caroline in the early days—those first couple of weeks where Charles dragged him along on his dates with Jane Bennet. When he’d first met Elizabeth he wrote her off as vivacious, immature, with a big mouth and eyes that liked to mock themselves that didn’t pertain merely to their jobs or status, but themselves—what they liked to do for fun and what they liked to eat and their favorite spots in the city. She became someone who he went from not wanting to talk to at all to someone he wanted to talk to but didn’t know how.

And earlier tonight… he finally got his head out of his ass—or rather, Elizabeth helped him to do so. It seemed like they’d reached an understanding, that they weren’t just unwilling victims, too nice to let down the people they loved, but friends. Allies. And on the dance floor, as terrifying as that was, it made him think that perhaps, even, they could be more than that.

But then he had to open his mouth and fuck it all up.

Darcy scowled, ignoring Caroline as she went on another diatribe. But hell, he didn’t see how he was in the wrong about this! Charles was his friend and he didn’t want to see him get hurt again, and Elizabeth, considering how protective she was of Jane, should understand that. There were so many times that Darcy heard or read something he shouldn’t that confirmed his suspicions that girls were only using Charles for the connection or the money, taking advantage of his good nature—and lord knew, when he was younger, that Darcy had been in that position as well.

Darcy was tired of half-carrying a drunk Charles to his apartment, the latter groaning sadly about how he’d never find a woman who just liked him for him. And Jane Bennet, though not overly giggly or flirty or seductive like the other women, was still a wild card. She was perfectly pleasant, but not overly demonstrative. And perhaps her eyes did light up a bit whenever she saw Charles walk into a room, and perhaps she, like Elizabeth, asked questions about him versus his job or his money or his (rich) family, but her body language didn’t indicate she was that into Charles. Jane Bennet was nice, but quiet, reserved, kind of like—

Shit. She was right (dammit.)
“—And from what Charles tells me, they’re not even native New Yorkers. They’re from some little bumfuck town in Jersey called Longbourn, for god’s sake, lord have you ever heard of something so—”

“Excuse me, Caroline,” Darcy said, “I have to, um, find the restroom.”

“Oh!” Caroline said. “I’ll just wait here, then.”

“Um, you don’t have to,” Darcy insisted. He wasn’t planning on coming back.

“What...?”

“See you around, Caroline!”

Upstairs and on the far side of the bar, Elizabeth proceeded to order a beer. As tempted as she was to order a shot of tequila, she was five years out of college and needed to retain at least some of her chill if she was ever going to survive tonight.

She was perhaps a quarter of the way through when a familiar face plopped down next to her. “Hello, stranger,” grinned George Wickham. Elizabeth deduced he was, at the very least, tipsy. It made him less polished, more sloppy, and she found she liked him better for it. “Where’s—hic! Your guy?”

Elizabeth took another sip of her drink. “He’s not my guy,” she said sourly. “And I ditched him on the dance floor. He was being annoying.”

“Ah,” George nodded sagely. “You guys had a fight.”

Elizabeth rolled her eyes. “You make it sound like we’re a couple.”

George looked visibly surprised. “Well, aren’t you?” He said. “I know you guys said you were ‘friends’ but I thought that was just because you hadn’t talked about labels yet. I definitely got the flirting vibe from you two, at the very least.”

“No,” Elizabeth said, shifting in her seat, “we’re not together. Or even planning on it.”

“Huh,” George smirked and Elizabeth had the strange urge to punch him in the mouth. Great. He was back to being Smarmy George. “Would you look at that? Finally, the infamous Fitzwilliam Darcy not get something that he wants.”

Elizabeth froze. “First of all,” she said, slowly, “I am not an object that some man gets to ‘have.’ Secondly, how do you know Will’s full name?”

“Will, is he?” Jeered George. “Well, Miss Elizabeth, I figured out why he seemed so familiar to me. And I figured it out. It’s because—”

“Oh, God,” Elizabeth groaned, putting her hand on her forehead, “he’s the dickhead wunderkind who ‘stole’ your job from you, isn’t he?”

George blinked. “That obvious, huh?”

“My life’s a fucking soap opera tonight,” Elizabeth muttered in disgust. “And now I’m talking to myself! Jesus.” She took a deep breath, and said, louder, “Look, George, Darcy can be an asshole, but I—”

“So you admit it!” George said, triumphant.
Elizabeth rolled her eyes. “Of course I admit it,” she said, “and you can bet your ass I’ve said it to his face, too. Hell, I just told him five minutes ago.”

“Oh, yeah?” George raised an eyebrow. “What did he do?”

Elizabeth scoffed. “He was going to stick his nose where it didn’t belong—into the relationship of my sister and his best friend. Thought my sister didn’t like his friend as much as he liked her, and he wanted to ‘warn’ his friend. God, the nerve of him!”

“Rich guys,” George said darkly. “Think they can do whatever they want!”

Elizabeth snorted into her beer. “Ain’t that the truth,” she said. “I told him off, though. It doesn’t matter that he was just trying to ‘be a good friend’ and that he had seen Charlie heartbroken so many times before! All he had were subjective observations that Jane doesn’t like Charlie as much as he likes her. Key word being subjective. Jane is shy; he should understand that! And Darcy’s spent a lot of time with both Jane and Charlie over the course of the past few months and he should have a better grip on Jane’s character than he does. But, still: he had no right—no right to do what he did!”

George frowned. “Waitaminute,” he slurred, “I thought… I thought you said he was going to tell Charlie Jane didn’t like him that much. Not that he already did.”

“He hasn’t,” Elizabeth folded her arms. “Yet. But he will!”

“Even after everything you told him?” George asked. “You sure?”

Elizabeth paused. “I…” Well, she hadn’t really given him a chance to say either way, now did she? She was too upset to hear him—really hear him—about his point of view. And it was none of his business, but who was she to say that if the situation hadn’t been reversed—if Jane had gotten her heart broken as often as it seemed like Charlie had—that she too wouldn’t revert to some hovering, overprotective mama bear mode?

Fuck. She needed to go find that fucker and apologize.

Elizabeth threw back the rest of her beer. Liquid courage and all that jazz.

George rolled his eyes. “Let me guess,” he said, “you’re gonna go find him.”

She patted his cheek. “Right in one, George Porgie Pudding Pie!” She said. Good god, her tolerance was embarrassingly low. Well, she wasn’t in college anymore! “Later, skater!”

And she was off.

3 AM

After a quick pit stop to the bathroom (she’d forgotten that beer went riiiiight through her,) Elizabeth carried on in her search for Darcy.

She found him on the stairs, her going down, him going up, and for a moment they both looked at each other, he two steps lower, so they were near the same height.

“Hi,” Darcy said. He looked nervous.

“Hi,” Elizabeth said, cursing herself for sounding breathless. She was more out of shape than she thought (uh-huh.) “Um. I was just looking for you.”
“That’s funny,” Darcy said, his lips quirking. “I was looking for you.” People were jostling them on either side, and for the first time all night, Elizabeth could barely hear him. He held out his hand. “Can we go talk?”

Wordlessly, she put her hands in his, and he navigated them out towards the entrance of the club. Elizabeth pulled on his hand and he turned. “Our cards are still at the bar.”

“We’ll come back,” Darcy assured her. “I just want to be heard.”

She nodded and followed him out, past the bouncers and the hipsters smoking right outside the door, until they were a block away. There were still an abundance of people out, but it was cooler, clearer. Elizabeth had to blink a few times, horrified that her eyes were better adjusted to flashing lights than they were to regular streetlights.

They were quiet for a moment, and then, at the same time, “I’m sorry.”

Elizabeth blinked. “What do you have to be sorry for? Look, I can’t say that I agree with your methods, but you were right when you said I’d do the same for Jane, especially if she was as unlucky in love as Charlie seems to be.”

Darcy shook his head. “No, you were the one who was right. Part of the reason why Charles is so unlucky is that he doesn’t learn from his mistakes because I don’t let him. I just keep swooping in and saving the day and he never truly learns, so he just picks the same girl over and over—until Jane.” He ran his hand through his hair, agitated. “That was such a shitty thing for me to imply, that Jane was like those other girls. She’s not, and if I had taken the time to get to know her as opposed to ‘standing there like a log’ during all of our dates, then I wouldn’t have worried.”

Elizabeth pursed her lips together. “True,” she said. “But I bitched at you for something you didn’t even do yet. And then I pretty much just yelled at you and walked away, without hearing you out. For that, I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry, too,” Darcy said. “I had you and Jane pegged all wrong, and that’s partly why I was such an ass to you guys. But I know better now, and I’ll be better.”

Elizabeth smiled. “Sounds like you’re coming along on your character studies, too.”

“Yeah?” Darcy looked sideways at her. “And how’s yours coming?”

“Hmmm,” Elizabeth rolled her eyes upward in thought. “It’s definitely something that can’t be completed in a night.”

“So you’ll need… repeat opportunities to study?” Darcy asked, watching her carefully.

Elizabeth, suddenly feeling skittish, laughed brightly. “Well,” she said lightly, “knowing Jane and Charlie, I’ll get many more opportunities whether I want them or not.” She knew immediately it was the wrong thing to say; Darcy’s face shuttered, his jaw tightened and he looked away.

Dammit! Jane and Charlotte told her time and time again her tongue would get her into trouble (to which she respond that it would be the good kind of trouble,) and they were right.

_Tonight’s the ‘Let’s Prove Elizabeth Wrong’ night_, she thought sourly.

They walked on for a little longer, in an uneasy silence, until Elizabeth felt her phone vibrate. It was from Jane, asking where they were.

“We’d better go back,” she told him, “and get our cards and such. It’s almost closing time.”
Last Call

Darcy and Elizabeth fought their way through the crowds, who were all heading out as they were heading in. After explaining to the bouncer, who didn’t want to let them in initially, that they ‘forgot’ to pay their tabs, they were immediately let back in.

Unfortunately, in the crush, they got separated. After trying to wait in one spot for him, Elizabeth resigned herself to going up to the bar, figuring he continued on without her and that she would find him there.

No such luck: she was able to get to the bartender and close out her tab easily, but Darcy was nowhere in sight.

As she was signing her name, she felt a heavy arm settle on her shoulders. She stiffened: Darcy would never be that forward.

She turned and groaned. Of freaking course.

“George,” she said flatly.

“Lizzzzzzzie,” he slurred hotly in her ear. Elizabeth pulled back in disgust, shrugging off his arm. Whereas earlier he was merely tipsy, now he was straight drunk—hell, he was past drunk, he was totally and completely wasted. “Where’s your man?”

“You’re like a dog with a fucking bone, George,” Elizabeth said. “He’s around, somewhere. Do you need a cab? An Uber?” Any vehicle that will take you far, far away from me?

“Nahhh,” George said. “Hoping to go home with someone.”

It better not be me, Elizabeth thought. Please let him have found some—reasonably sober, yet with poor taste—girl to take him home tonight.

“Hmm,” Elizabeth said. “Good luck with that, George! Have a good one.”

She slid off the bar stool and made room for another person angling for his tab. George caught up with her, though, and darted in front of her, wrapping an arm around her waist.

“Get your fucking hands off me,” she said coldly.

“Aww, don’t be like that, ‘Lisbeth,” George said. “You don’t have to pretend that Darcy’s here when he’s not. He ditched you, kicked you to the—hic! Curb, just like he made his ol’ man do t’me.”

Elizabeth, unable to help herself from engaging once Darcy’s name was brought up, clenched her jaw. She stepped out of George’s arm. “I may not know everything about him,” she said, “but I know this: Darcy’s not the kind of guy to go around stealing other people’s jobs. I bet he didn’t even know what his dad did.”

George’s accusations weren’t just prejudiced and annoying; they were maddening. Elizabeth was pissed. She had been wrong, so wrong about Darcy. Maybe at one time in the time they’d known each other—hell, even earlier tonight—she would have believed this bullshit, but she had gotten to know him tonight. He was so much more than that spoiled, arrogant rich kid that she had pegged
him to be. He was a bit of an arrogant rich kid, but he was also honest, straightforward, trustworthy. He was a loyal, if misguided friend, and he was a man who could admit when he was wrong. He was honorable and awkward and an absolutely wonderful dancer. He was stubborn and clever and damn if he didn’t have the best shoulders she’d ever seen. He was a puzzle she wasn’t even close to solving, a book with only the first few chapters read, and she wanted, suddenly, strongly and clearly, to know all of him. She only hoped she’d still get that chance, that he would let her after her tactless, cowardly rebuff earlier.

George sneered, and Elizabeth was taken aback by how ugly it made his face. She thought he’d probably make a great Gollum for Halloween. “So naï—naïve, Liz,” he spat. “I doubt he even deserves his job. I bet he doesn’t do anything at all.” His eyes grew a bit distant at the thought. “I bet he sleeps in late...strolls into the office whenever he wants...and does nothing but hit on secretaries and—and schmooze. He skips out early to go to cocktail parties and pick up women. He—”

“Okay, Mad Men,” Elizabeth put up a hand. “Can you please stop your wishful thinking and absurd projecting? Your blatant misogyny and general grossness are giving me a headache.”

“Why’re you stickin’ up for him?” He said. “He—he left you here, found someone else.”

“I assure you,” came a cool, clear voice from behind Elizabeth, “that he did no such thing.”

Elizabeth didn’t turn to face him, but every nerve in her body was alight. He was standing close to her, closer than she knew he normally would, because he thought she needed back up. She appreciated it; it was sweet, especially since she somehow instinctively knew he was holding back. He was letting her take the lead on how she wanted to handle this.

Acting on instinct, she reached her left hand behind her, palm open, hoping he would take the hint. Hesitantly, he slid his left palm into hers and she caught it, indulging in her thumb sweeping over his once then shifting her grip, sweeping their hands around the curve of her waist, skimming until she neatly untangled her fingers from his, encouraging them to drop on her hip. He caught on quickly, pressing the pads of his fingers inward. A claim was being made, at her insistence.

A moment later, his right hand was on her other hip, and if George missed Elizabeth’s machinations a moment before, he certainly didn’t miss, even in his intoxication, Darcy’s hands on Elizabeth, where his only a moment before were scorned.

“So this’s how it is,” he said, “Fitzy Darcy getting’ what he wants again, as always.”

Darcy could feel Elizabeth tense; he wasn’t sure if it was the slight against him, or the implication that she was something to be won. Probably both. Well, probably mostly the latter.

“Darcy can’t ‘get’ anyone unless they want it, too,” Elizabeth said coolly. “A concept you have yet to comprehend. And Will didn’t ‘get’ me. I chose him.”

His fingers tightened. Damn, if those words didn’t sound good, even if they weren’t real. Because it’s what he wanted: he wanted her to choose him, because, it might have taken him weeks to admit, he chose her.

Or weren’t those words real? Elizabeth wasn’t the type to fake having a boyfriend to get a fuckboy off her back. Hell, it was more likely she would make it so said boy could never fuck again. She also wasn’t the type to do—or say—anything she didn’t mean.

And maybe this was his opportunity to persuade her that choosing him was a good idea—or, at the very last, solidify her choice.
Plus, she was a decisive girl and he was a respectful guy. If she didn’t like what he was doing, she’d let him know and he’d back off.

So he moved in closer, like how they were on the dance floor, and bent his head, pressing his lips to the skin below her ear.

She drew a ragged breath—

But didn’t make any move to push him away.

“That’s right, George,” Darcy said, flicking his eyes up briefly and dismissing the man again, focusing on the delicious looking juncture of Elizabeth’s neck and shoulder. “She chose me and I’m very glad that she did,” he said, his lips and tongue brushing across her skin as he spoke.

Elizabeth shivered.

“If you’ll excuse us,” she said, and he noticed her voice was pitched ever so slightly lower, “I think my choice is eager to go home.” She stepped out of Darcy’s embrace, but reached for his hand. Her smile was steel. “Good bye, George.”

Darcy didn’t say anything, but if he smirked a little smugly at the man as he let Elizabeth pull him towards the door, well, who could blame him?

---

**Closing Time**

“You know,” Elizabeth said over her shoulder, “I thought for a minute you did leave me.”

He scowled quickly, reflexively, before realizing she was joking. “I waited for you downstairs when we got separated,” he said, “and then after a bit I realized you went upstairs. I just finished paying my tab when I saw you.”

Elizabeth laughed. “Great minds,” she said, “I did that, too, but obviously for not as long, and I didn’t see you down there. Well, it worked out.”

The moment was over, and Darcy felt a sharp pang of disappointment, but they were still holding hands, and he wasn’t planning on letting go before he needed to.

Outside, Charles and Jane were waiting for them, alternating from what looked like to be sappy, soft kisses and soft whispers.

“Err,” Darcy said. He hadn’t witnessed that before. “Should we… go?”

“Nah,” Elizabeth said dismissively. “Hey, lovebirds! Come up for air, would you?”

The two jerked apart, although Jane stuck her tongue out at her sister. In response, Elizabeth laughed.

“Ready to go?” Darcy asked.

“Erm, about that,” Charles said nervously. “We were thinking…”

Jane looked at Elizabeth pleadingly. Elizabeth knew that Jane and Charlie had been waiting to have sex, both wanting to take their relationship slow (if it hadn’t have been any of his fucking business, she would’ve told Darcy that earlier during his self-righteous speech.) It seemed they were both finally willing to take the plunge.
Elizabeth rolled her eyes and waved her hand imperiously, but she was smiling fondly at them. “Go,” she said. “Be merry. Use protection. Darcy and I will share a cab.”

Jane hadn’t noticed, but Charles saw their clasped hands and raised his eyebrows at Darcy, whose lips quirked in response. Charles’s eyes brightened, but he was smart enough not to make a fuss in front of the women. Later, his expression read.

Darcy didn’t even have it in him to scowl at the ensuing interrogation.

The two lovebirds made their escape, and Elizabeth and Darcy watched them go.

“As awkward as that scene was,” Darcy remarked, “if I had seen it earlier, I wouldn’t have had any reason to wonder if she loved him like he loves her.”

Elizabeth began to frown at his statement before she realized he was joking. And then—“You think he loves her?” She said in wonder.

Darcy shrugged. “It’s obvious to me,” he said. “Isn’t it obvious to you?”

She thought about it for a moment, then smiled. “Yeah,” she said, “it is.”

They stood for another minute, people watching, the throngs of people waiting for Ubers and climbing into cars; kissing and smoking and fighting and flirting against buildings and in the orange glow of the street lights.

Elizabeth murmured, seemingly to herself, "Wonder how long it'll be til the car gets here...”

At the thought, Darcy’s fingers tightened inadvertently around hers and Elizabeth startled, realizing that her hand was still in his. She flushed and began to loosen her grip.

Disappointed, Darcy half turned, loosening his own fingers, but not removing them completely, moving to hail a cab.

Then, suddenly, he felt her hand grasp onto his, jerking him suddenly, turning him, and she reached up, her hands on his face, her mouth coming up to meet his.

For a moment, he was a ridiculous creature, one arm half-bent in the air to get a cab, the other in her grip, but he was Fitzwilliam Darcy and he was many things, but a slow man wasn’t one of them, and he quickly rectified it, sliding one hand into her curls, the other sliding up her arm and behind her back.

Her lips were like her: playful, eager, exploring him, devouring him, demanding he open up and surrender to her, and he complied gladly, meeting her, offering her all. Darcy smiled against her lips, and felt her smile back. She pressed a quick kiss to his lips and then rocked back on her heels.

“Hi,” she said, and this time she was very much breathless and had no inclination to hide it.

“Hello,” he murmured, tucking a curl behind her ear. He waited for her to speak.

“So I was thinking,” she said, and her hands were eagerly raking through his own dark waves, “about what I said earlier.”

“Hmm, what was that?” He asked, ducking his head, nuzzling her neck, happy and secure in the knowledge that she wanted him, too.

“Will,” she giggled, and his head came up then, because he was startled and so pleased by the
“Listen.”

“I am,” he said, trying to clear the smile off his face (and failing.) “What is it, Lizzie?”

Elizabeth smiled. Lizzie was her father’s name for her—and when he died, she became Elizabeth, not letting anyone, save Jane on occasion, call her the nickname again. But it sounded good coming out of Darcy’s lips. Maybe she would make another exception. Time would tell.

“I think that in order to help me with my character studies,” she said, very seriously, “I’m going to need some one-on-one sessions with my subject. For—for proper research, after all.”

Darcy raised an eyebrow, his smile growing. “Oh, really?” He said. “Well, I suppose, as the subject, it would be pretty awful of me to refuse. And who am I to get in the way of your education? As long as you,” and here he looked a touch vulnerable, “keep me updated on what your findings.”

Elizabeth nodded seriously, but her eyes were warm as they smiled into his. “Oh, certainly,” she said, “but I think my hypothesis will hold.” She grinned wickedly. “However,” she said, “I’m going to need a lot of hands-on research, just to make sure,” and those delightful hands pulled on the back of his head and his mouth back to hers.

“Mmmphf, ‘Lizabeth,” he murmured, pulling his lips back from hers, marginally, “what about the taxi?”

She grinned wickedly. “I ordered us an Uber as we were leaving the club,” she said, “but because all the bars are letting out, it said it would take us a while. It should be here any minute, though. Until then…”

Darcy was too busy to reply; his lips were already back on hers.

He took it all back; he fucking loved clubs.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!