A Necessary Lesson

by Reading Redhead (readingredhead)

Summary

There were times when Elizabeth could not help laughing at her husband's quick temper. It was one of those things she hoped she could mend, or at least alleviate, with time and the proper sort of instruction, and tonight was as good a night as any to begin.

Notes

This story was written for girloftheburbs over on LJ as part of a fandom auction to raise money for disaster relief in Haiti.

It was evening at Pemberley, the first evening in several weeks in which Elizabeth had been unhurried enough to feel the truth that this was now her home. She had been married nearly a month—for nearly a month she had been connected by that most intimate of ties to the one man in the world whom she truly, dearly loved—but until now much of it had seemed like a dream. Much fuss had been made in preparing for the wedding, but as for the day itself, Elizabeth's fondest memory was of the moment when she and Darcy had finally been allowed to pull away from the crowds, sneaking off like disobedient children to the carriage that waited to drive them to the coast. From there, it was a simple matter of catching the ferry to Bilbao and spending their honeymoon in Spain, but even the two weeks abroad had been little other than surreal, part of a waking dream, every minute almost too bright to be trusted. Their return to England had brought about a great deal more work than either of them had expected; there was a household for Elizabeth to learn how to run, tenants to be visited, and so many letters in need of writing that Elizabeth had only just managed to catch up on neglected correspondence.
It was a pleasant sort of chaos, but kept her busy nonetheless, and so it was a relief that tonight she and her husband had no company but their own. After dinner, they had retired together to their private parlor, where Elizabeth now sat in an armchair with her legs curled under her, reading the final volume of Frances Burney's Cecilia. She would have rather been engaged in conversation with her husband, but he sat on the opposite side of the room before a table strewn with the remainders of his daily duties in the form of letters which still required his response. She eyed him over the top of her book, and saw him writing with quick but deliberate strokes yet another missive. Elizabeth knew better than to complain about his practice of continuing his work even into the evening hours that were sometimes their only shared moments. He would only think she was cross at him, or worse, believe that she did not understand the necessity of his work.

Elizabeth understood now, even if she had not entirely understood at the time, exactly what she had married into. Darcy had his hands full running an estate like Pemberley. Of course, he could have left it to the care of a steward, but he was not the sort of person who trusted easily in the abilities of others, and besides, he felt an intense connection to the place, and a deserved pride in his knowledge of its workings, which led him to insist upon his being involved in much of the day-to-day business of the grounds and tenants.

Still, Elizabeth thought, watching as he set aside one letter only to slide his letter-opener beneath the seal of another, it was not exactly her idea of a perfect evening.

She was about to return to her book when she caught a glance at his expression. Darcy looked at the new letter in his hands with a grim frustration she found it unprofitable to reveal outwardly on most occasions. He gave the letter a cursory reading, then threw it down to the table such that the other papers fluttered and threatened to fall to the floor.

Inwardly, Elizabeth could not help laughing at her husband's quick temper. It was one of those things she hoped she could mend, or at least alleviate, with time and the proper sort of instruction. And tonight was beginning to seem like a good night to begin. 'I believe there are only two people in the world who can have frustrated you so greatly,' she said, setting her book down upon the table beside her armchair, rising, and crossing the room toward Darcy. 'And you are only in regular correspondence with one of them.'

She stopped before his makeshift desk, then—rather impertinently—plucked up the letter that had caused him such frustration. As she had suspected, it was from his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. She did not bother to read it, suspecting that it would contain similar sentiments to the other letters that the lady had sent her nephew on the subject of his recent marriage, a choice she viewed as 'utterly insupportable and devoid of logic.'

Elizabeth placed the letter back down upon the table, then walked to stand beside Darcy, placing a hand on his shoulder. 'I cannot understand why you let her unsettle you like this.'

'She has not unsettled me,' Darcy said.

Elizabeth raised an eyebrow at him. 'For someone who is not unsettled,' she said, 'you've become quite tense.' She could feel it in his shoulder, and she absently began to massage the taut muscle.

Darcy let out a deep sigh and closed his eyes. 'There are days when I cannot believe that she was a sister to my own mother,' he said. 'The things my aunt says about you—about our marriage—'

Elizabeth smiled a little. Privately, she found it sweet that he was so offended by his aunt's mistreatment of her. As for herself, Elizabeth thought about Lady Catherine as infrequently as was possible. She couldn't even be bothered with the energy it might have taken to hate the woman. 'What has she been saying this time?'
'That you are some kind of witch, and that you've made me lose my senses,' Darcy replied, shrugging his shoulders absently under Elizabeth's touch. 'Apparently, you are the very personification of all things wicked, not to mention the symbol of what ails our present society.'

Elizabeth could not help laughing at that. 'The language, at least, is new, even if the sentiment expressed is something of a bore,' she said, an appropriately wicked smile upon her face.

Her husband shifted in his chair to regard her with a look made somber once again. 'I cannot understand how you do that,' he said.

'What, laugh?' Elizabeth teased him. 'It's really quite easy—when something absolutely ridiculous crosses your path, laughter is the natural response.'

'How can I laugh when this despicable woman, to whom I am nonetheless tied by blood, has insulted the one to whom I am most tightly tied by a force surpassing mere relation?' He took hold of Elizabeth's hand in his own and leaned back in his chair.

'My dear Fitzwilliam,' Elizabeth said, savoring the use of his first name, which she knew he found pleasantly vexing, 'she certainly has not offended me. And while I appreciate your taking offense on my behalf, I can promise you that in doing so, you are only serving her ends.'

Darcy's brow furrowed at that. 'How so?'

'You spend more time with her letters of complaint than with me!' Elizabeth said, in a tone of playfulness that nonetheless could not entirely mask her exasperation.

The shift in Darcy's facial expression was almost comical, and Elizabeth would have been inclined to laugh at that, too, were it not for her knowledge of how seriously he considered himself. 'Elizabeth,' he said, looking suddenly shocked, 'you must know—it is only because I love you—will you truly be cross with me?'

She did not answer immediately. Instead, she relinquished his hand, stepped between him and his work desk, and before he could say or do anything about it, sat herself down upon his lap and regarded him with an amused look. 'I will only be cross with you if you continue to pay attention to what your aunt has to say about me,' she said. Elizabeth saw Darcy's eyes flick past her to the other letters that lay unanswered on the table, and she amended her statement to add, 'Or if you even think of getting more paperwork done tonight.' Thus saying, she wrapped her arms around his neck, pulled herself closer to him, and silenced any protest with a kiss.

'I am beginning to think that my aunt has made at least one valid point,' Darcy said several minutes later, a wry smile on his face.

'And that would be?'

'You have most certainly bewitched me.'

Elizabeth chuckled. 'That had better not be a complaint.'

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