The Brighton Effect

by Shem

Summary

Kitty's chance to go to Brighton with Lydia may just change everyone's fate

Notes

Authors Note: After many years with Writers Block I found a solution: Get the flu, dose oneself with as much medication as possible, and spend days rewatching all your JA adaptations and 10,000 words will spring into being.

Many thanks to all my peeps who have reassure me these weren’t only the ravings of a sick madwoman, especially *my* Lydia who would behave better in Brighton, for her reviewing despite her claim that 10,000 words can’t accidentally be written. (they can!)

This was originally posted on the Derbyshire Writers Guild in 2013 and has not been edited since that posting.

From Chapter 9 of this story there is a parallel story (The Pemberley Effect with Lizzy's and Darcy's POV) that can be read with chapters alternating with this, or the stories can be read separately.

Will be posting this in parts!
Kitty eyed her eldest sisters with envy. It seemed impossible to her that they were able to partake of dinner so easily. Did not their stomachs and heads ache with the knowledge that the militia were to leave Meryton?

Lizzy had always been made of stern stuff, and had seemed to Kitty to be very indifferent to the officers since she had returned from Rosings, but Jane was usually so tender hearted. Perhaps it was not possible for her heart to break any further after Mr Bingley. Others may not have been able to see how Mr Bingley’s defection had affected Jane, but her sisters certainly could. It was difficult of Kitty to feel ill disposed towards a man who had looked so well in his blue coat, but clearly the man was a cad if he could treat Jane so poorly.

Even those distracting thoughts were not enough to make Kitty wish to eat, and their mother had gone to all the trouble of purchasing fish, perhaps more for her benefit than theirs, although Kitty noticed Mrs Bennet was eating little as well.

Mrs Bennet then gave out a great sigh. “Oh my poor girls.”

Mr Bennet looked up from his meal with a quizzical smile. “We are not quite in the hedgerows yet, Mrs Bennet!”

Kitty noticed Lizzy’s admonishing look at their father. She clearly did not wish to discuss yet again their mothers’ plan to take them all to Brighton. Kitty found it monstrously unfair that Lizzy would not aid them in their scheme. It apparently was quite all right for her to be allowed to jaunt about the countryside to visit Charlotte Lucas and she would be accompanying their aunt and uncle to the Lake District! However could she be moved to offer even the most desultory support to a plan that would allow her sisters a modicum of the happiness she had experienced? No of course not and Lydia and herself had not even had the pleasure of going to London! It was unfair in the extreme.

“We shall all be in the hedgerows if you will not bestir yourself to help your daughters find husbands!”

“But surely, Mrs Bennet, in a whole camp full of soldiers, in such a retiring place as Brighton, our daughters will fare very ill indeed, if they have not managed to secure a proposal or two here in Meryton? I do remember you assuring me that one visit to one gentleman would result in our salvation and look what came of that!”

“Papa!” exclaimed Lizzy.

“I have had a proposal!” cried Lydia.

“Yes, from a spotty fifteen year old ensign,” retorted Kitty who did not envy her sister the gentleman in question, only the proposal. Lydia was not yet sixteen and Kitty would be eighteen soon and no gentlemen – spotty – or not had ever tried to propose to her. Steal a kiss perhaps, but not a proposal.
“If I should go to Brighton, I should do much better,” said Lydia.

“Yes, yes, you would, my love. I do not see how your father thinks you are to all find husbands if you have no opportunity to meet young men.”

“My dear, Meryton has seen a veritable influx of men soldiers and gentlemen too, and Jane and Lizzy have abandoned us to explore what London and Kent have to offer, and yet still we have five unmarried daughters. I see no reason why removing the household to Brighton will assist in any way.”

Mrs Bennet, seeing that matrimonial prospects were of no interest to her spouse, moved to her second line of attack: attempting to convince her husband with the joys of sea bathing. Lydia added her vocal support.

Kitty had already tried to explain to her father the many health benefits of sea bathing, but as he had been reading at the time she did not think he had listened. Either way, she did not think her father would be swayed by immersion in salt water as it did not sound as though it was an activity he could enjoy while reading and eating gooseberry fool.

She turned her attention from her mother and Lydia to see that Jane had gone quite silent and put down her knife and fork.

Kitty had wondered whether Jane might have seen Mr Bingley in town and now she was certain Jane had not. Kitty thought it quite cruel of her father to constantly tease about Mr Bingley and not see how it was affecting Jane. Jane would have had Mr Bingley if she could, and it was obvious to anyone who looked that Jane had wanted him very much indeed.

Kitty had given up on the hope of removing to Brighton, although Lydia and Mrs Bennet continued to work upon Mr Bennet to little avail and the annoyance of the rest of the household. She merely confined herself to fantasizing about walking along the sea front with a handsome officer, and was indulging in this happy pastime when she heard Lydia yelling her name.

“Oh Kitty! Kitty!” Lydia was waving a letter. “Harriet has written.”

Harriet Forster was lately married to Colonel Forster of the militia; she had been one of the lucky girls to have managed to parlay a short stay by the militia in her town to a lasting happiness of being able to attend the officers wherever they went. Kitty was most jealous of Mrs Forster, particularly since she had become very intimate with Lydia. There seemed little room for Kitty in their plans and no need to include her in their jokes.

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“Can you guess what has happened?” Lydia’s eyes were wild.

“The militia is not to remove to Brighton?”

“No! Harriet has asked me to go to Brighton with her as her particular friend! Oh Kitty, there will be balls and parties every night and so many officers! A whole camp full of soldiers!”

Kitty felt distinctly unwell, she might not be Harriet’s particular friend but she was two years older than Lydia, and it seemed unfair that Harriet not invite her as well! She could not find any words to congratulate her sister on her good fortune because there were none to be had.

“Oh and she has asked you as well, Kitty,” said Lydia distractedly, “I must find Mama.”

With that short utterance, Kitty was transported from the depths of despair, contemplating a
summer where she would remain at Longbourn sentenced to hearing about the delights of Brighton from an indifferent and gloating correspondent, to the dizzying heights of happiness.

She was to go to Brighton!

Their mother entered into all their raptures and that was enough for Lydia. Her sister did not take any notice of Lizzy’s active interference but Kitty noticed the hushed conversations and shut library doors.

She could not understand it. Lizzy had never been so selfish. There was little expense – though of course they must have new wardrobes, they could not be embarrassed in Brighton – in accompanying the Forsters to Brighton. Certainly it was a far cheaper scheme than if the whole family had decamped. It could not be that Lizzy was jealous; when asked directly, she had disclaimed all desire to go to Brighton herself. Kitty could not then understand her objection.

Lydia, when made aware of Lizzy’s objections, dismissed them as pure jealousy but not because of Brighton itself but because of Mr Wickham. After all, Lizzy was violently in love with Lieutenant Wickham; everyone knew her partiality.

Kitty, however, doubted that was the reason. Lizzy had been very cold towards him the last time the officers had come for tea and, unless her heart was broken and she was too proud to show Wickham the impact of his defection, Kitty rather thought Lizzy had begun to dislike Mr Wickham preferring to bait him like she did all men she took a dislike to.

Whatever the case Lizzy did not prevail, because Mr Bennet chose to bow to his daughters’ and wife’s pleas; it was not a surprising outcome as it was common knowledge that Mr Bennet would do almost anything to preserve a quiet house with as few silly girls in it as possible. The idea of Mr Bennet refusing to allow Lydia and herself to go to Brighton and then put up with the outrage that would follow was ludicrous.

The joy of their going to Brighton far out shadowed Kitty’s upcoming birthday, although all her sisters bought her gowns and bonnets and other fine things, excepting Lydia who promised to find something in Brighton. Kitty knew how much that promise was worth.

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“Do you have everything you need? Did you pack that pelisse that so becomes you, Lydia?” Mrs Bennet fussed at the last minute as their trunks were loaded onto the Forsters’ hired carriage.

Lydia ignored her mother, too excited to do anything much then babble excitedly at Harriet.

“We have not forgotten anything, Mama,” soothed Kitty.

“Oh well, my dear girls, take every opportunity to enjoy yourselves. Oh Colonel Forster, look after my girls.”

“I will indeed, Ma’am. You can have no reason to concern yourself.” Kitty thought Colonel Forster would have addressed himself to their father, but Mr Bennet had said his farewells from his library and had seen no reason to come out and see them off.

“Lord, Mama, what a fuss!” said Lydia, pulling Kitty into the coach. “We shall send word by express when we have found husbands for all our sisters!”

With that, they were off and in a moment of unexpected sisterly charity Lydia grasped her hand and squealed in excitement. This charity lasted all of an hour, and Kitty wondered that Colonel Forster did not turn the carriage around, or choose to ride next to the carriage. Harriet and Lydia
were giving even Kitty the headache, and of course it was her fault for every inconvenience attendant on having four occupants squeezed into a too small carriage and a long journey.

They were to travel to Brighton in a day, as Colonel Forster wanted to reach his men as swiftly as possible. Kitty would have liked to spend a night in London, and thought Lydia would support her as Lydia had always wanted to go to London. But Lydia could only think of soldiers and camps and wishing to be as close to them as possible.

Arriving in Brighton was quite anti-climatic. It was pitch-black and there was nothing to see. If Kitty screwed up her eyes and thought very hard she possibly could smell the sea. Or at least what she imagined the sea would be like.

Lydia was disappointed to discover that their lodgings were not to be on the water’s edge. Colonel Forster had instead rented a house that was within respectable distance of the delights of Brighton, but also did not weigh heavily upon his purse.

The house was not a large one, and Kitty could tell that Lydia was disappointed that they still had to share a room and now a bed.

Kitty was exhausted by the journey, but Lydia was full of energy as she proposed all manners of diversions the next day.

In the end Lydia’s planned diversions came to nothing as Harriet had the headache. Colonel Forster promised to bring some of the officers by after he had completed his duties and neither Lydia nor Kitty could contain their excitement at seeing all their old friends, Denny, Chamberlayne, Saunderson and Wickham again.

Kitty used the time to unpack their trunks, while Lydia interrogated the local servants.

“There are balls on Monday and Thursday night, and card parties twice a week!” Lydia shook her head. “Although if they should be deathly dull parties of whist daresay we can find some other amusement. And that is only the public parties. We shall have many more private parties. I expect we will have to turn down invitations! Oh Kitty!” Lydia flopped upon the bed, crushing Kitty’s new ballgown and deaf to remonstrations.

These preparations barely took the morning and Lydia grew increasingly wild to be out and amongst it all. Kitty was unsure as this was not Meryton where they knew every lane, nook and cranny and could have navigated in the dark.

At length Lydia prevailed; she had secured the services of the man servants who had been born in Brighton and lived there all his life.

“See, Kitty, we shall not get lost now. Not that I should.”

Lydia soon quieted when they stepped out upon the street. Meryton was not a quiet hamlet by any means and while they had not much opportunity to visit any of the other local towns, except when they could surprise returning sisters, Kitty had thought she had seen a busy town. Brighton’s inhabitants must double that of any town she had visited and she was pleased to note that her sister was similarly affected.

Not that Lydia would be dampened for long. Kitty’s arm was almost pulled out of her socket as they marched towards the shore. Lydia was so determined to see the sea that she did not notice Kitty pointing out the Old Ship Tavern, which was sure to be the site of many a jolly evening.
The smell hit them first, and brought both them to a stop and brief silence. Then as one they could not contain their excitement, rushing forward as far as they were allowed, and in Kitty’s case as far as she dared.

They were in Brighton. They were by the sea!

It was not clearly the most fashionable part of Brighton but Kitty could see a red coat or two amongst those who had chosen to breathe the sea air that day.

She did not care how provincial she looked as she gaped in wonder. The breeze almost blew her bonnet off and as she turned to keep her face out of the wind, she noticed she had been under observation.

A gentleman seemed amused by her excitement. As he was a handsome gentleman, despite the lack of regimentals, she accepted his observation with no rancour. He then, with a nod of his hat at her, continued on his way. Kitty turned back to squeal at Lydia, but her sister as usual was nowhere to be seen when Kitty had tales to tell of her interaction with a handsome gentleman.

But what were men when one had the sea? Kitty breathed in deeply and coughed at the smell of fish; on second thought, the attraction of Brighton was indeed the officers.
Their expectations of Brighton, raised high by the novelty of the shoreline, were dashed when it seemed the officers could not be spared from their duties for dinner after all. It was a very glum set of ladies that sat down to eat.

Colonel Forster attempted joviality and reminded them that they were encamped for the whole summer, there would be many other opportunities for entertainment and as many officers as they could find.

Indeed, if they were to partake in any of the joys of Brighton, vast sums had to be outlaid to subscriptions to assemblies and so forth. Kitty was eager to join one of the subscription libraries as it seemed a particularly grown up thing to do, and she was assured that all the fashionable ladies and gentleman patronised at least one of the libraries. Harriet and Lydia were more inclined to save their money for more bonnets and gowns.

“Papa will forward us more if we explain we spent it on books,” argued Kitty, but as Lydia responded, it was easy enough to say that without actually spending anything on books. In the end Kitty managed to convince them to at least accompany her to purchase her subscription for two months.

“Now that you have your silly books, I thought I had brought my sister Catherine – not Mary – with me, will you help me pick which gown to wear this evening?”

Harriet had organised a small gathering that the officers would be honour bound to attend, after all one of the duties of an officer was keeping their Colonel’s wife happy.

“Your yellow gown,” replied Kitty, trying to keep one curl from escaping.

“I thought you said that made me look sallow?”

“I lied because you look so well in it,” smiled Kitty. The dress indeed did make Lydia look vile, but it would teach her to compare her to Mary!

Lydia remonstrated with all their old favourites loudly for most of the evening for not immediately coming to greet her arrival in Brighton. Kitty thought this was surely calculated to do the opposite of what Lydia wanted, but Lydia not Kitty was the most successful young lady in their acquaintance when it came to capturing a man’s attention.

“Are your duties more onerous now that you are in Brighton, Denny?” Kitty took her chance to attract her own officer.

Denny smiled at Kitty, “Miss Catherine – I should say Miss Bennet now, should I not?”

Kitty could not help preening a little at that.

“I should not say they are more onerous, perhaps more difficult to execute when we are not the only regiment, and when there are so many more distractions.”

She was not sure whether that was an aspersion on Meryton, but Kitty suspected it was when, apart from the party held by Mrs Forster, it seemed that the officers had found other entertainments now that they had more variety to choose from … and their choice was not two young ladies from
nowhere, Hertfordshire.

Lydia took their defection much to heart.

“\(\text{I only danced one dance,} \) she complained after their first dance; a disappointing ball put on by one of the regiments. Harriet entered into all her grievances, for she too had only danced once.

Kitty had danced no dances and had been forced to sit with the older wives, but she knew there was no point asking for sympathy from either Lydia or Harriet. She could not understand why not one of her old friends had not asked her to dance. Nothing had changed between Meryton and Brighton; certainly her ability to dance and to be entertaining had not altered. Was their success only because of the lack of alternatives? After all, who at home was there to distract a young gentleman? Miss Watson? The Misses Long? The Misses Harrington?

Harriet tutted as she helped Lydia out of her gown. “\(\text{They certainly need punishing. How shall we do it?} \)”

“I am sure there are many other much more amiable gentlemen in Brighton. We should forget Danny and Chamberbridge – see I have forgotten their names already.”

Lydia looked at Kitty in some surprise. “\(\text{Of course there are many handsomer men in Brighton, Kitty, and I shall conquer them all. But I must have our particular friends realise their mistake. After all does it matter that Miss Smith of goodness knows where has five thousand pounds? Or that Miss Jones looks like a milkmaid? No.} \)” Lydia gave a small smile. “\(\text{I shall make them all wildly in love with me.} \)”

Lydia’s first opportunity was their first public assembly; many of their officers attended, and other military men were not in short supply, neither were ordinary gentlemen. Although Harriet whispered to them that they could hardly expect the aristocracy to come when they could be attending the Prince Regent at the Pavilion.

That thought sent a thrill through the ladies, that the Regent, that lover of all things decadent, was actually residing in the same town as they. They would of course never be invited, and Kitty rather thought the parties would be quite staid for all his reputation. Sir William Lucas had never made court parties sound particularly exciting.

It looked for some time as if Lydia’s plan would fail before it even started, because Harriet proved not to be a competent chaperone. Kitty had not expected and certainly did not want a chaperone in the way most people thought of a chaperone. She did not want someone like her Aunt Gardiner sitting and tutting and preventing any little bit of fun that might be thought too daring: no, that was unthinkable.

However the other role that a chaperone should take is being able to navigate the world better than her unmarried charges. Harriet needed to discover the master of ceremonies and let him do his job. Otherwise who were they to talk to?

This skill had passed Harriet by and they stood awkwardly by the edge of the dancing watching everyone else whirl by.

Luckily, Lydia was not one to let societal rules confine her. She waited until a diffident yet impeccably attired young officer passed by them and then loudly accused him of stepping upon her gown.

Of course he had to apologise and then introductions were necessary, and then a further introduction to the young women in his party (wives and sisters of fellow officers) in order that
Lydia might be shown to the withdrawing room to attend to her gown.

Kitty withdrew with Lydia and the newly introduced Mrs Sharp, while Harriet charmed the rest of the party.

“Mr Samuels is not normally so clumsy, poor thing,” said Mrs Sharp, “Oh but it looks as though he has not caused any damage. How fortunate!” She was a pleasant young lady and it did not seem to even occur to her that it was all pretence. Lydia discovered that Mrs Sharp’s husband was part of the regulars that were stationed at the permanent barracks, and she lived in dread of him being sent to the Peninsula. It sounded as if they were only newlyweds.

“For if he goes, I shall be left here alone.”

Kitty thought that if she had a charming military husband, she would follow him anywhere. But as she had not made the acquaintance of Captain Sharp, perhaps he was the kind you would wish over the Channel. Lydia had no problem understanding why Mrs Sharp would prefer the bustle of Brighton to following the drum.

“Oh no, I should be forced to stay with his mother in Shropshire.”

Lydia’s exclamations of dismay were everything that a young lady should want from such an announcement and Kitty thought they had made a firm friend.

They walked back into the assembly room arm in arm, laughing as intimate friends of a quarter of an hour were wont to do.

Mrs Sharp declared she would find them both partners and partners better with their feet than Mr Samuels. Kitty was not paying much attention to Mrs Sharp, for as long as her partner came willing to dance she did not much care for his other attributes. It had been so long since she had danced where it was not just the carpet rolled up to the sound of one pianoforte.

Then on the opposite side of the room, through the dancing, Kitty saw a party of well-dressed men. What caught her eye were their coats, but since they were not red and the gentlemen themselves were a good deal older than her normal flirts, her eyes moved on, until she realised one of them was the gentleman from her first day in Brighton.

Lydia and Mrs Sharp were too deep in conversation to hear Kitty point him out, so she watched him. He and his companions were attracting some attention and they seemed acquainted with one or two officers. She thought him fearfully handsome but he seemed disinclined to dance – why else be at an assembly standing around – which was certainly a mark against him. Surely Mrs Sharp should be aware of who he and his companions were, she seemed very knowledgeable of fashionable Brighton.

There was a break in the conversation and Kitty gained Mrs Sharp’s attention, but when she gestured to the other side of the room she realised they had gone.

“Old General Harper?” Mrs Sharp gave her a strange look as indeed the only man opposite them was an old round man with an askew wig.

“Oh no – the gentlemen have moved on.”

Then Mrs Sharp alighted upon her prey and introduced Kitty to a Captain Clarkson, who despite an unfortunate mark upon his forehead, was charming and willing to dance.

That assembly was the beginning of their campaign. Kitty was not surprised to discover that Lydia’s next attack was to wear shocking gowns and flirt outrageously, but it worked: one by one,
their old friends drifted back.

Whether it was to do with Lydia’s gambit, or the fact that there was no need to work very hard to please Miss Lydia Bennet, unlike other young ladies, Kitty could not say.

She could however easily say that the officers had not begun to pay her any more attention then they had before, which had always been a very little. Indeed she was asked to dance more and to play cards, but it was clear she was not anyone’s first choice, or particular flirt.

Mrs Sharp and her sister Miss Kensington, however, provided company and amusement when no gentlemen were available and Harriet and Lydia had their own secrets.

They went promenading on the Steyne, which Lydia found quite dull she preferred to pay calls to officers when they might be still abed. That joke had not soured since they’d played it at Meryton. Kitty, however, enjoyed seeing all the fashions on display as everyone promenaded up and down.

“Can you ride, Miss Bennet?” asked Mrs Sharp as they strolled one morning.

“Not well at all, I’m afraid.” Her father had thrown them all upon a horse when they were small, and thus all the Miss Bennets could stay upon a gently plodding horse if the need arose. However as Lizzy had no aptitude or interest, Mr Bennet had run out of motivation to teach, and thus only Jane had any real ability.

“It is such a pity otherwise I should have thought we could be daring and mount ourselves,” said Mrs Sharp.

Miss Kensington giggled. “But we can much better admire the men’s seats from here.”

“Caroline, do not shock Miss Bennet.”

“We should go watch the officers,” said Miss Kensington, ignoring her sister, “I hear Mr Wickham is a particularly fine horseman.”

“Mr Wickham is particularly fine at everything I believe, is that not so, Miss Bennet? I am quite jealous of your long standing acquaintance with him. Was he a particular favourite of yours?”

Kitty did not know where to look. Mr Wickham had been one of the early deserters. He had come more and more into their circle recently, but he had not slunk back like the others. Instead it was if he had never repudiated their friendship, but because he was Mr Wickham and was all amiability they all forgave him.

“Not of mine, of the whole neighbourhood.”

“I should not let my younger sister have all her own way, especially when it comes to a man of Mr Wickham’s quality,” said Mrs Sharp.

Kitty had never thought of Mr Wickham as her particular property; after all it was Lizzy who was quite violently in love with him, and then Lydia, although she had strenuously denied such a claim. Mr Wickham did not dance to Lydia’s tune, so she preferred others, but Kitty always thought some of that was a feint from her true feelings.

She was a good sister and kept Lydia’s secrets, and the conversation turned.

After some weeks, it seemed to Kitty that while there were certainly more entertainments, there was hardly a night when they were at home, but it seemed only to be more of the same: dancing and inconsequential talking.
She found herself missing her sisters and even her father. They occasionally talked of things that were not scandalous love affairs and ribbons. Even Mary with her Fordyce, at least it was something to argue and complain about.

At home, she at least had the benefit of being known and for a dearth of choice in personable young ladies; here she was only Lydia Bennet’s quite overshadowed sister and Brighton did not lack for young ladies charming or otherwise. Too often she found herself wondering if anything truly life changing would occur. Surely they could not have come to Brighton for nothing much of substance to happen to them?
Chapter Three

“But everybody goes to Donaldson’s,” argued Kitty.

Harriet sighed, “The officers do not go to circulating libraries. They do not have time for books.”

“Who does,” replied Lydia reaching for the jam.

Kitty wanted to retort that she had time for books. Indeed, since Harriet and Lydia often forgot to invite her upon their morning visits she had plenty of time for books.

She was also surprised they did not see the benefits of being seen at Donaldson’s; it was like promenading on the Steyne, one did not have anything to do with exercise any more than the other had to do with reading.

“Oh Lydia, I meant to tell you, Chamberlayne asked especially if we were attending the Assembly tonight.”

That was a silly question. Unless there was a privately organised entertainment, the Forster party always attended the public assemblies; they attended everything they possibly could if it proved to have even a modicum of entertainment.

Lydia gave a sly smile, “Chamberlayne is a dear sweet boy, but he is nothing to some of the other officers. Kitty may dance with him.”

“Thank you very much,” was Kitty’s response. Lydia did not notice her sarcastic tone.

“Indeed, now that I have seen all the officers here in Brighton,” Lydia did by now know them all by sight if not by name, “I think I was much taken in by those in Colonel Forster’s regiment. Perhaps with one or two exceptions….”

Kitty did not like Lydia’s sly smile at Harriet. It spoke to a secret between them and Kitty hated not to be part of a secret. An intrigue would be just the thing to cap their stay, and to be kept out of it would be hateful.

“Well, I am going to go to Donaldson’s!”

If Kitty hoped her declaration would bend her friends to her will, she was much mistaken in their temperament. They were content to let Kitty go, so they could continue abusing another Colonel’s wife’s outfit and ranking the officers by whatever virtue they had decided upon that day.

Harriet did throw out one sop to propriety and asked her maid, Betsey, to attend Kitty to the library and back.

Kitty was usually glad that Harriet’s chaperonage was not worthy of the word and that Colonel Forster was content as long as the ladies were not complaining. However, it was usual to send a man-servant, but except for their first visit to the sea side it was always Betsey. A town full of rowdy soldiers and tourists from London sometimes needed elbowing.

It was freeing not to have to hear any of her eldest sisters’ strictures on her reading material, or
whether the plays they were seeing were quite proper. At the same time, Kitty missed being able to talk with Jane and Lizzy particularly. Jane would always enter into her delights, and Lizzy was fond of a novel.

They were willing to listen. Lydia never listened to anything that did not concern her and Harriet was no better.

Sometimes Kitty wondered if Colonel Forster regretted marrying Harriet, since she did not seem at all interested in her husband beyond his ability to allow her to go to parties with plenty of red coats. Kitty did not profess to be an expert in marriage, except she thought one was supposed to like one’s husband.

If she thought about it further, it seemed those thoughts had come from novels rather than examples in her life. Although surely her father must have at one point found her mother’s exuberance amusing? But Kitty could not think of one reason Charlotte Lucas had chosen to marry Mr Collins.

It was in the pursuit of romance unfettered by reality that Kitty was eager to venture to Donaldson’s. She had finished the second volume of The Mysterious Hand the night before. Lydia had been so disagreeable that Kitty had had to read downstairs in the freezing sitting room. The volume ended with the hero on trial for his life, and Kitty could not wait to see how Theodore and Julia were to be together: for it was impossible to countenance that the novel should not end with the good happy and the wicked unhappy. This was not a novel by Richardson. Kitty had been duped into reading Clarissa by Mary who had assured her it was a novel full of spice. Kitty had had the headache, otherwise Mary would not have been able to cheat her so.

The library was sparsely attended, but it was early in the morning and Brighton was known for its evening pursuits (except for promenading on the Steyne). Several elderly women attended with their maids, and some older gentlemen. Kitty searched for a red coat to prove to Lydia and Harriet that they were incorrect in their judgement of officers and books, but to her disappointment she discovered none.

She did, however, catch the eye of a lanky youth in an ill fitting coat. He was very handsome but very young with perhaps even still a spot or two, and Kitty thought he would look very fine in a blue coat. Kitty felt no compunction in smiling at him and then looking away in a highly practiced manner.

This minor flirtation resulted in a victory when Kitty discovered that the third volume of her novel was out of her reach. The young man swiftly crossed the library and fetched it for her.

“Thank you, sir,” said Kitty looking up at him in what she hoped was an appropriately grateful manner.

“Are you here alone, Miss …?”

“Bennet.” Kitty delighted in being Miss Bennet in Brighton. It leant one distinction rather than being the fourth of five sisters. “And I am not. You see my – “ Kitty turned to gesture at Betsy only to discover that Betsy had disappeared. Betsy had a habit of doing so; Harriet thought Betsy had a gentlemen friend. Any other mistress would have had strong words to say to a maid that abandoned her duties for a flirt, but Harriet found it such a good joke.

Kitty usually did too, but it seemed outside of enough to be abandoned in such a fashion when she had not even asked Betsy to leave her alone with a gentleman.

The gentleman, noticing that her party had vanished, moved a little closer and Kitty felt a little
alarmed. They had not been introduced, and she did not have the opportunity of being able to flee back to a gaggle of other young ladies. The benefit and enjoyment of flirtation, she found, was the ability to retreat at any moment.

Lydia might like lovelorn suitors who did not leave one alone; indeed she had no heart when it came to them and she often laughed at their tokens but Kitty always felt sorry for them and made an effort to be nice. This effort was never noticed by the gentlemen she really wished for, and Lydia mocked her for stooping to picking up those gentlemen Lydia had dropped.

“And what brings you to Brighton, Mr … “

“….Cheveley. And flirtation.” Mr Cheveley leered at her and Kitty rather thought he was looking straight down her gown; when she looked back up at him he gave her a cheeky grin.

Kitty extricated herself from Mr Cheveley, and wished him a good day. She hoped moving away to find another interesting looking novel would be enough to dissuade him. Kitty had always found that unless she was paying complete attention to a gentleman they would never look twice at her. Mr Cheveley, it seemed, was made of stronger stuff and he pursued her around the library, making comments that would have been highly flattering if made in a less suggestive manner and in a situation where she was not defenceless.

She had picked an Ann Radcliffe, which she had already read, for nothing else but to give her an excuse to ignore Mr Cheveley. However, he did not take the hint. Instead he closed his hand over hers and looked at her intently.

Kitty did not know what to do, until an arm reached between them to retrieve a book. Kitty took the opportunity to step backwards and reclaim her hand.

“Excuse me, sir!” exclaimed Mr Cheveley, turning to confront the interloper. She expected a confrontation, but Mr Cheveley had a surprised expression on his face and looked vaguely as if he was a little boy who had been found pilfering cake from the larder. Mr Cheveley stammered something inaudible and did not seem to notice that his pulling at his cravat was ruining it, not that it had been well tied to begin with.

“I believe the young lady is in no more need of your assistance, are you, Miss Bennet?”

Kitty could now look at the gentleman who had interrupted them and she was startled. It was the gentleman from the shore and from the assembly. Now she could observe him up close and as much as she chose, she found him much older than Mr Cheveley and in a far better tailored coat and he certainly had no spots. She had not thought it possible but he was far handsomer; it was perhaps the fact he was as dark as Mr Cheveley was blond (Kitty always preferred dark to light) and was far more assured.

“Thank you for your assistance, Mr Cheveley.” Kitty was surprised she could speak so firmly, so much was her mind disordered. A third encounter!

Kitty did not think that would end the matter, but it did. Mr Cheveley retreated in the face of a very quizzically raised eyebrow, leaving Kitty, Ann Radcliffe and the gentleman alone.

“Thank you, sir.”

“May I offer some advice?” He did not wait for her response, “A good stamp of one’s foot on the instep, and a retreat is a straightforward way to deal with unwanted advances. At least one made in such a public place.”

Kitty doubted she had the strength to cause any real damage and said as much.
“Perhaps not, but your intention could not be clearer, particularly to those around you.”

As they approached the counter, so that Kitty might withdraw her novels, conversation naturally came to a close as the person conducting the transaction seemed curious and the gentleman apparently did not wish to oblige.

Kitty was happy to have his company, at least until she found Betsey. As they stepped out of the library, she was glad she had brought her parasol for the sunshine had grown brighter since she had entered. She took the moment it took to unfurl it to recover some of her countenance.

“How did you know my name? Were you eavesdropping?”

The gentleman inclined his head. “All in a good cause. Now have you truly lost your party?”

Kitty was hoping Betsey would be on the seashore canoodling with her young man but she was not in sight. “It would seem so. My maid is quite unreliable.”

“Well then, may I accompany you home?” He offered his arm and Kitty was not sure why she hesitated. If before today such a handsome man, in such a smart coat had offered her anything she would have leapt upon him without a single thought.

“A short sharp shock to the instep, Miss Bennet.”

Kitty laughed and accepted his arm, although it took her a moment to juggle her parasol to hide her face from the sun.

“Have you been long in Brighton?” He matched his pace to hers, and Kitty was glad to see while he was tall he was not so tall, or perhaps she was not so short, that it made conversation ridiculous. Kitty looked curiously at him, did he not remember her? That made her disappointed… or was it that he was being polite? After all, he had been laughing at her enthusiasm.

“Several weeks. I am staying with Colonel Forster, do you know Colonel Forster?” Kitty could not imagine that he would, for surely they should have been introduced before now.

“I am very sorry to say I do not.”

“I think sometimes that he knows everybody, as much as that is possible in Brighton. What brings you to Brighton?”

“Sea bathing.” He did not sound serious, but he could not have picked a better topic of distraction.

“Oh, sea bathing.” Kitty could not keep her disgust out of her voice. She had been so excited for sea bathing and it had not been a pleasant experience. She understood now why it was listed for its health benefits, like gruel. It had taken her several days to extricate all the bits from unmentionable places.

“You are not fond of sea bathing?”

“It is less pleasant than described.”

He laughed. “I would venture a guess it is even less pleasant for a young lady.”

Kitty turned her head away, if any of the officers were to make such a comment she should have – or Lydia should have – made a highly suggestive comment back allowing the conversation to descend to rather obscene depths. She found, curiously, that she was shy but she did not want him
to think her stupid.

“It is not a subject for Mary Wollonstonecraft, but perhaps it should be another freedom for men only.”

She said a little prayer of thanks to God for making Mary one of her sisters; otherwise she could never have sounded so grown up.

Their conversation continued on in a pleasant way. She discovered that he, too, took pleasure in a novel, that he was in Brighton with his brother and expected another to join them any day and then they were at Kitty’s lodgings. Kitty felt keenly disappointed; she was about to invite the gentleman in when he made his bows and goodbyes.

Kitty found herself blankly standing in the hall, wishing she had not indulged in imagining Lydia and Harriet’s stares as she introduced her handsome stranger.

“You have been an age, Kitty, and only two books! We have wanted you to fix our gowns for the ball tonight!” Lydia’s voice brought her back to life, and revived some of her happiness. The dance! Surely he would be at the ball; she could ask the master of ceremonies …

Then she stopped short; that would not do for she did not have his name.

How silly of her not to ask. How silly of him not to offer it. Although they had not been properly introduced, the manner of their meeting should surely overcome propriety? Perhaps he was a stickler for good manners?

That would be an oddity in her flirts, thought Kitty. Neither the officers nor the men at home stood upon strict propriety.

She reassured herself that there could be no doubt that he would be there – for what else was there for a young man to do on a Monday night?

While she helped Harriet sew some pearl beading upon her gown, Kitty dreamed of his approaching her at the dance and of Harriet and Lydia’s astonished looks. For he was fearfully handsome, for all he did not wear a red coat and was older than the officers.

If nothing else, he appeared to be the kind of gentleman that would drive the other officers wild with jealousy. He was assured and distinguished and men put such a store on tailoring and the tying of one’s cravat. In that, he put all the officers to shame.

Kitty’s plan came to nothing, she should have expected it would not; none of her schemes ever came to anything.

The gentleman was not at the Assembly. Kitty was so consumed by her attempts to discover him that she almost refused Chamberlayne which would have been fatal if she had found her quarry. For she would have been then honour bound to sit down every dance. Lydia never remembered this etiquette for herself but when it came to Kitty, Lydia could suddenly recite a conduct manual.

While she was whirling around with Chamberlayne, keeping one eye on the door and only half an ear on his conversation, she noticed that Lydia was standing up again with Wickham. She could not blame her sister, Wickham was everything a young man should be, and to capture him for two dances certainly made Lydia the envy of many a young lady. Though it seemed out of character with her plan to make all the young men fall in love with her and then repudiate them all.
“I say, Miss Bennet, you are looking frightfully pretty in that gown, is it new?”

Kitty blinked at Chamberlayne. He normally wasn’t one for such romantic declarations; perhaps even without the appearance of the mysterious gentleman, he could be used to further her ambitions. It seemed her distraction was alluring to Chamberlayne.

He was nothing but solicitousness after their dance, and she noticed that several of the other officers were wondering what it was about Miss Bennet was keeping Chamberlayne trotting at her heels. Denny even fetched her a glass of lemonade and seemed to have no desire to leave their party.

Kitty felt herself grow under the attention, but not to the point that she did not see that Lydia did not leave Wickham’s side for one moment during the ball. It was a deliberate act of partiality that would be remarked upon.

It was only a small piece of gossip in such a scandalous place that it was of little consequence, until Kitty thought she saw Wickham pass her sister a letter, which Lydia then secreted in her bosom. That was shocking enough, but that Harriet was looking on approvingly was the last straw.
Chapter 4

Chapter Four

Lydia liked to think of herself as an enigma but she was an open book. If George Wickham had passed her a note of a personal nature, she would invariably hide it in her hat box.

It was the work of a moment to find it. It was a love letter and Lydia had not told her about it! Lieutenant Wickham was in love with Lydia and she had not told anybody of it – except perhaps Harriet.

That could only mean one thing: that she loved Wickham in return.

“What are you doing in my things? Kitty, that is a private letter and not for your eyes.” Lydia snatched it from her hands, and then, because she was Lydia, she continued in a crowing tone, “It is a love letter from George Wickham.”

“I can read, Lydia.”

Lydia laughed and sat down upon her trunk. “Oh can you believe it? George Wickham is violently in love with me.”

“Was that not your plan all along, for all the officers to fall violently in love with you?”

“What a good joke! But I did not expect that Wickham should – is he not the handsomest, most charming man, Kitty? All the young ladies were wild with envy when he danced with nobody but me last night. Just imagine when I am Lydia Wickham.”

Kitty was astounded that the love affair had moved along so quickly. She joined her sister on the trunk. “He has proposed?”

“Not yet, but surely it is only a matter of time. And to think I shall be the first to marry and I only just sixteen.”

“Why did you not tell me?” Lydia never kept anything from her; Lydia never kept anything from anybody, especially not a conquest like George Wickham.

Kitty tried to think over the past days whether she had had any other sign of Wickham and Lydia and found she could not think of any. It was peculiar for Lydia to be so circumspect while a wild flirtation was growing. It must mean that Lydia was serious in her affections for Wickham.

“Do you not think it would have been such a good joke, Kitty, to surprise you all?”

“We should have known before the wedding, Lydia; it would not be such a surprise.”

Lydia shrugged off this prosaic remark. “But Harriet suspected when he was so attentive to me on my birthday, and he had particularly asked what flowers were my favourite.”

Kitty had not enjoyed Lydia’s birthday. She did not begrudge any of her other sisters or friends their special day but Lydia had a way of making the day peculiarly unpleasant for any other young lady. She excused her bad mood on the fact Harriet’s interpretation of Wickham’s behaviour on the day did not quite match with her own recollection.

Wickham had certainly been there, and he had certainly bought a token to lay on the altar of
Lydia, but it had not been any more or less than any of the other officers. When she thought back, perhaps Lydia and Wickham did speak more than usual together after dinner.

“If you truly wish it to be a surprise, then perhaps you should not be so inseparable, I should think even Colonel Forster could ascertain your partiality from your behaviour at the ball last night.”

Lydia rolled her eyes. “Colonel Forster is a bore. I should not imagine he sees anything unless it is waved under his nose.”

She allowed Kitty to reread dearest George’s note, as she discussed his many perfections.

“I think it a shame that that odious Mr Darcy should have disinherited my George.”

“Was he not to have been a clergyman? Should you have liked to be a clergyman’s wife?”

Lydia had forgotten that point and made a face. “No, indeed. George would be wasted as anything but a dashing soldier. How fine he looks in his regimentals. You know when we visited the camp, I thought he was so strict with his men.” Lydia sighed.

Kitty thought she should feel jealous of her sister, but she found herself swept up in the excitement. This was a proper romance, not like the tepid flirtations at the Meryton Assemblies with young men they had known all their life. Here there was a real possibility that Lydia could become Mrs George Wickham.

“Oh, how glad I am that we have come to Brighton,” said Lydia.

“How sad we shall be to go home,” sighed Kitty and she meant it; for all she missed her sisters, she would rather they were here than she there.

“Oh I am not going back to Longbourn. Not for all the money in the world. To go back to darning by the fire, listening to Mary’s sermons and the same tale about Mrs Long’s chaise for the hundredth time? No, that will do very well for you, Kitty, but I could not bear it. My heart should break.”

It did paint a singularly depressing prospect. Kitty could not imagine not being able to walk to the theatre and to meet new people every night. To only be able to have an assembly every month, supplemented by tepid card parties where Mrs Long played for low stakes, it was inconceivable! Even the circulating library in Meryton was in every way inferior to the libraries in Brighton.

There would be no chance in Meryton of walking past the same handsome stranger on more than one occasion and for chance interactions. That was a lie: there was every chance, but then someone would see and then it would become the subject of hushed gossip – ‘Did you see Miss Catherine Bennet with the new lawyer?’ – and everything would be tainted.

“When you marry Wickham, you must invite me to stay with you as your companion,” Kitty begged.

Lydia was very gracious. “Of course. Once Wickham and I are married, I shall find you a husband. Unless of course you…”

“If you say Chamberlayne, Lydia, I will not be held accountable for my actions! I expect someone at least as handsome as Wickham…”

Lydia finished brushing her hair and allowed Kitty her time at the dresser.

“After you are married, I will find husbands for all my sisters, even Lizzy … although she would
never thank me for it.”

Kitty put down her hair brush. “Lydia….Lizzy!”

It took Lydia several moments to grasp her meaning and she rolled her eyes. “It serves her right. She had every opportunity to convince Papa to come to Brighton. I hope she is still in love with him.”

There was no persuading Lydia to think more charitably of Lizzy and her now ill-fated love for Mr Wickham.

Once they were in bed and had blown out the candle, Kitty moved closer to her sister. “When you are standing up in Longbourn church, do you think Mama will need more than one handkerchief? Oh how she will lord it over Lady Lucas. For who would trade George Wickham for Mr Collins?”

Lydia scoffed, “Oh we shan’t be marrying in Longbourn church. We shall elope.”

“Like in a novel,” sighed Kitty.

Lydia was not serious. She would not trade the opportunity to marry in front of all of their friends and to show off her ring and her handsome husband. It was like the plot of a novel: handsome young soldier and a beautiful young lady away from home…certainly in a novel they would most likely have to elope because of the devious machinations of a moustachioed Count.

“Though if it were a novel, Wickham would be more entangled with Lizzy and there would be no hope of your marrying right until the end,” Kitty concluded but Lydia was already fast asleep.

Lydia had not taken Kitty’s suggestion to be more circumspect to heart; she showed just as much of a marked preference for Wickham the very next evening at a card party hosted by Mrs Sharp.

Wickham himself spread his charm about, but Kitty noticed his eyes were on Lydia more and more. Kitty found herself playing chaperone as it was clear Harriet had no intention of doing so, nor did any of the other young matrons. So when she noticed Wickham and Lydia slipping away behind a curtain she followed.

While her sister’s face spoke her displeasure, Wickham did not seem perturbed by the intrusion.

“Miss Bennet,” he took her hand and kissed it before moving closer to Lydia to allow her to sit on the small window seat. “I have not had a chance to speak to a great deal since our arrival in Brighton.”

He had had many opportunities, but when he smiled Kitty forgot that and was happy for the flattery.

“You have had many duties to attend to.”

Wickham smiled, “I am fortunate to have such understanding company.”

“If only you had your proper inheritance, you would be a man of leisure,” said Lydia in a petulant voice.

He shook his head sadly, “But if I were a man of leisure I should have never been billeted in Meryton and met the Miss Bennets. So you see, I cannot be unhappy. Fortune may pave the way,
but it does not guarantee happiness. You have seen for yourself the truth of this in the form of Mr Darcy. Did either of you feel he was a man blessed with happiness? No, I feel nothing but pity for him, he will never really understand, never see the world for all its glories because he has never had to work at anything. To lose one’s position is character forming to be sure and humbling, but the world unfolds in front of you. All events become opportunities and new directions.”

Wickham had both young ladies hanging upon his very lips, and Kitty thought Wickham was far more generous than she would have been if someone had snatched a fortune that would have allowed her freedom for all one now had opportunities and new directions.

“The only think I regret is that it makes me such a poor prospect…” he shook his head sadly.

Lydia and Kitty rushed to reassure him that only a fool would think him a poor prospect. Kitty was surprised he did not realise how eager their mother would be for a son-in-law like Wickham. Even Mr Bennet could find little to object to. Wickham had a career, and with this war, even though he was in the militia, he had prospects of advancement. Wickham himself by his character and address should recommend himself to anybody.

But Wickham merely sighed and then excused himself.

Kitty contemplated the sad lot of Mr Wickham, for all he made the best of it, as she sat sipping some punch. She had deliberately hidden herself, for Chamberlayne’s attentions had become particularly marked.

“Have you seen Miss Bennet?”

Kitty drew her skirts in around her tighter, for as if called, Chamberlayne’s voice drifted towards her.

“Miss Kitty? No,” that was Carter.

“Damn.”

“Why ’D-damn?’” stuttered Saunderson.

“It is alright for you and Denny, you have your flirts, and the men know how you succeed – I must have somebody.”

Saunderson protested at being left out of Chamberlayne’s list but was shushed.

“It is just you have no address with women,” said Carter. “You have made a good choice in choosing one of the Miss Bennets. An even better choice at Miss Kitty. They are easy …” he lingered on that word with a laugh that made Kitty’s hands tighten around her punch cup “…good natured girls. You could do much worse.”

“But if I cannot even land such an easy target…”

Kitty could not hear any more as the group moved off – no doubt in search of her, or more easy prey perhaps. She was well aware that gentlemen spoke more freely when not in the presence of young ladies, but to speak so slightingly of herself? Of Lydia? She had thought them friends.

Friends did not stand on ceremony with each other! Her manners with her friends showed them that they were indeed her friends and that they could trust her, and share amusements with her. Did they instead think that her easy manners made her somewhat less of a prize? She was sure it was not so for Lydia! Did all gentlemen think so?
She could not hide the slight shake in her hand or the accusatory look in her eye as she stood next to Wickham later in the evening when coffee was to be served.

“Miss Bennet, may I bring you a drink? Here we can sit down upon this sofa most comfortably.”

He was so solicitous that she allowed him to guide her even though she felt none of the joy usually attendant on being the focus of Mr Wickham’s attention.

“Has something upset you, Miss Bennet?”

Kitty looked at him directly. “I heard the other officers speaking…about myself and Lydia.”

Wickham shook his head. “I can imagine what they said. It is difficult sometimes to be an officer—all the talk of arms and campaigns and targets. I should not refine upon it. I do try sometimes to turn their minds to better thoughts but…” he shrugged.

“But you do not think that way of Lydia?”

Mr Wickham smiled. “Not at all. Your sister is all that is good and amiable. I would never mistake her behaviour for anything but what it is. Truly.”

Kitty felt heartened. Wickham really was a hero: handsome, kind, truthful and with a tragic history.

“Kitty, I hope you are not monopolising Wickham, other young ladies want the opportunity to claim him.” Lydia stood before them with a saucy grin. Wickham grasped her hand and kissed it.

“Miss Lydia, I have all the time in the world for other young ladies.”

Surely it could not be long now before a proposal, thought Kitty watching them. So romantic and she would be a bridesmaid, and she would always be flitting between their household and Longbourn: one with all the amusements and the other where she would be a prime source of news and entertainment.
Chapter 5

Chapter Five

Kitty watched with pleasure the continuation of Lydia and Wickham’s attachment to one another. Harriet had by now noticed that Kitty was in her sisters’ confidence and it gave them another avenue of conversation.

“It is a great pity that Wickham has no money,” said Harriet as she watched Betsey arrange some flowers.

“What is money to love?” said Kitty, having finished a novel which satisfied all her desires with regards to romance.

Harriet laughed. “If one could eat on love no one would go hungry. Do you think I loved my husband when I agreed to marry him? No. If money were no object I would have married Denny when he asked.”

Even Lydia was surprised by this admission of Harriet’s. “Denny. Our Denny?”

Harriet nodded with a laugh. “My father was less than polite with his rejection. Poor Denny was too embarrassed to speak of it, and, well, my parents did not want to spoil Forster’s advance – so I am not surprised it did not get out, and a good thing, too.”

Kitty saw Harriet’s sly smile and rather thought she was lying. Not about Denny proposing, but that she was in any way apprehensive about it being known that she had been courted by more than one man, especially one like Denny.

“But Wickham … “

“Has no money.” Harriet shook her head in matron like wisdom, which never failed to annoy either Kitty or Lydia. Harriet was only some months older than Kitty; when she attempted to play the lordly lady, it was ludicrous.

“Your mother wants you to marry well, and you have what? 50 pounds per annum, and what with his expenses, his uniform alone, Wickham would struggle to match that!”

Kitty did not think that could be. It was impossible that Wickham should be so poor, not when he was so smart. Surely Harriet was mistaken? She would have a better idea of the expenses of a military man, although Kitty did not think Harriet was much of an accountant. When in Meryton she talked a lot of anticipating quarter days when either her father or Forster would give her pin money.

Harriet certainly was mistaken if she thought her words would persuade Lydia to abandon Wickham. Any obstacle in her way only made Lydia more determined to reach her goal.

“I should not expect it to be anything but a summer flirtation, my dear. You are only sixteen, there will be other gentlemen. Admittedly not as charming as Wickham, but far more eligible I assure you.” Harriet tipped her head to one side, “And most likely more accommodating. I expect Wickham to be a jealous man.”

Harriet gave a little giggle which rather contradicted her statement. Kitty thought Harriet wished Forster paid more attention to her and confronted her in a jealous strop. Harriet didn’t seem to wonder that neither Kitty nor Lydia giggled with her.
“Help me with my hair, Kitty!”

Kitty had not even finished putting on her gown, but she duly assisted her sister.

“Harriet is a horrid cat. I shan’t be telling her any more of my secrets, shall you, Kitty?”

Kitty shook her head. Lydia had dismissed Harriet’s talk as nonsense. If she could help it, Lydia never thought much of money and had no conception of it: it arrived and she spent it and that was it. Kitty didn’t blame Lydia for this attitude to money, it was her own after all at least until she had arrived in Brighton. Now seeing her folded bills disappear, rather than just being able to ask her mother or beg a sister for more, Kitty was appreciating the importance of tracking one’s purchases.

That was why Harriet’s comment had stuck longer with Kitty. It was such a bald thing to be discussing money when happiness was at stake, but she could not deny that to be without means would be very uncomfortable. Only heroines in novels could be sustained by love.

She remembered that Lizzy had tried to reason with them that it was important not to marry imprudently, when their hearts had broke when Wickham had turned his attention to Mary King, Kitty had not thought about it particularly when Wickham had returned to the fold but now it seemed that her sister had a valid point.

Now the idea struck her more, and if Harriet’s sums were correct it was more the pity that Wickham did not have his own private income

Musical soirees were not the fashion in Brighton but one hostess had decided that rarity would lend her evening distinction, while allowing some young women to shine more than others.

“She thinks that because we cannot sing and play as well as her sisters that we shall fade into the wallpaper,” whispered Lydia, “She cannot realise that while her sisters are chained to that pianoforte, we shall have the field to ourselves.”

Kitty was not sure whether Lydia was talking on behalf of all the unmusically inclined young women at the party, or just themselves. She did not have a chance to ask because Lydia flitted off.

She was surprised when she saw Wickham loitering outside the performance room (a young lady was playing from the Mary Bennet School of music and it was quite plain and boring). Kitty had expected Lydia to go straight for Wickham.

“Miss Bennet. “

She curtseyed and wondered if she should take her chance. “May I ask you a personal question?”

Wickham looked at her and then smiled, “Of course, Miss Bennet. I am an open book.”

“Mrs Forster spoke a little of a military man’s income and …“

“I am surprised Mrs Forster has come to grasps with the ins and outs of military payments. That is not an aspersion on Mrs Forster’s intelligence. I have been with the militia for six months now and it is still a mystery to me.”

“In what way?”
“There is my rate of pay, then my allowances, then allowances for baggage, and then my allowance as a commissioned officer. One cannot expect one simple sum when one can have many lines to add up! If Mrs Forster has been quoted my rate of pay, I cannot imagine she thinks very well of my prospects for her friend, but of course that is not the end of it. There is no end to the supplements. I used to think when I watched my father steward the grand estate of Pemberley that it must be a complicated task to keep all the streams of income together, now I see that it was easy compared to my task as a mere lieutenant! My case is not as hopeless as it may first appear, Miss Bennet.”

Wickham dazzled Kitty with his vast and amusing stories of the quartermaster of their regiment and then smiled again at her. “I hesitate to offer my hand to any young lady who I should be depriving of some level of society if she should plight her troth to me. But I do not just have my heart to give; we should certainly have more than just a maid of all work, and if a woman should take me for that I should know she loved me. Now if you excuse me, Miss Bennet, I see Carter gesturing to me, and I must discover what he wants.”

Kitty was satisfied, even if she did not understand quite how Wickham had his income. Though she did not understand how her father earned his money, he had Longbourn and thus they were provided for. When he was gone they would have a share of the money their mother brought to the marriage, and nothing more.

She had not thought him discomforted by her questioning but she did notice he became more than unusually distracted as the evening progressed and she could not blame it entirely on the dire entertainment. The hostess had given up and thrown back the carpets so they could all dance, an activity Wickham and Lydia enjoyed immensely. Kitty had preferred to play at speculation.

He smiled and danced, and flirted charmingly but his heart did not seem to be in it.

Lydia said nothing about his behaviour, but it was not the work of just a night. He excused himself from a promenade the next morning and then that evening he was just as distracted.

Kitty was pinning up her gown (a rather clumsy young gentleman from Worthing had torn it while they were dancing) when two ladies known only by sight entered the withdrawing room.

“I see Mr Wickham is distancing himself from that shameless Bennet girl.”

They did not hear Kitty’s gasp as she kept herself concealed in the corner of the room.

“Well might he – and her sister – that whole set indeed. No sense of decorum. To be chasing young men around ballrooms brandishing swords and allowing them all sorts of liberties. I have seen them.”

“Does the Bennet girl have a sister?” The elder woman sounded surprised. “There are two of them?”

“Oh yes – did you not perceive her? I own perhaps she is not so loud and not as successful as her sister. I am not sure why, for Charles tells me he prefers her beauty, but of course I forbid him to speak to her.”

Kitty was not sure whether she should be grievously offended at being so overlooked, or happy she was not immediately branded a shameless hoyden by these stuffy women.

“I shall have to keep my eye upon them to see which one you mean. I do feel sorry for them in any case.”

“Sorry, what should you be sorry for?”
“Well, Mrs Forster is married – who on earth would think her a suitable chaperone for anybody? I saw her two nights ago tossing up her accounts into a pot plant, and do not try to tell me she is breeding. It was the glasses of goodness knows what she was drinking to keep up with the officers. La what was I saying? Oh yes. Mrs Forster is married so unless her husband divorces her then she is safe, but the young ladies? They cannot know they are just sport! No man shall marry them, wild portionless girls? I saw Miss Kensington – well I cannot actually say what I saw her doing, I should bring on my palpitations.”

They continued on this way for several moments more before leaving, allowing Kitty to breathe once more and come out from behind her concealing curtain. Kitty was mortified. She and her friends, they had fun, there was nothing shameful in that, but to have two perfect strangers make such judgements!

In some cloud of thought she rejoined the party and found her hand claimed by her next partner, just as she would have rather found Lydia and spoken to her.

She watched for Wickham or Lydia from her spot in the dance. She saw Wickham just as he chased Lydia laughingly out onto the balcony for some cooling night air… but he seemed more serious than that action should imply, and Kitty herself wished they had not gone out onto the balcony alone considering what she had just overheard.

She had to wait until her own partner would release her before she could follow them.

“Oh, George, no!” Lydia looked close to tears and had Wickham’s hands clutched to her bosom.

Kitty was inured to moments of love making, it was hard not to be at parties in Brighton, particularly if one peered behind curtains, but this seemed particularly blatant and just what those women had been talking about.

Wickham perceived her, but he made no move to step back from Lydia. “Ah Miss Bennet, you find me all undone.”

Kitty feared that her discussion of money had made Wickham think more practically and he had decided to give Lydia up. That would be the action of a hero, to let his beloved go so she might be happier and richer.

“Wickham is to leave Brighton…” said Lydia. “To leave all his friends… when he promised me so faithfully that he should find a solution.”

“But why? Surely your duty will be swiftly executed and you may return to us.” Kitty did not understand it, and could not understand that Lydia had apparently had prior knowledge that Mr Wickham might leave. Lydia usually could not prevent herself from reciting at least twelve times every word her dear Mr Wickham said to her.

Wickham shook his head. “I am afraid it is not as simple as that. You see, your conversation to me recently, Miss Bennet, made me inquire some more… “

Lydia accused Kitty of perfidy but Wickham shushed her. “No, my dear, your sister was concerned only for your well being, as she must and I was happy to soothe her fears. Then I thought at once how serious it would be if I asked…” Wickham broke off and squeezed Lydia’s hands, “no matter, but I undertook to convince myself that I was not a fool and a villain.”

Kitty did not understand what Wickham meant at all, but it seemed Wickham was happy to explain.
“I am afraid I have found myself in some difficulty in Brighton. As a man of honour, I cannot remain here a moment longer. I placed my trust in some of my fellow officers and they have quite betrayed me. I am quite ruined. It will of course be settled once it is discovered, as it will be, that I have played no part – but I fear that if I am on the spot… Well, you know too well the judgement people make with so little evidence and understanding. “

Kitty did indeed know; she had just heard such a dose of judgement.

“If it is a matter of money…” Kitty had not spent all of the money both Papa and Mama had slipped to her; there was still a very little remaining, but she would happily give it to Wickham.

That did make Mr Wickham step away from Lydia and take her hand and kiss it – “I could not part you or your sister from your money. That I could not live with! It is my error, my naïveté and trust in the goodness of my fellow officers. I could not strip that away from you, too.”

“But you could live with leaving Brighton? And leaving me?” said Lydia with tears in her eyes.

“My heart …” Wickham broke off in distress.

“I will come with you. I love you, George. We spoke of eloping, let us fly to Gretna Green and then they can never part us, and my father must help you then.”

“Lydia, my dear Lydia. I could not ask you to plight your troth to such a sad man as I.”

“Nonsense, you are the handsomest man in all the world! And I should love it above all things to write a note to Harriet, and then write to Longbourn signing my name Lydia Wickham. The best of all good jokes!”

Kitty felt that she was intruding on an intimate moment and turned to leave when she was stopped by Mr Wickham.

“Miss Bennet, I do not wish to throw any doubt on the virtue of your sister. Please stay to lend us credence.”

They whispered together for several moments and Kitty feigned deafness, though she knew they had come to no conclusion. At last Lydia flew off in high dudgeon, leaving Wickham and Kitty regarding each other.

He took Kitty’s hands. “I trust that you shall console your sister? Please, for my sake, turn her mind away from mine. My heart is broken but I should not wish hers to be so; she is young, it will mend in time.”

Kitty thought Wickham rather underestimated Lydia’s affections for him … and the depth of how much Lydia disliked not getting her own way.

“I shall try, Mr Wickham.”

He kissed her hands. “You are the very best of women.”

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Mr Wickham’s resolve broke first, Lydia wrote letter after tearful letter to him the next day and even slipped away to surprise him at the camp.

When she returned she had a sly look in her eye.
“He has arranged our flight for tomorrow night. We have no engagements, and I shall pretend to be ill and go to bed early.” Lydia ignored Kitty’s gaping at her and thrust a letter in her face. “Wickham has written to you.”

The seal was broken, so Kitty did not even question Lydia as to whether she had read Wickham’s words. Those words were passionate declarations of the violence of his feelings and his begging of Kitty’s forgiveness and his complete understanding if she should try to throw his plans asunder.

“You shall not,” said Lydia firmly before turning to choose which two of her gowns she should take with her to the border, after all it was sure to be colder as they travelled north.

“I shall come with you.” Kitty finally said. She did not wish to part her sister from her lover. She did not wish to be the cause of Wickham’s distress either. Then there was the consideration of how an elopement would look, while it would prove those gossips wrong – Wickham did want to marry ‘one of those girls’ – but it would also be another mark against Lydia’s name if she wished to return to Brighton a married lady. Surely there could be less to say against a young lady and her sister leaving town with her fiancé to be married?

Lydia glared at her and raised strong objections.

“But, Lydia, an elopement! If I were to go with you, then it should be romantic and proper, surely you see that.”

“I do not see that, why must that be? You are only jealous that you do not have a handsome young man who wishes to elope with you. And that I shall be Lydia Wickham at sixteen.”

Lydia continued her complaints until suddenly she brightened/ “Oh what a good joke! Yes, Kitty, you should come with us. I should want one of my sisters to stand up with me; I should not wish to be without all my friends.”

Kitty was glad her sister had seen sense and did not much think upon what thought had struck Lydia that she should change her mind so decisively.

On the night in question, after Kitty had packed their valise, Lydia had declared Kitty should make herself useful. They had room for little else but nightclothes and one change of dress. Lydia thought they could easily purchase something upon the road. Kitty thought since they would return to Longbourn from Gretna Green they would soon be reunited with their wardrobes.

Every stroke of Lydia’s letter to Harriet was taken with some glee. “I should not want them to worry. And of course Harriet will be wild with envy. I shall be Lydia Wickham and have the handsomest, most amiable man of the regiment as my husband.”

She did, of course, make Kitty carry the valise as they made their way to their meeting point just after the stroke of midnight. Wickham was monstrously surprised at Kitty’s presence, but after Lydia’s laughing explanation of her wanting a sister to stand up with her and Kitty’s addition that it would be far more proper to have a companion he seemed to take her presence in good humour. He led them through more streets to where he had concealed the carriage.

Kitty gratefully handed over the valise and waited to make sure it was safely secured.

“Oh Kitty! I have dropped my handkerchief!” cried Lydia from the window. “Oh it is just there.”

Kitty turned and saw a piece of white lying on the other side of the road and ran to pick it up. There was some confusion as Wickham was calling for them to hurry; it seemed he too had seated himself in the vehicle. Then she heard Lydia laugh.
She could scarcely credit her eyes. They were driving off. She saw the shock in Wickham’s eyes and knew then that while he really had been surprised at her presence he had accepted it. No, it was Lydia who had tricked her; she had never changed her mind, just lulled her sister into a false sense of security.

Lydia had thought it a good joke to leave her standing on an unknown street in Brighton in the dark while she eloped with her prince.
Chapter Six

Under normal circumstances Kitty prided herself on her ability of navigation. Pride was perhaps the wrong word, for it was only an ability she was much better at than the majority of her friends. She would, however, be ashamed if she found herself unable to find her way back to her lodgings in a town she had been familiar with for two months.

But these were not normal circumstances. It was the middle of the night and she had had a terrible shock. Similarly recalling their flight from their lodgings, it now seemed somewhat baffling; it was possible Wickham had backtrack and gone a circuitous route to avoid detection. At the time she had not cared, for she had no intention of returning.

Now all she managed to do was walk to the corner, which proved to be a more major road than the mews Wickham had chosen from which to board his carriage. This however gave her no clue as to her location, and she could not ascertain in which direction lay Colonel Forster’s.

She knew not how long she stood there, wondering what she should do and from whom she should seek assistance.

Then she heard noises and noticed that a pair of gentlemen staggered up the road. Their condition quashed any desire she had in throwing herself on their mercy. Kitty stepped back against the wall, hoping to conceal herself while they passed by, but they noticed her.

Their being drunk and her being a young woman alone on the road in the middle of the night, it was not at all surprising that they made certain assumptions. Her protestations and incredulity did not cause them to waver from their task and Kitty was given quite a lesson in the value of certain business transactions before they decided perhaps Kitty was free.

It was at this point that Kitty remembered the sound advice she had been given and stamped down upon one of the men’s feet. This hardly helped, as there were two men with a pair of feet each.

Except then suddenly the men were upon the ground. So focused was she in protesting her innocence that she had not noticed that two other gentlemen had appeared and had come to her rescue. One had, it appeared, what she was sure Denny would term a punishing right. Her other saviour was engaged in hauling them to their feet and throwing them down the street.

The first, who did not even need to shake his fist so little did the punch affect him, once he was sure his companion was chasing the men off, turned to her. “Ma’am – Miss Bennet?”

Kitty felt the earth should open up and swallow her there. This was indeed a romance novel, but it was surely the kind where the heroine languished in tragedy before she expired and then everybody discovered they had thought well of her all along.

One of her saviours was her handsome stranger. It was too much and Kitty felt her emotions overtake her.

“Miss Bennet, how do you – “ He broke off and she could see his mind working. He had taken her for a simple country girl but now he was wondering if he had been mistaken.

“My sister – “ was all Kitty could respond before a wave of emotion overtook her.

“Is she unwell? Have you perhaps come out to fetch a doctor?”
“No – No – Sir, she has eloped, I was to join her but...but...”

Kitty was not sure why she had not just said Lydia had eloped and then feigned she had gone looking for her sister, but it was out before she knew it and then the gentleman seemed to still as if he intended to make no more enquiry.

She could not bear that he was making a judgement of her, however well it was deserved. Kitty tried to find some halting way to explain her predicament, feeling more mortified as the seconds passed. What had sounded like a romantic fairytale sounded more and more sordid when she had to discuss it with someone who was not Wickham or Lydia.

How had she thought this a sensible plan? How had she not thought of the risks to her reputation and to Lydia’s reputation? To hand herself over to a gentleman in the middle of the night and trust in him so implicitly...?

Kitty felt she was just adding fuel to her guilt, so ended her sad story with a halting – “It seemed so unfair to Mr Wickham.”

The other gentleman, who Kitty now saw was wearing regimentals and was a Colonel, had rejoined them and had kept a sober face throughout her stuttering, but at the name of Wickham he started.

“Wickham? George Wickham? Of Derbyshire?”

Kitty could only nod in bewilderment. It seemed that that name was a talisman and a new aspect overtook her two saviours. The Colonel began to question her most violently about Mr Wickham, until the other put a hand on his chest.

“Never mind that now, Richard.” He turned back to Kitty and gave her an encouraging look, “Let us take you back to your, Miss Bennet.” … which was how Kitty found herself standing on the steps to the Forster’s between a Colonel and her handsome stranger.

The servant who responded to the rapping of a walking stick seemed equally bewildered by the turn of events, as did Colonel Forster when he was finally roused.

“Miss Lydia? She is abed I am sure of it …”

That seemed a particularly stupid thing for Colonel Forster to say. If Kitty were out of bed, why would not Lydia be also?

“I am afraid, sir, that seems not to be the case,” said her stranger drily.

At this point Harriet arrived, stopping half way down the staircase. Kitty could not help but think Harriet looked a fright having been dragged from her bed. It seemed an odd thing to focus on but Kitty could think of nothing else.

“Harriet, what is this? These gentlemen have brought Miss Bennet home and have said Miss Lydia has eloped with Wickham?”

“Nonsense!” she replied, but Kitty could sense a tremor in her voice. “Lydia!” Harriet ran back up the stairs.

“I should send at once to Mr Wickham’s lodgings and those of his friends to discover his plans,” offered the Colonel. “Miss Bennet is unaware of anything but Gretna Green.”
Kitty cringed; she had not even had the sense to inquire as to their route and manner of their journey.

“And you, sir, are?”

“Colonel Fitzwilliam of the 10th regiment at your service.”

The introduction made Colonel Forster stand up a little straighter and take the proceedings more seriously.

“Forster!” Harriet sounded alarmed as she rushed back down the stair. She held Lydia’s letter in her hand and held it out to her husband.

“You silly girl,” she cried at Kitty, who could not argue with the criticism.

After reading Lydia’s note, it seemed Colonel Forster needed no more convincing. “It is likely they have taken the most direct route to London, although there are only two possibilities in any case. Ready my horse.”

“I shall go with you, I am acquainted with Mr Wickham,” said the gentleman, who had still not been introduced; there had not been a good opportunity to do so before.

“I should not like to entangle you in our concerns, Mr … “

“Lord Ashbourne, and I am afraid Mr Wickham’s character is known to myself and my brother, so you see it is rather my concern as well.”

Kitty blinked – she wondered if some ill-natured fairy named Puck was about to arrive and announce that this was in fact a dream. Her handsome stranger was… not a gentleman but a nobleman?

“My lord – “ responded Colonel Forster, sounding surprised himself.

“Let us not waste time arguing, sir. At the very least there are two roads, and two of us.”

Colonel Forster acquiesced, and the two men departed.

Colonel Fitzwilliam, it seemed, was to be in charge of ferreting out any accomplices – other than Kitty, of course – and to keep the household from falling into chaos.

Harriet was already quite hysterical and Kitty felt her nerves about to fail her once again.

“Perhaps, Mrs Forster, you should take Miss Bennet to lie down.” Colonel Fitzwilliam sounded firm but not unkind.

However it was not to be thought of that Harriet Forster would restrain herself from venting her spleen.

“Stupid girl!”

Kitty could only exclaim that she did not need to be reminded of the fact. “If you had but … “

“Oh. is it now my fault that your sister is a lightskirt? I see how it shall be, I shall be blamed, Forster will certainly blame me.”

“But we are here under your protection.” Harriet had been entirely uninterested in restraining Lydia’s behaviour, or her own, or Kitty’s. Harriet had loved to use Lydia’s wildness to attract the
handsomest men to her side without drawing too much censorious comment. Kitty knew Mrs Forster had failed in that respect; at least two women found much happiness in tearing apart her behaviour and where there were two women there were likely to be more.

“He shan’t marry her, and they shan’t find her,” was Mrs Forster’s happy prediction of the evening’s outcome.

Kitty did not know how long it was before she heard the outer door open and close, but she jumped up and ran down the stairs.

She caught sight of Denny awkwardly trailing Colonel Fitzwilliam into the sitting room. Kitty followed them and stood at the door.

“I am afraid, sir, I have no information with which to help with the rescue of Miss Bennet. Wickham did not disclose to me any plans of any nature. Otherwise it would have fallen to me to inform Colonel Forster of his intention to desert. I cannot deny that Miss Lydia Bennet has shown a strong partiality for Wickham, and her sister too, but it is a childish fancy. Wickham is a man who understands his own interest, and attaching himself to a family of no fortune, and deserting his regiment…that is not in his interest indeed. If Miss Bennet or her sister had been – “ Denny broke off, “well I should understand a man losing his head, but in this case…”

Kitty could not have felt more wretched if Denny had come over and slapped her in the face. She suspected that Denny too had not thought as well of Lydia and herself as his behaviour to their face supposed… but this was Denny, who had been a firm friend, and a confidante in their eyes. Kitty had hoped what she had previously overheard to be a misunderstanding, some ribald talk between men that was not spread amongst the officers, but to come under such circumstances and to speak in such a slighting manner of Lydia and herself? Kitty was devastated.

“I understand it was you who helped Wickham gain his lieutenancy and you tell me you do not stand on intimate terms with him?” Colonel Fitzwilliam looked every inch what Kitty thought a Colonel should be, and the comparison to Colonel Forster struck Kitty.

Denny shifted his weight. “Indeed. But that does not mean I am privy to all his closest concerns.”

“Does Wickham owe much about town?”

Kitty had not told either the Colonel or Lord Ashbourne, or indeed anybody, about Wickham’s sad state of affairs being monetary in nature. That was another thing in which she must have been deceived. The likelihood that Wickham would have to flee Brighton because he had been innocently embroiled in the matters of others seemed now very slim. Now that she could think more clearly, she saw that his monetary problems must be of his own doing.

Denny smiled, “Not at all, at least no more than the average officer, including myself.”

“Then he has changed a great deal from when I knew him. Or you and I have a very different opinion of the average debts of an officer. You see, my cousin grew up with Mr Wickham, Captain Denny. I know him capable of every vice. So there is no reason to dissemble with me. I already think the worst, and I can tell you I apportion no blame to any lady unfortunate enough to be caught up in his snares.”

Denny walked to pour himself a drink from the decanter the butler had fetched when the house had fallen into uproar. “I knew he was to desert. He has debts all over Brighton. Over a thousand pounds by my reckoning.”

That sum shocked Kitty. How could half such a sum be got through in two months?
Colonel Fitzwilliam did not seem shocked. “And quartered here all of two months. Debts of honour or has he merely screwed shopkeepers out of their livelihood?”

“I am afraid that I do not know the extent of his losses at cards, I imagine they are substantial. Some creditors had tracked him from our last billet, although those are not debts of honour in the usual manner at least. Meryton was not what you would say a great place for cards; everyone played for very low stakes.”

Kitty wondered where Wickham had found the time to gamble; he seemed too busy flirting and dancing to play seriously at cards. Perhaps there was a ‘Gentleman Only’ time in Brighton when all the young ladies had been packed off to bed.

“And women?”

Denny stiffened, “Flirtations. And the usual transactions – Wickham has never had cause to force a young lady to do anything. I swear upon my honour, although I see you do not think much of that, that I did not know he intended to take Lydia Bennet with him, or her sister. I would have thought them an encumbrance – some of the fellows he owes money to … let us just say I would not like to have them upon my tail.”

“I will take your oath, Captain Denny. Have you any other light to shed on this matter?”

“I do not know where he has gone; it is certainly not to Gretna Green. But he would have taken the swiftest road to London and once there, I do not know.”

“Luckily for you and Mr Wickham, I can make some guess as to where he will go, but let us hope it does not come to that.”

Denny saluted the Colonel and stiffly walked out of the room, only pausing when he saw Kitty. He looked then a little sorry and bowed to her. “Miss Bennet.”

Then Kitty was left only with Colonel Fitzwilliam’s kindly face, and it was too much for her to bear. She fled back to her room.

A gamester, who fled from debts of honour, was always the villain. But he had been so charming. It seemed to Kitty that she had awoken from a dream; once she had had time to think and seen the shocked expressions of strangers and friends alike, she realised how stupid she had been. If Wickham truly loved her sister, he should wish to declare it in front of the whole world, not allow her to sneak off with him like a rat in the night.

Her only comfort was that she and Lydia had not been the only ones deceived. Lizzy, who always counted herself such a good judge of character, had been taken in by him! Kitty wondered if his tale about Mr Darcy had been quite correct. Wickham had spoken of growing up with Mr Darcy only to be abandoned to his fate, and Colonel Fitzwilliam had spoken of his cousin growing up with Wickham. It would be a very small world indeed if Colonel Fitzwilliam turned out to be the cousin of Mr Darcy.

No more so than the fact Mr Collins was the rector of his aunt, thought Kitty. Now she thought of it, Kitty did think Lizzy or Maria had mentioned Mr Darcy’s cousin at Rosings. She had paid attention because he was a Colonel, but then Maria had said he was not at all handsome and Kitty had lost interest. It was true that Colonel Fitzwilliam was not at all handsome, but he was certainly a gentleman to know in a crisis.

And this indeed was a crisis.
Chapter Seven

Kitty did not wish to be lost in her own thoughts, nor did she wish to be surrounded by Lydia’s belongings which she had strewn about the room trying to find just the right gown to wear for her flight. It seemed very long ago that Kitty and Lydia had been giggling here.

Mrs Forster had shut herself up in her room and Kitty refused to beseech her to open her door; Mrs Forster might prove a distraction but it would not be a happy one. So Kitty wandered despondently to the ground floor.

Colonel Fitzwilliam had ordered a fire in the sitting room and was idly kicking at the hearth. She could not make up her mind whether she wished to join him or retreat. But then he noticed her hovering at the door. “Miss Bennet, should you like a drink?”

Kitty nodded and accepted something rather stronger than she had ever drunk before. “Did you mean it when you said you did not blame Lydia?” The ‘or me’ she hoped was implicit.

Colonel Fitzwilliam nodded, “I do not know what it is about George Wickham that makes sensible ladies lose all reason, but … “

Kitty thought it was best she did not disabuse him of the notion that either Lydia or herself were sensible ladies. She had never even heard the term directed at either of them before!

“Will everybody else understand?”

“No.” He was blunt. “That is why the best outcome is that your sister is recovered tonight and this can all become a mere nightmare that everyone can wake up from.”

“Is that possible?”

“Yes, it has happened before.”

Kitty wanted to ask him what he meant, but the look on his face did not invite questions.

They sat quietly as the clock ticked over, until they heard the door open again and Lydia’s shrill tones filled the entrance hall. Kitty had not thought she would find herself thanking God for Lydia’s shrieking. But she did most fervently.

Kitty ran out into the hall to embrace her sister. “Lydia!” But her sister did not return her joyful greeting.

“I hate you,” was all Lydia would say before she wrenched herself out of Colonel Forster’s hold and ran up the stairs.

“Wickham?” asked Colonel Fitzwilliam.

Lord Ashbourne removed his greatcoat, which was much stained with mud. “I told him the carriage was turning around with or without him, and he chose without. I expected more mettle. We left him some distance from Cuckfield. Colonel Forster first rode ahead to send out someone to fetch Wickham, if he has not melted into the fields. Colonel Forster only rejoined us several miles from Brighton, so there is some hope Wickham will not escape.”
“Paltry fellow,” said Colonel Fitzwilliam. “Though I am not surprised he did not make a fuss, for all that he must have taken his sword with him.”

“Indeed,” was his lordship’s dry retort, laying his greatcoat upon a small table with a slight clunk.

“Gentlemen, if you should like some refreshment, I cannot even begin to thank you for your efforts this evening, and your information, my lord, of Wickham’s character. I thought the man a little unsteady, but not a blackguard,” said Colonel Forster with false vigour.

Kitty attempted to add her thanks, but the gentlemen either did not see her, or ignored her. That more than anything, even the fact that Lydia had shut her out of their room and she was forced to sleep with an unfeeling Mrs Forster, caused her to cry herself to sleep.

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To the best of Kitty’s knowledge, none of the ladies went down for breakfast, even if they were awake at a reasonable hour. Kitty had slept fitfully and only rose from her bed – well, Mrs Forster’s bed – when Betsey came to request her presence in the sitting room.

She heard Colonel Forster remonstrating with Lydia through the door to her room, as she descended the stairs and wondered if he would have any success.

He did, as he led a defiant Lydia to her seat not ten minutes later.

“I have, of course, utmost trust in the servants who were privy to last night’s incident.”

Kitty had no trust in Betsey, and the rest of Mrs Forster’s servants were no better. Colonel Forster would have had to offer them strong inducement not to gossip about the night’s doing and Kitty hoped that he had done so and was not just presuming their discretion.

Colonel Forster cleared his throat, “But I do think it best that you – “he gestured at both Kitty and Lydia – “were removed from Brighton. It should not be remarked upon that you have returned to your parents. You have made a lengthy stay, and of course some family emergency can easily call you home.”

“Where is George?” said Lydia.

“Mr Wickham has no doubt been returned to Brighton, where he shall be forced to answer for his desertion of his post and to his creditors, of a mercantile and personal nature.”

“I wish to see him; you cannot keep me from my intended.”

“I can and I certainly will. If Mr Wickham is in Brighton, then you most certainly cannot be, and as your father has not given his permission for Mr Wickham to court you, he is certainly not your intended.”

Lydia descended into a sullen silence.

“It is too late to depart today, and as I have no desire to spend a night on the road we shall leave at first light tomorrow. You may both write to any acquaintance you choose, but I shall be reading all letters that leave this house.”

Kitty wondered where this stern man with such attention to detail and propriety had been when they had been making their mistakes. He had been much wanted, certainly more here than overseeing his regiment.
“You have both behaved very badly and it seems to me to be owing to a great deal of luck that neither of you have been much hurt by it.”

It certainly did not seem as if Colonel Forster should take much credit for it. It was certainly more to the credit of Colonel Fitzwilliam and Lord Ashbourne that Lydia had been rescued and Mr Wickham’s character exposed.

At that Lydia, stalked out the room, followed by Mrs Forster who sensed that Lydia was in a divulging mood.

“Thank you,” said Kitty quietly. “Will you be telling Papa?”

“Do you think I have a choice?” Colonel Forster snapped, sounding every inch the man who had had no sleep and had averted a disaster to his own reputation.

Kitty shook her head, and tried not to cry once more.

Colonel Forster lost patience and left her to her contemplation. Kitty very much doubted that Lydia would bestir herself to write to any of their friends, or not in a manner that Colonel Forster would allow to leave his door.

So it fell to Kitty, who asked for some paper and a pen and set about writing short notes to some of the women they had been particularly intimate with, Mrs Sharp and the like.

If the recipients were in any doubt over Kitty’s sincerest regret at leaving Brighton so suddenly due to a family emergency, the water blots that found their way to the paper would convince them.

When Kitty had finished she took the unsealed letters in to the small room Colonel Forster had put aside to be his study. She was surprised to find him not alone, stopping suddenly in the doorway when she saw Lord Ashbourne.

He stood and bowed, and all Kitty could do was curtsey. “I did not think – my letters, Colonel Forster. I do not think Lydia will write any. So I have written on both our behalves.”

Colonel Forster crossed the small room to take the letters from Kitty, and then he firmly closed the door.

Kitty stared at the door, and might have pressed her ear against it, except for the maid sweeping the hall floor who gave her a strange look. So she loitered in the sitting room, taking a seat that kept the door in full sight. At length, Lord Ashbourne left Colonel Forster in his study and Kitty judged she had a moment while his gloves and hat were retrieved.

She took a moment to observe him properly now that she knew he was a lord. She did not know his rank, but the closest Meryton came to nobility was Sir William Lucas and he was only a knight. There was a baronet who occasionally attended an assembly, but he was old and of no consequence. Any other aristocratic families in the area did not patronise Meryton and the local families.

Kitty was glad she had not known who he was when she first met him, because she could say with truth that she had found him handsome and amiable without any prejudice. Everyone had found Mr Darcy the handsomest man of their acquaintance upon discovering his £10,000 a year, until of course his character had shown him to be rude and awkward, and then good sense prevailed.

He had finished putting on his gloves and Kitty judged the time was now or never.
“My lord,” Kitty twisted her hands behind her. “I cannot leave Brighton without thanking you once again.”

“Completely unnecessary, I assure you. That you and your sister have not suffered from your connection with Mr Wickham that is the only thanks I require.”

He held out his hand and Kitty found herself hoping her hand was not damp, but he did not kiss it, he shook it. “I wish you a safe journey from Brighton. I suspect you will be glad to see the back of it.”

“Not all of Brighton…” was all Kitty could find within herself to respond, but he did not answer.

She watched from a window as he walked off in the direction of the Steyne and she gave a little sigh. Handsome noblemen definitely did not associate with young women who willingly ran off with villains.

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If Kitty had thought their journey to Brighton had seemed interminable, it had nothing on being shut in a carriage with a Lydia who was still not speaking to her.

“Lydia, you cannot – you left me in the street. If anything I should not be speaking to you.”

Lydia snorted, “It is not my fault that you cannot walk two streets.”

“How was I to get back into the house without waking the household?”

That did make Lydia pause. “I should have found some way, if it were you running away with Chamberlayne.”

“I would not run away with Chamberlayne,” Kitty was happy Lydia had not picked one of her favourites, otherwise she could not have been so firm in her assertion.

“Yes because he would not have asked you. You even had to invite yourself to my elopement.”

There seemed little point reminding Lydia that Kitty had been trying to lend the flight more countenance. That had been her motivation, but she knew how foolish it had been, and to defend it was impossible.

Kitty was glad Colonel Forster had chosen even in the inclement weather to ride next to the carriage, so that his opinion of them was not lowered any further.

She knew he had sent an express ahead of them, but she did not know what it contained. She hoped it had merely announced their arrival so that the household would not be thrown into too much confusion. If it were possible, she should like to add her own voice to Colonel Forster’s when they attempted to explain what had happened only two nights before although it already felt like years.

Her father’s face as they pulled up the drive put that hope out of her mind.
Chapter Eight

All Kitty could hope now was that their mother had not been told. For if their mother went into hysterics, the whole house would know of it, and if the whole house knew of it, the village would know if it, and if the village knew of it, Meryton would know of it – and, well, Colonel Fitzwilliam’s assurances that it could be forgot like a bad nightmare would not come to pass.

It was the first time Kitty had thought how good it would be if people were not so open, and no doubt this was the reason Jane had kept such close counsel. Not that it had served any purpose, everyone had gossiped anyway and perhaps Mr Bingley had not realised how much she truly had loved him.

Mrs Bennet was not waiting outside, neither was Mary nor the Gardiner children; it was only Mr Bennet and Jane. Colonel Forster addressed himself to Mr Bennet, while Lydia pushed past everyone, asking for her mother and upon being directed upstairs she ran in that direction.

Kitty looked from Mr Bennet’s stern face to Jane’s kind one and flung herself into Jane’s arms. She had hoped to listen to what Colonel Forster would say to her father; she could not blame him precisely, but she felt he would be unfair.

However, her feelings got the better of her and Jane had to lead her upstairs. Her sister pulled at her bonnet strings as Kitty tried to breathe naturally.

“Oh, Jane!”

Jane murmured some good natured remark that absolved Kitty and Lydia, as well as Mr Wickham, of all blame.

Kitty shook her head, “No, no, Jane. We were so stupid! So silly. So taken in. I thought it would be just like a romance novel. She was so in love with him and him a villain after all.”

Jane, despite her goodness and inability to think ill of anyone, realised that her sister needed to express her thoughts and after smoothing out Kitty’s travelling coat, she sat down upon Lydia’s bed with the expectation of a long conversation.

Kitty, pacing around the small room, managed to convey to Jane the delights of Brighton, and how many balls and parties and fine gowns there were. How it had seemed that Brighton was everything romantic – the lapping of the seas, the flirting with the gentleman. She explained how at first Lydia and Wickham had been nothing more to each other than they had been at Meryton. How an attachment had grown and then how Wickham had been so badly used and …

The story ended with the aborted elopement and all of Kitty’s feelings of mortification. “So you see, Mr Wickham is a gamester who owes over a thousand pounds, and Lydia was happy to leave me in the middle of the night on a road in Brighton.”

Jane seemed unable to speak, such tales of shocking behaviour quite overset her, and she folded her arms around Kitty for a moment. “We must believe that Mr Wickham truly loved her and it was the thought of parting from her that drove him to sanction such a … “

“No, Jane, No,” said Kitty and Jane subsided.
“Did you say it was Colonel Fitzwilliam, the same Colonel Fitzwilliam that Lizzy met at Rosings, that came to your rescue, he and his brother?”

Kitty had glossed over Lord Ashbourne. It seemed quite enough that she had to confess her childish and wild behaviour leading to a social misstep that could have seen all of the Bennet sisters barred from polite society. To confess she had spent a great deal of her time in Brighton fantasising about a handsome stranger who had then seen her at her worst was inconceivable.

“Colonel Forster did not mention him in his express?”

Jane shook her head. “He was very blunt in his express but vague upon details. Mama was quite shocked until she apprehended that you and Lydia were quite well and now …“

Jane and Kitty could hear Mrs Bennet through the walls, laughing with Lydia and Kitty was sure she had heard the words ‘London warehouses’.

“Well then we cannot rely upon her to convince Lydia that Mr Wickham will not be returning, even if he should want to, Jane. It should have been a true love match if he had courted her properly, but in debt …“

“You really think he had no intention of…” Jane looked pained.

“Colonel Fitzwilliam hinted he knew of other incidents when Mr Wickham had ‘eloped’ with young women, and we all know him not to be married,” Kitty was suddenly much struck, “or maybe he is?”

Jane could not countenance that Mr Wickham could be that shocking for all he was a gamester and a rake.

There seemed little else to say on the matter so Kitty turned the subject, “How is Lizzy? Has she found anything to object to in the Peaks?”

Jane smiled, “She seems to be having the most delightful trip. They have taken in all of the grand houses upon the way. I expect they will be sick of such things by the end of it.”

“Did you write to Lizzy?” It was not necessary to talk on what subject.

Jane shook her head, “No. I did not wish to worry Lizzy unnecessarily. ”

“Yes, I am sure she will hear about it upon her return. How have our little cousins been?”

Nothing was more likely to put Jane in a better frame of mind than to talk of the dear little children.

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Colonel Forster only stayed the night, and there was an uncomfortable supper, although Lydia had claimed exhaustion from the journey and stayed above stairs. Mrs Bennet managed to restrain herself from any exclamation beyond her general regret at her girls having to leave Brighton. Kitty hoped that Colonel Forster thought her mother meant what she should mean, rather than what Kitty knew her mother meant – which was that she regretted that Lydia had not been married and she cared not whether her girls married over the anvil or in a church.

Kitty watched the Colonel depart from one of the upper windows. Lydia had kept entirely to their mother’s quarters, demanding that Mary swap her tiny single room to share with Kitty. Mary had not agreed or objected but Mrs Bennet had already asked the servants to swap the girls
belongings. Kitty did not wish to watch the move and descended to face her father.

Mr Bennet was sitting in his library, which doubled as his study, but did not appear to be reading.

“Shut the door, Kitty.”

She did so and advanced to stand awkwardly upon the rug in front of his desk.

“Well, I cannot say I was not warned. Your sister spoke so eloquently to me of the disasters awaiting my giving you permission to go to Brighton. The worst did not come to pass, but well …” Mr Bennet spread his hands. “I understand from your mother that Lydia expects Mr Wickham at any moment and is quite distressed that her plans were upset. What say you, Kitty? What say you?”

Kitty could not say anything except what she had promised herself she would not do, which was cry. She had thought she would talk rationally, although since she had rarely done so in the past she wondered why she had thought she could so now.

Her father was clearly moved by her distress and came out from behind his desk to comfort her, and they moved to sit upon one of the sofas, where Kitty could pour out her troubles and her distress at novels being so utterly unhelpful when it came to reality.

“Well, Colonel Forster did not mention these gentlemen to me;“ Mr Bennet noted at one point during her tale. “Then again he did not mention he rarely attended assemblies with you or that his wife was quite so silly.”

“Perhaps they did not wish their contribution to be known,” said Kitty. Neither Colonel Fitzwilliam nor Lord Ashbourne had spoken to her of their desire for anonymity but that did not mean anything.

“Well, these fine gentlemen often don’t want to have persons such as us presuming on an acquaintance, as though we should under such circumstances.”

Kitty did not think that would be the case, or maybe her father meant that they would not want to further an acquaintance with a family of flighty ill-bred young ladies and he was too tactful to be so frank.

Mr Bennet looked at Kitty kindly and smiled at her, “Well, Kitty, perhaps I was not entirely incorrect in my summation of the Brighton scheme. I did not take into account blackguards who eloped with women no matter their circumstances, but I rather did think it would do both of you quite good to notice your own insignificance. I count myself blessed that one of you learnt that lesson at least.”

It took great strength not to cry at that, for her father was correct: it was her own insignificance that had been brought to her attention in Brighton, and how small she was that one little misstep could not be fixed for she had no other virtues but…her virtue.

“There now, I intend to make several changes here at Longbourn, but I expect with some good behaviour they will not trouble you for long.”

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Mary made no comment on her being included in these plans despite her not behaving badly in Brighton. Indeed it was only Lydia who complained loudly along with Mrs Bennet.

“But if, as you say, child, Mr Wickham is due at the door any moment to claim your hand, then these restrictions will not last very long.”

Mrs Bennet nodded and Lydia subsided, probably thinking – like most of the table – that Mr Bennet never stuck to his notions.

However, when an invitation to dine at Lucas Lodge arrived, Mr Bennet declined for his three youngest but to lessen the blow accepted for himself, which was a very rare thing indeed and quite an honour. For Mr Bennet to choose one’s society over the company of his books, the society must be very grand indeed.

Lydia declared she would walk to Lucas Lodge anyway but when the time come she instead shut herself in her room and wrote another impassioned letter to George Wickham that would end up in the fire in Mr Bennet’s study.

Mary spent the evening playing the pianoforte very ill, as she had just bought new sheet music in Meryton, so Kitty took the opportunity to slide another book off a shelf in her father’s study and left her older cousins to beg to be allowed to go to bed.

Kitty had decided she would improve herself by extensive reading. That was something that Lizzy would surely recommend and their father always said Lizzy had the most sense of all his daughters. At the beginning she had been searching for Debrett’s peerage for she desperately wanted to look up Colonel Fitzwilliam and Lord Ashbourne. Kitty had not wanted to ask her father if he owned such a book, so she had searched for it herself and not found anything even resembling a peerage.

The peerage was the only reason she was disappointed not to be going to Lucas Lodge. Sir William would have the most up-to-date peerage in his library, Kitty was sure.

It was during her search that Kitty thought perhaps she should extend her mind by reading and swear off novels. She did not know where to start and her father was likely to tease her, so she had begun by picking a book at random off a shelf and, unless it was a Volume two or three, reading it no matter what it was.

She had challenged herself to read at least a quarter of the tome before giving up. This was particularly hard when she picked up a catalogue of diurnal Lepidoptera of the family Satyridæ, which just seemed to be a list of Latin names referring to butterflies or perhaps moths. Kitty decided that if she got a catalogue again she would give herself leave to replace it. A natural history was more entertaining, although Kitty was upset that there was so much information about horses and oxen and only five lines on zebras, which looked from the drawing to be most interesting creatures. Kitty was now on Volume Two of the History of England. Kitty had not changed so very much that she was not very glad she had picked up the abridged version, which was only two volumes and not the ten or eight which she thought was the state of affairs for the unabridged version.

Only Mary noticed her sister’s new regime and slid some of Hannah More’s work in Kitty’s direction. Kitty found she did not like Miss More’s work a great deal, and argued with her sister about it when they went to bed.

Kitty found she did not much mind a little sedate life after the delights of Brighton. The mortification she had felt there began to fade, especially since Lydia and Mrs Bennet’s
exclamations to the neighbourhood at large that they were soon to have a marriage with one ‘George Wickham Esquire,’ slowly faded away as the man himself failed to appear.

A day or two before Lizzy was to rejoin them after her month away, her father called Kitty into his sanctum.

“Well, it seems we were mistaken, Kitty.” Mr Bennet was holding a letter.

Kitty suddenly felt her heart sink. Had Mr Wickham somehow extricated himself from his difficulties and written to claim Lydia? It would make him much less a villain but such a match could not result in Lydia’s happiness.

“Colonel Fitzwilliam has written.”

“Oh.” Kitty sat herself down, now apprehensive but for another reason.

“He apologises for having delayed his letter; he and his brother had sorted it that he should write, and then regimental duties caught up with him. It is a very good letter, I find.”

“Can I read it?” Kitty wondered how much Colonel Fitzwilliam had written about Lord Ashbourne.

Mr Bennet hesitated. “No, I think it might be best if you did not. He writes with some conviction about Mr Wickham. I did not realise at first he was the cousin of our proud Mr Darcy, and he certainly has a different view than the one we heard from Mr Wickham’s mouth. It sounds as though Mr Darcy has committed no more offence than the usual offences of a bad tempered rich young man. Colonel Fitzwilliam writes – in some vague terms which leads me to believe it was a closer acquaintance than a mere report – that this is not the first time Mr Wickham has attempted such an elopement, although I gather the first attempt was for monetary gain rather than …” Mr Bennet stopped and shifted in his seat. “He has reassured me that Mr Wickham is to blame and not my daughters. I do not think he had much to do with Lydia if he thinks her entirely blameless.”

“I am not blameless either, Papa; I see that now, I promise you.”

Mr Bennet smiled, “Good girl. And Colonel Fitzwilliam speaks highly of your sense after a shock. I was very surprised at this, but now that I think of it you are a very pretty girl. Well, I think I now can hold myself absolved of any blame in the whole Brighton affair. I am very obliged to Colonel Fitzwilliam.”

Kitty blinked. She was not surprised that her father would take any opportunity to salve his conscience; it was that her father should think her a very pretty girl. That statement took her to her looking glass and she was still attempting to figure her thoughts when she was putting Mary’s hair into curlers for bed.

It had taken a great deal of convincing and (Kitty was not ashamed to say) some whining, before Mary had given in and allowed Kitty free range with her hair. Kitty had always played with Lydia’s hair, so with Lydia still very cold towards her and now in her own room, Kitty descended upon her elder sister.

Mary now sported a much more becoming hairstyle if Kitty said so herself.

“You know very well that the sea air has much improved you, “ said Mary shortly.

“What?”

“You keep looking at yourself in the glass. I can only imagine you require my assurances that you
will still be quite the second prettiest Bennet sister upon Lizzy’s return. I cannot give you that assurance, but that is because gentlemen seem to find Lizzy peculiarly attractive. I expect it is her wit.”

Kitty could not but stare at her sister, who continued on her train of thought.

“You always were prettier than Lydia. But the sea air and I think a little weight in the face has proved it.”

Now Kitty just gaped.

“I do not expect you to give me any such assurances. I am happy that my virtues are of a moral nature rather than of an accidental nature like yours.”

“And after I read Fordyce’s sermons for you last night when you lost your spectacles!” said Kitty, pulling her sister’s hair, but then she hugged Mary and kissed her on the cheek so their sibling quarrel was quickly over.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Corresponds with Part One of the Pemberley Effect.

I realised I had written myself into a corner if I wanted to show Lizzy and Darcy’s story, as there are only so many times Kitty can lurk behind bushes and press her ear to doors. So Lizzy & Darcy's POV on the following events is over there. I had a lot of fun playing with misunderstandings and showing the same event from multiple perspectives.

Chapter Nine

The house was in uproar. Kitty thought it was usual for the uproar to happen when there was a departure, not an arrival. Lizzy and the Gardiners were expected later in the day. Mrs Bennet of course had convinced herself they had overset themselves even though it would be impossible to expect them for hours yet.

Lydia had taken refuge outside, playing shuttlecock with the Miss Gardiners while the boys trundled along with their hoops. Kitty played with them for a little bit, and sensed Lydia softening a little towards her. Kitty moved away after a while not wanting to risk upsetting their new détente… that and she wanted to go to Lucas Lodge.

Mr Bennet would not let her go without one of her sisters, which made things difficult. Lydia was not an option, and it would be wrong to ask Jane. Jane would no doubt find herself incapable of refusing but she would wish to be there when Lizzy returned. Kitty had noticed that Lizzy’s last letter had not been read in its entirety to the family. Jane had been very secretive with it, though she had assured Kitty that Lizzy was still in ignorance of what had occurred in Brighton.

So it must be her experiences in Lambton, which apparently was not five miles from Mr Darcy’s estate. Knowing Lizzy’s opinion of that young man and Lizzy’s ability to jump to judgement the letter could contain anything. However, this only left Kitty one sister, Mary, who in the end was surprisingly malleable to a walk to Lucas Lodge.

She would not be so malleable if she knew Kitty planned on abandoning her to hear all the news from Lady Lucas while she raided Sir William’s library. It was easy to execute this plan by pushing Mary closest to Lady Lucas while she begged Sir William’s permission.

“You wish to see my library? Capital! Capital!”

“Not just see, Sir William, I should like to borrow some books if I may?”

Sir William was overjoyed at the idea that somebody should wish to borrow from his library. With Mr Bennet in the neighbourhood, it was very infrequent that anyone should praise his library, as Sir William was known to only keep a library because a gentleman should have one.

“Are there any in particular I should help you ferret out?”

This was the tricky bit. Kitty knew if she asked for Debrett’s peerage, it would become an object
of gossip for he would tell Lady Lucas – and indeed the whole neighbourhood – who would then speculate on precisely whose entry Kitty Bennet wished to look at and whether she had met them in Brighton.

“Some novels about the seaside….” It was a terrible fabrication but Sir William did not notice.

“Of course you should wish to meditate on happy memories,” smiled Sir William, bustling about. “I am not sure that I have any of those, of course some of the girls could have easily purchased some.”

Kitty smiled. “Well I should not wish to keep you, I am sure I will find something….”

“Yes, I do not expect your father keeps many novels in his library.”

“No. He approves of them, but not for himself. I think perhaps I hear Lady Lucas calling for you?”

Sir William often did not take the hint but this time he did, allowing Kitty to find Debrett’s peerage of which Sir William had several; however, he also had a book that looked as if it had not even been opened so new was it, called ‘The Peerage of England’. Kitty took that book and then returned to the sitting room.

So after three quarters of an hour listening to Lady Lucas, Kitty and Mary escaped, with Kitty carrying four books in her large reticule, three of which she had no intention of reading.

“Did you get what you came for?” asked Mary peevishly.

“Yes!” smiled Kitty.

They did not use the main drive as they returned to Longbourn and as such did not realise that the Gardiners and Lizzy had returned early until they entered the house and stumbled upon the uproar.

Mrs Gardiner’s wish to be with her children had prompted a precipitous departure from their inn that morning; indeed Mr Gardiner was telling Mr Bennet that he hoped not to many items had been left behind as Mr Bennet shepherded his brother-in-law into his library, firmly closing the door behind them.

While Kitty wished to run upstairs and consult the peerage, she also did not want to be the last of her family to hear about the delights of Derbyshire.

Except when Kitty and Mary entered the sitting room, Kitty clutching her books to her chest, Derbyshire was not the topic of conversation. Instead Mrs Bennet was lamenting the roads, and imparting the gossip of the past month. Lydia was clearly bored and took the opportunity to snatch Kitty’s books.

"Why on earth would you borrow this from Sir William?" Kitty tried to snatch the peerage back from her sister, blushing under the observation of the room. Clearly her reading choices were of more interest than the fact Mrs Long had repapered her parlour.

"I thought since Lizzy and my aunt and uncle had visited Blenheim and Chatsworth that I could examine..."

Lizzy smiled, "We did not meet the owners; we were quite poor tourists, we only met housekeepers."

"We did meet one owner at his grand estate," said Mrs Gardiner with a smile.
"Oh who?" cried Mrs Bennet, always on the alert for possible single rich young men no matter their station.

"No one, Mama," said Lizzy with a blush. Kitty had rarely seen Lizzy so disordered in her reaction to a simple question.

"I am not sure Mr Darcy would like to be thought of as no one, Lizzy," added Mrs Gardiner. Kitty thought she had a sly look about her and watching Jane's reaction to this raillery, Kitty wondered what on earth had happened upon their journey and what Lizzy had written to Jane.

"Oh, Mr Darcy! He is nothing to any of us, I'm sure. A ruder, more unpleasant man I have not had the pleasure to have met," said Mrs Bennet dismissively. "Lizzy had much rather gone to Brighton with Lydia and Kitty if she wanted to meet young men."

Kitty froze, surely her mother was not about to discuss Mr Wickham? It would be inconceivable for all that they were a family party. She had, however, overestimated her mother’s sense.

"If it wasn't for a small obstacle which we are all convinced will be soon overcome, Lydia would be Mrs George Wickham by now!"

“Oh yes we expect my dear George any day now, Aunt,” added Lydia, remembering Mr Wickham’s existence.

Kitty’s reaction of horror was overshadowed by Lizzy spilling her tea all over her dress.

The resulting confusion lead to the break up of the gathering and an abrupt end to the conversation. Mrs Gardiner, Jane, and Lizzy disappeared upstairs and Lydia took the opportunity to lure her cousins outside with promises of more games. Mrs Bennet went to lure her brother from the library as he had not yet heard about Mrs Long’s new wallpaper.

Mary took to her pianoforte and Kitty slid the peerage onto the table.

At first she had little success, the listing appeared to be in no order she could discern. Really Kitty should have asked Maria Lucas the name of the earldom while she was at Lucas Lodge; surely with Mr Collins such a fact should have arisen. She ran her eye down the contents and immediately found the Earl of Fitzwilliam and congratulated herself until she read further and realised they were not the right family.

She then had to apply herself to the contents list and she was lucky that the author had chosen to link the surname to the title.

Then she wished she had picked up the older Peerage – from what she had seen from flicking through, it had been briefer and to the point. This author spent some time diving into the history of the family. The general description of the reasons for the granting of the Earldom was of little interest, Kitty skipped straight to the details of the current earl and his family. There he was with his dates of birth and marriages. Two issue from his first marriage when he was quite young to a young lady who seemed to be of inconsequential birth (her father was a mere “Mr”), and two issue from his second very well-connected wife who still lived. Kitty felt a pang of sadness for two little boys who had lost their mother so young; she hoped their stepmother was a kindly woman who didn't promote her own son's interests over those of her stepsons.

The line that Kitty was dreading, that of a marriage of the Earl's eldest son, did not exist. She knew it meant nothing for herself. It was a foolish fantasy. How foolish was borne in upon her as she read the history of his family. What had the Bennets ever done? They had farmed in Hertfordshire for generations – well, her father had spoken of his grandfather owning Longbourn
but that was as far back as she knew. The peerage spoke of events in the time of Henry the Eighth!

There was no more discussion of Mr Darcy or his estate of Pemberley at dinner that evening. It seemed that the Gardiners and Lizzy were doing everything to avoid discussing the man. All other moments of their journey were dissected minutely, as they no doubt would be again and again over the coming weeks. But of Pemberley there was nothing. Lambton and Mrs Gardiner’s childhood nostalgia was discussed at length but there were gaps in their retelling. Kitty noticed this and wondered that no one else remarked up on it.

Nor was there any discussion of Wickham, but that was not surprising although Kitty wondered when Lizzy would be told of Brighton. Lizzy’s reaction to Mr Wickham led Kitty to believe that her sister had prior knowledge of Mr Wickham's bad character and had chosen not to share with anyone but possibly Jane. Considering the matter further while moving potatoes around her plate, it was likely that Jane had already spoken to her aunt and Lizzy about the Brighton incident when they had gone to change Lizzy’s gown. It would certainly explain the looks being sent her way by her aunt.

After they retired for the evening, Kitty went in search of Lizzy.

"Lizzy?" Kitty stood watching Sally brushing her sister’s hair. Kitty held out her hand and took over. "You were not burnt by the tea?"

Lizzy wasn't stupid; she knew Kitty hadn't come to discuss her mishap, but the reason for it. Lizzy shook her head and remained silent.

"Did you know about Mr Wickham?" If Lizzy was pretending to be obtuse, Kitty would be blunt.

"Yes. I knew of his instability of character. If anything further had happened to Lydia in Brighton, it would have been my fault for not exposing his character."

"Why did you not? Expose his character, I mean."

"I did not think I should be believed."

That was true. Mr Darcy was so universally despised and Mr Wickham so universally liked in the county that to try to turn the tide would have been impossible. Kitty would not have believed him but Lizzy should have tried.

"Is Mr Wickham daily expected?" said Lizzy with a face. "Jane says no one but Mama and Lydia has any real thought to it, but … "

"No, even Lydia – I think – has forgotten him except for the fact he is the reason Papa is curtailing her access to society … except of course when Mama reminds her of his existence like this afternoon. It is Mama who truly expects, but her mind will be moved the moment some other young man pays serious attentions to her daughters."

"Jane tells me that Colonel Fitzwilliam discovered you in Brighton? I think you were very lucky with your rescuer. I cannot think of a better man."

"Was it from him that you heard of Mr Wickham's character?"

Lizzy nodded. Kitty would have asked her sister more explicit questions but Jane interrupted them. Jane would have gone away immediately, but Lizzy asked her to stay.
“No, come in, Jane, Kitty was just helping me with my hair.”

“It looks very pretty,” smiled Jane before sitting upon the bed. “You wanted to speak to me, Lizzy?” Jane sounded confused: when had her closest sister requested an audience? They always spoke to each other before bed.

Lizzy shot a look at Kitty before speaking. “My Aunt and I – we did not say anything before or in my letters, but Mr Bingley was at Pemberley.”

Jane took a deep breath and played with her nightgown for a moment before replying, “Well. You can hardly expect that Mr Bingley should affect me now.”

Kitty found herself sharing an unbelieving look with Lizzy.

“Oh, you do not believe me,” said Jane.

Lizzy shook her head. “No. I found him just as amiable as ever and he asked quite explicitly after you. First quite subtly but at our dinner at Pemberley we were seated together and he – I believe he is as much in love with you as he ever was.”

“Which cannot have been very much,” said Jane. “And you have just confessed your first impressions have been so faulty recently.”

“Well if I was mistaken at his feelings before, then I cannot be now. Just as if I were mistaken about Mr Darcy’s goodness …“ Lizzy broke off. “Well. There was some talk of returning to Netherfield to shoot.”

“Should they come to Netherfield, when they have access to much better shooting elsewhere?” Jane smiled. “And you say that I think too well of people.”

It turned out that Jane was wrong. Less than a fortnight after they farewelled the Gardiners back to London and close to the date the shooting season traditionally commenced, they were alerted to Lizzy’s prediction coming true by an excited Mrs Phillips, who brought the news in her traditional subtle style.

“Mr Bingley brings a large party.”

“If it is only men we shall not see them much, Aunt; they shall be too busy with their sport,” said Lizzy.

“Oh but Mrs Nicholls informed the butcher that he should be careful with his cuts as Miss Bingley and her sister will also be of the party.”

Jane blanched; there would be no escaping the acquaintance. Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst might cut Jane in London, but in Hertfordshire they could not expose themselves thus to the neighbourhood.

“Yes, and more are joining the party: Mr Hurst, of course, and Mr Darcy.”

Now it was Lizzy’s turn to change colour, much to Kitty’s curiosity.

“And I believe some of Mr Darcy’s cousins may be attending.”

Kitty was glad no eyes were on her, because she was sure she blanched and flushed as much as
her sisters had. Was it possible? No, Mr Darcy must have many male cousins, who were happy to shoot in such indifferent country as they had little other opportunity.
Chapter Ten

Kitty was distracted from her nerves and daily expectation of news from Netherfield by her father noticing her raids of his library.

She found him peering at the stack of books in her room.

“Did you enjoy all of these?”

Kitty shook her head, “I made myself read at least a quarter of each, but I’m afraid I did not finish a great many of them.”

Mr Bennet made a clucking noise and wandered away.

She was left in suspense as to whether her father approved or not, until he beckoned her into his library just before breakfast the next day.

“I have arranged these shelves,” he said gesturing at five shelves. “I think you should confine yourself to random selection from these. There should be fewer catalogues of butterflies.”

Kitty still did not know if he was teasing her until she looked at what books he had chosen. Some were serious studies in various subjects and some looked rather silly. Kitty hugged her father, and waited the moment for him to cease to be surprised and hug her back.

“There, there…don’t become too serious, though I suspect there will be a great amount of silliness now that Mr Bingley has come back.”

“He’s arrived?” How was the house still standing, thought Kitty, surely her mother should be here in the library berating Mr Bennet for not immediately visiting Mr Bingley?

Mr Bennet put a finger over his lips, but he went to his desk and picked up a letter – less a letter and more a note.

“Mr Bingley quite civilly wrote to me ahead of his arrival – which is either today or quite possibly yesterday evening; he was a little imprecise. I have not informed your mother. For what I hope are obvious reasons.”

“Does he mention Mr Darcy’s cousins?” Kitty tried to read the note.

“Mr Darcy’s cousins – why such …oh if you are wondering if Colonel Fitzwilliam is of the party? He will not be, at least, he is not mentioned.”

Kitty could hardly interrogate her father any further without betraying her real interest in Mr Darcy’s cousins.
Suddenly there was a shriek from the upper floor, then a “Hill!! Hill!!” followed swiftly by a
“Jane! He has come!!!”

Mr Bennet smiled, looking out the window. “It looks as though I shall not have to keep it a secret
from your mother any longer.”

Kitty rushed to the window, and indeed two men on horseback were making their way down the
drive. One was indeed Mr Bingley in his blue coat, looking as cheerful as she remembered him.
The other gentleman was a little harder to make out until they grew closer, and then Kitty
recognised him as Mr Darcy.

Mrs Bennet threw open the library door, still with her hair tied up in rags. “Mr Bennet! Mr
Bennet!”

“I see! I see!” was her father’s response.

“And none of the girls are ready!”

“I am dressed, Mama, and Mary is certainly downstairs, too.”

“Oh what are you and Mary to do with it? It is Jane! Jane!” Mrs Bennet did not stay to listen and
ran back upstairs.

Kitty waited in the doorway to the library while Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy were invited to enter.

Mr Bennet went to greet them. “Welcome! It is such a fine morning I can see why you wished to
rise so early to ride about.”

Mr Bingley did not sense the slight rebuke, but Mr Darcy certainly did, grimacing.

“I was very glad to get your note, Mr Bingley; did you wish to come into my study?”

Mr Bingley stammered and blushed.

“Or would you like to be shown to the parlour, where my daughters may entertain you?”

“Oh the parlour…” Mr Bingley said immediately then checked himself, “not that your company is
in any way deficient …“

“Not at all, a young man wants pleasant young ladies. Kitty? Remind the gentlemen where our
parlour is.”

Kitty was pleased to do so. Mary was practicing the pianoforte and did not seem inclined to cease,
although she did briefly stand to curtsey to the gentlemen.

“Please take a seat. It is very good to see you again.” Kitty was not sure what else she should say.
Mr Bingley had always been a pleasant young man, but he had confined almost all of his
conversation to her sister and Mr Darcy had once asked her to pass the salt.

They sat in an uncomfortable silence for several moments, punctuated only by Mary’s attempts to
master a concerto.

Mr Bingley leaned towards Mr Darcy and said something in a low tone that Kitty could not quite
make out. She was sure she should not be straining to hear but she did anyway. She thought that
Mr Bingley was chastising Mr Darcy for saying that coming so early would be fine. That did not
make much sense to Kitty so she thought she must be mistaken.
“I believe you have been at Brighton?” said Mr Darcy with a slight clearing of his throat. “Your sister Elizabeth spoke of it at Pemberley.”

“Oh yes. I have been at Brighton with my sister Lydia.”

“Did you enjoy Brighton?” said Mr Bingley.

“Yes,” said Kitty. She did not particularly wish to talk about Brighton.

“Did you go sea bathing?”

Kitty could have answered that question simply too, but she took some pity on the poor man and spoke at length about her hatred of sea bathing.

“My sisters have just been at Scarborough, although they join us tomorrow,” said Mr Bingley. “You will be able to compare opinions upon the sea.”

“Will your sisters be the entirety of your party?” said Kitty, she hoped not too eagerly, but Mr Darcy seemed distracted, looking towards the door and Mr Bingley was too generous to place a meaning on her question.

“Oh no, Mr Hurst of course comes too and Darcy’s cousin, Frederick Fitzwilliam, came down with us, and we expect another of his cousins any day now.”

Kitty’s heart sank and then soared again.

Mr Darcy smiled, “I may have to fetch him from London.”

That did not sound like the Viscount. He seemed very capable in Brighton, not at all like a man who would need directing from London to Hertfordshire.

“Is he not a good traveller?” asked Kitty.

“No, he is very well travelled. He is engaged with a party of friends to go to some races and I think he is liable to forget an engagement here.”

Mr Bingley shook his head. “You are very severe upon your cousin! What could he object to? Finer countryside and prettier young ladies I have never seen.”

Mr Darcy’s mouth twisted, “You are not as well travelled as he.” Then he froze, “Not that of course I mean any impunity upon …“

Kitty took pity on him, thinking Mr Darcy quite disordered, which was not how she remembered him. “I take no offense, sir. We are not well situated for sport… at least that is what I am told.”

They spoke a little about sport before Mrs Bennet made her entrance, pushing before her Jane – dressed in her best morning gown – with Lizzy trailing afterwards.

Mr Bingley leapt out of his seat with welcomes and apologies tripping over themselves. His face lit up when he saw Jane, which was no surprise, and Jane rewarded him with one of her best smiles. Kitty did not think Jane even realised she had done so.

Mr Darcy stood more leisurely, but Kitty noticed he was watching Lizzy, who after meeting his eye did not seem able to meet them again. Kitty had no time to ponder their strange looks for Mrs Bennet took over the room with her effusions.
“I am so glad you are back at Netherfield, sir. They said you meant to quit the place entirely. I told them you were a sensible man and knew the virtues of Netherfield and its surrounds.”

Mr Bingley nodded his vigorous approval of Mrs Bennet’s sense.

“And now you will recall you promised yourself to dinner at Longbourn before you went away, I do hope you intend to keep your promise? You are not going to flit away again in the night?” Mrs Bennet gave a hearty laugh, and at least three of her daughters blushed.

“Oh no, I think we shall be here for some time; it is only the start of the shooting season after all.”

“And when you have shot all of your own birds, I am sure Mr Bennet would be vastly obliged to you – and you, sir – “ Mrs Bennet finally acknowledged Mr Darcy, “to help him with his.”

“Oh that is an excellent idea, although there will be others of the party. I should hope they are welcome.”

Mrs Bennet beamed glad Mr Bingley had brought up the subject, “Yes, I did hear in the village that Mrs Nicolls was preparing for a large party.”

“At the moment it is just Mr Darcy’s cousin, a Mr Fitzwilliam. But my sisters and Mr Hurst are expected any day now, and another of Mr Darcy’s cousins may join us.”

“If he remembers,” added Mr Darcy drily, “and can get away.”

“Why should he forget?” said Mrs Bennet, predisposed to find anything Mr Darcy said disagreeable.

“I am sure Mr Darcy’s cousin’s memory is not an insult to us.” Kitty thought Lizzy sounded a trifle desperate in her reply.

“Indeed, my cousin is much wanted …“

“Well, I dare say we do not want him,” sniffed Mrs Bennet, talking over Mr Darcy.

“- upon his father, my uncle the Earl of Matlock’s business.”

Mrs Bennet stilled. “Oh and pray, what is your cousin’s name?”

“Lord Ashbourne ma’am.”

Mrs Bennet made a strange face, which Kitty did not quite know how to interpret.

“Is he a young single man?”

“Mama!” Jane had flushed red. Kitty bit her tongue; she could have answered her mother’s questions.

“I ask because an older married gentleman would, of course, find it difficult to move about the countryside. Young unattached men can do what they like.” Mrs Bennet looked innocent. Kitty knew no one was fooled. Indeed Mr Darcy had stiffened; he now appeared much like the Mr Darcy who had come amongst them before.

“He is unmarried.”

“And young?”
“He is older than me by some years,” replied Mr Darcy.

Kitty wanted to announce Mr Darcy was lying. She did not know precisely when Mr Darcy’s year of birth was, but the peerage was quite exact about Lord Ashbourne’s and Kitty could not see how he could be much more than four years older than Mr Darcy.

Mrs Bennet subsided for a while, allowing Jane to turn the conversation to some innocuous subject or other for a moment or two, before realising that she had not asked about Mr Darcy’s other cousin, the one actually in situ.

“And you did not think to bring Mr Fitzwilliam?”

Mr Bingley, who had been in the process of confirming that the weather and roads had held very well during their journey south, blinked at the swerve in the conversation.

“He is not an early riser,” said Mr Darcy shortly.

“Oh, but we will see him soon, no doubt?”

“I understand he is Colonel Fitzwilliam’s brother?” Lizzy spoke loudly. “The Colonel himself could not be spared from his duties?”

Mr Darcy had stood by this point and moved towards the window to stare out of it. He took a deep breath before turning back to the room.

“Yes, his regiment is in …” He broke off in a little confusion and Kitty knew he had been about to say Brighton. She could understand why no one of the Bennet family would want to mention Brighton, but why should Mr Darcy think it a sensitive topic to remind them all that his cousin was billeted in Brighton? He had little trouble mentioning Kitty’s own visit to Brighton not half an hour ago. Unless Colonel Fitzwilliam had told his cousin about the elopement? Or Lord Ashbourne had. Neither scenario much pleased Kitty.

“He is much occupied with regimental duties,” finished Mr Darcy.

“Mr Fitzwilliam is much closer to my age than Mr Darcy. In fact, I acted as somewhat of a guide to him while he was up at university,” said Mr Bingley with genuine enthusiasm. “He is the Colonel and Lord Ashbourne’s half brother from the second Lady Matlock and a livelier man I have never met! I wager he will dance enough for all the Miss Bennets.”

Mrs Bennet made a sad sound. “I do hope there is a good provision for him. While I should have wanted a son…more than one causes such trouble when there is an entailment for they are forced to go into the professions, you know, and are at the mercy of the world. Sometimes the world can be very cruel.” This seemed directed at Mr Darcy and caused Jane and Lizzy to wince.

Kitty thought they were right to be embarrassed by their mother, but she doubted Mr Darcy would make the connection and realise Mrs Bennet meant to rebuke him for his treatment of Wickham.

“It is such a fine day, we should perhaps take a walk?” said Lizzy, rising.

Mr Bingley looked towards his friend, who had resumed staring out the window, and back to the Bennets. “I think we have trespassed on your time, and I should not like to leave a guest alone for too long.”

Mrs Bennet was all graciousness, although she did press Mr Bingley to stay a little while longer, and when he demurred that he could not, she made free with an open invitation to Longbourn.
After the gentleman had departed, Jane and Lizzy took that proposed walk in the garden. Kitty fetched a book from her father’s shelves and told herself that it was just a coincidence she had picked a book about racing and sport. She could see her sisters from where she was curled up in the window seat.

At first they had their heads together, as they walked arm in arm, but then Lizzy broke off to pace about in an agitated fashion. Jane remained as calm as she ever did.

It was an odd scene; it was Jane who had just come face to face with her former love, not Lizzy. Jane should be agitated and alarmed at her mother’s behaviour. Kitty knew that Lizzy felt deeply that Jane’s hurts were her own, but this seemed ridiculous.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Don’t forget to check out the Pemberley Effect which has Lizzy and Darcy POV!

Chapter Eleven

No communication came from Netherfield the next day and Mrs Bennet was in agony. After such a prosperous start it could not again come to nothing!

Jane tried to soothe her mother by talking of herself and Mr Bingley meeting as common and indifferent acquaintance.

“Common and indifferent! He could not take his eyes off of you! And he came so early in the morning. No, it is that friend of his, I wager it. He is keeping your Mr Bingley from you!”

No amount of contradiction could make Jane convince Mrs Bennet that Mr Bingley was not hers in any way.

The second day fared much the same as the first and Kitty was glad she had her books despite Lydia deliberately calling her Mary the entire day. However, in the afternoon they had a letter from Netherfield.

Hill had waited until Mrs Bennet had left the sitting room to go and inspect some lace with Lydia with the design of making up a new gown for her favourite daughter.

“Miss Bennet? A letter has come for you from Netherfield.”

Even Mary stopped to eye Jane over the pianoforte.

“Thank you, Hill.”

Jane opened the letter and scanned it. “Oh, it is from Miss Bingley.”

Lizzy rolled her eyes “And?”

“She apologises for not coming to see us, but she has injured her foot. She injured it stepping from the carriage and begs you and I to come keep her company tomorrow morning.”

Lizzy’s face twisted at the idea of spending the morning with Miss Bingley and her sister. “Are the gentlemen not sufficient company?”

“She says they are to shoot all day, Mr Hurst is most insistent, although it seems Mr Darcy has left for London.”

Kitty was beginning to be suspicious of her sister and those suspicions seemed worthy when Lizzy’s face fell at the news Mr Darcy had left for London. How had Lizzy changed her mind so completely about Mr Darcy after one short week in Lambton? Kitty wished she had paid less attention to officers and more to her sisters so that she would have been able to judge whether this reversal of sentiment was purely to do with Derbyshire or had been coming along since Kent.
“Mama will never forgive you if you do not go,” said Kitty as her sisters were discussing the merits of accepting Miss Bingley’s invitation.

“Mama does not need to know,” said Lizzy showing how distracted she was to think such a thing would be possible to keep from their mother.

“Lizzy, if Miss Bingley is truly injured she will want for some company. We should not be so churlish as to refuse to give it to her.”

“If Miss Bingley were a better person, she should not have cut your acquaintance in London,” replied Lizzy who then regretted her sharp tongue.

It was then settled that Jane would write immediately to Miss Bingley accepting the invitation. Only afterwards did Kitty think that she should have offered to go in Lizzy’s place. Mr Fitzwilliam was at Netherfield and they had had no news of him except that he was blond. Her sisters would not think to ask him the right questions.

It took Mrs Bennet several hours to decide upon the best dress for Jane, and to agree that the invitation had not included Mrs Bennet herself. Then, when she remembered how poorly her second daughter rode, she wailed that they could not go upon horseback.

“It does not look like rain, Mama,” said Lydia helpfully, “so it does not much matter how they go.”

Mrs Bennet had to agree to this forecast and allowed them the carriage.

Mrs Bennet was forced to wait until dinner to hear about her daughters’ visit to Netherfield. Lizzy and Jane had made a long visit and then returned home via Meryton.

“Well, girls?”

“Miss Bingley was all kindness,” said Jane, taking a sip of her soup.

“What is Miss Bingley to us? What of the gentlemen, Jane, did you see the gentlemen?”

“Mother!” said Lizzy.

“Yes, Mrs Bennet, you once hoped that Miss Bingley would be to Jane as her sisters are to her, you can hardly call her nothing now,” said Mr Bennet with a smile.

Mrs Bennet silenced her husband with a look. “What of this Mr Fitzwilliam?”

Jane laid down her soup spoon in surrender. “Mr Fitzwilliam is a very pleasant man. He is blond and has a pleasing countenance. He is Lizzy’s age. They have discovered their birthdays are only a week apart.”

“So he is not of age? That is disappointing. But well, if he is inclined to be agreeable and is not at all like his cousin Mr Darcy, then I will welcome him to Longbourn any day of the week. We have not had such young men since the militia went away.”

“You forget that Lizzy’s birthday is next month…you should not dismiss this Mr Fitzwilliam so easily.”
Now it was time for Mr Bennet’s eldest two daughters to stare him down.

“He is a third son, and if your estate is entailed away, you can be sure some Earl of Matlock did quite the same disservice to his family.”

“It is not a disservice,” said Mr Bennet. “It is to keep estates viable and intact. Now, now, Mrs Bennet, I grant you in our case it is a sad case, but my grandfather was not to know I would not have any sons!”

“Miss Bingley informed us that a small estate, similar to Longbourn, has been bequeathed to him through his mother’s side. So he is quite provided for.”

Mrs Bennet smiled upon her eldest. “Well, then I am very glad for Mr Fitzwilliam, very glad for him indeed.”

Kitty noticed then her mother eyed herself, Mary and Lydia in turn, but she did not speak further on the subject of Mr Fitzwilliam.

“And Mr Bingley, did you meet him?”

“I expect he spent the whole time staring at Jane,” said Lydia with a laugh.

Jane’s answering blush was all the response that was needed.

“When shall you lure them all to Longbourn?” asked Mr Bennet.

Mrs Bennet made a clucking sound. “I had quite set a date with the cook when I recalled Mrs Goulding is having a card party.”

“You could issue a rival invitation! What better way to test Mr Bingley’s affection – hey, Jane?”

“Yes, and it is a great pity that I did not accept for Lydia also, or the younger girls. Now they shall not meet Mr Fitzwilliam until goodness knows when. We cannot even meet at Church for they will not come all the way to Longbourn for the service.”

Lydia and Mary did not feel much sadness at this pronouncement, but Kitty, who had a keen interest in comparing the young man to his brother, felt all the anguish her mother might hope.

“You forget, Mama, that Sir William is holding a dance for Emma, we shall surely meet them there,” said Lizzy earning her mother’s good graces and then displeasure when Mrs Bennet realised this was another evening she could not invite Mr Bingley and his party to Longbourn.

When Mrs Goulding had planned her card party, she could not have foreseen that her little party would become the talk of the neighbourhood, nor could have she imagined that those she had not issued invitations to would feel themselves very ill used.

It had merely been an informal party of friends, but when Mr Bingley had returned to the neighbourhood Mrs Gould took her chance. Adding to her party caused much consternation amongst her servants and overset all her plans with regards to arrangements of the furniture and such like, but it was worth it to be the first party of the neighbourhood to entertain the returning Netherfield party.
They were found on the whole to be quite the same as before they quit the county. Miss Bingley, whose ankle was quite recovered, and her sister were determined to think themselves above their company. Mr Hurst only required some port, a sofa, and somebody to talk sport with. They were easily dismissed from the minds of the neighbourhood, who did not, it could be said, even miss Mr Darcy’s absence.

Mr Bingley was found to be just as charming and easy going as ever, and just as in love with Jane Bennet as ever. They played every game together and, when they were not partnering each other in cards, sat closely beside the fireplace talking to no one but each other.

Frederick Fitzwilliam was the real prize and was found to be a young energetic man. He was declared handsome and well-mannered. He did not seem to find the company beneath him, and was happy to talk of things other than sport. He did not confine himself to speaking to one or two persons; instead he made himself acquainted with all, and he did not sneer at the stakes.

All of this Kitty discovered through various means and she managed to piece together a picture that was no doubt as accurate as any. It would have been better to have seen it all for herself, but Kitty felt secure in the knowledge that Mr Fitzwilliam did his brothers credit.

Kitty was content with this, but her mother was not content; in her mind Mr Bingley should have proposed to Jane in front of Mrs Goulding’s hearth. Kitty escaped outdoors with a book.

She swung herself idly, becoming bored with her latest book which was about wealth. She had hoped it would be about how she could acquire wealth, but it seemed more about the nation.

Her sisters, all bar Mary, who was still at her pianoforte, had also escaped into the garden. Lydia was playing quoits and Jane and Lizzy were walking about together.

At length they walked close to her and, by virtue of Kitty pretending to be very engrossed in the production of labour, they forgot to lower their voices.

“Jane, you cannot still think he does not still admire you?”

“Oh no, I am sensible of his attentions, but, Lizzy, I was sensible of them before.”

“I thought Charlotte a fool when she said one should show more than one feels, but there may be some truth in what she says, particularly for you, Jane.”

“Particularly for me?”

“You are so very patient and kind to all, I imagine that to a gentleman who is equally as tender-hearted as you, it would be very hard to presume that you thought of him above all others.”

Jane did not answer for a moment or two “I grant you there may be some truth, but I cannot act – I cannot be Lydia.”

“No, no one is unaware of who Lydia esteems.”

“Lizzy, do you think the Colonel spoke to Mr Darcy about Mr Wickham? Once or twice I suspected – “

Now it was Lizzy’s turn to pause, “I had noticed, but I cannot think that the Colonel would – or at least I think he would conceal our names even if he wishes Mr Darcy to be aware of his former friend’s behaviour.”

“Then what else explains his odd behaviour, his coming here and going away so quickly?”
“It is not like you to be suspicious, Jane.”

“It is not like you to be so secretive. Your letters from Lambton were so scant with detail. Was it very awkward to meet Mr Darcy again?”

“Oh no, he was everything that was kind and generous. I could not have been so generous in his place. To find actually visiting his estate, with no warning, the young lady who so vehemently refused him under such a misapprehension of his character? No, I could not have been so generous.”

Kitty’s reaction to overhearing this, was thankfully muffled by Hill’s calling Jane inside to tend to Mrs Bennet.

Mr Darcy had proposed to Lizzy? When? It must have been in Kent, where she was then made aware of Mr Wickham’s true character. Then to meet him on his estate, which she was visiting as a tourist?

Now that was certainly the plot of a romance novel.

Mrs Bennet hopes were raised further still when Miss Bingley and her sister, accompanied by Mr Bingley, came to call.

“Although, I think it a great pity that he should have brought his sisters; there will be no possibility of them speaking alone.”

“That is why they have come, no doubt,” said Lizzy but as only Kitty was sitting near her, she did not think the rest of the room heard her sister.

The visit was promising; while Miss Bingley and her sister found it necessary to talk a great deal about their London friends, Mr Bingley still had eyes only for Jane.

Kitty noticed that Miss Bingley was just as determined to paint Mr Darcy as being surrounded by eligible young ladies as her brother. She wondered if Miss Bingley was jealous of Lizzy and knew of the proposal. Just what had happened at Pemberley? Certainly not as painful a reunion as Jane and Mr Bingley had to endure under the regard of her mother.

“Mama, perhaps we could take a walk? It is such a fine day,” Kitty found herself suggesting.

Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst disclaimed any desire for themselves, but enthusiastically supported the Bennet sisters’ removal.

“I should like a walk,” said Mr Bingley. “If you do not mind, Caroline, Louisa, you may take the carriage back when you have finished talking with Mrs Bennet. I am happy to walk back to Netherfield.”

“We can walk you half way to Meryton!” said Lydia.

“Indeed, Miss Lydia! That is a grand notion!”

Mary stayed at Longbourn, but the other sisters walked slowly behind Jane and Mr Bingley.

“This is no good,” said Lydia in a not very soft voice. “We should walk in front of them for we will walk much faster and they shall fall behind.”
“Lydia!” hissed Lizzy.

“Lord, Lizzy, do you not want Mr Bingley to have an opportunity to propose?”

Lizzy frowned at her youngest sister, but then made a decision, and the three of them linked arms to overtake Jane and Mr Bingley and practically march into town.

“Well then, if he has not taken the opportunity, he never will do so,” said Lizzy with a sigh as Lydia ran off to find some ribbons or someone to gossip with.

“I expect he will; I expect that was his design this morning but his sisters spoiled his plans.”

“Hateful women.”

“Why do you dislike them so?” asked Kitty as they continued upon the high street.

“They have forgotten how to associate with us poor commoners,” was Lizzy’s response.

They stopped to look in a shop window, when Kitty heard her sister being hailed, and turning she was confronted by Mr Cheveley. His spots had certainly cleared up and his jacket fit a little better, but it was certainly Mr Cheveley.

“Miss Elizabeth, it is fortunate that we meet again and this must be one of your – “ Mr Cheveley stopped and stared at Kitty. Kitty found herself incapable of doing anything but the same. What was Mr Cheveley doing in Meryton and how had he become acquainted with Lizzy?

Lizzy sensed Mr Cheveley was not going to speak further and took up the slack, “Yes, Mr Fitzwilliam, this is my sister. Kitty, may I introduce Mr Fitzwilliam?”

“Mr Fitzwilliam?” said Kitty faintly.

“Yes, Mr Darcy’s cousin?” Lizzy’s tone rather suggested she thought her sister had lost her faculties.

Kitty looked around for any support, for Mr C- Fitzwilliam seemed loathed to provide it; he was instead staring across the road and Kitty followed his gaze. He was looking at his brother, Lord Ashbourne.

If Kitty had any doubt of Mr Fitzwilliam’s identity, the look of unholy glee on Lord Ashbourne’s face put it to rest. That was certainly the face of a sibling who had just triumphed in discomforting a brother.
Chapter Twelve

The awkwardness between Kitty and Mr Fitzwilliam remained for some moments longer until Lord Ashbourne chose to cross the street whereupon Mr Fitzwilliam was obliged to introduce Kitty and Lizzy to his brother.

Lord Ashbourne inquired of Lizzy (to Kitty he showed no particular attention) where they were walking and offered to accompany them. Since Lizzy had no definite destination except to allow Mr Bingley time enough to propose it seemed as if they were to continue to walk through Meryton towards Netherfield. His lordship naturally fell in step with Lizzy leaving Kitty to walk with Mr Fitzwilliam.

They outpaced their companions a little, and once Kitty was sure she was out of range of Lizzy’s sharp ears, she allowed her outrage to burst forth.

“Cheveley!”

“My estate.” He sounded most apologetic.

“Do you often accost young women under a false name?”

“No! No I…well you are acquainted with my brother are you not?”

“They both of them have such address and are so much older…I merely require some practice, and if I used my real name, it should get back to them.”

“Then your brother was not with you – not assisting you in your –“ That had been Kitty’s first thought; that it had been a scheme, a prank, and she had been the easy prey allowing both brothers to laugh at her.

Mr Fitzwilliam laughed. “Good gracious, no. My brother has no trouble introducing himself to young ladies without any schemes. You can be assured I was quite severely lectured. You see I can talk to you now without any silliness. I always can when there aren’t pretty young ladies…it is just with the pretty ones where I fall all to pieces.” He sounded mournful.

“Your brother taught me an excellent method of dealing with impertinent men. Should I employ it now?”

“Why? Oh! …No, obviously, I found you a pretty young lady, but then well…the moment was spoiled.” Mr Fitzwilliam looked behind him.

“Well, I was very glad for his intervention,” said Kitty pertly.

“Most women are,” said Mr Fitzwilliam in a rather forlorn tone, and Kitty couldn’t suppress her laughter, but then she became more serious.

“It was still very ill-done of you.”

“I know. I did not mean…“ Mr Fitzwilliam tugged at his cravat. “I am afraid I did not realise how my actions would be interpreted. As I said, I am not very well practiced and I thought … I have
been taught to understand the impropriety and error of my thinking, and I certainly do not mean to
terrify young ladies. I thought I was being masterful and charming. I do apologise, most sincerely.”

Kitty’s feelings towards him softened. “You certainly need practice at addressing yourself to
young ladies. Luckily, there are many young ladies in Meryton who are happy to have a young
man’s attention – even his studied compliments. I may, if you are very nice to me, introduce you
to them.”

They began to come to the outskirts of Meryton and Kitty turned to see what Lizzy would say
now.

“Well here we must part ways,” said Lizzy with a smile, and Kitty wondered what Lord
Ashbourne had been saying, how he had been charming her.

Lord Ashbourne looked around in some puzzlement, “This is your destination? No, I cannot have
you think so ill of my brother and I as to not allow us to walk you properly to the door, so to
speak. I am not entirely without country manners.”

“We are walking about only to allow Mr Bingley time to propose to our sister, Jane. We have no
destination, except at some point we must find Lydia and return to Longbourn,” said Kitty; she
couldn’t quite help her smile.

“Kitty!” Lizzy looked alarmed.

“Then clearly it is our duty to walk you back into town,” replied Lord Ashbourne.

Despite Lizzy’s protests both gentlemen did just that, and Kitty walked closely behind her sister
and shamelessly eavesdropped, but they were not talking of anything of particular interest:
Meryton and its inhabitants. Lord Ashbourne had been invited to Sir William Lucas’ dance and
was asking about who he might encounter there. Mr Fitzwilliam seemed content to walk in
silence.

They met some of the younger Lucas boys who had been to visit the sweet shops, who informed
them that Lydia had returned to Longbourn with Maria. Of Jane and Bingley they had seen
nothing.

“No doubt they are either walking the charming country lanes or have returned to Longbourn,”
said Lord Ashbourne with a smile.

Lizzy gave a small curtsey, “Indeed, we shall not trouble you any further.” With that remark she
practically dragged Kitty in the direction of Longbourn. Kitty was allowed to turn briefly and
wave but that was all.

“Kitty! You should not talk of our private concerns.”

“You think Mr Bingley will not propose?”

“That is not the point!” Lizzy continued her rebukes until they reached Longbourn and they were
greeted by Maria and Lydia.

“Mr Bingley has proposed!” said Maria sounding more excited than she had when her own sister
had become engaged.

Lydia looked put out that Maria had been the first to meet them; she made up for it by regaling
them with the details of the case, which were as much as Lizzy and Kitty had surmised.
Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst had left not five minutes after the party had set out for Meryton, which was also not surprising.

Mr Bingley had immediately applied to Mr Bennet, who was very happy to give his consent and Mrs Bennet was planning a grander dinner than ever before. Mr Bingley had apparently stayed for a little while and then was reminded that he must return to inform his sisters.

“It is such a pity that your first appearance as an engaged couple must be at a dance given by Sir William Lucas.”

Jane briefly wondered if it could be kept private until afterwards, for it would be unfair to Miss Emma Lucas. If Jane was not the best of women, it might be suspected she wished to draw attention to herself. Mrs Bennet gaped at such a ridiculous notion from her eldest, after all, when she had time to reflect she comforted herself with the notion that Jane would be quite the belle of the ball, and here was her eldest daughter talking of secrecy! Jane’s reaction to her mother’s new way of thinking was to turn quite red.

“No one will suspect you, Jane,” said Lizzy in a low voice, “and I do not think you can keep your engagement secret not even for one day…” Lizzy shot a reproachful look at Kitty which Kitty chose not to acknowledge.

They sat there talking wedding plans until Mrs Phillips burst in on them.

“I had to come the minute I heard the news.”

“Good heavens, it has not made Mertyon already? Mr Bingley has only just proposed!” cried Mrs Bennet.

“Mr Bingley has proposed? Oh Jane!” Mrs Phillips fell upon her niece.

“Did you not know, Aunt? Then why have you come?” said Lydia.

“Mr Darcy has returned to Netherfield and brought his cousin.”

“The viscount?” Mrs Bennet sat further forward in her seat, Jane’s triumph momentarily forgotten.

“Indeed. A handsome young man, much younger than I supposed, after all he is from the first marriage, I understand. I only saw him from the window, but I am surprised your daughters have not given you a better description.”

Mrs Bennet turned to stare at Lizzy, Lydia, and Kitty.

“Lord, I did not see him, Mama,” said Lydia.

“He was with his brother, Mr Fitzwilliam, who greeted Lizzy so civilly. By the by, what do you know –“

“What do I know?” said Mrs Bennet annoyed at her sister’s way of prolonging her own enjoyment at Mrs Bennet’s expense.

“Off walked this happy little quartet; they must have done a lap of Meryton. He seemed quite taken with Lizzy.”

Kitty gripped her hands in her lap and looked to her sister.

“If you mean he was polite enough to discuss with me how I found the countryside and whether
he was likely to get any good sport...then, Aunt, I confess,” replied Lizzy archly.

Mrs Bennet sensed that Lizzy would not oblige her further, so she busied herself interrogating her sister. Lydia joined in that pleasant task, but gave Kitty a winking look and Mary sat herself at the pianoforte, judging that her mother would not complain of a headache.

Jane crossed to Lizzy who grasped her hand, “I am sorry that the subject has turned from you, but I guess you are not.”

“I am not. But, Lizzy, have you made a fine conquest?”

“Not at all. His manners are extremely pleasant. He presents himself far better to his inferiors than his cousin did at first. But there is something wanting in seriousness, I think.”

Kitty wanted to contradict her sister, as she knew Lydia could also, but she remained silent. Lord Ashbourne had not acknowledged their prior acquaintance; he would doubtlessly not acknowledge Lydia’s either.

“You are severe. Perhaps you do not wish a certain gentleman to think you prefer his cousin,” said Jane.

“Not three hours engaged and you have become bold,” was Lizzy’s response.

At length there was nothing more to discover about Lord Ashbourne so the talk returned to the wedding. It was to occur at the end of September after the banns had been called. Now all that was to be decided was where they were to honeymoon and for how long. Kitty hoped Jane would have some say in the matter; it did not seem to be the case as Kitty lured Lydia from the room while the rest were distracted in choosing destinations.

“Lydia, Lord Ashbourne did not acknowledge our former acquaintance. I beg that you don’t … “

“I doubt I shall speak to the horrid man. If he had not come along, I would be Mrs George Wickham.”

“Lydia. If he had not come along, you would be very unhappy indeed. There are handsomer and richer men in the world than Mr Wickham, who are not likely to spend all of the money you could spend on gowns on gaming tables.”

Lydia looked as if she might actually take that into consideration. “Perhaps. If Mr Wickham had abducted me, it might even have been quite thrilling.”

Kitty did not follow her sister’s train of thought at all. “I beg your pardon?”

“A handsome viscount, riding to my rescue – he apparently stopped for pistols in case Wickham should have objected.”

“Was not Colonel Forster with him?”

“Oh yes, but who would put a pudgy Colonel into the story?”

That Kitty could not argue with, she was just happy that Lydia would not expose herself the following night. Mr Bennet had, as they had all expected, forgotten his former strictures and all of the Miss Bennets were to go to the dance.

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Emma Lucas was a charming girl between Lydia and Kitty’s ages, and was just as pliant and good natured as her sister, Maria. She also had Charlotte’s common sense. Thus, she was not at all upset that the room spoke almost universally of Jane and Mr Bingley’s engagement. They were all atwitter to see Mr Bingley’s party arrive and the expression upon that gentleman’s face.

They were not to be disappointed. Mr Bingley was all smiles and stepped first towards Jane. She was his only focus. His sisters, however, looked as they ever did, though they exerted themselves by smiling at Jane. Kitty did not think them pleased with the connection, but they clearly realised their brother was not to be swayed and he could hardly turn back now without losing honour.

Lizzy whispered something very similar to her while they stood by the punch bowl. Kitty wondered if Lizzy was hiding from Mr Darcy who had reappeared as quietly as he had disappeared, and was standing silently behind Jane and Mr Bingley. He looked neither unhappy nor happy.

Sir William Lucas descended upon the other two members of Mr Bingley’s party, and drew them into conversation.

Kitty watched, and thought she heard the words ‘St James’ Court’ and knew it to be true when Lizzy cringed beside her. Then he waved Emma over towards them, and introduced her. She wondered if Sir William had connived at the next outcome, which was that Lord Ashbourne asked if Miss Emma had any dances available to him.

He was scolded. This was a country dance and no one organised such things so early! Emma could oblige him with any dance, indeed. So Emma was to be belle of the ball once more, with their handsome new acquaintance leading her out to open the dancing.

Kitty was so engrossed that she did not notice Mr Fitzwilliam cross to her.

“May I have the honour of the first dance?”

She looked at his outstretched hand suspiciously. “Is your dancing better than your flirting?”

“Infinitely. And Ash made me practice the steps before we came.”

Kitty could not prevent her laughter and allowed Mr Fitzwilliam to lead her into the dance.

She observed, as did everybody else, Lord Ashbourne and Emma dance down the set. They were well matched – for what did the younger Lucas girls have to do, as they were not out, but practice and practice all of their social graces?

Several times during their own dance Mr Fitzwilliam scolded Kitty for paying too much attention to their companions and not enough to himself; yet at the end of the dance he petulantly requested another dance at some later point in the evening.

“For you did not even notice the trouble I took over my steps!”

Kitty was asked to dance the second by one of the older Lucas boys, and as she agreed she kept half an eye on Lord Ashbourne tempting Jane to dance with him.

“You cannot dance every dance with your fiancé, Miss Bennet, it would be unseemly.”

Young Rupert Lucas did not mind Kitty’s distraction; he was young enough that his chief enjoyment at a dance was the dance itself.
Her next partner, a young clerk at Uncle Phillips’, expressed some impatience with her. Kitty was normally such an obliging and perfect partner, but tonight she was distracted. Lord Ashbourne had next asked Lizzy to dance. She heard him ask, and then tease Mr Darcy into asking her to stand up with him for the following dance.

Mr Darcy had not stood out on the side as he once had done in Hertfordshire. He had danced with Miss Bingley, but he had done as much at that first Meryton Assembly. Kitty remembered everyone acknowledging that while dismissing him as rude and disobliging.

All she could think of while dancing with Mr Parker was that if Lord Ashbourne was making his way through the Bennet sisters, there would be one more dance before he would approach her.

Indeed, Lord Ashbourne approached Mary next, and Kitty moved closer under the pretence of wishing to see what the next dance was likely to be. A short break had been called due to some of the flooring becoming wet due to an unfortunate collision between a young Lucas and some punch.

After an introduction from Lizzy, Lord Ashbourne civilly requested Mary’s hand for the dance that was just forming.

“No,” said Mary bluntly.

Lord Ashbourne seemed taken aback, and Lizzy looked mortified. Kitty was feeling much the same.

“Thank you,” added Mary, “I take no pleasure in dancing.” She was, no doubt, glad she could now sit out the rest of the dances with no hope of her mother finagling someone to ask her to dance.

Mrs Bennet seeing this altercation swiftly came over, “You see, your lordship, my middle child is very serious. She would prefer to play for us all, but my next daughter – Kitty, come here child!”

Kitty did not much wish to come here, but she joined her mother.

“Kitty is an excellent dancer –“ Mrs Bennet looked in expectation at the viscount.

“Then I should be very happy to accept Miss Mary’s preference and dance with Miss Kitty instead.”

Why had her mother not called her Catherine? Catherine was a fine name; Kitty was childish and silly, and would, no doubt, remind him of that foolish child standing on a dark street in Brighton.

What should have been utter joy was tinged with some misery, as Kitty was never sure whether he would have asked her next if her mother had not interfered. She had not a clear confirmation that he liked her well enough to dance with her.
Chapter 13

Chapter Thirteen

“And he danced every dance,” said Mrs Bennet the following morning, addressing herself to the only occupant of the room that had not been at Sir William’s … who was also the least interested. “Never with one young lady more than once though, which is a pity.”

Mr Bennet sighed. “I really wish he had sprained his ankle in the first dance.”

“But to be so charming! So unlike his cousin! I suppose we should have known from his brother’s manners.”

“So he has read Lord Chesterfield’s advice and never gives offence or acts above his party?” said Mr Bennet, smiling at Lizzy, who giggled into her handkerchief. “Well, it is nice to know that rich young men are not all proud and disagreeable.” That Lizzy did not laugh at.

“Mr Darcy behaved better,” said Jane. “He danced with Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst, and also one with myself and Lizzy. He even asked Emma to dance but all her dances had been claimed.”

“Well, it is only because his cousin shows him up, I dare say, and he does not have ten thousand a year.” Mrs Bennet grew agitated.

“A penniless heir!” cried Mr Bennet.

“You misunderstand me, Mr Bennet,” said Mrs Bennet.

“Wilfully!”

“Of course, he is heir to a much grander estate; perhaps one should say estates…”

“And the amount to keep them up is probably equal to their income,” said Lizzy, lightly trying, Kitty thought, to change the subject.

“Nonsense, Lizzy!” said Mrs Bennet.

“Either way I do not think one should have any hopes there, Mama.”

“Why should that be?” Mrs Bennet did not like aspersions thrown upon her daughters, even by one of those daughters.

This would have descended into an argument if Lady Lucas had not called with her daughters in order to discuss the party.

As Maria was claimed by Lydia, Emma clung to Kitty’s side as they walked about the garden.

“I thought I might faint when I was lead out to dance by a lord! Mama says not to refine upon it so much, and of course I do not, but he was so very civil. He asked so many questions about the neighbourhood. What did you speak about in your dance?”

Kitty had wanted to keep that to herself. They had talked about books, almost as if they were continuing their conversation as they had walked along the Steyne back to Colonel Forster’s lodgings. There had been no explicit mention of Brighton, but they had not stopped speaking the entire dance.

Emma made a face. “Books in a ballroom! I expect your taste did not much match! What did you speak of in your dance, Lydia?”

Lydia turned from where she was plucking at some flowers while giggling with Maria. “I danced every dance, which dance do you mean?”

“The one with Lord Ashbourne,” said Maria, “Who else?”

Lydia laughed. “Oh we talked about sport. I fancy he is a very good shot.” Lydia winked at Kitty, who had to turn away. “Why not tease Kitty about Mr Fitzwilliam? He danced with her twice, and they looked so intimate.”

“Oh yes, Kitty. Such a handsome man, and I heard him talking to Papa about Cheveley. It sounds like it would be such a charming home,” said Emma slyly.

Kitty did not understand why they should want to tease her. Mr Fitzwilliam and herself had squabbled during their second dance as he had not quite the right steps or energy, and she had all but ignored him for the first.

“You seem so familiar with him already, as if you already know him,” said Maria.

“Ridiculous,” was all Kitty could say, but the three girls would not stop their insinuations and giggling. She had to retreat into the house and be forced to sit through talk of weddings to escape.

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It seemed that the Lucas girls’ misapprehension was shared by others. Kitty had been greatly admired outside Church the next day, and she had never paid more strict attention to the service.

Kitty had thought that Jane’s triumph would be the talk of the village; she had underestimated the village’s enthusiasm for love. One marriage always begat another was their hope. So, of course, their eyes turned towards the next possible match. Under almost any other circumstances, and before her trip to Brighton, Kitty would have been pleased to be the source of so much attention.

Mrs Bennet was as good a housekeeper as she was a gossip and she had taught her all her daughters well; for if they had no fortune, they must bring something to the marriage beside their face. Mrs Bennet was not so romantic as to think, probably from her own circumstances, that physical attraction could be the only hook to a harmonious marriage. Mary and Jane were the two daughters who most assisted their mother in the running of the household; Jane because she was the eldest and most biddable, and Mary because Mrs Bennet reckoned that she required extra assistance in the marriage market. Though it must be said that Mrs Bennet rarely suffered her daughters’ interventions, particularly with regards to the seating arrangement.

Mrs Bennet intended to spend the rest of the day finishing off her plans for her grand dinner, so Kitty offered her services to her mother as a distraction from the torment of everybody asking her about Mr Fitzwilliam …. and earned a grateful look from Mary, which was a rare sight indeed.

So it was a quiet Sunday afternoon that passed as Kitty listened to her mother’s changing mood for the dishes and Hill’s quiet reminders that it was a little too late to be changing dishes entirely. Then her mother moved on to entertainment.

“Of course, if we should want it we can throw back the rug and dance, but we had much better play cards, I think. Kitty, run and see if we have any new card packs. Remember, it always looks very well to have new card packs upon the table.”
It was during her search for card packs that Mrs Bennet fixed the one aspect of the dinner party that Kitty had really been trying to influence.

“Mama!” She looked at the little card places and how her mother intended to arrange her guests.

“Do you think we ought to arrange the table by precedence? There is only Sir William and Lord Ashbourne and it would so upset my table! How is one to manage it with the rest of the ladies and gentlemen? No, it will not do. This arrangement is much better.”

Kitty looked at the placements; she had been placed next to Mr Fitzwilliam, “But, Mama, look: if we just … “

“Why are you moving yourself away from Mr Fitzwilliam, child? My daughter is not a simpleton, I hope? You cannot tell me you have taken him in dislike? Why do all my daughters take their suitors in dislike?”

“Jane did not …“

“It took Mr Bingley long enough; I am not taking any more chances.”

No amount of persuasion could convince Mrs Bennet that Kitty felt nothing for Mr Fitzwilliam.

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The party from Netherfield arrived very early, although Kitty was surprised Mr Bingley was not even earlier. Since he had proposed, they had only not seen Mr Bingley the day before and that was most likely because it was a Sunday.

“Why have Miss Bingley and her sister come so early?” said Lydia, “They would better have come in a later carriage and not bring their glum faces to spoil our fun.”

“Lydia! Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst are – “ Jane’s attempts at remonstrating with Lydia fell on deaf ears, for Lydia moved away.

“Jane, you are not deceived by them either, I hope; if it were just your Mr Bingley, they would not have come early. If Lydia wants to blame anyone, she should blame the single young gentlemen,” said Lizzy into Jane’s ear with a smile. Then Lizzy made a silencing gesture at Kitty before laughing.

Indeed, Miss Bingley had drawn her chair particularly close to Lord Ashbourne’s. Mr Darcy was not forgotten by her either, so Miss Bingley was forced to split her attentions.

Mr Bennet was the most put out by the early arrivals, for he could not hide in his library for as long as he might have wanted. He stood by the fire – removing a position for Mr Darcy to lean and glower– and poked at it occasionally.

“What do you have there, sir?” Mr Bennet said suddenly to Mr Fitzwilliam.

Mr Fitzwilliam smiled. “It is a parcel, Mr Bennet.”

It was indeed a small parcel tied up with brown paper and string.

“Have you bought your own dinner?” continued Mr Bennet. “I can assure you Mrs Bennet keeps a good table, whatever her other faults.”

Mr Fitzwilliam laughed. “No, it is not I assure you. It is a gift – a loan I should say – for your
Mr. Fitzwilliam laughed. "No, it is not I assure you. It is a gift – a loan I should say – for your daughter."

This exchange was only part of the general conversation in the room … except with that phrase, Mr. Fitzwilliam and Mr. Bennet’s conversation became the focus of the room’s attention.

“I have several, Mr. Fitzwilliam.”

“For Miss Catherine.”

Kitty could not have been more confused as she received this token. Usually she could unwrap very well, but her fingers almost failed her. Finally she managed and revealed a novel. It was a handsome volume, not pasteboard at all; it had been redone in leather.

She turned the volume to see the title embossed in gold. It was the very novel she had discussed at Sir William’s dance. It was a book she had most wanted to read. She had heard it spoken of and read about it and had very much wished to read it, but it was not in Sir William’s library or her father’s or the circulating library. Except she had not discussed this book with Mr. Fitzwilliam; she had discussed it with Lord Ashbourne.

Kitty did not know which way to look; Lord Ashbourne was not even looking at her, but everyone else was looking at her expectantly.

“Mr. Fitzwilliam, this is a very generous loan. I shall endeavour to read swiftly.”

“There is no rush, Miss Catherine,” was his response.

The conversation moved on but Kitty could not recover her composure. Was he teasing her? And which ‘he’ did she mean?

Her thoughts remained disordered, partly because her mother kept giving her encouraging approving looks which were not at all subtle, and partly because Mr. Fitzwilliam sat next to her.

They did not speak until Lizzy, who had been changing seats every five minutes, sat with them. Kitty did not know why her sister could not sit still but she wished her very far away.

“You enjoy novels, Mr. Fitzwilliam? That is certainly a recommendation.”

“I do indeed. I prefer them to my studies.”

Lizzy interrogated Mr. Fitzwilliam for a moment longer before more guests arrived and soon they were summoned to dinner.

Mrs. Bennet arranged it so that Kitty ended up being led into dinner by Mr. Fitzwilliam.

“I never spoke to you about novels. I would assume your taste quite lacking.”

“I find your taste quite lacking. I would much prefer to be reading a magazine. It looks a dreadful book: do you not wish to sleep, Miss Bennet? And what a title!”

“The Orphan of the Rhine? What is wrong with such a title?”

“There are always orphans? They always are and very rich and pretty and put upon.”

There was nothing Kitty could say to this because it was entirely true.

Mrs. Bennet had found a horrid epergne and placed it upon the table to show that the Bennet household was quite up to the task of entertaining the heir of an earldom, and marrying into the
wealth of the Bingley family. This epergne, apart from its hideousness, had the unintended consequence of meaning that Kitty could not see Lord Ashbourne from where she sat. Dinner quite spoiled in her mouth. Her only comfort was continuing her aspersions of Mr Fitzwilliam’s taste in novels and his inarticulate defence of himself.

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“You see,” Mrs Bennet spoke loudly, “he gave it as a loan. A gift would be too much too soon. But you see…” She was addressing Mrs Long and Lady Lucas, but all the other ladies could hear her. Kitty was just glad the gentlemen were sitting awhile over their port.

Kitty was mortified, but her mother would not be silent. Jane came immediately to sit by her, understanding at once Kitty’s feelings. Jane spoke quietly to her about nothing in particular until the gentlemen came in, and then Kitty released her as it was obvious Jane did not wish to be anywhere but by Mr Bingley’s side.

Mrs Bennet’s talk was muted slightly, but Kitty heard her quite distinctly thank Mr Fitzwilliam for his generosity to her dear girl.

The table with coffee and tea was right behind the sofa upon which Kitty sat and she became aware of a conversation.

“Do you think this quite wise…” It was Mr Darcy. Kitty refused to turn around to see whom he was speaking to.

“Sugar in your coffee? I do not prefer it, but if you do – “

“Talk sense, Ash. Your brother…and his…offering.”

“You sound as if he were a priest.”

“This society has certain expectations which are being raised.”

“This society? All society, I think you will find …”

“In town, such flirtations can be seen as what they are – here…and it is not … “

“He is of an age; she is of an age, what is there to object to?”

That did not seem to be the answer Mr Darcy wanted, but he clearly dropped the conversation or they moved away and spoke lower, because Kitty could not hear any more.

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Kitty stared at the novel as it lay beside her bed. She had little interest in it – what was a most anticipated read was now a leaden feeling in her stomach. Mary had taken more interest in the novel, flicking through some of the pages, even pausing once, before laying it back on the table.

Did Lord Ashbourne think Kitty preferred his brother? Did he think she should prefer his brother?

Had she given that impression? She certainly could speak with ease and without reservation with Mr Fitzwilliam. He was handsome, but she felt no attraction to him. It was as if he were the brother her parents had longed for.

How had it all become such a muddle?
Chapter Fourteen

Kitty slept very ill and rather stupidly, for she had fallen asleep lying on the novel that caused all of her torment. As a result, a red mark was on her face and after it caused some comment at breakfast, she skulked in her room, staring at the offending object.

Mr Bingley called as he always did, and Kitty thought little of it until she looked out of the window to see that the other gentlemen from Netherfield had come and they were all walking on the lawn.

There was a moment of indecision in front of the mirror, before Kitty hastily rearranged her hair to cover the mark and ascertained that it was indeed fading. Then she launched herself down the stairs and into the garden.

She realised as soon as she got there that she had miscalculated. Nothing would confirm the gossip than her sudden abrupt appearance. No one would realise who had brought her downstairs.

“Miss Kitty!” cried Mr Bingley, coming towards her with a beaming smile, “just the very person!”

Kitty was never the very person, so she accepted Mr Bingley’s arm with some bemusement.

“We have been talking about having a picnic. It has been such good weather and it seems a pity to waste it! There are some objections, but I know you will support me.”

“Who would object to a picnic?”

The rather stern looking countenance of Mr Darcy answered her question. He was awkwardly standing apart with Lord Ashbourne. Apparently, Lizzy had been entertaining Mr Fitzwilliam. Lydia was nowhere to be seen and, of course, Mary was inside playing her pianoforte.

“I do not object to a picnic. I merely commented on the effort that much be expended and the … “

“Yes, for we have no legs to walk upon, nor arms amongst us to carry the rugs and baskets. You are very right, Darcy.” Lord Ashbourne clearly did not object to a picnic.

“I suspect Miss Bennet,” Mr Darcy nodded at Jane, “would plan a more refined picnic than ones we enjoyed as children. I was thinking more of the picnic we enjoyed with Miss Bingley. That was a lot of planning and work and I should not think …”

Kitty was surprised that Mr Darcy had ever been a child who enjoyed picnics and wished to hear more, but the rest of Mr Darcy’s thoughts were cut off.

“Caroline may prefer carriages and servants and tables and chairs, but the Miss Bennets are hardier women! As, I suspect, are the other young ladies in the neighbourhood; no, a picnic is a very pleasant idea. I shall undertake to plan it myself if that is your objection!” Mr Bingley cried, very pleased with his idea.

“Mr Bingley, I would be very glad to plan a picnic, though I should prefer carriages to walking,” said Jane.
“Oh no, I suggested the picnic…” Mr Bingley let go of Kitty’s arm to go to argue with his fiancée about who should take the most responsibility for organising the picnic.

Kitty could not help rolling her eyes and found Mr Fitzwilliam and Lizzy at her side.

“They are a well matched pair – “ said Mr Fitzwilliam.

Lizzy laughed, “Indeed, we shall never have our picnic organised, for they will claim the most trouble for themselves until…winter at least.”

“I think not, Miss Elizabeth,” replied Mr Fitzwilliam. Kitty did not understand why she got to be Miss Kitty whereas her sister managed not to have her nickname bandied about by all and sundry.

“You think they will come to some conclusion?” Lizzy sounded surprised.

“No but …” was his rather cryptic response as he nodded towards his brother, who seemed to be intently studying a notebook with a pencil which he had produced from somewhere.

Lizzy and Kitty did not understand his meaning until several moments later his lordship spoke.

“Saturday! We shall leave from Netherfield. Seems as good a day and place as any; we must hope for continuation of good weather. I have here a list of what seems to me to be the principal guests – or at least those who would be most offended if left out of the fun. You shall have to check my list, Miss Elizabeth, you will be practical but not as kind hearted as your sister so we shan’t have the entire population hereabouts with us.

We will have perhaps a manservant, and we will all take a great quantity of simple food and some rugs, and thus all we have to do is organise the carriages and placate the cooks. Et Voila.”

The entire party was impressed at his lordship’s command of the situation; all except Mr Darcy, who opened his mouth to voice some objection but was hushed.

“And those who find it too childish can stay home with a book.”

Lizzy was summoned to examine the list. Kitty felt a sharp pang of envy; she could have easily checked the list! Then she realised she was standing next to Mr Fitzwilliam, looking for all the world like a couple, and excused herself to tell Mrs Bennet about the proposed picnic.

That did not improve her spirits because Mrs Bennet gave her a great deal of advice about how she should give Mr Fitzwilliam the wrong directions, for of course Kitty would be taken to the picnic in his curricle all by herself.

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It was Jane who recollected that evening that they had not even chosen a location for their picnic.

“The viscount quite forgot that!”

“Well, we could not expect him to arrange everything,” said Lizzy with a laugh, “Although I suspect he is used to arranging everything. Miss Bingley will be very put out with him.”

“Where should we go?” said Jane, frowning over this difficult decision because it would not do to pick a location disagreeable to anybody.

“The river!” said Lydia. “I long to see water again. And we have not been since we were children. Why did we not go to the river again?”
“That is because I have tried heartily to forget the time I had the pleasure of transporting a family of five troublesome girls to a spot where they tried their hardest to drown themselves,” said Mr Bennet from behind his newspaper.

“I do not think any of us likely to do that again, Papa,” said Lizzy, for once in charity with Lydia. “The river would be just the thing.”

Even Mary joined in and went and found the book that had amused them as children with the plates of nearby attractive vistas. It was an agreeable evening and not a man was mentioned.

Kitty went to bed in a better frame of mind, but she was still no closer to her goal. She could not attend the picnic with the misapprehension – which existed in one or possibly two gentlemen’s minds – still in existence.

She also did not know whether she was going to make a fool of herself and expose herself to complete ridicule. Before she blew out the candle, she turned the offending item over in her hands, and at length opened it. She would have devoured the novel the moment she had placed her hands on it under any other circumstance.

She glanced at the frontispiece and laughed. She perhaps was not entirely a fool and she determined she must speak with Lord Ashbourne immediately.

This plan she was thwarted in when Mr Bingley was the only gentleman who visited Longbourn the next morning. He too had realised they had not picked a location and was thrilled to discover the Miss Bennets had hit upon the very notion.

He – or Miss Bingley, rather – had been busy and written up all the invitations which he was intending to deliver. It would be the work of a moment to add the prospective location to the cards; after all, the important point was the gathering at Netherfield before they set out.

Mr Bingley had brought a little trap, clearly with the hope of inviting Miss Bennet to join him in issuing the invitations. Kitty saw her opening. “May I not come with you and Jane, Mr Bingley?”

Mr Bingley saw his vision of a day cuddling his beloved disappear like a puff of smoke, but he was too good to deny Kitty. As a reward Kitty did not wedge herself between them, despite her alarm at the way Bingley drove the trap; at several points she felt as if she would bounce right out.

Kitty was forced to listen to their pretty speeches to one another and traipe around the neighbourhood issuing invitations. She only realised half way through that there was no reason to deliver an invitation to Netherfield! How stupid she had been!

“Should we not go to Netherfield so Jane and Miss Bingley can consult on the food preparations?”

Mr Bingley could not find any objection to a plan which allowed him to spend more time with Jane, and Jane, despite a crease in her forehead at Kitty’s suggestions, could not but agree that it would be politic to coordinate with Miss Bingley.

The men were out shooting. Of course they were out shooting. Kitty felt she had descended into a farce worthy of the stage where nothing went well for the heroine.

Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst were not happy to see them; they, of course, thought that Jane had come to assert her authority as the future Mrs Bingley. That made Kitty sure of their ill-judgement, the idea that Jane would or could usurp anybody’s position was laughable.

Mrs Hurst was particularly bored of the idea of a picnic and suggested Kitty should like to take a
turn with her in the shrubbery. Kitty wondered if Mrs Hurst wished to speak to her, but no, Mrs Hurst was happy to walk this way and that not saying very much at all.

Until they heard some raised voices that sounded very much like a squabble; Kitty knew what squabbles sounded like, she was one of five sisters. Mrs Hurst, despite her having a brother and a sister, did not seem to know and was disconcerted.

“Really, Charles hires the strangest groundsmen. I shall have to speak to him about it, but he will not turn them off!”

Mrs Hurst took a moment to decide whether she wanted to turn away from the sounds or walk towards them, and finally marched in the direction of the noise crying, “Hie there!”

Her planned lecture of unruly servants died upon her lips, as the gentlemen in question rounded the corner and proved not to be groundsmen, but Mr Darcy and his two cousins locked in an intense debate.

“I do not know where you learned to shoot but …“

“You taught me.”

“Someone must have untaught you. It was unpardonably …“

“I do not know what has you in such a pique, it was my hat that he almost – Mrs Hurst.” Mr Darcy stopped short first, coloured and bowed.

Mrs Hurst smiled. “Oh dear, have you finished for the day?”

“Mr Hurst is still out with the dogs, but we have indeed,” said Lord Ashbourne.

“Well, look who has come to pay a visit and discuss our picnic. Mr Fitzwilliam, you see Miss Catherine is here.”

Of course Mrs Hurst used her proper name, thought Kitty in annoyance, but only to couple it with insinuation.

The three gentlemen bowed in her direction. Kitty took her chance, inadvertently helped by Mrs Hurst taking Mr Darcy by the arm, and put herself between the brothers.

“Did you not have a good day’s shooting? I thought I heard that your brother did not do you credit?” Kitty ignored Mr Fitzwilliam’s exclamation.

“My brother is young, he will learn,” was the viscount’s response.

“Indeed, he is very young,” Kitty hoped he felt her emphasis.

“I thought you were fond of me,” said Mr Fitzwilliam, “but now you insult me!”

Kitty did not think he was really insulted, but did not wish to lose his friendship. “Oh no, I think of you as quite a brother.” That was a good word. “A brother.”

“Oh, well, you quite treat me like my siblings do already…dreadfully ill.”

Kitty could not help but giggle, but then she felt Lord Ashbourne begin to slip away and she grabbed his arm. It was not the way to recommend herself by digging her fingernails into his flesh, but she had little option.
“Do not go, my lord, I have not thanked you.”

“For what, Miss Bennet?”

“For my book.”

“You confuse me with my brother,” Lord Ashbourne spoke distinctly and slowly.

Kitty smiled, “I do not think I do.” She spoke just as distinctly and slowly.

“I was there, Miss Bennet; I recollect my brother handing over the present.”

“And I recollect, my lord, that it was with you that I discussed The Orphan of the Rhine.”

Lord Ashbourne did not look discomposed, but Kitty thought she sensed a twitch in his cheek.

“I must have mentioned it to my brother, and he thought what a good thing it would be to furnish you with the novel, so he discovered a copy.”

“You are a very obliging brother.”

“I am, Miss Bennet, I am.”

“You must be very obliging to allow him to send to London for your own personal copy.”

“My personal copy?” Lord Ashbourne gave a startled, disbelieving laugh. “Whatever do you mean?”

“It has your name in it, you see,” said Kitty innocently.

Mr Fitzwilliam was suddenly indisposed with a fit of coughing and dropped behind.

“Ah.”

“Ah indeed,” replied Kitty. “As you said, you are an uncommonly good brother. Mr Fitzwilliam, on the other hand, delights in your discomfort.”

“I hope you are enjoying the novel.”

“Oh, I have not started it – “ said Kitty blithely, “but now I will.”

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Read it she did. She managed to read it twice before the picnic and she congratulated herself on only spending a very small amount of time staring at the inked name on the frontispiece.

Her luck held, as did the weather, and Mr Fitzwilliam did not come in a curricle; his brother did. She, however, was not the lucky lady seated beside him; that honour went to Miss Bingley.

Kitty was forced to sit in a carriage with all of her sisters. But it was a start.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

This matches with Part Seven of the Pemberley Effect which is Darcy & Lizzy's POV.

Chapter Fifteen

Early indications were that the picnic would not be a success. The problem was the addition to the party of elements that were not disposed to picnic: namely the sisters Bingley and Mr Darcy.

At least Mr Darcy demeaned himself enough to lay out the rugs and then took himself off to walk along the river bank. Miss Bingley and her sister seemed determined to complain about everything. It was partially their attitude that made the party decide to explore first and eat later. They split into two parties: the gentlemen, who walked in Mr Darcy’s direction, and the ladies, who went the other way.

Miss Bingley and her sister might sit stiffly on their rug, parasols at the ready, but the other young ladies were choosing to disport themselves. Except for Mary, but that did not even need saying.

Lydia had taken off her shoes first, and then, with a sly glance back towards the party, had disappeared around the bend in the river a little way. When the other young ladies had followed they had found her without her stockings.

“Lydia, put on your – the gentlemen could…” Jane was shocked.

“Then I shall be in the river and they shall not see my bare legs,” retorted Lydia, hiking her dress up and splashing in the shallows.

“That is hardly any better!” said Lizzy.

None of Lydia’s usual romps had been invited to the picnic; however, the Miss Lucases, Gouldings and Longs found Lydia’s vitality just as irresistible as any other young lady.

“You must stop the gentlemen coming to see, Lizzy!” said Emma Lucas; she too shucked off her shoes and stockings.

“How am I supposed to do that, pray?”

“Tell them we are bathing!” said Maria with a laugh, pulling one of the Miss Longs into deeper water.

“I think that is likely to have them descend upon us with alacrity,” retorted Lizzy, but she saw she was fighting a losing battle and eyed the water with some thought before looking back towards their picnic spot with some distress. Jane retreated, most likely to guide the gentlemen away.

Kitty found herself walking further along the river, away from the girls who were now giggling and splashing and likely to draw a crowd no matter what Jane or Lizzy could do. She, herself, was not in the mood to be merry. Nor was she particularly in the mood for mud in her stockings. But
She sat down on an obliging log, readied herself and waded in. It was a mistake; this part of the river was not as shallow, it also seemed to be made up of a great deal of sandy silt which Kitty found herself trapped in, holding her skirts very high indeed. Then she tried to extricate herself and a sharp pain emanated from her ankle. Kitty gave a little shriek.

“Miss Bennet?”

Kitty wondered what ill star she had been born under and looked up to see Lord Ashbourne standing on the river bank. There was a brief consideration for spoiling the very fine fabric she had brought in Brighton – it had been 2 shillings a yard – before she dropped her skirts into the water.

“I think I have hurt my ankle,” said Kitty, feeling quite stupid once again.

“I think river bathing suits you as ill as sea bathing,” was his lordship's reply before he waded in to her rescue.

She did not faint, which was, she understood, the expected response to being swept up into someone’s arms. She did not even feel slightly lightheaded when he placed her on that obliging log and asked permission to examine her ankle.

“Yes, I think you have done some damage to it, Miss Bennet.”

Kitty peered down at her ankle, which did not look red or bruised or swollen in any way, but it had been a very sharp pain. “Do you think?”

“Undoubtedly,” said Lord Ashbourne who did the most extraordinary thing and tugged at his cravat until it gave way and then he set to work binding up her ankle. “Now, Miss Bennet, I think we must think of a way to get you back to Longbourn.”

“It is lucky then, sir, you have a curricle,” said Kitty.

Lord Ashbourne smiled. “I do have a curricle, and I am a very safe driver.”

“Are you much better than Mr Bingley?”

He looked aghast. “I am offended you would even think – I see that I must prove it.” He held out his hand to help her stand up. “No, do not put any weight upon it.” He picked up her shoes and stockings, causing Kitty to blush a little, and gave them to her, before picking her up.

“Have you had much practice?” Kitty could not imagine her father being able to carry young ladies around in this fashion with such grace. She could not imagine Mr Darcy either. He would be stiff and make the situation more awkward.

“In carrying young ladies?” Lord Ashbourne sounded surprised.

Kitty had meant in carrying young ladies, but upon reflection it probably was not a line of inquiry she wished to follow. It was not proper and she thought she did not want to know how many ladies he had carried about so effortlessly in his arms. She feigned shock.

“In the binding of ankles, my lord!”

“I was in the army briefly; one learns a little about injuries there.”
They re-entered the clearing where the picnic had been set up, and no one was present except Mary and the gentlemen brought to see to the horses.

“You there, Samuel, is it? Could you bring my curricle around?”

“Yes, my lord,” Samuel ran to re-harness his lordship’s horses.

Mary stood up, gaping at the very improper sight in front of her. Clearly Fordyce had given her no instructions on how to deal with this situation in a ladylike manner.

“Ah, Miss Bennet, your sister has injured her ankle and we must return her to Longbourn. You will accompany us.”

As it was not phrased as a question, Mary could not answer; instead she continued to stare as Kitty was placed in the curricle.

“If you would wait here, although you can hardly go anywhere, I shall go tell your sisters that we are leaving.”

Kitty only remembered that he would be inserting himself into a frolic of young ladies as he was already striding off.

“Kitty, what have you been doing? Did you allow him to ... “

“Shush, Mary, and climb in. I was paddling and hurt my ankle. All the other young ladies took advantage, why should not I? And I didn’t mean to let anyone see anything!”

Mary made a sniffing sound but did not object. After all, Mary’s idols would have objected strongly to a young lady making a long journey in a curricle alone with a man unrelated to them. It was Mary’s duty to accompany them back.

The curricle was moving smoothly but rather slowly, Lord Ashbourne nobly sacrificing speed and a demonstration of his true ability for the sake of Kitty’s ankle. Of this Kitty had no doubt; she had seen – or rather not seen – his journey to the picnic. He had set the pace; Miss Bingley had looked positively thrilled by his side.

“Have you finished the book my brother lent you?”

“Yes,” Kitty chose not to contradict him on the source of the book. “It makes me wish I could travel.”

That made the viscount look away from the road, “I cannot think the type of travel a heroine of a novel is subjected to can be very pleasant.”

“Obviously I would prefer not to be kidnapped and confined in a carriage, but to be able to see – they speak of the landscape so vividly. It sounds so different from England! Although I expect it will never be possible to see it.”

“Why ever not?”

“Well, the war.” Kitty did not mention the cost of such an expedition, which was surely beyond her family’s means.

Lord Ashbourne’s brow furrowed, “Yes, we have been at war for most, if not all, of your life,
have we not?”

Kitty could only agree to this statement and they trundled along in silence for some moments. She cursed herself for bringing up a subject that could only highlight the differences in their age and station.

“I went to France in 1802,” said Lord Ashbourne unexpectedly, most likely from the fact it would be uncomfortable to not say anything at all for the rest of their journey. “During the peace, I think everybody did! It was not the Grand Tour of my father’s day but I think it sufficed.”

“Did you see the Rhine?”

“I think I did, I confess that some of the rivers all ran into each other,” he gave a little chuckle at his pun.

“You should have paid more attention.” It seemed unfair to Kitty that someone who had all the privileges of life should not appreciate them.

“If I had known I would be quizzed on the beauty of the Rhine, I most certainly would have.”

“Did it have any effect?”

“The Rhine?”

“Your travel, I can only imagine it would provoke – “ Kitty stopped. She didn’t want to say her brief travel from home had changed her. It would remind them both what had occurred to make Kitty see the world in a different way.

“Well I joined the army much to my family’s joy and despair.” At her quizzical look he continued. “Joy that I found some occupation and despair that it was so dangerous.”

“Surely you had some occupation before? You were twenty-two!”

“Was I?” He said with amusement.

Kitty felt herself growing red with mortification. There was no way she should know Lord Ashbourne’s precise age, no way that reflected well upon herself and her curiosity.

“I was at Cambridge, although I suspect that was not much occupation, at least not as you mean. Darcy, I believe, is the only one of my acquaintance who gave that institution the reverence it deserved. I lasted less than two years in the army.” He gave a laugh. “India is not a climate suited to my constitution. I think I would have lasted less if not for Wellington.”

“India! Oh now that is most unfair!”

“Unfair? Hot, I should call it.”

“That you should be able to travel the world, whereas for me it is the peak of possibility to go to Brighton and see the sea!”

“Another thing Mary Wollstonecraft should discuss,” replied Lord Ashbourne. Kitty had known it before now, but it was another certain indication that he too thought of Brighton and of that moment they had met before she had exposed herself and ruined his good opinion.

Mary gave a start at the name of Wollstonecraft. Kitty had quite forgotten her sister was there, even though they were quite wedged together – Kitty had tried to keep some distance between
herself and the viscount but it was not entirely possible, otherwise she would need to sit upon her sister.

“Miss Bennet, you do not approve of Miss Wollstonecraft?” Lord Ashbourne addressed himself to her sister.

Mary was even more overcome at being asked her opinion than Kitty was when Lord Ashbourne had carried her about so effortlessly. Mary stuttered for a moment before indicating her preference for Fordyce and Hannah More.

“Your father, an earl, should surely agree with me.”

“There you may be wrong, Miss Bennet; my father is quite a revolutionary.” At their look of incredulity he continued, “Now, he will not be walking up to lay his own head upon the guillotine any time soon, but as my aunt puts it, he fell into quite the wrong society when he was younger. I think he continues his beliefs and his funding of certain experiments just to horrify her and allow him an excuse not to pay court at Rosings every year.”

“You did not pay court at Rosings with your brother at Easter, either.” As Kitty had already betrayed her interest, she chose not to hide it any longer.

“No, you will find that being known for only caring for one’s own amusement is very useful.” He smiled at her and Kitty could not help smiling back. The moment was spoiled by Mary pointing out they had just missed their turn.

“It is too narrow to turn around, but never fear: I know another way back to Longbourn, if your ankle is not troubling you too much to journey a little while longer?”

Kitty did not even feel her ankle and told his lordship not to even consider it an obstacle.

“So your father is a scientist?” Kitty was confused as to what revolutionary tendencies the Viscount was referring to.

“Just so. Well, he has some aptitude, but what he really did have was money and status.”

“Surely Lady Catherine could not object to the advancement of England!”

“To the advancement of England, no, but the fact my father fell in love with one of the daughters, a woman of little importance to anyone who looks at pedigree and wealth, now that was a strong objection.”

“He married her despite his family’s objections?”

“He was of age and had already inherited; he did not need to think of anyone but himself.”

Kitty did not know what to say. Discussing Lord Ashbourne’s mother was surely not a happy subject.

Kitty was not close to her mother, but she did not wish to think about losing her.

“My father redeemed himself with the present Lady Matlock. There was some worry that Richard and I would grow up quite wild without respectable female guidance.”

“She is – “ Kitty did not know how to ask if Lady Matlock had been a welcome addition to the family. Lord Ashbourne and his brother must have been very young when their mother died, she wondered if they even remembered her.
“She is the best of women. She undertakes to keep up our good name in London as long as my father does not explode the greenhouse. Or allow any of his friends to do so.”

“I believe, my lord, you have just missed the next possible turn,” said Mary flatly.

Lord Ashbourne seemed dismayed that he should be so inattentive. “I will be giving you a very strange notion of my ability to navigate.”

It was once again too narrow to turn the curricle around, so they continued onwards until a prospect emerged. It took some time to discover a practical place, but in the meantime they did not run out of conversation.

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Mrs Bennet had not expected or wanted her daughters back for some hours yet, so it was only Mr Bennet (and Hill) who noticed the Viscount’s curricle upon the drive. Mr Bennet was unconcerned until he saw Kitty being carried from the vehicle; he came into the foyer in his housecoat with his book in his hand.

“Do not concern yourself, sir, it is a trifling injury. But we thought it best to return Miss Bennet to the comfort of home.”

“It’s my ankle, Papa, I twisted it.”

Lord Ashbourne asked permission to deposit his charge in her room and that was done swiftly. Kitty would have wished for his departure to take place in the parlour, for she would not now be able to hear if anything further was said between Mr Bennet and his lordship.

Mary had gone to acquaint their mother with the accident. Mrs Bennet took no time in bustling along to her daughters’ room.

“What have you been doing, you foolish child? Could you not have had Mr Fitzwilliam bring you home?”

“Mr Fitzwilliam did not have a curricle!” Kitty was surprised that her mother had not switched her allegiances now to the Viscount. After all, she had spent now more time with him than with his brother.

“Well, we must hope that he is worrying about you.” Mrs Bennet spoke with some abstraction. “Now someone needs to see to that ankle.” Mrs Bennet did not mean herself. She never did.

Mary undertook to bathe Kitty’s ankle and replace the cravat with proper bandages. Kitty knew her sister was entirely uninterested in listening to her speak, particularly since she had been present for the entirety of the conversation. However, she could not stop herself recounting their journey. Kitty counted herself lucky that Mary made no comment and listened in silence.

“There is nothing wrong with your ankle.”

Kitty stopped speaking and looked down and saw her ankle looked identical to her other ankle. She moved both of them about and nothing hurt in any way. “I thought that it did not hurt. His lordship must have been overly cautious.”

Mary’s blank look made Kitty think she did not agree. Instead Mary grabbed one of her feet and began to bind it.

“That is not necessary.” Kitty tried to pull her foot away.
‘You wish Mama to know there was no reason for your returning from the picnic without speaking so much as a word to Mr Fitzwilliam?’

Kitty stuck her foot back into Mary’s lap. “Are you sure this is the right ankle?”
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

This matches with Part Eight of the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV.

Chapter Sixteen

Kitty’s ankle was an excuse for the young ladies to discuss the picnic within the relative privacy of Kitty's bedroom. Lydia, despite having no particular friends at the picnic, took up the lion’s share of the conversation.

“And did Mr Darcy, in the end, have a pleasant time?” Kitty asked, partially desperate to turn the conversation and partially out of curiosity.

Lizzy it seemed did not know where to look, before she attempted levity. “No he did not. I am not sure what he does enjoy. He does not enjoy balls; he does not enjoy picnics.”

“Lizzy that is unkind; you wrote how well he appeared in his own house amongst his own people. He is perhaps uncomfortable – “

“Perhaps, Jane, but does he have a reason to be uncomfortable here?”

Jane looked as if she wanted to say something. Kitty thought it was most likely regarding Mr Darcy's rejected proposal since that was something that could genuinely excuse discomfort.

“Lord, no!” cried Lydia. “Such a proud disagreeable man. He does not improve on closer acquaintance, always lurking and looming about, judging everyone he sees.”

“Lydia, I think that is unfair!” cried Jane.

“It is perhaps true,” said Lizzy quietly. “His relations are very different; they do not seem displeased or judgemental!”

“He is still a good man,” insisted Jane, “I shall not let anyone dispute that.”

“No one is disputing that, Jane, but he is not even tempered! He is charming and all that is good in Derbyshire and all discomposure and stiltedness here. We are not so shocking that he cannot bear to be about us. He only has the Bingley sisters to support him in that opinion!”

“You do not know what his opinion is! Perhaps he is ashamed of ever holding such an opinion!”

Lizzy, it seemed, could not continue the argument and left the room, with Jane swiftly following her. Kitty wondered if they had spoken much on this topic before. If they had, she wagered they had spent most of their conversation talking in circles. Lizzy did not know what to think or what she wanted and Jane was determined to think well of her Mr Bingley’s closest friend.

Mary also watched their departure with a curiosity Kitty knew she’d never own; Lydia was the only one oblivious.
“We did not even miss you,” said Lydia pulling at the fringe of the bedspread. Kitty yanked it out of her hand. “I did not mean that in a cruel way! There was too much excitement! I expect Lady Lucas will be here in the morning!”

“It is Sunday tomorrow, Lydia,” reminded Mary.

“Why should Lady Lucas calling be any great matter?” Kitty was intrigued.

“Well, we all managed to hide ourselves when the gentlemen came; Emma could not!” There was clearly more to this story, but Lydia could not talk for laughing as she tried to recall it.

All Mary and Kitty could discover was that Lizzy and Jane had not been present to witness the hilarity.

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Kitty’s ankle was entirely healed, if it had ever been injured to begin with but, she still stayed home from church the next day. Her mother had encouraged her to do so, and Kitty did not want to give rise to the belief that she had counterfeited an injury in order to be alone with Lord Ashbourne. She salved her conscience by spending the time she would have been at church reading serious works.

“I wish Mr Rogers would die, so we could have a new rector,” said Lydia storming into the parlour and throwing her bonnet upon the floor.

“Lydia, you bought that in Brighton!”

Lydia just huffed at her, “What does it signify as I have nowhere to wear it and you were stupid enough to twist your ankle and thus Mr Fitzwilliam spent the picnic making eyes at Emma Lucas.”

Kitty was very happy for Emma Lucas, if she could like so ridiculous a man as Mr Fitzwilliam. He did very well as a friend or a brother, but as a lover? However, since no one would believe her, Kitty remained silent. 

Lydia teased her a little more about Mr Fitzwilliam but Kitty could see that Lydia had something else upon her mind; Kitty, however, had no chance to discover what it was because Lydia premonition about Lady Lucas turned out to be correct.

“I do not know what she is thinking, arriving so soon after church; we have hardly had time to take off our jackets. Look Jane is still in her bonnet,” said their mother bustling into the room to look out at the Lucas party walking up the drive.

Lady Lucas was followed by a shamefaced Emma and Maria.

Lydia and Mary excused themselves and Kitty would have done so too if she thought running upon her ankle would not cause remark. Jane and Lizzy clearly stayed out of some sense of martyrdom and belief they had been the responsible chaperones of the trip.

Neither Mrs Bennet nor Lady Lucas seemed to gain much from the interview. Mrs Bennet was annoyed that it had not been her daughters who had exposed their ankles and calves to the young gentlemen, and Lady Lucas, who was mortified that such fine gentlemen thought her daughters hoydens when it was always the Bennet girls influence, did not receive so much as an apology from Mrs Bennet. From Jane and Lizzy, certainly but that was not her object.

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Lady Lucas’s visit burned the picnic from their mother’s mind and it was all she could talk of for the rest of the day.

“Such impudence! As if my daughters did not know how to behave!”

“They certainly have learnt from you, my dear,” Mr Bennet responded at the dinner table, and the next morning at the breakfast table when the same thing was said to him again.

“Well, I should not go walking to Lucas Lodge so often if I were you, girls! The young gentlemen will never visit them when they can visit here, so they will soon learn their error when they are left to languish. Who would visit such plain girls?” Mrs Bennet declared when the ladies retired to the parlour for their morning activities.

“Mama!” remonstrated Jane.

Kitty distracted herself by looking out the window and thus was the first to see the curricle sweep into the drive.

She had not bothered to put on shoes as it was doubtful she would go anywhere, now this seemed a terrible mistake.

“Mary! Fetch my shoes, please? They are just at the top of the stairs.” Kitty begged and luckily Mary was obliging. More likely she did not wish to be badgered until Kitty got what she wanted.

Mary did not even dawdle and Kitty took no notice of her lecture about the proper place to leave things so they would not cause an accident.

“Lord Ashbourne, ma’am,” said Hill ushering in the viscount.

Mrs Bennet had been too preoccupied being contemptuous of the Lucases to have noticed his impending arrival and was disconcerted to find herself with sewing still in her hand.

“My lord! You find us all …” words failed Mrs Bennet.

“Industrious?” supplied Lord Ashbourne.

“Yes! I would not have had you see this for the world!” Mrs Bennet liked to pretend her girls were not required to do anything whatsoever in the household. Miss Bingley and her sister contributed nothing to do the running of their household and they were the epitome of gentility for Mrs Bennet.

“I apologise for interrupting.”

“Oh, you are always welcome here.”

“I came to inquire of the patient.”

“Oh, yes!” It was evident that Mrs Bennet had forgotten about Kitty. Her disappointment that Kitty had not pressed her advantage with Mr Fitzwilliam had been swallowed by her annoyance over Lady Lucas’s lecturing. “I am so grateful for your rescue of my darling girl.”

“It was no great matter. I also came to inquire whether Miss Catherine would wish to take the air, if she is recovered?”

Kitty stood up with some alacrity. “I am quite recovered.”
“Of course she will take the air,” said Mrs Bennet her eyes gleaming.

“Kitty…” said Lizzy in a low voice, “you cannot go alone.”

Lizzy could not mean to prevent her going! Their mother had no difficulties and Lord Ashbourne was surely no Mr Wickham.

“There is space for a third, if one of your sisters should like to accompany us?” said Lord Ashbourne and Kitty was not sure whether he had heard Lizzy’s comment or not.

“Mary!” said Kitty immediately, “Mary should like to take the air.”

Mary most decidedly did not wish to take the air, but Kitty would not go with Lydia. Kitty would not mind Jane, but Jane would hardly wish to be away in case Mr Bingley called, or worse still their mother made some decisions about the wedding or Jane’s situation after the wedding. Lizzy would be perhaps the worst choice for she would be pleasant, but Kitty would not feel able to speak in front of her Wittier sister, who would no doubt trade barbs and *bon mots*; with Lord Ashbourne.

As expected Mary began to decline, but Kitty took the opportunity to whisper in her ear that now they shared the same room Mary should be obliged check her bed more often -- perhaps for frogs. If that threat did not work, Kitty also urged Mary to think of the likelihood that she would be forced to sit and listen to more of Mrs Bennet’s ruminations.

“You may think solemnly much better in a curricle.”

Mary protested no more and went to fetch their bonnets and after another whispered conversation she fetched something else.

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“I am glad your ankle has recovered, Miss Bennet,” said Lord Ashbourne as soon as he had navigated them from Longbourn’s gate.

“Yes, I think it is remarkably miraculous, do not you?” said Kitty with a smile.

“Clearly, the prompt attention was beneficial.”

His face really did not betray anything, thought Kitty, and she decided to let the matter drop.

“Well I should at least return your cravat. It has been laundered. I asked especially, although I was not quite sure ... “

Mary handed Kitty the snowy white cravat from her reticule and Kitty displayed it proudly.

An expression she was not sure quite how to identify flickered across his face and Kitty dropped her hands back to her lap, “Have I ruined it?”

The viscount recovered swiftly, “Not at all.”

“I think you are being kind. How are you supposed to treat them? Or are you a true fashionable gentleman and do not know what your valet does?”

Lord Ashbourne coughed, “If anyone but your fair self had asked such a question, I should consider it an affair of honour. The fabric must be starched and ironed. Your father does not adhere to the niceties?”
“Oh, I expect he does, but I did not say this was a cravat, they thought it a bandage.”

This teasing of one another looked as if might continue for some time except Mary coughed.

“Miss Mary does not approve of our trivial conversation.”

Kitty wanted to say that Mary did not approve of any conversation, but she bit her tongue. She did not have to say everything she thought.

“If one or other of you would reach to the floor, you will find something that may turn our minds to a more educative bent.”

It was an Atlas and Lord Ashbourne brought his horses to a very mild walk, as Kitty opened it carefully without her elbows causing Mary to tip out of the curricle.

Even Mary could not feign disinterest as the two girls found India and under the guidance of Lord Ashbourne naming places for them to find, traced his time in the army. Then it was Europe’s turn to be conquered.

“And I have only been from here to here,” said Kitty tracing Hertfordshire – Meryton was not even large enough to be shown upon the map – to Brighton.

“You should remember that others have not even had the benefit of that journey,” said Mary in a quiet voice.

“Where should you go if you had the opportunity?” said Kitty feeling for her sister as she never remembered doing so before. It must be difficult to be so overlooked and then see her two younger sisters sent on an adventure and come home disgraced. Mary would never disgrace herself in that way.

“London or Bath.”

Kitty was astounded she would never have picked such places of pleasure for Mary.

“Beyond the usual fascination with shops, fashion, and society, do you have any particular reason for London or Bath?” asked Lord Ashbourne.

“I should like to see where Reverend Fordyce gave his sermons and where he lived the last years of his life.”

Kitty gave a sigh of relief; that was the Mary she knew.

“I was given to understand you enjoyed Mary Wollstonecraft? How do you reconcile Miss Wollstonecraft to Fordyce?”

Mary had never been asked such a question and it was not one she was capable of answering. Their father often teased Mary with such questions and then did not give her a chance to answer them, so Kitty waited to see if Mary could speak.

She could not, so Kitty spoke instead.

“I think it is very possible, if one applies one’s own thinking. Perhaps Fordyce gives some acceptable advice and Miss Wollstonecraft champions the ability to be able to question it. After all, I am sure I do not agree with every word either says, but I have not studied either to any great extent.”
“What have you been reading, Miss Bennet? Surely not the Orphan of the Rhine again?”

Kitty shook her head, “No I was trying to discover who you may have meant when you said your father was involved with revolutionaries. I have been reading some memoirs. I do not profess to understand everything I have read.”

“Then you prove yourself smarter than the majority of people, and I do not think we should keep calling them revolutionaries! I should not like my father to come under suspicion, let us merely call them thinkers, of perhaps the radical persuasion.”

They spoke at length about what she had read and Lord Ashbourne suggested some books that might not prove to be quite so chemically minded – Kitty thought if she would be a philosopher, she would not be a natural one.

It was Mary who recollected them to the time and Kitty realised how long they had been away. She did not wish to return to Longbourn, but one could argue that there was such a thing as too much fresh air.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

This matches with Part Nine of The Pemberley Effect, which shows Lizzy and Darcy's POV

Chapter Seventeen

They had not made definitive plans, but Kitty could not say she was surprised when at the same hour the next day a curricle swept up their drive.

Kitty dragged Mary away from the pianoforte.

“Cannot – “ Mary protested.

“No,” Kitty interrupted, pushing Mary into the foyer and shoving her pelisse and bonnet into her hands, then she grabbed her own.

She tried to look innocent when Hill opened the door to admit Lord Ashbourne.

“Should I perhaps just wait in the curricle next time?”

Kitty curtseyed, “It would be more expedient.”

Once they were safely in the curricle, Lord Ashbourne looked in askance at them. “Are you perhaps escaping?”

“It is less than two weeks until the wedding,” answered Kitty. “Mama is beside herself.” Kitty stopped. “Not that I blame her, I think she is more upset by the idea of losing Jane than she cares to admit.”

“Netherfield is not so far away.”

“But I do not think Mr Bingley will choose to settle there permanently.”

“She has still four daughters for consolation.”

Kitty sighed, “Jane is her favourite, for the moment, it is always between Lydia and Jane for mama. So she only has one daughter for consolation really.”

“And your father has the other three?” laughed Lord Ashbourne.

Kitty looked down and tried to lighten her tone, but it was difficult. “Oh Papa only has one, Lizzy. So you see, Mary and I are quite superfluous to requirements.”

She had hoped when Mr Bennet had taken some difficulty in showing her what books to improve herself with, that this would usher in a new regime where Kitty would be a favoured daughter. But after that initial push, Mr Bennet had waved away her questions, consigning her back to the silly child who only wished to talk about handsome men.
So we are underfoot at home, you do a charitable thing in taking us away.”

Kitty could not identify the look in Lord Ashbourne’s face and hoped it wasn’t pity.

“Well then, if this is charity I must do as I am commanded. Where should you like to be taken?”

“I have no preference, do you, Mary?”

Mary had no partiality for bowling about the countryside, so she did not wish to go anywhere, but Kitty thought she was gratified to be at least asked.

“I wonder if Mr Bingley and his family are as concerned about the wedding – I mean, not about the marriage, but about the wedding.”

“I think the groom’s family is historically not as involved in the planning of the ceremony. But Mr Bingley will not be a distant groomsman.”

“No, he is all amiability.”

Lord Ashbourne looked sideways at her. “You think that his sisters are unhappy? I assure you, they are the type who would be unhappy with any choice that was not their own.”

“And Miss Darcy? I heard Lizzy say she was expected, and ... “

“Georgie? Did Miss Bingley really think that Georgiana and Mr Bingley? Darcy would – well perhaps he did plan, he does like things tidy.” Lord Ashbourne shook his head. “Georgiana is sixteen. I hope you will be kind to her when she arrives, she needs more female companionship. I do not expect she will marry for some time.”

“Sixteen is not so very young,” said Kitty.

“Is it not?”

Kitty bit her lip. He was telling her that she was too young and she was, perhaps not only in years.

“Georgiana is a particularly young sixteen. She is very shy, another reason why she needs more companionship.”

They continued on in some silence and Lord Ashbourne, seemingly for no other reason than to break the awkwardness, took a small path. It was very narrow and had probably only ever been used for carts, but he navigated it with supreme skill until the rut filled with water.

Kitty tried to keep a straight face as the viscount looked displeased that he should be defeated by some mud and in front of ladies as well. It had only rained very briefly overnight, Kitty thought, so it was not surprising that the possibility of muddy ground would not have crossed his mind.

“I am afraid you will have to get down,” said Lord Ashbourne after surveying the damage.

They complied, and Kitty took a better look. “Will you unhitch your horses? If you do, can you hitch them again?”

Lord Ashbourne gave her an exasperated look – “I may require some small rendering of assistance.”

Mary held the horses, most unwillingly, but she did not complain, even though Kitty was sure Mary detested horses.
After watching for a moment – “Would it not be easier, my lord, if I helped?” Kitty did not wait for him to answer and stepped forward to help push the currie out of the rut.

“Miss Bennet, you will …” Mud splattered up her dress and Kitty saw that his breeches were no better.

“Well, better a little mud than a walk home,” said Kitty. It was not her favourite dress and she would sacrifice her entire wardrobe to spend more time with Lord Ashbourne and prove that she was not so silly and useless as she feared he might think her.

They took the opportunity to manoeuvre the currie until it was facing the way they had come, and then under a great deal of guidance, Mary and Kitty assisted with re-hitching the horses. When it looked as if Mary would baulk, Kitty reminded her that they were showing that females were just as capable as men, even if not in the manner prescribed by Fordyce.

By the end, the three of them were hardly fit to be seen and Kitty thought her hair was almost completely undone. She pushed it up into her bonnet as a temporary solution.

“I cannot think of many women of my acquaintance that would have assisted me so,” said Lord Ashbourne.

“Then you cannot know many women,” said Kitty primly.

They returned to Longbourn chatting, all the way.

“I think perhaps I should not deliver you right to the door. If your mother sees the way that I have returned you, then I think I will be forbidden from darkening your doorstep.”

“I think you would have to be ruined and stripped of your title before that should happen, my lord, as you well know. I hope you will make this trip up to us tomorrow?”

There was no response to that, only a smirk.

Despite Kitty’s insistence that no blame would attach to Lord Ashbourne, she was not so certain for herself, so they went in the side door, and Kitty ran up to their bedroom, trusting Mary was behind her.

“Oh Mary!” Kitty slumped against their door, feelings welling up and she almost fancied herself lightheaded

“My hair is ruined.”

If anything was to make Kitty stand up and almost forget Lord Ashbourne entirely, it was Mary professing such a feminine fixation as worrying about her appearance.

Lord Ashbourne presented himself promptly the next morning, and was not kept waiting a moment. Mrs Bennet had spent all of breakfast discussing what changes she wished to make to Netherfield and Kitty was heartily sick of the possibility of new curtains.

“Kitty!” Lizzy called after her, but Kitty did not wait to hear what her sister might say, instead calling for Mary.

“Why have you brought such a large reticule?” said Kitty with a frown once they were underway. “Do you think we shall become stuck again and you have brought provisions?”
“We shall not become stuck again,” was Lord Ashbourne’s pronouncement and he did not even wilt under Kitty’s look.

Mary did not answer Kitty, and instead pulled out some netting she had been working on. No inducement would make Mary explain herself so neither the viscount nor Kitty pressed her.

Instead they happily conversed and ran into no ruts or mud.

“What say you to an impromptu picnic?” said Lord Ashbourne as they turned down a lane, a much larger lane than the previous day. “To make up for the one that your injury prevented you from enjoying.”

“When?” Kitty did not really wish for a picnic that would no doubt involve the others. Although her sisters most likely would clamour to escape, and Mr Bingley would support any plan that allowed him more time with Jane.

“Tomorrow? I’m sure there is a pretty prospect hereabouts.”

“Oakham Mount?” said Kitty, “It is not too far and you can see quite a way. Should we invite the Bingley sisters?”

He would probably deny it, but a look of distaste crossed his face. “An impromptu picnic does not include invitations, surely.”

“Very politic, but my answer is yes.”

“Miss Mary?”

“I would prefer to stay home and practice the pianoforte,” said Mary.

“That is admirable,” the viscount sounded sincere and engaged Mary in a conversation about music, where she was forced to think of her own opinions.

Kitty wished at that moment that she too was musical, but she was not and it seemed a little late to start now. It took her a moment to realise that she was jealous, but it was silly to feel jealous of Mary. Not because Mary could not attract a man, although Kitty was doubtful that Mary should wish to attract a man such as Lord Ashbourne. She should not feel jealous, because if it wasn’t meant to be, it was not meant to be, and she should always feel happy for her sister. But she still felt subdued for the rest of the morning.

Before Brighton what had Kitty’s life consisted of? Nothing! Now she read, certainly, but little else. Her magazines made it quite clear what was expected of an aristocratic wife and Kitty only but rarely visited the poor. Her mother rarely did either, nor could Kitty think of Lady Lucas being particularly charitable.

“Kitty, are you quite all right? You have been staring at your hands for a quarter of an hour,” said Jane gently. Jane had not been idle; she was sewing, part of her trousseau no doubt.

Kitty shook her head, and then realised that would be taken as a sign that she was not all right and Jane would no doubt question her further. “I am perfectly all right. I was just thinking about our all possibly driving, or walking, to Oakham Mount tomorrow. Lord Ashbourne suggested it.”

“That was very kind of him,” said Jane. “Have you been enjoying your excursions?”

Kitty could not help smiling. “Very much so!”
There was no chance for them to talk further, because Mrs Bennet came down from her room.

“There you are, Kitty! I am very cross with you!”

Kitty could not understand what could have upset her mother, unless it was the mud that she and Mary had tracked in the day before.

“You have been neglecting Mr Fitzwilliam! You have abandoned him!”

To drive out with a viscount, thought Kitty; surely that if one was mercenary, that was better. “Mama, I do not think you could call it abandonment!”

“Perhaps Kitty does not care for Mr Fitzwilliam anymore!” laughed Lydia.

“Now, Kitty, I know that Lord Ashbourne is a much better looking man than we had been led to believe. I do not trust that Mr Darcy as far as I could throw him. But you cannot be a simpleton. Mr Fitzwilliam is a certainty, my dear. You capture him now, before he’s had time to look about!”

Kitty did not have to object to this, as Lizzy was quite happy to do so on her behalf.

“Mama, Kitty is eighteen, there is time enough yet for her to …”

“I was eighteen when I was married. Lydia would have been sixteen if not for unfortunate circumstances. You only think it very young because you will be one and twenty soon, and what have you to show for yourself? You refused Mr Collins, and it is only due to the good nature and beauty of your sister that we are not all to be in the hedgerows.”

If Mama thinks you a simpleton, then you truly must be one,” said Lydia, perched on Kitty’s bed waking her up. It looked as if dawn had not even come, which surprised Kitty because Lydia was never an early riser.

“Do go away, Lydia.”

Lydia laughed, “I think you like the viscount, and I heard the others talking of it! He’s separating you from Mr Fitzwilliam. Distracting you. Isn’t it a joke! That you would think it was not charity!”

Kitty did not find it a joke at all. Perhaps it was Lydia’s way of revenging herself upon Kitty, but she sounded as sincere as Lydia could be, yet it was exactly what Kitty feared and Lydia always managed to know her darkest fears.

She also did not find it funny that it was raining.

It was raining no less heavily when she looked out of the dining room window either.

“Perhaps it will ease,” she said hopefully to the room.

“Ease? Of what are you talking?! I expect it will rain for three days, and we shall see no one,” complained Mrs Bennet.

Mr Bennet consoled with her. “I know, a veritable torrent of eligible young gentleman and our girls are unable to set their caps because of a little rain.”

“I knew you would see it my way, Mr Bennet,” replied Mrs Bennet.
Kitty just stared despondently out of the window, praying for the rain to break and only changed locations not activity that morning. That was until Mary pushed a sewing basket into her hands. Mary was pleased for the rain; it allowed her to practice instead of being jolted around every country lane from here to goodness knows where and back. No one else was pleased, as Mary had just begun to learn a new piece. Kitty looked up from the basket and saw that everyone else had deserted the parlour: no doubt to find somewhere quiet.

“Be useful. Is that not what you want to become?”

Kitty took a deep breath and admitted that she had to try.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

This matches with Part Ten of The Pemberley Effect which shows Lizzy and Darcy's POV.

Chapter Eighteen

The rain did not let up the next day, and Kitty had run out of mending jobs in the sewing basket. The only luck was that Lydia had decided such a day required her to spend it in her nightgown in their mother's room. Longbourn was decidedly small when Lydia was bored and prowling around.

"If you are looking for something to do, Papa needs some more shirts," said Jane, looking up from her embroidery.

"Do you not wish to practice for Mr Bingley?" said Lizzy with a sly smile. "Or do you think you shall have plenty of time for that?"

"Lizzy! Of course I shall sew my husband’s shirts, but he is not my husband yet."

"No, much better to finish embroidering your night gown."

"Lizzy!" Jane was scandalised and turned bright red. Lizzy looked as if she might have said something further but Kitty and Mary’s presence restrained her. However, Kitty understood to what she referred, at least in vague terms. She had Harriet, Mrs Sharp and Brighton to thank for that, and Lydia’s lack of propriety. Not to mention there was the home farm. Lizzy needn’t cease speaking for her sake.

It seemed that neither sister was going to speak, and Mary just continued with her piano, so Kitty went in search of Hill and fabric. Both were easy to find; they were together, but Hill was distracted.

"If you wish to make Mr Bennet’s shirts, there is the fabric I bought in Meryton," she waved at the shelf.

Kitty took the linen and was about to turn away. "Could I help you, Hill?"

"Oh, Miss Kitty! It is this wedding!"

"Are you not excited?"

"About Miss Jane, yes. About the wedding breakfast, and the trousseau and…well…"

"My mother. I understand, Hill, but have you not asked Lizzy or Jane?"

Hill gave Kitty a look that told her in no uncertain terms that this was a silly question. Of course, Lizzy and Jane had too much to do already. "Elizabeth and Jane will not be here soon."
“Lizzy is not engaged and I do not think she will stay for a visit at Netherfield, it is only three miles!”

“Perhaps she is not engaged now,” said Hill in a curious tone.

Kitty wondered what Hill had heard. Though she was practically a member of the family, she was still their housekeeper and as such many things might be said in front of her that otherwise would not be. Certainly, Mrs Bennet often confided everything in Hill; she certainly knew about the aborted elopement and had not looked at Lydia or Kitty any differently.

“Well then, I could help?”

As it turned out, Kitty could help. Mrs Bennet’s normally good household management had subsided in standards since Jane’s engagement. Jane was distracted, and Lizzy was distracted in making sure Jane was not allowing every single one of her wishes to be contradicted by Miss Bingley and their mother.

The week’s menus (which were spoiled by the laziness of the grocer of Meryton, and the collusion of the butcher) were easy to fix. It of course meant that all of Kitty’s favourite dishes that could be made up with what they had would happily find their way onto the Bennets’ table.

Then it transpired that the kitchen maid did not at all like the new scullery maid and there had been some contretemps between them that Hill did not feel capable of resolving without assistance from the lady of the house. Mrs Bennet had never been one to do so, but once Jane had become old enough to induce servants into harmony by her relentless goodness, Hill’s responsibility in this area had diminished. She was no longer used to sorting out such matters alone.

Privately, Kitty thought it was ridiculous to summon the two young ladies to the housekeeper’s room to face her. She told herself over and over again that if she was to have her own establishment, no matter how big or small, she must become accustomed to such things.

First, she was sure was to listen to both women equally. Kitty hated it when Lydia managed to get her version of events in first; no one ever wanted to then listen to hers. She was surprised that it sounded much like the kind of squabble that would occur between sisters, indeed Kitty had had similar arguments.

She had only, it seemed, to allow them to complain equally and they were happy to go back to work and within half an hour, Hill confided that they were laughing together and everything had been forgot.

Buoyed by this success, Kitty turned her mind to the shirts. They could not be so difficult.

They turned out to be more problematic than Kitty expected and thus she was half glad for the next two days of rain, and then when it ceased that it was a Sunday and all they were expected to do was go to Church.

The stitching was laborious and it gave her a great deal of time to think. She presented them to her father after dinner.

“Well! I shall look very fine in these. I do hope they are not designed to make me go out more in society.”

“You shall have to do so, Mr Bennet! Our eldest may soon be married, but you must endeavour to
assist me in finding husbands for all our girls.”

“I thought that was to be Jane’s role in life,” said Mr Bennet drily.

“Well if she is here at Netherfield, she can hardly do so! And she may only take one sister at a
time to London.”

“Only one?” Mr Bennet was surprised. “Why not take all of the girls, Jane?”

“Papa!” protested Jane.

“He is not serious, Jane,” said Lizzy, looking up from her embroidery.

“Am I not, Lizzy? Am I not? Although now that I think of it, we have three eligible gentlemen at
Netherfield, we need only find a fourth and then the problem is settled.”

“Mr Bennet, how can you talk such nonsense? Mr Fitzwilliam will do for Kitty; indeed she is
already in love with him and him with her, but Mr Darcy! I should not want such a man as my son
in law.”

“And Lord Ashbourne? I understand your objections to Mr Darcy, but what is the difficulty
there?”

“I expect he is already engaged, or it has been arranged. These things are often the case. I have
read about it in novels. In his cradle, I expect.”

“Mama, those novels are hardly realistic,” said Lizzy. “Although I expect you are right, Mama,
and the young lady who will be the Countess of Matlock is not going to be a young lady we
know.”

“So I must find three more gentlemen?” said Mr Bennet. “Cannot be done, seems a hopeless
business.”

With that remark, Mr Bennet took himself off to bed. Kitty went thither, too, but with more
thoughts.

She was in love with Lord Ashbourne, that much had become clear to her. She was not just
attracted to him; he was necessary to her happiness. Yet there was so much that they had not
spoken of, and so much was between them.

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“Papa, is that my shirt?” said Kitty, looking up from the breakfast table. She had never been so
excited about an item she had not sewn for herself.

“It is indeed,” said Mr Bennet, coughing. “Let me take off my dressing gown and display myself.”

Mr Bennet did and Lydia burst out laughing.

“Lydia!” Jane was often to be found exclaiming her sister’s names in various tones of shock. “It is
a very fine shirt, Kitty.”

“Indeed, it has two arms and a hole for the neck,” said Lydia, tears in her eyes.

Lizzy looked as if she was also trying not to laugh.

“I am afraid, my dear, that you have made these shirts for a somewhat taller man, who is, I fear,
far more athletic than myself.”

Indeed, Mr Bennet looked comical in the tight long shirts.

“But they are well made?” said Kitty.

“Oh yes, the stitching and seams are perfection. But may I be permitted to change?”

“Sorry, Papa,” said Kitty.

“It was a very fine effort, Kitty,” said Jane. “I should have helped you with the proportions.”

“Whatsoever, or whoever, were you thinking of?” giggled Lydia.

Kitty blushed but she did not miss the concerned expression pass between Jane and Lizzy.

“I see it no longer rains,” said Mary, who had been entirely composed through the proceedings.

“I expect we shall see Mr Bingley here very shortly,” said Lizzy. “I am surprised he did not ride through the rain for you, Jane.”

“Lord, Lizzy, they are engaged now; he is secure of her, he does not have to dance such attendance,” said Lydia, biting into her toast.

Lydia might be right that Mr Bingley was not obliged to wait upon his fiancée as often as a undeclared man, but he was a man who **wanted** to see his fiancée at every waking hour and so he did come with the rest of the Netherfield party. Well, all those that counted to the Bennets, which meant the gentlemen barring Mr Hurst.

Although Bingley’s arrival did not hurry Mrs Bennet, who was still abed; Kitty thought this very peculiar, especially with the presence of the other gentlemen and their conversation the previous night.

“Jane!”

“Charles!”

Kitty tried to look interested in this affectionate greeting, but all she could think of was walking out, away from Longbourn and prying eyes and ears.

Luckily, Lizzy would never support being cooped up in the house for longer than she must. “Shall we not walk in the garden? Three days of straight rain and four sisters, I find drive me quite wild to be outdoors.”

They were not freed before Mrs Bennet made an appearance and came out onto the lawn.

“Lord Ashbourne, should you not like to walk in the direction of the home farm? You may find it interesting,” said Kitty with a hopeful smile.

“Might I? Then let us of course proceed in that direction.”

Kitty’s plan was spoiled by her mother.

“Mr Fitzwilliam, do go with them to the home farm. I expect you will see many similarities with your fine estate at Cheveley. You may even bring some cheese back for lunch. They do a prodigious cheese.”
“I should be delighted,” said Mr Fitzwilliam as he began to dog Kitty’s and the Viscount’s steps. Kitty’s only hope was a significant glance at Mary, who just sighed and engaged Mr Fitzwilliam in conversation about sonatas or Fordyce or whatever Mary liked to discuss with gentlemen. Kitty would have to find out at bedtime what Mary preferred to converse upon, but for now she had another goal.

Mary and Mr Fitzwilliam walked faster, once they had rounded the corner and were out of sight and range of her mother.

“You can see the farm from here,” said Kitty, walking to a low hedge that overlooked the farm.

“Indeed you can.” This was not a promising start, thought Kitty.

“My lord, I wished to say something to you privately.”

“I did not think you that excited for a farm you have known all your life.”

“I did thank you at the time,” Kitty was not quite sure how to say what she wanted so frankness seemed to be called for. “But we have not discussed it since. ‘It’ of course being my sister’s aborted elopement and my shameful part in it.”

“I do not believe there is anything to discuss, Miss Bennet.”

“I was so stupid. I thought Wickham was in love, and that he was a gentleman. I based this on his appearance, I did not think of his behaviour. He deserted us for Miss King and her inheritance and then when she was whisked off to Bristol he returned. He deserted us in Brighton, and then came amongst us as if he had not done so. He spoke ill of your cousin after swearing that he should not do so. I think his ill words were even the first thing he ever said to Lizzy, a young lady he had never met before. But I am not sure of that.” Kitty was rambling and she only stopped when Lord Ashbourne took her hand.

“Miss Bennet, it was misjudgement of character. We have all been guilty of that. You were presumed upon by a man with great address, and you lacked knowledge of the world. Luckily, knowledge can be acquired.”

“But we almost eloped,” said Kitty. “I did not even think that was very wrong.”

“Romantic, misguided romance but…” he shrugged. “If this is your only youthful mistake, Miss Bennet, you should congratulate yourself. No one except Mr Wickham was much discomposed.”

“You do not think that I…” Kitty did not know how to vocalise her fears.

“No. Do I think you were extremely fortunate? Yes. Do I think that you should have others to guide you, others who have already made their mistakes, or learnt from others? Yes.”

“But I must have some share of the blame,” said Kitty. “I think only children can be blameless and I am not so very young.”

“Very well, you may take whatever proportion of the blame you choose, as long as you remember that the vast majority is not yours.” He released her hand and they started to walk towards the farm.

“Oh, I know that Mr Wickham imposed upon us, and that Lydia…she should take some of the blame but she will not.”
“Passion will make many do strange things,” said Lord Ashbourne.

“You do not know my sister,” said Kitty. Lydia’s elopement had not been all out of her love, or her imagined love of Mr Wickham, of that Kitty was certain.

“I bow to your better knowledge, but she is a sixteen year old girl who has seen little of the world outside novels, and it is a truth universally acknowledged that a man in a uniform is more attractive than his sadly un-uniformed brethren.”

Kitty laughed, “But Lydia does not refine on what happened, not that I think she should do penance every day, but some indication she would not run off with the next officer who asked her would be acceptable.”

“Some hope and some guidance would not go astray,” replied Lord Ashbourne, “But you should not equate your behaviour with anyone else’s. They do not reflect upon you. You must forge your own path, you are very ... “

“If you say young, Lord Ashbourne, I will not be held accountable! You seem determined to say that about me every time we meet. I do know my own mind, and my own faults.”

“Indeed you do.”

“Then I shall hear no more about my youth. You must recognise I have not once mentioned your advanced years and how they must make it difficult to hear and walk and so forth.”

Kitty looked at him to see his reaction and was put out by the fact that only a glimmer of amusement showed upon his face.

“Well then, Miss Bennet, you must give me your arm in support if we are to make it to the home farm and its prodigious cheese.”
Chapter Nineteen

The good weather held the next day. Mrs Bennet fretted that it might not hold, so forbade them from going any further than Oakham Mount, which was lucky because that was their destination.

“You will not be able to recover from a cold, no matter how trifling, in less than a week, Jane!”

Mr Bingley, remembering Jane’s mortal illness at Netherfield and his own torments, suddenly declared he had no desire to go on a picnic and would much rather stay indoors and read a book, or listen to Mary play the piano.

Kitty thought Jane was too lenient with Mr Bingley. She just gave him an indulgent smile and disclaimed any desire to venture forth, although now she would be condemned to their mother’s anxiety over the wedding.

The others however were happy to go, excepting Mary, who was now needed to display her talents to Mr Bingley, and they chose to walk. Two simple picnic baskets and some rugs were easily conveyed the short distance.

“Jane should have not deferred to Mr Bingley; she is not so prone to catching cold, and it really does not look like rain.”

Lizzy, who was walking with Kitty and carrying one of the rugs, laughed. “Jane has not your temperament, or my temperament. She is happy to defer to others if it does not materially disadvantage her.”

“Mama discussing the wedding breakfast for the twelfth time today is a very great disadvantage,” said Kitty.

“Oh I agree, but we must remember our mother is happy. She will not achieve her greatest happiness until we are all married, but perhaps Jane’s marriage will calm her.”

“That is not likely!” replied Kitty.

Lizzy shook her head. “No, it is not likely is it?”

“And Jane living so close!”

“You should not wish to live close when you marry?” said Lizzy.

“I should not wish to live in isolation, but walking distance …” Kitty wondered to what end her sister questioned. “I think you should wish the same, Lizzy.”

“Indeed. Mr Fitzwilliam is very handsome.”
Kitty agreed with this non sequitur as it was very true.

“His brother is also very handsome,” continued Lizzy.

“Mr Darcy is very handsome.” Kitty thought it was unfair that Mr Darcy should be left out of the conversation and the colour that suffused across Lizzy’s face was worth it. “I think he is a little less disagreeable than before.”

Lizzy had nothing to say to that, and thankfully did not seem to wish to continue questioning Kitty. Kitty had nothing to confide in her sister, or nothing she wished to confide.

Lizzy’s attention was soon claimed by Lydia, and Kitty was allowed to quicken her steps to join the two brothers. Mr Darcy was lagging somewhat behind.

Kitty was surprised he had agreed to come on this venture, but perhaps he felt that a picnic was a better prospect than a small room containing Mrs Bennet.

“This looks like a good spot,” Lizzy stopped as they came to the crest of the hill. “The ground is not so wet here.”

The gentlemen had never seen the view from Oakham Mount, so they climbed a little further to see the best view. Kitty was left to spread out the rugs, as Lizzy accompanied them and Lydia scampered off to do what Lydia liked best, which was not assisting.

Lord Ashbourne returned, as did Mr Fitzwilliam and the two of them sat down with Kitty, to look at what had been put in the baskets. That had been a hurried conversation Kitty had had with Hill.

Their housekeeper had been disgruntled by the request to provide picnic baskets. Kitty could not blame her; the weather had not improved the situation of the pantry as it had disrupted visits to Meryton and Mrs Bennet would not hear of simple food being provided for such illustrious guests.

Kitty thought that was ridiculous and that if they wished for extravagant food in a field they might as well retire entirely from Hertfordshire.

“Ah, cheese!” said Lord Ashbourne and then he sounded delighted to find bread.

“You do not object to the simplicity?” said Kitty.

Mr Fitzwilliam, wielding the cheese knife, shook his head, “Gentlemen are notoriously not fussy. As long as you provide for us, we are happy.”

“Unless it is of course peas,” said Lord Ashbourne.

Mr Fitzwilliam made a face. “Cannot abide them.”

“You are safe,” said Kitty. “Did Mr Darcy and Lizzy not wish to come back?”

Her sister and Mr Darcy were walking in the distance, stopping every now and then to speak or point something out to each other.

Lord Ashbourne shook his head. “They were discussing the view quite intently.”

“There is not much to discuss, unless they are arguing over whether it is Haye-Park or Purvis Lodge they could see, and Mr Darcy cannot expect to be an expert over such matters.”
“Darcy expects a great deal that he should not,” said Lord Ashbourne, stretching himself out. “This will be the last of the good weather. We have been lucky to have it hold out so well.”

Kitty regarded her companion as he lay propped on his elbows, face towards the sun, and legs crossed elegantly at the ankle. She could watch him because he was not looking at her. When he did look she pretended she had been watching Lizzy walking with Mr Darcy.

“How does he not propose?”

They had only spoken of Mr Darcy and Lizzy a little, and not so bluntly, but Kitty had decided that she would rather be frank with him than not. Only Mr Fitzwilliam could hear what she was saying, so she hoped it would not be thought impolitic or forward.

The Viscount laughed, “A gentleman, particularly one like my cousin, who has been refused, is reluctant to burn himself again, and I suspect a young lady who has changed her mind is reluctant to allow said gentleman the opportunity to revenge himself upon her.”

Kitty wondered that he took it for granted that she should know about the proposal. He had siblings, and yet he still thought that all of the Bennet sisters confided in one another. She envied that sense of family.

“So one should never refuse a proposal?” She tried to speak lightly.

“Lord, no, young ladies should probably say no as many times as they can. I imagine Darcy had his whole perspective of the world turned on his head. My cousin is not a man who finds his will thwarted often. It will take some getting used to, but it will do him good.”

“Whereas you are very used to getting your will thwarted,” retorted Kitty.

He laughed again, smiling at her. “No. I find it extraordinarily easy to get my way.”

“Presumptuous,” was her response, she wanted to add ‘and true’ but could not, although she suspected he knew it already.

“Indeed. But you should not think Darcy and I have been made better by our privilege.” He turned away, and played with a blade of grass. “Before very recently I had never even thought it could be necessary to think about whether what I wanted, would be best for others. For personal matters I mean, for matters of business, or for our tenant farmers that is a given, but personally, why should I worry about whether my desires might be … “

Kitty thought Lord Ashbourne had said more than he meant to say.

“You are patient to listen to me run on.”

She wanted to tell him she’d listen to anything he’d care to say. “In under a week my sister will be married.”

“But not so very far away,” said Lord Ashbourne idly, picking at the petals of a flower.

It seemed distance was on everybody’s mind today.

“Perhaps too close. Mama will not keep her distance.” Kitty shrugged. “She will be Jane Bingley, and belong to his family.”

“She will always be a Bennet, and your sister,” was Lord Ashbourne’s reply.
“Not by name she will not, and somehow that makes a difference. At least, I think Lizzy and Mama fear it will.”

“When you have a great deal of names, you realise they are worth little to who you truly are.”

“You don’t believe in the honour of a name?”

“I believe in the honour of a person. Should I be any different or act any different if I were the oldest son of a plain Mr Fitzwilliam? Actually, I should not be able to tell you as I cannot know. I hope I should not be.”

“Plain Mr Fitzwilliam or not you would still be an elder brother,” said Mr Fitzwilliam.

“I accept the compliment.”

“It was not meant as such,” was the reply.

“If you were plain Mr Fitzwilliam, then would your nickname be Fitz? Or would you be known by your first name? I think it is unfair that men should have such options.”

“Says Kitty,” said Lord Ashbourne drily.

“But that is only a corruption of my first name. My choices are my first name or a corruption. I do not have all these other choices.”

“To be fair most of my brother’s choice comes from the fact he has a title. Really though there is no choice: he has a rather ridiculous first name, and too many brothers and cousins also called Fitzwilliam. So really Ash is the only option.”

“Only for my particular friends,” said Lord Ashbourne.

“Of which you have many,” said Mr Fitzwilliam.

Kitty interrupted this exchange which was likely to descend into bickering if Kitty knew siblings, “What does this leave you Mr Fitzwilliam?”

“Freddie, as the baby of the family, I must be so infantilised! Richard, or as I like to refer to him ‘The Colonel’, is usually meant when one says Fitzwilliam or Fitz. Although occasionally if one wants to torment Darcy....”

Kitty had thought that Mr Darcy’s first name was Fitzwilliam, but she had never been game enough to inquire if she was correct. “That is truly his Christian name? Although I suppose you, my lord, should not judge as yours is ...” Kitty broke off. She did not mean to offend him.

“I do not blame you. I blame Horace Walpole,” said the aforementioned Horatio.

Kitty stared at him. “You are named after the author of the Castle of Otranto?”

The next day was cloudy but still pleasant. Kitty’s hopes that she should convince Lord Ashbourne to read the Castle of Otranto to them came to nothing. The viscount would not be moved. He had, however, suggested that they should go riding.

This plan looked as if it would come to nothing, for as Lizzy had reminded Lord Ashbourne walking back to Longbourn, the Bennet sisters did not ride and did not keep horses for themselves. However, Lizzy had forgotten that Miss Bingley and her sister kept horses for
themselves, and Mr Bingley had already purchased a mare for Jane.

Mary had taken one look at the horses and declared her devotion to her instrument, leaving four sisters to take three places.

“If you will promise to keep to a slow pace, I am happy to walk beside the horses,” said Lizzy.

“You do not ride, Miss Elizabeth?” said Mr Darcy stiffly, holding two sets of reins.

“I am afraid I had a fall as a child and as such am not fond of them. I admire them, but from a distance.”

“Well I am not going riding,” said Lydia, “How dull. I am going to Lucas Lodge and then to Meryton.”

“That could be accomplished faster on horseback, Miss Lydia,” noted Lord Ashbourne.

Lydia dismissed this piece of sense and scampered off. Lizzy looked mortified and Mr Darcy uncomfortable.

Lord Ashbourne just looked amused and Kitty wondered if that is what he had meant; the only behaviour Kitty could control was her own.

“Well, then we have the perfect number of ladies and horses, shall we be off? Bingley?”

Mr Bingley and Jane had been standing apart the whole time, and Kitty wondered when they should wish to spend any time with others. She understood love and romance, indeed she knew she was in love, but how she wished she spent her time was not how she spent her time. Kitty was not sure if this was by design or because of propriety, so she should perhaps not judge Jane and Mr Bingley.

“Oh yes, if we are all settled? Darcy, you shall look after Elizabeth, of course, and Kitty, I think Mr Fitzwilliam …”

“Do not entrust the care of a lady to me, sir!” cried that gentleman, who had not dismounted. “I am sure Miss Catherine will be the sort of rider who would annoy me most.”

“What, a capable one?” was Lord Ashbourne’s reply. “My brother rides all to pieces, I should not heed him.”

“I never do!” was Kitty’s retort as she was helped into her saddle. Was it her imagination that Lord Ashbourne held her closer than he perhaps should have? It probably was, a gentleman (barring her father when she was a child, which did not count) had never helped her into the saddle before and she did not know how it should be done.

Kitty, it turned out, was not a capable rider. Lizzy for all her complaints, or perhaps because her horse was the dullest (being Miss Bingley’s) did not have as much difficulty as Kitty.

Kitty was informed that her horse was named Fortune and Kitty wondered whether Mrs Hurst or her husband named him. The mare was certainly not Good Fortune.

“Oh! No!” cried Kitty as Fortune found a hedge fascinating. She turned to see Lord Ashbourne laughing at her. “It is not my fault! Fortune does not seem to favour me.”

That just made him laugh more. “She is a disagreeable mount, but she is untamed. Mrs Hurst has not ridden her once since she was here, and I understand she was brought down when they first
“Then why do they keep her?”

“It is very fashionable to keep a horse.”

“And never to ride?” Fortune backed out of the hedge and then careened across the lane.

“Miss Bennet, perhaps I should lead you?”

“No!” cried Kitty, feeling mortified. “I am capable of riding slowly in a straight line, I assure you!”

Her mare, however, did not agree to displaying Kitty’s true ability and began to prance about.

Lord Ashbourne dismounted suddenly and took hold of Fortune’s reins.

“I think all that will happen is Fortune will take her chance to escape and you will take a tumble. How shall I explain that to your parents?”

Kitty felt entirely humiliated: what sort of gentlewoman could not even control a horse? But it would be stupid to be stubborn. Controlling Fortune was clearly not in her capability and to take the risk of injuring herself because of her pride…inconceivable.

Lord Ashbourne held out one arm as she slid to the ground; at least there was some benefit to her precipitous end to the riding excursion.

“I shall have to speak to sternly to Bingley; I do not know what he is about.”

“We must apportion a great deal of blame to the rider. Lizzy did try to tell you that we are not horsewomen.”

“Should you like to be a horsewoman?”

“Yes, I think it could be useful, as a method of transport and exercise. Although I very much doubt I’d ever need or be able to attain the skill to hunt.”

“What about driving a team? Or even a gig? That might be more useful, if we are thinking in purely practical terms.”

“Who should teach me?” said Kitty. Whom did he expect would be able to teach her, the coachman?

Lord Ashbourne just looked at her.

“You would teach me? Have you taught many?”

“You would like references? I am afraid I have none. I have never taught a young lady. I expect you would not wish to hear Freddie’s opinion on my teaching ability. So shall it be horseback or the curricle?”

“Cannot I have both?” said Kitty.

“You drive a hard bargain!”

“I drive no bargain. I have just asked!” was Kitty’s smiling response.
“Very well, but I feel the curricle should be first, until something other than this undertrained mare presents itself.”
This chapter corresponds with the events of Part Twelve of the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV.

Chapter Twenty

It seemed that it was not only Lord Ashbourne and Kitty’s horse riding expedition that did not prosper.

Lizzy had returned in a disagreeable mood and Kitty thought that Mr Darcy too was a little out of spirits, but with him he was so much never in spirits that it was hard to tell.

“I am sorry if you did not wish to ride,” said Jane, looking distressed.

“It is not your fault, Jane,” said Lizzy, sewing quite crossly.

“I know your dislike of …”

“Jane!” Lizzy exclaimed. “Unless you are the reason Mr Darcy was born into this world, you are not the reason I am cross.”

“Mr Darcy? I thought that you …” Jane lowered her voice a little, but it was only the three of them in the parlour.

“I did, too, Jane.”

“Was it Lydia?” said Kitty. “She was very rude, I thought.”

Lizzy put down her sewing. “I am glad you saw that her behaviour was not as it should have been. That was only the start. If Mr Darcy was Mr Bingley, Jane, he should take you off to the wilds of the north and never allow you to see your family again. Except those he finds agreeable.”

Jane did not seem to know what to say to that.

“Certainly you quit your house to become a man’s wife…but that does not mean he has the right to dictate to one.”

“I think that is precisely what a husband is allowed to do,” said Jane.

“You say so because you know you are marrying a man who will deny you nothing.”

“I do not think Mr Darcy a cruel man; you said yourself that his servants at Pemberley spoke nothing but praise for him.”

“Oh, so a wife is to be a servant?” Lizzy put aside her basket with some force and left the room.

“That is not what I meant!” cried Jane.
“I think Mr Darcy and Lizzy are both very stubborn and set in their ways, they will never agree all the time. I think it does not help they cannot talk equally,” said Kitty.

“Not talk equally?” said Jane.

“No, because she knows he once loved her, and may love her still, but she cannot be so obvious about her feelings, whatever they may be. They certainly cannot speak of those feelings openly.”

Jane sighed. “Yes, it is difficult not to be able to speak openly. How did you know that Mr Darcy once admired Lizzy?”

“Is it not common knowledge?” said Kitty.

“I do not think it is,” said Jane.

Kitty did not wish to admit to eavesdropping, or betray Lord Ashbourne, so she focused on her improvements to their father’s shirts.

“Lizzy could, in private moments, be more explicit in her feelings, whether to give him hope or not,” said Kitty, attempting to turn the conversation.

“Accepting a gentleman is an important decision, perhaps the most important decision a lady can make. It is sometimes difficult to separate a mere fancy from the sort of respect and affection that a marriage should be composed of.”

Kitty privately thought it had not taken Jane very long to discover that Mr Bingley was the partner of her fate. She was some five years older than Kitty, and had, at least according to Lizzy, liked many a gentleman. However, it had merely been like and Jane had never shown a great deal of that affection to society itself. Mrs Bennet had spoken more of those affections than Jane herself.

“It is very important to be respected,” repeated Jane. “And to be steady in one’s affections; after all, the heart can be changeable. I should have been hurt, but not surprised, if Charles had changed his mind while we were separated. Also young gentlemen have more freedom to be in love many times.”

“Jane, Mr Bingley loves you. If you doubt his love in any way, you are blind. He loved you the whole time. He is just easily persuaded into actions, but not in affection.” Kitty grasped Jane’s hand to try and comfort her. “These are only silly fears before Monday, when you will be the happiest woman in the world.”

“Oh yes, I will be the happiest woman in the world, but Kitty …” Jane was unable to finish her sentence, and Kitty wondered what she had meant, because Mrs Bennet interrupted them.

Lord Ashbourne kept his promise and before long it was Kitty holding the reins. The Viscount did her the compliment of keeping a straight face, unlike Mary, who, Kitty noticed, gripped the edge of her seat with some strength.

“Come now, Miss Mary, your sister is a natural, and we are only walking. Indeed, perhaps something slower than walking...”

“But at least we are continuing in a forward motion and in a straight line,” was Kitty’s retort. “Perhaps you would feel safer if you took the reins, Mary?”

Mary looked horrified. “No, I am sure you are doing very well.”
“Then we, Miss Mary, shall sit back and enjoy our excursion.”

Lord Ashbourne was even complacent when his formidable greys were overtaken by a farmer’s cart.

“No, I quite agree with you; mastering walking is the first priority before attempting anything else,” was his response when Kitty apologised for the insult to his team.

They even came across Mr Darcy on horseback, who looked quite startled.

“Darcy! Are you off to meet the carriage?”

“Yes,” was his short reply. It looked as if he would say nothing more, but then was prompted to exclaim, “And to what does this tend?”

“What does it look like, Darcy? I am being driven about the country,”

Mr Darcy looked at the greys and then at Lord Ashbourne and at Kitty. “Well, if you think it best.”

“I am very safe I assure you, Mr Darcy. You see I have not progressed beyond a very slow shuffle,” Kitty retorted.

Mr Darcy tipped his hat at them and continued on his way.

“That was very well done,” laughed Lord Ashbourne.

“Well, it is your curricle and your horses, and you are not five.”

“No, we have established I am quite past my youth, have we not?”

“Whose carriage was he going to meet?” said Mary with unexpected curiosity.

“My cousin Georgiana’s. She has come down for the wedding. There is one of her party that might particularly interest your sister, Miss Mary.”

“One of her party?” Kitty could not think whom he meant. Did he perhaps mean Lady Matlock? Or his father?

“Her mare.”

Kitty did not know what to say to that, except surely it was such an imposition of Miss Darcy.

“Georgiana is an indifferent rider, although she has had the best instruction and the best at her disposal. She will enter into all your concerns, and as I think I spoke of before she is shy; she will welcome the established conversation topic of loaning Adeline to you.”

Any argument seemed churlish to Miss Darcy and they continued their drive.

By the end the team was even moving quite swiftly and quite without flaw, well in Kitty’s determination she was sure others in the curricle would disagree with her.

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It was not just Miss Darcy who was expected, but Charlotte Collins and the Gardiners.

Their aunt and uncle’s visit was solely to attend the wedding. They were only upset that the length
was not to be even a week. Kitty did not understand the particulars, but Mr Gardiner’s business could not do without him so for so long.

Charlotte’s visit had a dual purpose; Lady Lucas had been quite overjoyed at the idea of her first grandchild and the news had been spread far and wide. The only blight to welcoming Charlotte back for a visit was that she brought Mr Collins.

“I am surprised Lady Catherine allowed him leave for a service,” said Lizzy.

“Two services,” said Lydia. “For Emma told me they are staying two weeks at least!”

“Perhaps even Lady Catherine tires of Mr Collins,” said Lizzy.

“Lizzy,” said Jane, “you should be more charitable.”

“You have not met Lady Catherine, Jane.”

“And nor am I likely to,” said Jane contentedly. “Lizzy, have you seen the lace that Aunt brought from town?”

“Yes it is very fine; you are too good to us Aunt,”

Mrs Gardiner laughed, “Why should I not bring you gifts from London? Is that not my purpose, to provide you all with London gossip and fashions?”

“I should hope we think better of you than that,” said Lizzy.

Mrs Gardiner just smiled. “How does your mother do?”

“You will discover that for yourself very shortly,” said Lizzy. “She is ecstatic and very insistent that everybody should know her happiness.”

“And where will go on your wedding trip, Jane?”

“We go to Devon.”

“Devon? Has Mr Bingley particular interest there?”

“Neither of them does, that was the design in choosing it,” laughed Lizzy.

“Politic to the end, Jane.”

Kitty was not particularly interested in Devon. She had read about Devon, but on questioning Mr Bingley it did not sound as if they were going to see any of its great beauties, natural or manmade. Instead, she looked out of the window and thus once again was the first to see the carriage.

“Oh, we have visitors!”

Mrs Gardiner joined her immediately. “Well, you did say there was a fine party at Netherfield, Lizzy.”

A young lady was sitting in the curricle with Lord Ashbourne. Kitty tried not to feel jealous as it must be Miss Darcy.

“Is that lady Miss Darcy, Lizzy?” asked Jane.

“Yes.”
“It is a great honour that Mr Darcy should bring her to call so soon; he makes a habit of it, I see,” said Mrs Gardiner with some slyness, so Kitty could not help but giggle. “Are they often at the house?”

“Often at the house!” exclaimed Mrs Bennet, who had clearly noted their visitors from her rooms upstairs and had come to greet them. “Why sister they practically live here. I have quite some hopes from some of the party.”

“Why not all of the party?” said Mrs Gardiner, and her nieces stared at her, wondering at her encouragement.

“My girls would do for anybody, but even I cannot expect such good fortune as to have them all marry my daughters!”

The party seemed a little discomposed to be intruding upon Longbourn so soon after it had received houseguests. Mr Bingley blamed his memory for not realising, but Mrs Bennet would not hear his apologies and waved them away.

“The more the merrier, Mr Bingley, and you have met my sister and brother in Derbyshire, have you not? They are old friends then.”

Any necessary introductions were made, and Kitty had the leisure to observe Miss Darcy. If Lord Ashbourne had not said she was shy, Kitty might have thought her reserved. She sat by Lizzy, whom of course she had met before, and spoke quietly.

“Do you intend to say long in the neighbourhood, my lord, or do you and your brother depart after the wedding on Monday?” said Mrs Gardiner.

Kitty had not even contemplated that they might leave; of course, Mr Bingley and Jane would not be in residence, but surely that did not mean they would leave.

“I had not given it much thought, Mrs Gardiner,” said Lord Ashbourne.

“You do not have many demands on your time?”

“Not especially, and if I were not here, I would be at my father’s or some other friends taking part in their shooting.”

“I hope that you intend to stay,” said Mr Bingley. “My sisters and Mr Hurst are remaining at Netherfield while we are in Devon.”

“You will not wish for a full house upon your return,” said Mr Darcy suddenly. That gentleman had just taken his usual place in the window embrasure, and Kitty was sure that he and Lizzy had not resolved their disagreement with each other.

Mr Bingley seemed torn between bringing his bride home to enjoy Netherfield alone, and tossing his friends out into the cold.

“Do not fret, Bingley, you shall be gone for a fortnight, anything could happen,” said Mr Fitzwilliam.

Mrs Gardiner smiled, and whispered to Kitty, “Mr Bingley is as amiable as I remember. Your sister does very well.”

Kitty had little part of the conversation until Miss Darcy with an awkward look, moved across the room to sit beside her.
“Miss Catherine.”

“Miss Darcy,” said Kitty encouragingly. Miss Darcy seemed so retiring, which was not a common attribute amongst the young ladies Kitty knew.

Miss Darcy looked at Lord Ashbourne and then at her brother before speaking again.

“My cousin says you are not – that is you are not fond of riding.”

“Well I do not know if I am fond of it or not, I have little experience.”

“I have the experience, but not the temperament. I do not like to ride alone and my brother is not patient enough to ride so slowly with me.”

“But Lord Ashbourne says you have a pleasant mare, Adeline is her name, is it not?”

Miss Darcy smiled. “Yes, I had her brought from town. I had some thought that perhaps you might learn upon her.”

That had not been Miss Darcy’s thought, but it was good of her to claim it in company, thought Kitty. Miss Darcy was certainly more discreet than her other friends would have been.

“I should like to ride upon an Adeline. Is she named for the heroine of the Romance of the Forest?”

Lizzy, who had somehow felt the need to hover about them both, looked despairingly at Kitty, but what else was Kitty to think? She’d never heard of another Adeline!

“Oh yes! I do adore that book, although I am not supposed to as it is so very horrid.”

That declaration removed all constraint from their conversation as Kitty and Miss Darcy discovered other novels they had been quite terrified by, much, Kitty was sure, to the dismay of Mr Darcy and Lizzy.

Monday morning dawned bright and calm, the perfect day for Jane Bennet to be united to Charles Bingley.

While Jane was serenity itself, the household was all a flutter and Kitty found it enjoyable to be so useful.

It was not so pleasant to be excluded from the whispered conversations.

“They are no doubt conversations that we should not be privy to,” was all Mary would say, “at least until we are to be married.”

“Which is not likely to be any time soon,” sighed Lydia, lying upon all of Jane’s new gowns which Kitty was trying to pack.

“But if you marry, Lydia, you must only think upon one man. Do you wish that to happen too early?” said Mary.

Lydia rolled her eyes. “Jane was almost an old maid! I should die to be her age and not be long married!”
Despite these caustic thoughts Kitty was sure she saw a little tear in Lydia’s eyes when Jane stood up beside Mr Bingley. Kitty lent her a handkerchief and was not rebuffed.

“I should not like to marry him, but he will do very well for Jane,” said Lydia as they came out of the church.

Lizzy was behind them and laughed. “I am sure Jane is glad of your approbation, and now there are four.” She threaded her arms through her sisters’

“One daughter married, Mr Bennet! Let us hope we are future blessed, and soon!” was Mrs Bennet’s first concern as they set off back to Longbourn for the wedding breakfast, and all her unmarried daughters could not help but giggle.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

This chapter corresponds with Part Thirteen of the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV

Chapter Twenty-One

Kitty had not made a sound in a full fifteen minutes. Sewing a shirt should be a quite simple task, and indeed she had come a long way since her first effort. She intended to be much more refined than her first efforts and indeed for them to fit! She determined to think of her father’s proportions.

It must have been her silence and her focus on her task that caused Charlotte Collins' and Lizzy’s voices to rise.

Looking up briefly, Kitty saw that Charlotte had her hand protectively upon the swell of her stomach and she looked a little restless. Marriage to Mr Collins clearly prospered, but Kitty could not imagine Charlotte had much love or respect for her husband. Even her home could not be comfortable. Marriage was not a decision one could draw back from.

“Well, this was certainly the last time I could travel in my conditions,” said Charlotte, “though I will own it was a fortuitous time to leave Hunsford.”

“I am surprised Lady Catherine can bear the loss of Mr Collins for so long as a fortnight.”

“I quite insisted. I wanted time to talk to you privately, Lizzy; I am afraid I forgot myself.”

“You? Forget yourself in front of Lady Catherine? Never!”

“Not in front of Lady Catherine, Lizzy, in front of Mr Collins. I was speculating after Jane’s engagement and I did not perceive that Mr Collins would not understand it was the fancy of a friend. He, of course, spoke to Lady Catherine. She was highly displeased and I am surprised she only decided a letter was to the purpose.”

Lizzy shifted in her seat, and was so engrossed in her conversation she had not noticed Kitty had not moved her needle in quite some time.

“Why should this concern me, Charlotte?”

“Confess, you know my thoughts about you and Mr Darcy. Now that I am here, I think it less idle speculation and am sorry if Lady Catherine’s letter should dissuade him.”

“Mr Darcy and I?” Lizzy tried to laugh, but it was false. “Oh Charlotte. I confess my opinion of him has changed so completely. But I do not know what to think, or what to do.”

“Then let me repeat to you my advice of November last: you had better show even more affection than you feel to leave him no doubt.”

“He has already proposed, Charlotte, at Hunsford, and he was refused. I cannot show so much affection and be rebuffed. Particularly when I am not so very sure! Indeed, he has a very pleasant
affection and be rebuffed. Particularly when I am not so very sure! Indeed, he has a very pleasant house and his manners are extremely charming when around his intimates. But he has returned to Hertfordshire and the worst of his manners are still there. He is silent and grave. I cannot say that I am in love because of his well situated house?"

Kitty was curious as Lizzy did not mention Mr Darcy and her disagreement. Perhaps it had just been a lovers' tiff.

“There are many baser reasons, Lizzy! You will be well situated. If you like him, then why should you not be happy?”

“But is he really the man I could esteem higher than all others? Would the loss of him be really too great to bear? Several pleasant dinner parties and realising his goodness – is that love? I wish his aunt would come and cause trouble, then I should know whether his presence was necessary to my happiness. That and his opinion of my family…he seems determined to think ill of them.”

This conversation had become much too touch too personal for Kitty, so she folded up the half finished shirt, and packed away her sewing basket. She left the room, but could not help pausing at the door in case they should say something about her. She was rewarded and punished.

“Your sister follows my advice.”

“In showing more affection? No, she shows just the amount of affection she feels.”

“I mean in leaving the gentleman in no doubt of her own feelings. I thought perhaps it was just my mother’s idle gossip. After all, it seemed as if Mama was promoting Mr Fitzwilliam and then it was his brother. I understand she now has hopes for Mr Fitzwilliam and Emma.” Charlotte spoke lightly.

“That, Charlotte, is the problem, her initial inconsistency! And now she has her pinned her hopes where she will be disappointed and in the meantime is thinking herself above her other friends.”

“Perhaps not, and she is being productive. There can be nothing lost in her devoting herself to tasks that will materially improve her situation in life.”

Kitty could not see, but she thought it was likely that Lizzy; was giving her friend a look.

“I am all seriousness, Lizzy; these little tasks she has set herself can only recommend her to other gentlemen.”

Kitty moved away then. She did not wish to hear about other gentlemen.

She wondered if she was indeed losing her friends' regard; so when Lydia announced she was meeting Maria and Emma Lucas and walking to Meryton, Kitty said she would go too and she tried not to think about whether Lord Ashbourne would call in her absence.

Kitty found she did not miss Lydia’s company as much as she thought she would have, if not six months ago somebody had told her they would have a falling out. But Lydia was still her sister and the only sister who could enter into all her concerns with enthusiasm.

The four of them had a lively walk to Meryton, where they met the Miss Harringtons who had spent the majority of the summer away at Harrowgate, which Lydia certainly thought sounded very dull in comparison to Brighton.

She held her breath for a moment or two to see if Mr Wickham would be mentioned, but it seemed that Lydia truly had forgotten him. Her disappointment was in being able to lord it over her sisters rather than about Mr Wickham himself, and with other young gentlemen paying her attentions and
their father forgetting his strictness, Mr Wickham faded from view.

The return of the Harringtons also had the benefit of Lydia being able to relive Brighton, everybody else having grown tired of her stories. Here she had the opportunity to boast about how she had danced at the most balls, receiving the most favours and having the most desired dress. Miss Harrington took it for granted that Lydia should eclipse them, but Pen Harrington drew Kitty aside.

"Do not believe my sister; we had as many smart beaux as Lydia did! Do you remember when we dressed Chamberlayne up in my old gown? We had many a joke like that – “ She broke off to address Lydia with the same request. Maria and Emma Lucas looked shocked; they had not romped with the officers and their only attempt at the picnic to be daring had caused them to be much lectured by their mother and had left Emma embarrassed.

Lydia laughed, “Oh, we played many a good joke.” Kitty had thought them good jokes at the time, but in the light of how others had perceived them in Brighton, and Lydia’s aborted elopement, she was not now sure.

She wished she could ask the advice of ... No, she should be able to make up her own mind and not be reliant on others. Kitty stopped outside the bookseller, and stared at the window display to give her an excuse to think and not respond to Lydia’s retelling of the time they had switched all the officers’ swords and hats about just as they needed to report for duty. This led Lydia to recall the time with the pig and the ribbons and Kitty could not bear to hear it again.

Perhaps those things would be good jokes if played amongst private persons, if she’d had a brother – and it remained a private amusement?

Kitty focused her eyes when there was some movement in the shop and saw Lord Ashbourne raising an eyebrow. She blushed, it must have seemed as though she was staring; and staring at him! He did not look annoyed or importuned, instead held up a three volume novel set.

“Kitty, what are you – oh,” Lydia joined her. “Look, Pen, here is ... “

“Lydia!” Kitty dragged Lydia away from the window, sure she was bright red.

“Lord, Kitty, what are you doing? Do you not wish to flirt with – “ Lydia’s words were cut off with a vicious yank.

It was to no purpose. The Miss Harringtons might have only returned from Harrowgate a week ago, but they were up to date with all of the gossip.

“Oh Kitty! He is so handsome. You have a fine flirt,” said Miss Pen with a smile. “You made a good choice to change brothers!”

Miss Harrington smiled too, but hers did not reach her eyes. “Indeed, as long as you understand the little games they play, Kitty.”

“Games?”

“Yes, indeed, we learnt them all in Harrowgate. These fine young men do not mean a word that they say; it is very pleasant as long as you know that. You should know they make love and then flee.”

“Mr Bingley and Jane are engaged now,” said Kitty. All men did not do these things.

“Yes, I should think your family had quite used up its luck. La, look at that bonnet.”
Kitty wanted to smack Miss Harrington in her bonnet. But she did not. Instead she remained silent. She even remained silent when they discovered the notice for the upcoming Meryton Assembly.

Normally an assembly would throw Kitty into transports, even if she had danced her fill in Brighton. Now she wondered. Lord Ashbourne was attentive, but he was attentive privately. At the dance for Emma, he had not been at all particular in his attentions to anyone; of course, that was before their picnic.

To be so attentive at a public assembly was quite another matter. It would be a very certain signal of … affection? Love? Serious courtship?

If anyone had asked her the day before if she thought he would pay court to her publicly she would have said yes now she wondered. Was he really just amusing himself privately?

She could not believe it. He seemed so sincere and surely he could sense her feelings for him? She could not be explicit in words, but in almost everything else she could be and she had done so.

His company she preferred above all others, she wanted to tell him of her findings in the latest gentleman’s magazine, or of her enjoyment of Cowper. She wanted to make him read *The Woes of the Chaste Orphan Athalia*, a book recommended to her by Miss Darcy.

How wretched it was that she must wait for his pleasure.

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These musings did not make her heart leap any less when the next morning Lord Ashbourne called with Miss Darcy.

“Miss Bennet,” said Lord Ashbourne, “My cousin would not rest until I promised to ride over with her so you could spend the morning together.”

Lizzy, now so elevated as to be the Miss Bennet of the household, smiled. “And you could not prevail upon your brother to bring you?”

Kitty noticed that Miss Darcy blushed at that.

“I think Darcy knows he would be in the way in such a tête-à-tête, Miss Bennet. I certainly realise that I am. Miss Catherine, should you like to begin a riding lesson?”

Kitty most certainly did, if Miss Darcy did not mind her horse being so used. Miss Darcy did not object in the least and Lizzy only objected until Kitty made sure that Mary would come and sit on an obliging stump nearby.

“I do not like horses,” said Mary, as she planted herself down in order to read her book.

“I would be happy to teach you too, if you should like to overcome this fear,” replied Lord Ashbourne.

He held a leading rope and Kitty found it quite lowering to be led about. But the viscount was firm. Adeline and Kitty must see if they liked each other before he would trust to remove the leading rope.

“We should have done so before, but I did not know your history. Or the horse’s.”

It made conversation a little difficult but they managed. Lord Ashbourne knew about the
upcoming assembly as it fell so close to his brother’s birthday. Mr Fitzwilliam, apparently, quite saw the assembly as his own coming of age celebration.

“Papa!” Kitty cried, seeing her father, plodding on his own horse, across the field. At first she thought he might ignore her, but still in a grumpy profile he turned to come across to them.

“Well this is a welcome sight, although I hope you know, my lord, that I do not have animals enough to indulge all my daughters if they should take to riding. Do not encourage her overmuch.”

Kitty frowned at that and turned the conversation. “Where are you going, Papa? I thought you to be in your library.”

“That is where I should be, if these tenants did not come to squabble every day.”

No wonder Mr Bennet looked cross. He disliked being called out of his library to deal with the problems of their tenant farmers.

“Have you particularly problematic tenants?” asked Lord Ashbourne.

“No doubt, no more than usual. But they must argue over right of way and who should be liable for a bridge – well, plank – across a stream. And they must require my presence.”

“If you are going there now, might we accompany you? Miss Bennet requires some real practice.”

Mr Bennet brightened at the prospect, no doubt hoping that Lord Ashbourne’s presence might awe his arguing farmers into silence.

Mary was the most pleased by the arrangement, as she could escape back to the house to practice the piano if her father was to chaperone. All that had to be done was to call Lord Ashbourne’s horse from the stables, and they were on their way.

Kitty found her tongue a little tied by the presence of her father, and the two men talked a little about estates. She had talked about such things with Lord Ashbourne at the home farm, but somehow it seemed silly to speak so in front of her father; he should never believe she knew so much.

The farmers were waiting for them, standing on opposite sides of the stream looking irritable. They were only compelled to gather on one side of the stream when it was obvious that hearing each other speak, and Mr Bennet, was of paramount importance.

Kitty did not understand half of their complaints; she thought the problem was about the bridge over the stream, not chickens and disobliging rude farmers.

Mr Bennet said nothing, and Kitty could see he was committing their attitudes to memory so he might recreate them for amusement over the dinner table. Lord Ashbourne had stationed himself a little apart from them as well, no doubt out of respect for Mr Bennet who should be in control of this conversation.

“I beg your pardon, but what do chickens have to do with it?” said Kitty finally.

“Miss?” said Mr Jones, startled out of his long-winded complaint.

“I thought there was a problem with the bridge; what do chickens have to do with the bridge? Do they cross it?”
“No, Miss, I was merely showing more evidence for this here – well I would have a word for him, if a lady was not present – lack of consideration and poor management.”

Mr Smythe would have argued this point except Kitty glared at him. “Well, we should confine ourselves to the main point you wish to have resolved, do you not think?”

Mr Jones muttered that there were so many things wrong with Mr Smythe, he would not know where to begin and Mr Smythe, that there were so many things wrong with Mr Jones. However both managed to present their arguments over the bridge.

Mr Bennet said nothing, but looked a little amused.

“Well, there seems a simple solution to me,” said Kitty, thinking of what Lizzy would say when she and Lydia were squabbling.

“A simple solution, miss?” said Mr Jones, looking hopeful.

“Yes, we remove the bridge! Then neither of you would have to go to the trouble of keeping it up or guarding its use! How simple! Your problem is solved, gentlemen.”

Kitty noticed that Lord Ashbourne’s horse chose that moment to fidget and he had to turn it away. She wondered if he was really laughing.

Suddenly Mr Jones and Mr Smythe discovered that sharing the access and the upkeep of the little bridge was no difficulty at all. They should split the costs equally as really they used it both so much it was impossible to tell who got the most use out of the bridge.

“Oh that seems a much more sensible solution, how clever you are,” said Kitty finally. “Do you not think, Papa?”

Mr Bennet nodded his approbation of the plan.

“I should bring you along to all my negotiations, Kitty,” said Mr Bennet as they made their way back to Longbourn.

He rode some way in front of them as Lord Ashbourne and Kitty dawdled a little.

“I think I should bring you to some of my negotiations,” said Lord Ashbourne.

“Well, it was only a silly nonsensical argument. I should not be any use in a real debate,” said Kitty.

“You underestimate yourself I think,” was his reply, but he turned the conversation and they talked of better things and Kitty felt as if everything was right in the world.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

This chapter corresponds with Part Fourteen of the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV.

Chapter Twenty-Two

It had taken almost a week, today being Sunday, for Mrs Bennet to recover from the shock of losing her favourite daughter. It was only the recollection that in little over a week Jane would return and Mrs Bennet could take her rightful spot as the mother of Mrs Bingley mistress of Netherfield that had boosted her spirits.

“They should of course have a party. That will show Jane’s good nature and her good housekeeping,” mused Mrs Bennet. “If only they did not have such numerous company, Mr Bingley could invite some of his friends.”

“Do you think it likely that our new son has more illustrious friends than those already in situ?” said Mr Bennet, folding his newspaper.

Mrs Bennet sighed, “Well now that Kitty has quite spoiled her chances with Mr Fitzwilliam, there is little hope of their getting any of the others.”

Kitty was a little alarmed at the rather knowing look her father gave her before he responded to his wife. “Very true, my dear. But, at least, they are receiving a good education in fine gentlemen.”

Mrs Bennet sighed some more and then was distracted by Lydia’s need for a new gown.

“You have gowns enough,” said Lizzy shortly.

“Oh do not deny my poor girl. We must be such dull company as compared to Brighton.”

Kitty had not a new gown to wear to the Assembly, but she could rework an old one, and was doing just that; attempting to sew new lace and ribbons and create an overskirt.

“Do you think Miss Darcy will come to the assembly?” Kitty asked Lizzy, who was most likely to know.

“I cannot think so. She is not out. He might allow a private party, but this would be too public.”

“Not out! Why ever not? She is sixteen, is she not? Seems a very proud and disagreeable thing for Mr Darcy to do to his sister to deny her such pleasures!” Mrs Bennet did not believe in daughters being ‘in’.

“Mama, I beg you will not share this opinion with Mr Darcy. Miss Darcy is his ward and sister he does what he sees fit.”

This warm defence of Mr Darcy was, Kitty hoped, a sign that they had made up their quarrel.

“Well, we do not have to regard how he treats his inferiors,” dismissed Mrs Bennet.
“The house seems uneven without Jane,” said Kitty in a low voice.

Lizzy nodded, “I did not think I would miss her quite as much as I do. She manages to distract Mama without a fuss.”

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The next morning brought an elegant invitation to a very informal card party the following night. The invitation was made more charming by the fact it was brought by Miss Darcy. She, unfortunately in Kitty’s opinion, brought her brother with her and not her cousin, but Kitty would not hold that against her.

“May we not walk in the garden?” said Miss Darcy in that shy quiet way of hers.

Kitty was a little bewildered, as it was a little wet and it would be far more comfortable to sit indoors. But Miss Darcy became insistent so Kitty fetched her bonnet and hoped Miss Darcy’s shoes were sturdy enough.

“Oh, I wore my more hardy boots in anticipation,” said Miss Darcy on inquiry.

Kitty thought she sensed a stratagem.

“Did you mean to walk with me?”

Miss Darcy nodded. “I wanted Fitzwilliam and Miss Bennet …” she blushed. “I should not interfere. But I so wish for a sister and Miss Bennet is quite everything I should want in a sister.”

Kitty could have told Miss Darcy some of Lizzy’s faults as a sister, but it seemed cruel to deprive Miss Darcy of her perfect view.

As they took a circuit of Mrs Bennet’s formal gardens Kitty could not help but notice that everything reminded Miss Darcy of something at her uncle’s many estates.

Matlock Close was everything that was charming, Ashbourne was picturesque, and one of their other Scottish estates was vast and imposing like in a gothic romance. The roses reminded her of her Aunt’s rose garden and the discussion of whether Longbourn kept any cows made her think of her uncle allowing her to name a pretty cow ‘Daisy’ when she was a child.

Lord Matlock was a friendly man with some eccentricities, but a fondness for the world and his wife was so good natured that no one ever vexed them or upset them. They were not terrifying or argumentative. The polar opposite of Lady Catherine, who seemed a gorgon to Kitty through Miss Darcy’s eyes.

Miss Darcy was not very subtle, but Kitty could not pounce exactly on her meaning until Miss Darcy began to talk very warmly of her cousin’s attributes.

He was handsome, and well read, and very kind, and always attentive. He was the best of brothers and cousins. None of this was surprising to Kitty, but she wondered whether she had mistaken Miss Darcy’s meaning and Miss Darcy meant to warn Kitty that she was in love with Lord Ashbourne and thus Kitty had no hope.

“I do not think anyone should ever worry that he should not make a very fine husband,” finished Miss Darcy.

Kitty did not know where to look.
“I am not sure that this should be addressed to me, Miss Darcy, I …” Kitty did not know how to finish her thoughts. It had been told to her time and time again than her preferences were quite wildly known throughout the county! She needed no convincing of the viscount’s attributes! “…. I am most sensible of his good qualities.”

It was Miss Darcy’s turn to turn quite a bright red. “But I had thought that it was you who…” she broke off, and while Kitty desperately wished to press the matter she could not bear to upset Miss Darcy any further.

Kitty changed the conversation to Mr Fitzwilliam’s birthday and whether being another year old would make him more sensible.

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In Kitty’s opinion, it did not make Mr Fitzwilliam more sensible and she had to own that Lizzy’s reservations in attending a card party at Netherfield while Mr Bingley was away were not ridiculous. In the end it was Mr Darcy, of all people, who soothed her.

“Miss Bennet, in this instance it would do to remember Mr Bingley’s desires. He should not wish for his house to stand idle and allow the celebration of friend’s coming of age to pass by unnoticed. Miss Bingley is here to be hostess.”

“Well, Mr Darcy, if you find nothing improper in it, then it cannot be so,” teased Lizzy and Kitty wondered what was preventing Mr Darcy from declaring himself.

Kitty agreed to play speculation and was surprised that all of the young people, including Mr Darcy, also agreed. It seemed he was determined to be good natured.

Though it amused Kitty, and Lizzy too it seemed, that he was not particularly good at speculation.

“He dissembles,” whispered Lord Ashbourne to her.

“Who does?”

“Darcy,” said Mr Fitzwilliam who was on her other side, but spent most of his time aiding Emma Lucas.

“He plays a very good speculation,” said Lord Ashbourne, “but look: he requires so much assistance from your sister.”

“And he who despises the arts of women to draw young men in!” said Mr Fitzwilliam with a wink.

“We may play very differently in Hertfordshire.” But Kitty’s giggle gave her away. She refused to gossip further about her sister and Mr Darcy, but she could not help but look at them during the play and it did seem as Mr Darcy was asking Lizzy questions every moment or so and she did not look annoyed by the attention.

“Do you play piquet?” Lord Ashbourne asked once the joy of speculation had run dry.

“Your hope being that I do not, so you may teach me and show how proficient you are at everything?” said Kitty. She was glad he had picked a game that she did know to play, because she wished sometimes that she had not so limited an experience that he must know everything and her nothing.

Lord Ashbourne spread his hands out in mock surprise. “You wound me, Miss Catherine.”
“Well, I am sorry to inform you that I do indeed know how to play.”

She was not so skilful to win, however, but Kitty could hardly expect that since she only played occasionally with the Lucas boys or the officers. She was just glad that Lord Ashbourne was not letting her win; that would be humiliating indeed.

At one point Lizzy came to sit near them and looked at their score sheet. “I do hope you are not playing for money, Kitty.” She said in a low voice.

If they had been playing for money, Kitty would have lost all of her allowance and quite a bit more.

“We are playing for pride, Miss Bennet,” said Lord Ashbourne and Lizzy looked disconcerted to have been overheard.

“I have none of mine left,” said Kitty sadly. “Now Lord Ashbourne has a surfeit of it,” she opened her eyes widely and hoped she looked innocent.

Mr Darcy, who had arrived with lemonade for Lizzy, coughed. “I am afraid he had a surfeit of it before the game commenced.”

Kitty laughed, Mr Darcy had made a joke! At least she hoped it was a joke.

“Miss Bennet, your sister is about to begin her concerto; I have saved a space for you on the sofa.”

Lizzy accepted the glass of lemonade and Mr Darcy’s arm as they made their way into the next room to listen to Mary perform.

“Should you not wish to go hear your sister?”

Kitty lay down her cards. “She has been practicing so faithfully, it would seem rude not to.”

The Bingley sisters seemed unimpressed that the pianoforte should be commanded by anybody but themselves, and Lydia was slumped in an armchair, but the rest of the party was amenable to a concert.

“She is playing much better, I think,” said Kitty in an under voice.

“Perhaps because she does not strive too much for technical perfection,” replied Lord Ashbourne.

“Well I do not play at all well. I expect you play masterfully.”

“I am afraid to disappoint you. Although, if I had ever learnt, I should have been a great proficient!”

That was amusing, but did not quite explain why Mr Fitzwilliam and Mr Darcy who were nearby did not seem able to keep a straight face. Even Lizzy was suffering.

Kitty felt a little put out, but petulantly asking them to explain the joke would be worse so she said nothing.

Mary surrendered the pianoforte after her piece and seemed to grow quite two inches under the praise.

“Capital, Miss Mary! Now who shall delight us?” said Sir William.
“Miss Darcy plays very well indeed. She has been taught by all the masters,” said Miss Bingley. Miss Darcy looked quite ill. She had been allowed to appear at this private party, but Kitty had noticed she had not put herself forward at all. It was cruel of Miss Bingley to turn the room’s attention to her when her friend did not desire it in any way. But Miss Bingley could not conceive of a young lady not wishing to display her talents.

“I had not thought – “ Miss Darcy stammered.

“Not thought of showing the room how well you play?” Miss Bingley sounded astonished. “Mr Darcy, will you not help me convince your sister that we require to hear a true genius?”

Mr Darcy looked startled, as if he wished to assist his sister, but did not quite know how to do so without embarrassing her further. Lizzy looked torn as well, seeing that Mary too looked quite cast down after such a welcomed performance.

“But why should we hear Miss Darcy play?” Kitty found herself saying quite suddenly. “Why should we hear perfection when Miss Darcy’s talents are better used elsewhere?”

Miss Darcy looked at her in some shock.

“Did you not say, Miss Darcy, that you would assist myself in playing quite the worst duet in the world?”

Miss Darcy let out a small giggle, “I do not remember such a thing! I remember saying I should assist you and my cousin to play the worst duet in the world. I should be too afraid of my tutors suddenly appearing out of thin air to scold me if I attempted to play ill.”

It was now Kitty’s turn to glare at Miss Darcy, but she had no time to argue as her hand was claimed.

“Shall we delight the room?” Lord Ashbourne drew her to the piano and seated her there, before taking his own seat.

Under Miss Darcy’s direction, they did indeed grace the room with the worst duet in history, dedicating it to Mr Fitzwilliam’s birthday. As it was punctuated by a great deal of laughing and other young ladies coming to add their advice as to how to play, no one but perhaps Miss Bingley minded.

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“If you had not insisted on gadding about the countryside!” Mrs Bennet scolded Kitty, as her hair would not cooperate and in Mrs Bennet’s mind it was the fault of Kitty going out in the curricle the previous day and that morning.

They were gathered in Lizzy’s room getting ready for the assembly.

“But I am much improving my driving of a team, Mama!”

“And whose team shall you drive, Kitty? Your father cannot spare the horses. You would be better off being more useful!”

“Mama, Kitty is being useful. She has been a great assistance to Hill during your…distraction.”

Kitty smiled gratefully at Lizzy, surprised that Lizzy had noticed Kitty’s household assistance.
“Oh, what does that signify that she drew up some menus! Can she find herself a husband? Can you find a husband? I saw you cozying up to Mr Darcy. Well I should have thought him a fine match for one of you girls until he opened his mouth! And do not forget how he insulted you.”

Lizzy looked as if she wished to argue the point but did not trust herself to speak.

“Mama, come and assist me with my hair,” said Mary. standing. “I too have been out in the curricle and my hair is quite ruined.”

Once they had departed, Lizzy sunk down onto the bed. “Oh how I miss Jane.”

Kitty ignored the little pang that said that she could be Lizzy’s support, if Lizzy should but ask. “Did you know that Mr Darcy knows very well how to play speculation as it is quite Miss Darcy’s favourite game?”

That made Lizzy sit up. “Did Miss Darcy tell you this?”

“No, Mr Fitzwilliam and Lord Ashbourne did. I wonder why he should pretend with you that he did not know how to play?”

Lizzy laughed. “Wretched man! I should have refused to grant him a dance this evening.”

“Shall you dance with anyone else?” said Kitty.

“But then how will I know he wanted to marry me or if he only asked because he wished to oblige his sister?”

“No brother is that obliging, Lizzy.”

Lizzy cocked her head to one side, “And you, too, be careful, Kitty.”

Anything else Lizzy might had said was cut off by Lydia’s groan. “Lord, I am bored even before we have gone to the assembly. It will be nothing to anything I have seen in Brighton.”

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The rooms may have been smaller and the company less numerous and varied, but Kitty did not see much difference from Brighton. Everyone here and there came eager to dance and gossip and be merry.

Kitty had not been asked to dance and she lived in fear that such an open declaration would not occur. That he should hide himself in the card room or confine himself very properly to paying attention to everyone equally.

She had been disappointed before, but she was not to be so now.

“Miss Bennet, may I claim these dances?” He was at her side from the moment his party arrived.

She curtseyed and gave him her hand. “I am sure I should encourage you to dance with Miss Darcy, my lord.”

“Miss Darcy does not mean to dance, or should I say Darcy does not mean her to dance and even
if she meant to dance, I would much rather dance with you.”
Chapter Summary

This chapter corresponds with Part Fifteen on the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV

Chapter Twenty-Three

“Staring out the window will not make anyone appear,” said Mary over the top of her book.

Kitty turned back to her embroidery. She had cast away both Edmund Burke and Bruce’s stories about finding the source of the Nile. She found them fascinating if heavy works, but she found she could not concentrate.

If she did not force herself to concentrate, the pillow she was working on would be equally spoiled.

“But why has no one come?” she found herself complaining.

The Assembly had been perfection. She had danced twice with Lord Ashbourne, once with Mr Fitzwilliam and even Mr Darcy had asked her to dance. She had found him not an unpleasant partner, although he was rather imposing and he did not seem to wish to speak a great deal. She had not ignored her old favourites either, remembering what Lizzy and Charlotte had spoken of, but she had also had plenty of free dances and supper where it seemed ordained that Lord Ashbourne should also be free and available to chat.

There could not have been a greater indication that he might be serious and yet he did not come. He must know that now everybody had quite forgot their silly idea that Kitty had preferred Mr Fitzwilliam.

She tried to tell herself that Mr Bingley had sought Jane out in such a way and that at first had come to naught and Mr Bingley was quite free in the world with no family (apart from his sisters) who could disapprove his choice. Lord Ashbourne was not so free and Mr Bingley’s situation in life was nothing to his.

Lizzy wandered in idly and seemed very dull too.

“How empty life feels the day after a ball,” she sighed. She picked up Burke and made a face before setting it down.

Lizzy had danced twice with Mr Darcy, and every time Kitty had seen her she had been with him.

“Perhaps the Lucases will call,” said Lizzy with not a great deal of enthusiasm.

“The gentlemen did call and have gone shooting with Papa,” said Mary, shutting her book. “I was not so knocked up from dancing that I was awake early enough to see them.” She then turned away and began reading again. This was a certain signal that she would answer no questions even, though both her sisters had sat up quite rapidly.
“Mary, you are unkind,” said Kitty.

“Mama will be pleased that they have come,” said Lizzy. “Come, we should not be so listless with just our company. We are intelligent women. We want no gentlemen to enliven our day.”

Kitty and Lizzy attempted to rally and found that playing at letters soothed their tempers. Even if they both kept forming words of a romantic persuasion.

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“It is a great pity they did not come in,” said Mrs Bennet over dinner that evening.

“They would not trespass upon you in all their dirt,” said Mr Bennet calmly.

Kitty thought that a poor excuse.

“Now, Lizzy, I wish to speak to you about something,” said Mrs Bennet, laying down her knife and waiting until the servants were out of the room. “I wish to speak to you about it with your father present so there can be no confusion as there was with Mr Collins.”

Kitty and Mary looked at each other in some awkwardness and Lydia just snorted.

“Mama, we may speak of this later, and privately.”

“No, I shall say it now. I noticed that Mr Darcy was very attentive to you. Now I know we have spoken about his ill temper and how you should never dance with him even if he did ask you, but I see you discredited that advice, which was quite sensible.”

“Mama, I do not think my sisters need to…” Lizzy threw a pleading look also to their father, who just seemed amused.

“But I have been thinking, Lizzy, he has ten thousand a year and a very great house if your aunt is to be believed. You may marry him and never see him! And Miss Darcy does not look as if she would give you any trouble.”

“Mama!”

“Do not keep ‘Mama’-ing me, Lizzy! You have already refused one very fine match, if you do not flirt and continue to do whatever it is that has attracted Mr Darcy, I will be done with you! Do you hear me, Mr Bennet?”

“I do indeed. Am I supposed to object to Mr Darcy? I find I do object to him greatly if that is of assistance!”

“There can be nothing to object to with Mr Darcy!” cried Kitty on seeing her sister’s face. “He is a little cross, but then he might be cheered by having a wife. It cannot be so very nice to have had the guardianship of his sister and the responsibilities of an estate so early in life.”

“Well there you hear it, Lizzy, you are to marry Mr Darcy and never see him according to your mother and marry him solely to cheer him up if you believe your sister.”

Lizzy chose to excuse herself.

Kitty found her sister after dinner and tried to apologise.

“I did not mean to make things worse…” She had not indeed. It had just seemed unfair that Lizzy should listen to Mr Darcy being abused by her own parents.
“Oh you did not, it is my own fault. I know Mama’s temperament but I thought that my father would be more understanding.” Lizzy squeezed her hand. “You are quite clever when you mean to be, Kitty. I did not think for some time about what difficulties Mr Darcy might have. I just saw a proud ill-tempered young man and did not care to inquire why he might be so, even when I knew his circumstances.”

“Ten thousand pounds a year does not alleviate all ills,” said Kitty.

“No, and I am not sure I should have quite the strength of Mr Darcy if I should have been in his shoes.”

This was a mournful turn of conversation and Kitty did not care for it. “Fitzwilliam.”

Lizzy blinked at her.

“That is his name. Fitzwilliam Darcy. It is not a name that eases off the tongue.”

Lizzy giggled. “No, it is not.”

“Should you name your first son Bennet?”

“I do not see why not, if it is a tradition in the family,” then Lizzy blushed at what she had implied and Kitty wisely did not press her.

“How long do you think before Mama visits Jane? They arrive on Monday night, do they not, before your birthday?”

“I think she might be there to greet them. Oh poor Jane,” sighed Lizzy.

“Poor Jane has just spent a fortnight in Devon with her husband,” retorted Kitty.

“And then surely the party at Netherfield must depart,” said Lizzy. “We shall miss them shall we not, but they cannot stay here forever.” She sounded wistful but Lizzy was also looking at Kitty intently.

Kitty did not want to think about anyone leaving, so she pretended she did not understand her sister.

Several days passed away quietly. Mr Darcy came to call more frequently, at first bringing Miss Darcy and then calling on his own.

Kitty made herself scarce and was ably assisted by her continued riding and driving lessons. One morning they suddenly thought of Jane’s mare, and Miss Darcy was able to attend them.

During the evenings, both Kitty and Lizzy attempted to convince their mother that camping at Netherfield awaiting Jane’s return would look most peculiar and they must trust that Jane and Mr Bingley would attend to them promptly.

“After all, it is Lizzy’s birthday. Jane should wish to celebrate with her!” cried Kitty.

“Oh, have it your way. I think it most objectionable that you should be quite cruel to me. I only wish to see my eldest daughter and how she flourishes as Mrs Bingley. She will need me to help direct her servants and how to oust Miss Bingley, for I see she will be a sly one and not wish to
give control over to Jane.”

“I do not disagree with Mama,” said Lizzy to Kitty as they sat sewing in a corner. “Miss Bingley may be difficult but it is Jane’s problem to deal with, not ours.”

“Miss Bingley, I think, probably does not wish to keep up her brother’s house; she would rather her own establishment! Why then should she wish to continue the bother when she does not have to, or seem so rude?” said Kitty.

“That is true,” conceded Lizzy. “I hope Jane is successful. Netherfield is so different from Longbourn.”

Kitty thought that Lizzy was not thinking of the difference in station between Netherfield and Longbourn. She still did not understand why Mr Darcy had not proposed. His attentions had become more marked. Perhaps he waited until Jane returned so that Lizzy might share her happiness with her beloved sister?

They were correct, and Jane and Bingley presented themselves early on Lizzy’s birthday.

“Oh Jane!” cried Lizzy. “How well you look! Devon must agree with you, and you too, my dear brother.”

Bingley smiled and placed all of his parcels down upon the table. “Now I fear, despite it being your birthday, these are not all for you, Elizabeth.”

Lydia fell upon the parcels and had to be pulled away by Mary.

“They are not all for you, either,” said Mary.

There turned out to be one for each sister and an extra for Lizzy; after all it was her birthday.

In Kitty’s parcel was a very fine shawl and a book that surveyed Devon.

“So you may tell us what it was we should have seen, Kitty,” said Bingley with a smile.

All of the sisters received shawls, and Mary some sheet music and Lydia some more ribbon and lace. Lizzy received a beautiful watercolour that must have needed some care in transporting. The other parcel Jane would not let her open, whispering to Lizzy that it was for her trousseau. Lizzy quite blushed.

“Why does she blush?” said Mrs Bennet, put out that she had not received a parcel, until Mr Bingley recollected he had forgotten it in the carriage.

“Jane has bought her things for her trousseau” said Lydia loudly.

This reminded Mrs Bennet of her plans for Mr Darcy and Lizzy, which allowed Lizzy to be the centre of conversation on her own birthday, but in a manner of Mrs Bennet’s own choosing until even she grew bored of the conversation.

“Oh Lizzy, I had hoped,” said Jane, once Mrs Bennet had finally been drawn off by the ever patient Bingley.

“You had hopes! I had hopes,” said Lizzy. “We seem to be in perfect charity. We understand each other; there is no constraint in our conversations. We have forgiven our past selves and each other.
There seems to be nothing preventing him!”

Kitty thought again that Mr Darcy was no doubt waiting until Jane returned, but she did not say so because if she was wrong she did not want to raise and then dash hopes in her sister.

She knew how difficult it was to hope and wonder: when?

“Perhaps he is still unsure of how you feel or ...“

“Between his aunt and his sister, I do not see how that is possible.”

“His aunt? Has Lady Catherine been here?”

“No, she has however written to Mr Darcy, and to Lord Ashbourne. Mr Collins told her that an engagement was expected. Of course her ladyship disapproves and I think we were only saved from her appearance by Lord Ashbourne’s presence here. She trusts him, I think, to prevent Darcy from making a misalliance.”

Lizzy then shot another look at Kitty, but when she saw Kitty was looking at her, Lizzy turned uncomfortably.

“I will say no more, but I think he found her letters (for of course his lordship showed Mr Darcy his letter) illuminating. He knows that I should have contradicted such a report if it were not true. If I had no hopes and expectations, I would have no scruples to say such a thing and have it reported there was little chance of such a marriage.”

Jane smiled. “Do not lose hope.”

“No, I shall not. Although please do not chase Mr Darcy out of Netherfield? For my sake could you bear to have your house invaded for a little while longer?”

Jane laughed. “For you, I could bear anything.”

Mr Darcy called the next day, but, as he called with his sister and his cousins, any hopes the household might have that he might declare himself were dashed.

“Mr Darcy, you do us such an honour,” said Mrs Bennet.

Mr Darcy looked uncomfortable at the change in attitude of Mrs Bennet. He was clearly used to being abused by her.

“Not at all,” he said shortly.

“We thought it best to vacate as best as possible to allow the Bingleys time to settle,” said Lord Ashbourne.

Mrs Bennet spoke at some length about Jane’s perfection before suggesting they should take a walk.

“It is such a pleasant day, it seems a shame to have you young people cooped up in here.” She said this with such a wink that Kitty felt a little mortified.

Everyone readily agreed to such a suggestion, ignoring Mrs Bennet’s blatant hint, but it was not at all surprising that Mr Darcy and Lizzy should naturally fall into step.
“Shall we walk into Meryton?” said Mr Fitzwilliam, linking arms with Miss Darcy.

“An admirable objective,” said Lord Ashbourne, offering his arm to Kitty.

Once they managed to get beyond Longbourn’s borders, Lord Ashbourne looked behind him at Mr Darcy and Lizzy and said to the rest of their party, “And now I propose that we four walk very quickly into Meryton and then perambulate around for a little while. After all, it worked so very well last time.”

Miss Darcy was the only one for whom this had to be translated, but after she was made to understand she insisted that it must be so and was the quickest walker.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

This chapter corresponds with Part Sixteen of the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV

Chapter Twenty-Four

“Oh he did wish to wait for you! And Bingley,” cried Lizzy. “Oh come in, Kitty, come in, Mary; you are not being very subtle there!” Lizzy waved them into Jane’s bedchamber.

Kitty had been disappointed the previous afternoon for there had been no sign of an engagement. Their happy little party had wasted as much time in Meryton as possible, but while Mr Darcy and Lizzy had certainly been even longer than themselves, when Lizzy returned to Longbourn she was close-mouthed.

Kitty had wanted to ask her directly, but Mary reminded her it might be embarrassing if nothing had occurred and they should know soon enough. After all, they were to dine at Netherfield the next evening.

The girls had walked to Netherfield early, ostensibly to help Jane, but since Lizzy seemed determined to go alone, Kitty knew she must wish to talk to Jane.

“Yes, Mr Darcy has proposed,” said Lizzy to her sisters' looks and then accepted Kitty’s hug. “These two have been following me about all day wanting to hear my news, but I wished to tell you first, Jane.”

Jane looked close to tears. “Oh Lizzy, how happy I am for you!”

“I am very glad, for I am so happy myself!”

“When does he ask our father?” said Jane.

“Tonight! Oh Lord, I had not thought of Mama finding out here at Netherfield!”

“We will try and shield you,” said Jane, “but you cannot blame her for being so happy.”

“Maybe, but surely I may object to her manner and her insistence on it being all her own doing!”

Kitty soon grew impatient to be downstairs and to see the other inhabitants of Netherfield.

It was such a large house that she made several errors before finding the sitting room.

“I do not see why they all came so early, it is only a family dinner party. I think Jane can handle the arrangements – Oh Miss Catherine, how nice to see you.” Miss Bingley was insincere.

Kitty looked around the room, but it was only Miss Bingley and her sister. Mr Hurst was on a sofa, but he did not count.

“Are you looking for anyone in particular?” said Mrs Hurst in a tone Kitty did not care to
interrogate.

“No, it is just a very fine room.” Kitty did not think she sounded convincing so she sat down and waited.

She was rewarded very shortly when Mr Darcy and Lord Ashbourne entered the room deep in discussion Kitty could not help standing upon their entrance and fixing them with a great smile. Mr Darcy seemed a little surprised until he must have recollected that Lizzy should have told her of their engagement.

“Miss Catherine,” he said with a bow. Kitty accepted salutations from Lord Ashbourne also.

“Do not let him take all the credit,” said Kitty. She would have been more explicit but she doubted that Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst had been told the good news.

Mr Darcy blinked at that and looked at Lord Ashbourne and then smiled. “I shall endeavour not to, but he is rather difficult to persuade out of the notion that everything happens because he commanded it.”

Miss Bingley, who did not understand this conversation, called Mr Darcy over to her in order to stop it; as this left Kitty with Lord Ashbourne, Kitty did not mind.

Her only disappointment in the evening was that Jane had not placed her anywhere near him during dinner. She supposed this allowed her to pay attention to her meal. Mr Hurst would not speak of anything but a ragout and Mr Bingley was still too transfixed on Jane to be much of a conversationalist.

“You must be hoping that Mrs Bingley takes your daughters into society, Mrs Bennet,” said Miss Bingley, fanning herself as they waited for the gentlemen to return.

“Oh yes,” said Mrs Bennet. “My daughters will do very well for themselves.”

“Indeed they already have; they are so accomplished,” said Mrs Hurst and more than one lady, though not Mrs Bennet, felt her true meaning.

“Well, I should like to have your daughters for sisters,” said Miss Darcy boldly and Kitty knew then she also knew of the engagement.

“Perhaps you shall,” said Mrs Bennet wistfully, not knowing that her wildest dreams were about to come true in perhaps a quarter of an hour.

When Mr Bennet and Mr Darcy finally returned to the ladies, Mr Bennet called Lizzy away for a moment, but they soon returned and Mr Bennet was announcing his congratulations to the whole party.

If some of the party were disappointed, Mrs Bennet's effusions were enough to disguise them. Although that lady, after properly taking in whom she was to call son-in-law, was more muted in her joy that anyone had any expectation of her being.

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The days after the excitement of Lizzy’s engagement had not given Kitty a chance to really observe either sister in their joy. They had been too full of watching Mr Darcy unfold in temperament and smile more and for arguments over the wedding date (that was Lizzy and their mother. Mr Darcy would acquiesce to anything).
Kitty wanted to really observe Lizzy in her newly betrothed state and Jane in her marriage. Kitty did not know what she expected. Jane looked as she ever did. Apart from the cap now upon her head, there was no visual evidence that Jane was now a married woman and fully immersed into that secret world.

Lizzy and Jane were walking on the lawn of Longbourn, and Kitty wondered if they were turning every word of Mr Darcy’s proposal over and over again. Kitty could not imagine that Mr Darcy would be particularly passionate or romantic but one never knew.

Kitty was engaged in cleaning one of the windows. Mary had suddenly become quite taken with teaching herself to watercolour, and had determined that it was the dirtiness of the windows that was skewing her eye. Mrs Bennet refused to upend her strict cleaning schedule, so Kitty was keeping the peace by cleaning the windows herself.

She opened it in order to do so and found that she could hear Lizzy and Jane’s conversation as they came to sit on a bench directly below. Kitty knew she should announce her presence and she would have done so if they had not begun to speak about her.

“I am so very happy, Jane. I thought it would never happen. A second chance is not to be thrown away so lightly. No, it is not of myself I wish to speak. It is Kitty. It is Kitty we should worry about.”

“Why should we worry? She seems so very happy. Indeed, I have not seen her so well looking.”

“Before you went away we talked about the possibility of her being in love with Lord Ashbourne. I thought perhaps it was a fancy, particularly after her attention to his brother! But Lord Ashbourne is handsome and personable and she is very young. You liked many a stupid person – not that he is one! – before your heart was truly captured. I have liked several very stupid people. I thought it would fall away to nothing after a little while, but I believe she is very much in love.”

“Then what should we worry about?”

Kitty wished she could see their expressions.

“Can you see the heir to an earldom proposing to the daughter of an obscure country gentleman?”

“Mr Darcy proposed to you, twice!”

“Mr Darcy does not have a family to please. And he does not have a title. His expectations are little compared to… and…”

“And what, Lizzy?”

“I do not wish to speak well of myself and ill of my sister, but I am older and, I hope, wiser. She is much improved since Brighton but she will never be serious. She will always enjoy a good joke and to race about in a curricle at high speed. Many a gentleman would find that attractive but I am not sure how many would require it in their wives.”

“You think that Lord Ashbourne is dallying with her?”

“I think he likes her very much while he is here, but I think that is all it is. He strikes me as the type of man who wants and expects amusement and enjoys the attention of pretty girls. Kitty is a pretty girl who is quite happy to give him all of her attention. I cannot imagine what they speak of gallivanting about practically every day.”

“Mary no longer goes with them?”
“Oh no, I have spoken to Papa in case there was any suggestion that they should go off alone together and there has never been any. I think it another sign he cannot be serious for he makes little effort to get to know her alone.”

“Have you spoken to Mary? What does Mary say they speak of?”

“Mary says they speak of trifling and nothings. What did she say – ‘It would quite embarrass you to hear of what they speak.’ Does that sound like you and Mr Bingley learning about each other?”

Jane gave a little sigh. “I should not like to see Kitty hurt, and it would be quite uncomfortable if it comes to nothing and if you should ...“

“You see why I worry? I do not want her heart broken. After Brighton and her trying so very hard to understand the world better, it would be so upsetting. She does not deserve to be ill-treated. Not that I think he does so deliberately. I expect London understands such flirtations and he does not comprehend what standing up twice at a Meryton Assembly means to everybody else. Do you see, Jane?”

“I do, but have you not tried to speak to her?”

“I have, but she just looks at me and I do not have the heart to speak to her about it. ”

Kitty did not recollect their conversations in that way; she thought Lizzy had been entering into all her thoughts with her, not against her!

“My dear Mrs Bingley!” That was Mr Bingley. Kitty saw his grin as he walked across the lawn.

“Charles.”

“I did not want to be parted with you for so long, but you are frowning... you are not angry with me?”

“Not at all, we have just been discussing a difficult matter.”

“Well your difficult matters are my difficult matters now.”

Kitty imagined they were beaming at each other.

“It is my sister, Kitty. Her heart is likely to be broken,” said Lizzy bluntly.

“By whom?”

“Mr Darcy’s cousin.”

“Oh, I do not think she is in love with Freddie; they are too like brother and sister.”

“Not Freddie.”

“Really?” Mr Bingley sounded truly astonished. He really had not seen anything but Jane until their wedding, had he, thought Kitty.

“Yes, and we do not know what to do. Could you speak to him?”

“Me speak to Lord Ashbourne about what?” Mr Bingley sounded a little strained.

“How he should not tease Kitty. He should let her down gently. He is raising great expectations.
In Kitty at least. I am surprised my mother has not had the thought in her head. That should be enough to tell Kitty how foolish it is! Our mother thinks it is impossible.”

There was a spluttering sound. “Now I would do anything for you my dear sister, and my dearest Jane, but I cannot imagine that Lord Ashbourne would receive my - - It should come from your father.”

“My father says a girl likes to be crossed in love, and thinks Kitty being crossed by a Viscount will have her elevated in the respect of the neighbourhood. She will be the receiver of so much consolation and that is all a girl wants.” Lizzy sounded disappointed in their father.

“Charles, perhaps drop a word in his ear that we do things differently in the country. So many people doubted your honour – not me, of course– when you left Netherfield. It was very uncomfortable for me to know that everyone was talking about – “ Jane broke off sounding distressed.

It seemed Mr Bingley got down on his knees and Lizzy retreated a little way to give the married couple time to whisper at each other. Offers of penance from one and boundless forgiveness from the other.

“So you will speak to him?” said Lizzy at length.

“I will observe him and – hang it, cannot you ask Darcy?”

“I ask Darcy?” Lizzy sounded shocked. “I cannot become engaged to him and ask him to ….”

“You must know he would do anything for you, even tell his cousin that he is trifling with a female’s affection. A cousin that is a handy shot and knows how to lay a man flat in seconds. I have seen him do it.”

Kitty had to agree with Mr Bingley; she had seen Lord Ashbourne do it, too.

“I think Mr Darcy would be the best choice. He knows his cousin. He must know that his lordship does not mean to be cruel.”

“Oh Jane, you think the best of everyone.”

Kitty could not listen to this any longer. She closed the window softly and withdrew to her room to have a cry.

She wished she could trust her judgement. But she was so foolish and had shown him all her worst qualities. What could he see in her to judge her worthy?

All of their conversations and pleasant times -- was that really enough to make him forget the stupid child standing in the middle of the street in Brighton? She loved him so much and surely the world would not be so cruel as to make her feel so much for it to come to nothing!

“Kitty, did you not clean the ...Whatever is the matter?” Mary closed the bedroom door behind her.

“Oh Mary, I have been so stupid.”

Mary sat warily on her bed. She was not used to being the recipient of tearful confessions.

“How could I think he loved me? Jane and Lizzy are right he is just trifling with me. I have no money, nothing to recommend myself except…myself and that is no mean thing!”
Kitty could not stop her weeping and her ramblings until Mary stuck a handkerchief in her hand. “You are upset because Lizzy and Jane think that Lord Ashbourne does not care enough about you to marry you?”

“Yes, because they are right. I have no ... “

“You are singularly stupid,” said Mary.

“Exactly!” Kitty was glad Mary was joining her fully in her thoughts.

“He will ask you to marry him. No doubt he is waiting for some ridiculous moment to do so.”

“Mary, you cannot know that!”

“I have spent hours chaperoning you. I have listened to all of your conversation where you seem to be of one mind, or arguing passionately. I have borne this like Fordyce and Hannah More would ask me to bear it. I have also learned far more than I should like to about certain subjects like the wealth of nations, the production of labour and where in England one can find the best cheeses!”

Mary stood up.

“He has discussed politics with you, the Economy. Morality! He exposed himself as the worst pianoforte player in the history of the pianoforte!”

“That does not mean he likes what he heard. That does not mean that he can overlook – that he is not – he has had so many young ladies to chose from, who can say what his intentions are! Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley took over a year to declare themselves!!”

“He will declare himself because I have asked him about his intentions every Wednesday for five weeks now and no doubt I will ask him again tomorrow.”

Kitty stared at Mary, but Mary had not finished.

“I am beginning to suspect he has not declared himself just to annoy me.”
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

This chapter corresponds with Part Seventeen of the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV

Chapter Twenty-Five

Kitty did not know if Mary had asked Lord Ashbourne again or indeed when in the past she had found the time to ask him. It had lent a certain constraint to the next day’s curricle ride and Lord Ashbourne had had to ask her if she was quite well.

She had managed to answer him quite levelly and take command of the greys again and soon she felt almost able to engage him in a conversation.

“Are you to remain until Lizzy and Mr Darcy are to be married?”

“I expect I shall return for their wedding. I am afraid there will be pressing business to attend to in the near future.”

That was not encouraging and Kitty shot a look at Mary, whose blank face did not assist.

“But you are pleased for Mr Darcy?”

“I am astonished he should find such a good natured woman to agree to marry him; she must not know his tendency to sulk when it’s raining and he is stuck indoors.”

“She does the same,” confided Kitty.

“Then I shall endeavour to never be at Pemberley when it rains,” he replied.

“I hope that I shall see Pemberley, whether it is raining or not. I think Lizzy means to invite me.”

That roused nothing in the viscount’s face so Kitty tried a different tack. “Jane says that Bingley is talking of taking a house in Derbyshire when the lease for Netherfield expires.”

“It is a very good country and it has many attractions.”

“The distance from my mother,” said Kitty.

“I should have said the nearness of his advisor and for Mrs Bingley her sister.”

No topic of conversation seemed promising, but the expressions on his face made Kitty think he was teasing her. He would not speak until he was ready, and then she should be allowed to strangle him. After accepting, of course.

So Kitty tried no more to bring him round to such a topic of conversation and instead asked him his opinion of Gibbons. If he would not propose, then he might as well be forced to talk about the fall of the Roman Empire, a most dreary topic.
“Kitty!”

Kitty was just going to assist Hill with some small household matter when Mary gestured at her.

“Mary, what is it? I need to …” she was cut off when her sister most uncharacteristically pulled her to the servant’s stairs. “Mary!”

“Shush!” said Mary, stopping only when they came near to the servant’s door into Mr Bennet’s library.

Kitty could hear voices, but she still did not understand her sister until Mary pushed the door until it was open a sliver. Then Kitty could see a little as well as hear better.

“This seems a comfortable library.”

“It is not a library, my lord, it is a shelter from storm,” replied Mr Bennet drily. “Now what may I do for you?”

“Have your tenants begun to live in harmony?” Lord Ashbourne took a seat after being gestured into one by Mr Bennet.

“I think I have little hope of that, but they are not so discontent. Should you like a drink?”

As Lord Ashbourne clearly indicated that he would, they could only see a tiny part of his profile; the gentlemen took some moments to savour whatever it was that they were drinking.

“Now, I do not think you came in all this state to merely ask me about my tenants. I have had some practice at receiving young men recently. I have begun to see the signs.”

“Have you?” said Lord Ashbourne. “I should not like to be so obvious.”

“I am afraid you have been. Luckily, your situation in life has clouded most from perceiving the true intentions of your actions. At least I hope, for my daughter’s sake, that you are not here out of a matter of honour. The neighbourhood marries my daughters off to any man that speaks to them; you shall not be disgraced and condemned, at least not for very long, if you leave without a wife. After all this has been an acquaintance of short duration.”

Kitty felt her breath leave her; what was her father about? Was this the time for him to worry about her?

“It is not so short a duration. I have been at Netherfield for just over seven weeks.”

“Seven weeks is nothing compared to a lifetime,” said Mr Bennet.

“I first saw your daughter on a beach in Brighton. Does that relieve your mind?” said Lord Ashbourne.

Kitty felt Mary’s eyes staring at her but she kept her eyes on the gap in the door.

“I thought my foolish youngest daughter left Kitty on a street.”

“She did.”

“Ah. She has done well to conceal it.”
“There was nothing to conceal. I speak only to reassure you that this is not the desire of a capricious young man.”

“Well then, I suspect all you have to do is ask me.”

“I should like to formally ask for your daughter’s -- Catherine’s, in case we were talking at cross purposes, -- hand in marriage. Do you have any objections?”

Kitty stuffed her hand in her mouth to keep her from exclaiming.

“None at all my dear boy! Although I must warn you about one thing.”

“What is that, sir?”

“I have a number of shirts that I shall wish to gift you.”

“Shirts?” Lord Ashbourne did indeed seem startled by this.

“Kitty made them some weeks ago, but as I do not think they were quite intended to be worn by me, it does seem a pity to waste them.”

“I shall accept them gratefully.”

“Good, good. Now one other thing. I should slip out quite quietly. It would not do for Mrs Bennet to hear of this before my daughter. You would then never be quite sure of the answer you would get, would you?”

“Oh I would be. I just hope that she is.”

Mary!” called Lizzy up the stairs. “My sister will be with you in one moment.”

Kitty could have strangled Lizzy at that moment. She had been standing in the foyer waiting for the sound of wheels and horse hooves.

Kitty had intended upon leaping into the curricle, well perhaps not leaping, but some very swift climbing, although she had not really considered the fact that Mr Darcy would first have to climb down in order to vacate a seat for her.

However if Lord Ashbourne did not now take the opportunity to be alone, then Kitty really would despair.

Mary joining them was not part of her plan, or she hoped Lord Ashbourne’s. It was not in Mary’s plan either, based on the slow way she came down the stairs.

“Hurry up, Mary!” said Mrs Bennet, waving her handkerchief. “We do not want the house full of silly girls for Mr Darcy.”

Mr Darcy was to be granted every desire close to his heart, and Mrs Bennet found herself in one mind as her prospective son-in-law and lived in daily fear he would take back his offer to rid herself of her most problematic daughter. Who else would want to marry such a hoyden?

“My dear Mrs Bennet, Mary has been practicing her sonata. Do not deprive her of the opportunity of displaying her talents. What say you, Mr Darcy? My Mary wishes to play for you all!”

Mr Bennet stood in his library door with an amused expression on his face as he spoke to Mr
Darcy, who clearly did not know what to say to this, and the look on Lizzy’s face was comical. But Kitty did not stay to hear anyone’s response and ran to the curicle, allowing herself to be handed in, and in a moment, a clutch of her bonnet, they were off and Longbourn faded rapidly out of sight.

“Mary’s piano playing cannot be that bad that you wished to flee so fast,” said Lord Ashbourne, who had heard their conversation from his seat in the carriage.

“Oh she has much improved, but she has not been practicing a sonata!”

“Strange then that Mr Bennet should say she was.”

“I think he was scheming,” said Kitty, not wanting to admit she had been listening behind the door the previous night, but not being able avoid hinting.

One look at Lord Ashbourne’s face and she realised she did not have to hint. Somehow he knew.

“How did you know? Can you see through doors? That is truly not fair!”

Lord Ashbourne burst out laughing, but did not lose control of his team. “No, but I think by now I can read your face.”

Kitty did not give him the satisfaction he so clearly wanted; she just looked at him.

“Well then, I expect I do not have to say anything. That is very good because then I won’t make a mull of it.”

“No! You cannot – I may not accept you.”

“Are you planning on refusing me?”

“No,” said Kitty honestly.

“Well then,” was his lordship’s reply and Kitty was not sure what she thought. She was happy that they understood each other, but it was hardly romantic. They drove along in silence for a moment until Kitty realised that they were for Oakham Mount.

Lord Ashbourne drove his horses as far as he was able before he pulled up (he clearly did not wish to risk getting stuck in another rut); he handed her the reins while he climbed down to secure the horses to a helpful fence.

“I should drive off and leave you here!” called Kitty.

“I do not wish to tempt you with my opposition, but if you do not come down you will not hear what I have to say.”

That declaration made Kitty jump down and they walked arm in arm up towards the top to take in the view.

The view made Kitty smile, she had not walked up here many times before; there had been no men to tempt her or Lydia for long country walks. She could see the Gouldings' house and turned to point it out to Lord Ashbourne.

He was on one knee and Kitty found herself surprised and overwhelmed despite her certainty of its occurring.

“Miss Bennet, Catherine, Kitty will you – “ he took her gloved hand in his, frowning at it for a
moment, and then he undid the button of her glove and slid it off before he reclaimed her hand.
“Miss Bennet, Will you let me look after you? Protect you? Cherish you? And love you?”

Kitty could only nod mutely after each declaration.

“Kitty, will you do me the very great honour of consenting to become my wife?”

She nodded.

“I am afraid I cannot comprehend you – “

“Yes….yes,” Kitty found her voice.

Then it was the moment: she would be taken into his arms and she would properly understand
love and be kissed properly. Not a sloppily applied set of lips to the corner of her mouth, or a
complete miss to her cheek but the kiss, the only kiss that would matter.

She put her hands on his shoulders as he pulled her closer ... “Why? ….Why me?” Kitty chastised
herself; why was she asking this question at this juncture? Did she truly care?

“That may require a long answer; must I remain on my knees?”

Kitty took a step back. “Oh no, no, I’m ... “

He caught her face in his hands as he stood up. “Don’t be silly. The reason why I want to marry
you is because you are you.”

“That is not a very good reason. We are so disparate. Our ages, our fortunes, our families. You
know many young ladies, you have known many ladies. All of whom are probably better born
and better endowed.”

“None that I want to grow old with. None I want to travel with. None I want to teach. None I
want to learn from. That is the difference.”

“You could grow bored of me,” said Kitty, trying to distract herself from the warmth spreading
throughout her face and body.

“I think it likely to be quite the opposite. You have a curiosity and tenacity ... “

“And silliness.”

“I have not forgotten the silliness and if you have not noticed I do not view the world in a serious
manner, I have been quite remiss.”

“You take your duties seriously. I know others would not think so, but I know you do. But I
know why you pretend not to ... “

“You see through me, Miss Bennet. Do you believe I see you?”

Kitty bit her lip before nodding.

“May I kiss you now or do you have other serious questions to ask me?”

Kitty shook her head, and then, realising this could be taken as a no to the first part of his question,
she nodded; then, realising her contradiction, laughed.

Lord Ashbourne, her Lord Ashbourne, her Ash - did not seem to mind and kissed her anyway.
Kitty could not think of any words to explain how happy she was.

She could not possibly tell how much time had passed before they walked back to Ash’s very patient team; this time he had his arm around her waist.

“We do not have to return to Longbourn immediately – “ said Kitty, thinking of her mother and no doubt her sisters’ reactions. She found she wanted to tell Mary first, but she wanted to keep this happy moment for a while longer.

“We cannot return until I give you this,” he drew out a small parcel from his coat. “It is not a ring, but I could not think of an underhanded way to discover the size of your finger.”

“How disappointing that you cannot achieve everything you aim to do.”

He took his teasing well, and Kitty opened the parcel to find a beautiful emerald necklace.

“It was my mother’s. My father gave it to her upon their engagement.”

“Oh!” She had no words sufficient to thank him and was glad she could now express her thanks with actions. After some moments she thought to ask him if the necklace was the reason for the delay.

“Was I waiting for this to come from London? Yes. Was this the reason I waited? No.” Ash fixed the necklace around her neck.

Kitty turned to look at him. “Why did you wait? I thought ...

He put a finger over her lips. “You have not guessed? I thought I quite gave myself away at the picnic we had here…oh has it really been a month since we did?”

Kitty could not recollect anything but her own perfect happiness. “I do not remember.”

“I thought you would remember every word of mine, how cast down I am,” Ash smiled before kissing her. “I had not thought, before I met you, much of other’s happiness. Of course it meant a great deal to me that my friends should be happy and my family, but I did not think much about whether what I wanted would be the best thing for anybody but myself. If I had a notion and I wanted something, then it occurred.”

“Until?” He’d stopped talking, but Kitty knew that could not be the end of the matter.

“Until I met you. Suddenly, it mattered a great deal what you wanted, and what was good for you. If it was not me – if it was my brother – who would make you happy, then that should be so.”

“Did you really think I preferred Mr Fitzwilliam? Or should I say Cheveley? After such a first impression?”

“Stranger things have happened.”

Kitty let him know in no uncertain terms that her heart had been his from almost the first moment she had seen him. Not the first moment because he had been laughing at her reaction to seeing the sea.

“And it is very unfair to laugh at my naïveté of such things.”

“Indeed it was, but I had not seen a young lady so truly captivated and not afraid to show it in quite some time.”
The greys became restless and they signalled their desire to depart, even if neither Kitty nor Ash truly wished to.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

This chapter corresponds with Part Eighteen of the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV

Chapter Twenty-Six

The two miles back from Oakham Mount were not enough to abate either Kitty’s excitement or her happiness.

She could later not remember what they spoke of, but Ash assured her that she had made a series of promises such as to always obey him and never ask him to eat mock turtle soup and praise him daily. Kitty would always say that she had no intention of keeping promises she did not remember making.

Her first thought was to acquaint Mary of everything; after all Mary would be overjoyed that she would not be pulled away from her serious study to chaperone. She would also, hopefully, be happy for Kitty as a sister should be.

Kitty barely waited until the curricle stopped before leaping out, ignoring Ash’s laughing protestations.

“Oh Hill!” cried Kitty as she slipped past the housekeeper into the parlour. She looked around and noticed that it was not only her family and Mr Darcy sitting together, but that Lady Lucas and Charlotte had come to visit; then she saw Mr Fitzwilliam and Jane and Bingley. They must have ridden over from Netherfield after Mr Darcy and Ash.

It was quite a crowd, but she did not see Mary, who was her only object.

Her mother stared at her. “Kitty!” said Mrs Bennet. “Whatever do you mean, child, rushing in here with your bonnet on? You will be giving Lady Lucas an odd opinion of us, indeed.”

Kitty did not heed her mother’s words as she went back into the hallway and asked Hill where her sister was.

“She is upstairs. Are you quite well, Miss Kitty?”

Kitty did not stay to answer; instead she took the stairs two at a time and finding Mary in their bedroom, surprised her sister by throwing herself into her arms.

“Kitty!” Mary sounded alarmed, but then she softened.

“Oh, I wanted to tell you first!” said Kitty when she could speak.

“He has proposed?”

Kitty nodded and her feelings began to overwhelm her.

Mary simply nodded curtly. “Well then.”
“Mary, are you not happy?!”

“Yes, but it is hardly a surprise, so it does not surely require a fuss.”

“You are an unfeeling sister!”

Mary just fixed her with a look, and Kitty was no longer upset or mad. Instead she sat down upon her bed and told her everything.

“Does this mean you have left Lord Ashbourne downstairs alone?” replied Mary sensibly at the end of Kitty's speech.

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It had only been the work of a moment to divest herself of her bonnet, and then Kitty had realised she was still wearing the late Lady Matlock’s necklace. Mary had undone it for her, but then Kitty had been able to marvel at its beauty, and the fact she had been given it, that she had been thought worthy of it.

“You might lose it, and you do not wish to render our mother speechless,” said Mary sensibly and Kitty put it in the pages of the Orphan of the Rhine. She had never given it back to either Freddie or Ash.

She had thought that Ash would have told the assembled company, if for no other reason but to explain her peculiar behaviour but the looks that her mother and sisters gave her when she walked into the parlour made her think otherwise.

“Have you quite recovered?” said Mrs Bennet with some asperity. “Lord Ashbourne will be thinking you a very troublesome companion and not take you out in his curricle anymore.”

“Mama,” said Lizzy in a long-suffering tone.

“Indeed, Mrs Bennet, I may very well refuse to take your daughter out in a curricle anymore,” said Ash with a smile.

“See, Kitty,” said Mrs Bennet pursing her lips together.

“Are you well, Kitty?” said Jane, wanting to turn the conversation.

“I am very well,” said Kitty. “Although I may become annoyed if a certain someone continues to tease me.” Kitty shot a look at Ash before sitting upon the sofa.

“Kitty, Lord Ashbourne is very good to have been so kind to you,” said Lizzy.

“Oh it was not a kindness, Miss Bennet,” replied Ash, before looking fondly at Kitty and she smiled back.

Mr Fitzwilliam laughed and then muttered under his breath. Kitty thought he said ‘finally’ and gave him a little glare.

The room seemed generally confused until Mr Darcy stepped forward, from where he was standing awkwardly in the window, and gave her a little bow. “My congratulations, Miss Catherine.”

“Thank you, Mr Darcy.”
Mr Darcy did not sound at all surprised, which puzzled Kitty because the way Jane and Lizzy had spoken, it did not sound like Mr Darcy had had any idea about his cousin’s impending proposal.

“Darcy?” said Lizzy stood, looking surprised.

“I think my cousin is congratulating your sister and my brother on their engagement. At least I trust it has finally occurred?” said Mr Fitzwilliam.

“You should mind your manners, Freddie,” replied Ash but he did not sound angry.

“An engagement? Kitty, is this true? Mr Bennet?” Mrs Bennet comically looked between Ash and Kitty in bewilderment.

Mr Bennet went to sit beside his wife and took her hand quite gently. “Yes, my dear, two weddings to plan! God has been very good to us!”

Kitty expected an eruption of effusions from her mother, but instead she gaped a little and turned a little pale.

It fell to Charlotte Collins to begin the wave of congratulations. Lady Lucas looked as though she had swallowed a lemon, and hurried her daughter into bidding the Bennets farewell as she felt that they must have a great deal to plan and discuss as a family.

The rest of their guests took longer to depart, but they were expected back at Netherfield, and Kitty found it difficult to let go of her fiancé’s – how well that sounded – arm.

Her father stopped her after her sisters had gone back into the house. “You are a sly thing, my child.”

“You were not surprised,” replied Kitty.

“No, I was not.”

“Even if I am very silly.”

“Not so silly,” smiled her father, pinching her chin. “Now it seems I am to have a surfeit of son-in-laws. Shall I like your husband the most, do you think?”

Kitty thought of Bingley’s giant smile and how Ash had taken a seat next to Mrs Bennet which Kitty thought was quite brave of him, although her mother had seemed only capable of smiling, and how Mr Darcy had stood awkwardly in the window embrasure. Then she thought about how he had come forward to congratulate her.

“No, I think your favourite shall be Mr Darcy.”

Mr Bennet laughed, “Yes, I rather think he shall be. I shall delight even more than Lizzy in teasing him. For I do not have anything to lose.”

“But then you may not be invited to Pemberley, and I understand it has a very fine library.”

“Well I shall just have to come to your home then, for I am sure it has a very fine library, too.”

Lydia had been visiting at the Lucas’. Maria Lucas had become her constant boon companion; she was as biddable as Kitty had once been for all she was less likely to be outrageous.
Kitty felt a little apprehensive about her sister’s reaction, particularly when Lydia was told by Mrs Bennet. Their mother in her raptures made it entirely clear that she now had a new favourite child: Kitty. Lydia had gone into their mother’s bedroom to share some good joke or other and found herself on the receiving end of a torrent of words from a delighted Mrs Bennet, who could think of nothing but Kitty’s engagement. It was not likely to put Lydia in a good humour.

So Kitty hovered in the hallway to intercept Lydia.

“Well, you are quite the favourite daughter,” Lydia said pushing past and into her own bedroom.

“Allow me the brief moment, Lydia.”

Lydia opened one of her drawers and then closed it with some firmness. “Well, are you happy? “

“I did not mean to draw attention away from you…”

“I meant with your Viscount. I should not like a man so old and so…I am sure he will not allow you any fun.”

“Then it is a good thing I am marrying him, not you.”

Lydia laughed, “A very good thing, although you will quite waste him.”

Kitty did not understand her sister, until Lydia began to dwell on her future husband’s powerful thighs.

“Lydia!”

“You have not noticed? I perceived them even when I quite hated him.”

“Hated?” Kitty chose to ignore the rest of her sister’s utterances.

Lydia made a face, and then she reached around to close the door. “I will never admit it to anyone else, but you have done very well.” Then she hugged Kitty. Kitty was quite moved but then Lydia drew back and looked very serious, “And you will introduce me to a Duke. For I shall not go after you.”

Kitty laughed; that was the sister she knew.

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Kitty thought it was odd that Lizzy did not privately congratulate her. She certainly joined her family in their general congratulations but she was the only sister at home who did not draw Kitty aside. However, they had never been close so it was perhaps not surprising. Lizzy had her own marriage to think of, after all.

“Well, we shall be a merry party today,” said Mrs Bennet at breakfast.

“How so?” said Mr Bennet, buttering his toast.

Mrs Bennet put down her knife noisily. “You do not think it important to note the presence of Mr Darcy and Lord Ashbourne. The future husbands of your daughters.”

“I will note it, but I do not see why it follows the party will be so merry that we have to note it particularly?”

“Papa, do not tease Mama,” said Lizzy intervening before their mother could react to her
husband’s levity.

“Since you have been eclipsed, my dear Lizzy, by your sister’s match I will be kind to you.”

“Papa, do not set us against each other,” said Kitty. “I should not wish to marry Mr Darcy and she should not wish to marry Ash. We are each perfectly happy.”

Lizzy’s smile seemed a little tight, but that was the end of the conversation as Mrs Bennet preferred to discuss London, a location she expected to be invited to frequently, and the gentlemen they would now be able to find for Mary and Lydia.

Lydia enjoyed this attention, but Kitty noticed that Mary did not seem to dislike it, which intrigued her.

“Well, Mama, it appears that you are to be disappointed. Jane has come, she has even walked, but she does not bring any of the gentlemen,” said Lizzy after looking out the window.

Mrs Bennet looked annoyed at this faithlessness of her daughter’s fiancés. Kitty noted that Lizzy did not seem to feel as she did; perhaps it was the length of their engagement, or a difference in character. Because Kitty wondered that Jane came alone.

Perhaps Jane wanted to talk to her? Impart some marital wisdom?

However that was not to be, because Jane seemed only interested in taking Lizzy into the gardens. But Kitty was wrong about Jane coming alone: she brought Miss Darcy. Although Lizzy had only said she did not bring the gentlemen.

“I am very sorry I did not come yesterday,” said Miss Darcy as they walked in the garden. 

“As it seemed everybody was in the parlour yesterday, you may have found it rather uncomfortable and difficult to find a seat.”

"But it meant I could not congratulate you until now."

“Thank you, Miss Darcy.”

“Georgiana, or Georgie. We are to be cousins after all,” said Miss Darcy.

Kitty squeezed her hand. “Cousins. I am very happy to be.”

“I am to gain a sister and a cousin. I am too happy.” Georgiana certainly did not look as thought she could be happier. “I did not come yesterday for I thought I should be in the way, and I had some letters to answer, although some of my effort was quite wasted as you will soon see! One of the letters was from my aunt.”

Kitty thought for a moment that Georgiana meant Lady Catherine de Bourgh and was alarmed.

“No, from Lady Matlock, Aunt Harriet. I should have brought the letter, so that you might know my aunt before you meet her.”

“I do not think reading a private letter, one she did not mean to be read outside of the family, would endear me to her.”

Georgiana frowned. “I cannot think Aunt Harriet would be so exacting. Oh I cannot wait for you to meet.”

Kitty thought she could wait. Ash could not (and Kitty was sure he did not want to) in all honour
withdraw his proposal, even if his step-mother and father objected. Everything she had heard suggested they would not object, but until Kitty saw in their eyes their acceptance she would not be easy.

“Lizzy, you speak very stridently.”

Evidently Kitty and Georgiana had come to one side of a hedge, and Jane and Lizzy clearly to the other side.

“Should I not do so?” said Lizzy.

“Mr Darcy did not seem surprised.”

“No, that is why I wonder. I suspect your Bingley did not speak to Lord Ashbourne. Instead he spoke to Darcy, who then…commanded his cousin.”

Kitty stopped short and put up a finger to silence Georgiana who had opened her mouth to exclaim.

“If he did not wish to marry Kitty he would have left Meryton, and he asked our father’s permission first.”

“Very correct, too proper, where was his passion? Oh, Jane, I just … you have seen our parents’ unequal marriage. He proposed to Mama out of a sense of feeling that did not last.”

“You seem to find fault with his lack of passion and his surfeit of passion. It cannot be both, Lizzy. And how is there any guarantee of your love, or mine, lasting past the feelings that encompass us now?”

"Jane, you did not see his struggle to accept his feelings for me! I cannot imagine that he feels my sister is a good match for his cousin! I know he disapproves!"

“Is that the difficulty? You think that Mr Darcy will think less of you because he disapproves of his cousin’s choice?”

"I hope it was his choice! I just worry ... "

“Neither of us has spoken to Kitty with regards to her feelings, or what she may or may not have discussed with his lordship. I worried she would have her heart broken, but he returns her feelings!"

"I cannot believe it, Jane..."

Lizzy paused and Kitty judged it the best time to step around the hedge and into her sisters’ view.

“I am grateful to hear what you think of me,” she said stiffly before striding away. Georgiana made to follow her, but Kitty waved her away. She had to be alone.

It was all falsehood, but it hurt that her sister could think so meanly of her.

Kitty walked out of the formal gardens and took one of the paths; she was half way along it before she remembered that this was a path Lizzy liked to walk because it overlooked the fields.

She sat down on a tree stump and wondered why Ash had not come. Kitty tried not to cry, but the tears came.
“Miss Bennet!”

Kitty looked up at the male voice; she had not heard the horse approaching. It was not Ash; he would not call her Miss Bennet.

It was Mr Darcy.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

This chapter corresponds with Part Nineteen of the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV

Chapter Twenty Seven

Kitty furiously wiped away her tears, and stood to greet Mr Darcy, who swung off his horse. She would not allow him to see her upset.

“Mr Darcy,” she curtseyed.

“Miss Bennet, are you unwell?” He then saw that she’d been crying. “You have been crying.”

“Excellent deduction,” She should have kept her mouth shut. That was unlikely to improve his opinion of her. But she should not care for that!

“What is it Elizabeth?”

Kitty stared at him; of course, that was his only concern. If something had happened to Lizzy, did he think she’d be sitting in the woods crying by herself, and not by her mother’s or sister’s side?

“Has my cousin done something to offend you?”

“What would you do if he had?” asked Kitty. She searched his face, expecting to see some sort of triumph or happiness but he looked concerned.

“I cannot believe that Ash would intentionally offend you. You would only have to inform him of his error and he would beg your pardon.”

“What if he did not?” said Kitty, bemused by Mr Darcy’s response. Surely he should be warning her of his cousin’s temperament or something, anything to get her to jilt him.

“Then I should speak very strongly to him. For I assure you, Miss Bennet, that there is no one my cousin cares for more in this world than you.”

“I have seen him level a man, and I understand he is very handy with pistols; perhaps he would not like your interference.”

“He would not, but he has always attempted to set me straight when he feels I am being foolish.” Mr Darcy straightened. “It would be remiss of me not to attempt it when the boot was on the other foot.”

That did not sound like a man who did not approve. “I understand that you may have expressed some thoughts to Ash before his proposed.” It was only a theory, but Kitty wanted to see his reaction.

Her words had the effect of making him run his fingers through his hair and he looked distressed.
“I beg your pardon for delaying his making his intentions clear.”

Kitty swallowed; so he had counselled Ash not to propose to her.

“He takes some delight in vexing people, as you must know, and when I told him he should not delay, of course he delayed.”

Kitty blinked. This was the second person who had told her they were convinced that Ash had not declared himself purely to vex them. She couldn’t help but smile, and then she realised Mr Darcy had said that he had counselled Ash to propose.

“You have no objections to your cousin marrying me?”

“No,” Mr Darcy looked baffled, “I should not wish to marry you, but you should not wish to marry me.” The fact he used almost the same words as she had done this morning made Kitty laugh. “But my cousin...well, I do not know you as well as I should, Miss Bennet, but he knows his own mind.”

"Then his proposal was his own idea?"

Mr Darcy looked even more baffled. "Might we sit down?"

Kitty returned to her rather damp tree stump, allowing a small spot for Mr Darcy to perch. He did so without hesitation. Kitty rather thought Ash would have lain down a handkerchief or remained standing.

"I have never seen my cousin act upon anything that was not his own determination. May I ask why you doubt him?"

"You may not like my answer, sir."

"Nevertheless, I should like it." Ash would have given her an amused look or reacted in some way to her arch comment. Mr Darcy had no amusement or humour in his response.

"Lizzy. She implied you did not approve and that you commanded Ash to marry me."

A crease appeared in Mr Darcy's forehead. "Those statements seem contradictory."

"Perhaps you do not approve, but you approve even less of someone in your family being thought a rake."

"I think that Elizabeth has not had a chance to spend much time with my cousin. Somebody has monopolised him, and I feel extremely flattered by the esteem in which she holds me, if she feels I am capable of arranging marriage proposals when she knows what a mull I made of my own...both of them."

"It is not entirely esteem since she judges you capable of interfering in the lives of others."

Mr Darcy blinked. "Perhaps you are correct. She has some knowledge of my capacity to do so."

"Bingley?" Kitty had wondered; certainly Bingley had had little encouragement from his friend and sisters, but she had not thought Mr Darcy had been so officious.

"I was incorrect, and while I told myself it was entirely in Bingley's best interest, I am afraid it was not. I did not deliberately interfere with my own interests more in mind than his, but that was largely the result. Your sister was aware of my interference; perhaps she has thought I did not
learn my lesson, or I learned it incorrectly. In this case I should have been promoting, not preventing, a marriage."

Mr Darcy sounded troubled and Kitty could not help but reassure him. It was a fault of hers she was beginning to think.

"The fact she thinks you capable of arranging the world to suit yourself, means she feels you capable of a great deal; that is a lot to live up to, even ..."

"If it is misdirected? I think your sister's concerns come mainly from a place of affection. Perhaps she is more like me than I think. Neither of us are able to quite transfer our feelings to actions that are interpreted correctly."

Mr Darcy twisted his signet ring, and Kitty wondered if that was something he consciously did or whether he only did it when he was agitated.

"Your sister and I have had all our prejudices used against us, and our view of the world turned upside down. Both of us are still adjusting to the fact we are not always correct, and our interpretation of others is faulty."

They sat silently, Kitty digesting what Mr Darcy had said, and she presumed he was doing the same. Finally he spoke again.

"You have spent more time talking with my cousin privately, well apart from your sister, Mary, than I have with Elizabeth. I cannot imagine you did not use that time wisely. I am certain from our interactions that Elizabeth is the wife for me, and she is certain that I am the husband for her. You should trust your own feelings. You cannot tell me in the weeks and many hours driving through bogs you have not proven yourself to be the wife my cousin wishes for, and you have confirmed he is the husband for you?"

Kitty did not a have a chance to respond to this sensible view of the world because Georgiana interrupted them.

"Oh!" Georgiana stopped short. "Fitzwilliam I did not ..."

Mr Darcy got up and walked over to his sister and exchanged words in such a low tone that Kitty was unable to hear the words, although the manner of the exchange seemed like an argument.

Mr Darcy retrieved his horse and led it off in the direction of Longbourn.

Kitty pressed her hands to her cheeks; she did not want Georgiana to see that she had been crying. They did not feel red but from Georgiana's expression Kitty thought they must be.

Georgiana was twisting her hands in front of her. "I thought I always wanted sisters."

Kitty laughed, but tried to swallow it when she saw that Georgiana was truly distressed; she stood up and took Georgiana's hands. "It is not so very serious. At least compared to when I accidentally poured ink over Lydia's favourite gown."

"I did try to explain to Elizabeth..." said Georgiana, "she was very distressed."

Kitty was not sure she believed that! She was sure Georgiana thought that she would be distressed in Lizzy's position. It was quite like Jane, always attributing to Lydia the feelings that Jane herself would have.

"Let us go for a walk," Kitty did not feel very much like returning to Longbourn. She presumed
Mr Darcy was going to speak to Lizzy, which would make her having to face her sister unlikely, but Kitty still did not wish to return to listen to her mother's general raptures.

"So what delayed your brother?" said Kitty, slipping her hand into the crook of Georgiana's elbow.

Georgiana looked distracted. "Oh, Aunt Harriet and Uncle Edwin's baggage arrived yesterday evening, but they did not."

Kitty stopped. "Do you think they have suffered an accident?"

"Oh no...I...Freddie, Ash and my brother went out riding to see if they could discover them. I am sure it is not so very serious, if Fitzwilliam has returned. I did not think to ask him..."

Now Georgiana seemed distressed that she'd entirely forgotten her aunt and uncle in the midst of a Bennet sibling fracas. They turned their steps back towards Longbourn, because Georgiana did need to ask her brother about Lord and Lady Matlock, and Kitty couldn't deny that she was anxious.

Jane was standing on the lawn, and walked towards them.

"Kitty!"

"Oh Mrs Bingley, did my brother say anything about my aunt and uncle?" said Georgiana, interrupting what was no doubt a profuse apology from Jane for something she had not said, done or thought.

"Jane, please, I believe I have asked you to call me Jane before?" said Jane in that soft way of hers. "It seems that your Aunt and Uncle sent their baggage ahead."

"With no explanation?" Kitty thought that sounded more like the action of Lydia rather than an Earl and his Countess.

"I did not press Mr Darcy for more information, Kitty," replied Jane in a little sharper tone, at least as sharp as Jane's tone ever got. Then Kitty saw the moment her sister realised her sharp tone was not conducive to apologising to Kitty on her behalf, or on Lizzy's.

"Well then let us go discover if Mama discovered anything."

Mama had not even realised Mr Darcy had come to Longbourn, so they were forced to listen to her incredibly muted disapproval of Mr Darcy's not paying his respects to her. It was a little less muted than it would have been before Ash had proposed. However it did not allow for anyone else to discuss anything, which was rather what Kitty wanted.

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"You have done a very good job of avoiding me, but you should know I bribed Mary with sheet music," said Lizzy, closing and locking the bedroom door behind her. Kitty had managed to keep herself separated from her sister until after dinner, but she'd known some sort of conversation was inevitable.

She stopped fiddling with her curls and turned to watch Lizzy. It was up to Lizzy to talk, not Kitty.

"Kitty, I am so sorry." Lizzy came to sit on the Mary's bed.
"Is that all I am to expect?" replied Kitty. She did not like fighting with her sisters, or indeed anyone, so she was proud she did not immediately accept.

"I think that an unreserved apology was what I should begin with."

"But what are you apologising for?"

"For being a terrible sister, and a terrible judge of character." Lizzy smiled. "It will not mean much to you, but I was worried about you. My sisterly feelings may not have been there when they should have, but I have learnt a great deal about myself, and my faults this past year."

Kitty placed her hairbrush back on her dresser; she had been idly playing with it while listening to Lizzy.

"Please come and sit next to me, Kitty."

Kitty accepted the outstretched hand and sat rather stiffly next to Lizzy.

"I know you are aware of Darcy's first proposal to me, but I cannot think you know the details."

Lizzy then described Mr Darcy's first proposal and Kitty began to see. Mr Darcy had spoken so shockingly about their family, and had made so many presumptions about Lizzy's feelings, based no doubt on his assumption than any young lady would be gratified and humbled to be joined in union with such a one as Mr Darcy. Then Lizzy described her folly with Mr Wickham more fully. Ash had told her that Mr Darcy's world must have been inverted by Lizzy's refusal, but it seemed that Lizzy's axis had been tilted just as much.

"Then he was so different at Pemberley, and I was not sure whether he was ..."

"Playing the true gentleman to prove how wrong you have been?"

Lizzy smiled. "Exactly, you see I have been ignoring how perceptive you have become, or perhaps always been."

"You have been second guessing yourself?"

"Yes, and well I did not trust Papa, or Mama; no matter how much I love them they ..."

"Yes," replied Kitty. Her father's reaction to her engagement had heartened her, but he would always be himself. She did not think he would ever see her anything but one of his silly daughters. She knew that while Lizzy was Mr Bennet's favourite, he still thought her of as the least silly. It was slightly reassuring. "But you should not make such judgements, Lizzy, when you have no information or have made no push to do so. I am not you, and Ash is certainly not Mr Darcy."

Lizzy looked distressed to have spoken so disparagingly of Mr Darcy, "Obviously now that I ..."

"I did not think you had accepted him without loving and respecting him, Lizzy!"

"Some will think that," replied Lizzy. "Many in London will, and I was so worried that you...and if it were not a case of love, then you would not have the support of your husband."

"But surely we shall face whatever London might say - and confess you don't mean London but Mr Darcy’s relations - together?"

"Yes. I know that Lady Catherine certainly disapproves, but I know that Mr Darcy does not care a great deal for her opinion. His uncle, on the other hand..."
"Since his first wife was not of the first stare, surely he will not be too judgemental," replied Kitty. "His wife was the daughter of a natural philosopher. She had no money, but Lord Matlock was a visitor to the house to discuss ....well, things that sound quite boring to me."

"But his second wife..."

"Yes, the daughter of a Duke, so they will be trusting that Mr Darcy and Ash make better second choices."

Lizzy looked aghast for a moment and then started laughing; it took her many moments before she could speak again. "Oh dear. How very dreadful. Do never reassure Jane in such a manner, she will not find amusement in it. But, Kitty I am truly sorry. I was only worried about you, all I could see was my little sister who used to brush my hair, and I thought Darcy had interfered. I suspect I am always going to judge him harshly."

"But, Lizzy, I think Mr Darcy needs a wife who will tell him when he is wrong. As does his cousin."

Lizzy looked at her. "And do you?"

"Not quite as directly, as you do, sister, for we are not that alike."

Lizzy had pulled back the covers on Mary's bed, as the air was chilly, and half wrapped them around herself. "Come, that window really is not secure; I did not realise how much the air got into this bedroom." Kitty joined her under the covers. "So much I did not realise."

Kitty had not curled up with Lizzy in bed for a very long time, not since she was a very little girl. Jane had always been Lizzy's sister.

"Now, I have been told so many times I should just speak to you, and I have decided that my resolution is to take advice..."

"I think that shall be a short lasting resolution," said Kitty, but Lizzy pinched her.

"...now tell me about this Lord Ashbourne who I am to call brother."
This chapter corresponds with Part Twenty of the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV

Chapter Twenty Eight

Kitty woke to Mary looming over her, looking as if she had been dragged through a bush backwards.

"Mary, what on ..."

"I was forced to sleep in the library."

"You could have taken Lizzy's bed! Or Jane's!" retorted Kitty, slipping out of Mary's bed. Sometime during the night, Lizzy had slipped out and taken Kitty's bed. She must have also unlocked the door, or Mary had learned how to pick locks, which Kitty did not put past her newly improved sister.

Mary looked a little startled and dismayed. "I had not thought of that, but it is a good thing I was downstairs so I could intercept this note before Mama saw that you have received a missive from Lord Ashbourne."

Kitty took a moment to admire his fine hand; she did not think she had even seen his handwriting before.

"Stop staring at it and read it," said Mary sharply, while attacking her hair with a brush.

She did as her sister bid and half wished she had just stared at the outside and not broken the seal. He was bringing Lord and Lady Matlock to call that very morning!

"Does he bring the Earl and Countess?" said Mary.

"Mary Bennet, when did you become so curious?" said Lizzy yawning. "I missed that too, it seems."

"Well, I wish to see if he really is a sober man interested in philosophy."

"I want to know if he will approve of me," said Kitty. "We shall both find out our answers, this morning. And Ash writes that they particularly wish to make your acquaintance too, Lizzy."

Lizzy looked a little pale.

Kitty steeled herself for the unpleasant task of informing their mother of their illustrious visitors.

"Lord and Lady Matlock ...today? But ...fish ...cake ...tea!" Mrs Bennet clutched her handkerchief and looked bewildered.

"Lord, Mama, they do not want fish cake tea. Whoever heard of such a thing? No doubt they
come to stop the wedding. Has a date even been decided on? Lizzy managed to pin Mr Darcy down, but you must be quick, otherwise you will not be able to have the banns read before next year!

That brought Mrs Bennet's speech back. "Next year?! Lydia, what nonsense. Lord Ashbourne does not need to have the banns read, he may get a special licence if he so chooses. I am sure Mr Darcy could have also got a special licence for all Lizzy tells me otherwise. All you need to do is know a bishop, is that not correct?"

Kitty rather thought this was the first time in her life Mary was being sincerely requested for a piece of information by her mother.

"Don't dawdle Mary, is that the only requirement?"

"Why do you not ask Mr Collins?" said Mary brightening. "Surely he should understand ecclesiastical convention."

Mrs Bennet liked the idea of inviting Mr Collins over to show him that her daughters might not ever be mistress of Longbourn, but she thought that a very good thing as they would be too busy being the mistresses of Netherfield, Pemberley and Matlock.

"Why has he not gone away?" said Lydia.

"They were to leave yesterday," said Mary, "But Mr Collins had a spasm."

" He does not want to tell Lady Catherine both of her nephews are engaged," said Lydia, who was clearly in one of her more perceptive moods, and thinking of others rather than herself. Kitty did not think it would last.

"Lord and Lady Matlock! Fish! Cake! Tea!" Mrs Bennet glared at her daughters for distracting her, when she should be yelling for Hill and shooed them all out of her room. "Find your best dress Catherine, and make Sarah fix your hair so you do not look so ...oh oh ...where are my salts?"

Lizzy, it appeared, had not needed her mother's instructions to put on her prettiest gown and dress her hair in the most attractive fashion.

"Come, Kitty, we must be united ..."

Kitty submitted to her sister's ministrations."Perhaps we should look like plain sober young ladies because then their reasons for marrying us would be respectable, and we shouldn't have lured them in ...

"I thought you stopped reading novels," said Lizzy, laughing. "I am not as concerned for myself as I am for you. Darcy is only their nephew and ... but what I am sure of is that you will have your family, especially me, if they are stupid enough not to like you." Lizzy kissed Kitty's forehead.

Ash's note had not mentioned a time, so Lizzy and Kitty did not dally, but that left them sitting in the parlour. Mrs Bennet would not allow them to take out any of their normal activities like darning or embroidering in case the Earl and Countess found them doing menial labour.

Mary was allowed to sit at the piano and practice, but Lydia, Kitty and Lizzy were forced to sit with their hands folded.
"We could read, Mama," said Lydia after about ten minutes, which spoke to how truly bored she was, and how much she wanted to see Lord and Lady Matlock that she had not run off.

"I do not wish them to think my daughters bluestockings!"

Lizzy took a deep breath, but Kitty pinched her. It would be pointless to argue with Mama, particularly when Kitty thought it was highly likely that their mother was more worried about the Earl and Countess than Lizzy and her combined.

Finally they heard a carriage on the drive. It felt so strange not to have leapt up and pressed her face to the window to watch their visitors.

"Lady Matlock, ma'am," said Hill, bobbing nervously, as they all rose to greet their visitor.

Kitty wasn't sure she should have looked immediately for Ash, but she did. He wasn't following his step-mother; indeed the door swung firmly shut behind Hill's swift retreat.

At least that allowed Kitty to really regard her future mother-in-law. She was much younger than Kitty would have expected, but of course she was not Ash's or the Colonel's mother so her being her mother's age or even a little younger should not have been surprising.

That Lady Matlock would be dressed in the height of fashion, in styles Kitty had only seen in the magazines brought to them by Aunt Gardiner when she visited for Jane's wedding, Kitty took for granted. The quiz of a hat however Kitty had not expected.

"Lady Matlock," said Mrs Bennet curtseying as low as she could manage, "May I welcome you to my home? Lizzy! Kitty!" Mrs Bennet fluttered her handkerchief at her daughters and Kitty found herself stepping forward. "Girls ..." Mrs Bennet petered out clearly not quite sure how she should introduce everybody, or whether it was even proper for her to do so.

"Oh!" was Lady Matlock's first word and then her hat quivering she crossed to Lizzy and Kitty with outstretched hands. "How happy I am to meet you both. So very delighted."

Then she crushed them to herself, Lizzy was unfortunately on the side of the feathers and Kitty could not imagine that was pleasant. After some moments she released them and they returned to their seats.

"Are you not as happy as I am Mrs Bennet? I was quite sure they would never marry!" Lady Matlock sat down and put her reticule on her lap.

"Oh, yes ...I have five daughters, your ladyship," said Mrs Bennet blinking as if she did not quite believe that a Countess would have the same worries.

"Now, we shall be great friends, because I am so grateful to you. I do hope you know what you have agreed to?" said Lady Matlock with a smile. Kitty thought she saw a little bit of Ash in her, which was strange, but she thought it spoke well of their relationship.

"Mr Darcy is the best of men, Lady Matlock," said Lizzy very sincerely.

"And my son, Miss Catherine?"

"He certainly thinks he is the best of men," said Kitty. There was no point being somebody she was not, and considering everything Lady Matlock had said and done since entering their parlour, Kitty did not think it was much of a risk.

"Kitty!" exclaimed Mrs Bennet, but Lady Matlock laughed.
What Lady Matlock would have responded would never be known as the door to the parlour opened.

"No, do not introduce me, I am sure you have better things to do! Harriet!"

Kitty found herself standing up, because this could only be Lord Matlock. He was much shorter than she had expected considering the height of Ash, the Colonel and Freddie. While his wife looked the very picture of a fashionable ton woman, the Earl looked more like he would be happier on his home farm.

"Edwin, the ladies will be thinking you very odd."

"Well, if my wife had not pretended that the carriage had a fault, bribed my coachman and left us to walk the rest of the way to Longbourn, I would not be presenting myself in such an odd fashion."

"Well, if you had not become distracted by farming techniques we should not have been held up on the road ..."

"Aunt! Uncle!" Mr Darcy entered the room. Hill was nowhere to be seen, no doubt confused by the strange comings to Longbourn that morning.

Kitty did not know how Lord Matlock had managed to outpace his son and nephew. Kitty found it amusing that Mr Darcy should have judged himself and his connections so far above everybody else when they did not seem at all stiff in the neck.

Mr Darcy had mud on his breeches and looked rather furious. He also did not seem to quite know what to do or say.

"I do apologise for coming amongst you all in our dirt, but as I am sure my dearest Mama told you, the carriage ran into some difficulties." Ash did not have mud on his breeches and looked entirely sanguine.

"I am afraid, Ash, your father has already betrayed me," said Lady Matlock. "It is true, I wished to form an impression entirely without the influence of my nephew or son."

"Then why was I - " begun Lord Matlock.

"It would have looked very odd if all the men had not alighted," responded Lady Matlock.

"You could have made some excuse about my infirmity." Lord Matlock did not look at all as if he suffered from an infirmity.

Mrs Bennet did not quite follow this conversation and sincerely offered her sympathy for his ailments. Then it was not to be hoped she would not follow this with a laundry list of her own complaints. Kitty felt Lizzy stiffen beside her, but Lord Matlock seemed to take the nerves and palpitations with grace.

"Now that your mother has graciously distracted my husband, we should take a walk," said Lady Matlock. "Your sisters will entertain my son and nephew."

It was not really a request, and it was a little cold for a walk, but Kitty did not mind. She hoped Lydia was forced to entertain Ash, that would no doubt be amusing, and would mean Lizzy would not be terrified about Mr Darcy. Mary would just play the piano at him, Lizzy had nothing to fear there!
"You must have wanted to speak to us privately very much," said Lizzy once they were away from the house.

"I wished to give myself every opportunity of a first impression. However, I have heard so much about you both. Catherine a little more than you, Elizabeth."

Kitty could not believe that Ash had written about her, at least until recently; he was too guarded. Freddie on the other hand - "You should not believe anything your son says about me."

"I see you understand both my sons," laughed Lady Matlock. "Should I believe or disbelieve Georgiana? She, has been my source of gossip for you, Elizabeth. I find myself embarrassed! I did not realise the import of her reporting of your visit to Pemberley. I should have known Darcy would never be so solicitous of a mere acquaintance. I thought perhaps he wished Georgiana to meet a variety of young women before her debut. But I was blinded by my failed attempts to lure him this summer with several eligible young ladies."

"Whereas I did not appear at all eligible, so did not give you a moment's pause," said Lizzy.

Lady Matlock stopped and looked at her. "You have arms and legs enough, and nothing you have said, or that has been reported to me, makes me think you lack intelligence. That is eligibility. My nephew has wealth and status, what he does not have is a bit of liveliness or the ability to talk without offending."

Lady Matlock turned to smile at Kitty. "And any young lady that manages to assist in the rescue of a curricle without irrevocably offending my son, whose sense of his own worth is, by the by, vast, is a lady who works miracles."

"It had only rained a little ..."

"And he was trying to impress you."

Kitty did not know why she had worried so much. Lady Matlock could be feigning but Kitty doubted that; they were alone if she really wished to show her true colours as it were, she could easily do so. No, she truly was pleased. The way she looked at Lizzy and Kitty made Kitty think she had found someone, whose name was not Horatio Fitzwilliam, who would appreciate her and not judge her unfairly.

"I am afraid, Mama, you have monopolised Kitty long enough," Ash had escaped from whichever of her sisters had been entertaining him. When Lady Matlock started to protest Ash silenced her with a look. "You will have the rest of your life to do so."

"You do not think that a little rude?" said Kitty, but she was happy to be walked away,

"I am sure it was very rude, but a man in love is allowed a little latitude, surely?"

"A very little latitude," replied Kitty. "And you have used yours. I like Lady Matlock and the little I have seen of your father." She tucked her hand into the crook of his elbow. He covered her hand with his.

"I am glad."

"Are you relieved that they do not dislike me on sight?"

"That was never a concern of mine," replied Ash with a smile. "My only concern is your happiness."
"Your only concern?" Kitty looked at his cravat, and then his tousled hair, and lastly at his boots that were slightly less shiny than usual, but she had no doubt they had left Netherfield immaculate.

Ash conceded her point. "I expect you will not wish me to say you are the only person who is my concern. You should not wish me to be so selfish."

"No," Kitty replied simply. "For the moment, however, I am happy to have your only concern be kissing me, and never letting me go. For I cannot think how I can be happier than this moment."

"That, my dear Kitty, that I can certainly do. But I shall have to disagree with you and endeavour to prove to you that you can be happier."

*** THE END***
The Epilogue Effect

Chapter Summary

This is the Epilogue Effect it is the same between this and the Pemberley Effect which is Lizzy and Darcy's POV

The Epilogue Effect

It was a mild late September morning, perfect for walking, but Lizzy found she had no inclination. All she wanted was to sit on the bench that was only several yards away.

"Shall we sit?"

Kitty raised an eyebrow. "We have only walked down the stairs and around the corner!"

"If you wish to walk on, I shall walk on," replied Lizzy, sure her sister, still very pale, would not call her bluff.

Indeed she did not and the two of them sank, with relief, onto the bench.

"We have become very poor women indeed."

Lizzy put her hand upon her stomach. "It is perhaps understandable under the circumstances." She shaded her face from the sun with her other hand and saw that through one of Matlock Close's windows Lord Ashbourne was looking very intently at them. When he saw that Lizzy had spotted him however, he disappeared. She did not blame him. Kitty had not left the house since the arrival of little Maximilien, who had had a rather dramatic entrance to the world; Lizzy hoped her own child would be more obliging.

Kitty had tipped her head up to catch the sun. "I am however glad to be free from being cosseted." Lizzy decided it would be best not to mention her glimpse of the viscount. "Darcy will be worse," finished Kitty.

"I know."

"But I shall come to Pemberley and ensure he does not loom over the midwife."

"I would rather you do me the same office I did you and prevent Mama from her worst excesses. Although she was far more sensible than I had expected, especially after her ..." Lizzy broke off, still finding it difficult to talk about her disappointment, and finding herself holding her stomach more protectively.

"Will you invite Mary?"

It was not quite true that Mary had married to disoblige her family, after all Mr and Mrs Bennet were just pleased she had married at all. Of all her sisters, Mary had never paid gentlemen much attention, so it had been shocking when she had almost eloped. In the end it had been a private marriage only attended by Mr Bennet.

"I would like to, but I am afraid Darcy..."
"I am sure Sir Christian knows how to behave! He always did know how to behave, he just decided against it and there is very little impropriety in him now, he is too much under Mary’s thumb. Surely Darcy's infamous temper could be cooled!"

"We may have helped each other greatly with our weaknesses but being made a fool of is still a sore matter for my husband. He will not be brought to believe that Sir Christian did not pursue Mary purely to offend his sensibilities!"

Kitty burst into giggles, and Lizzy joined her. They, Darcy and herself, had kept to their resolution of learning and changing, but it was a journey.

"I do find him very charming," confided Lizzy. "And he is very handsome."

Kitty pulled her feet underneath her and curled towards Lizzy, still giggling. "He is very handsome. Ash does not like me saying it but it does not make it an untruth."

"Speaking of handsome men, should we go to the nursery?"

Lizzy pulled Kitty to her feet, which seemed ironic in their circumstances. Lizzy could not remember being so happy. She would soon be a mother, her mother was very close to completing her quest of seeing all her daughters happily married, and her father was surrounded by sons-in-law to assist him with the management of Longbourn and provide him with books into his old age.

They found Mrs Bennet staring at her grandson. She seemed to be absorbing everything, no doubt to best describe the new heir of Matlock to everyone back at Longbourn.

"Kitty, you should ensure the nurserymaid wraps him more tightly!"

"Yes, Mama." Kitty gave her mother a kiss and was happy to take her advice as she was soon leaving.

"And Lizzy, you should not be on your feet, it will not be a boy if you are on your feet."

The look on Lizzy's face told Kitty all she wanted to know and after making sure her son was sleeping, she pulled Lizzy out of the room saying they had letters to write.

"I do not have to write to Jane," argued Lizzy.

"No, but while I do not think walking around will cause you to deliver a girl, I do think arguing with Mama would be injurious, to more than just the baby!"

Lizzy laughed. "But I have no letters to write."

"I do," replied Kitty. "If they were not letters of thanks I would ask you to write them for me."

Many people had written to her in advance of the birth, and in congratulations once the happy event had taken place. Georgiana had offered to respond to the letters for Kitty, indeed Georgiana had been a great assistance, but Georgiana for all her talents could not quite forge Kitty's tone and Kitty did not want to offend anybody by not writing personally.

"I shall have my own pile to respond to soon," smiled Lizzy. "Who sent this?"

Kitty turned to see that Lizzy was playing with a little abacus.
"Oh, Cousin Olivia."

"That explains it," said Lizzy sharing a smile with Kitty. Cousin Olivia was one of Ash’s cousins on his mother's side. She shared her grandfather's passions, so the abacus was perfectly her. "And these?"

"Miss Bingley," replied Kitty. Lizzy was holding up a piece of art which did not refer in any way to herself or to her son.

"At least we know she can paint screens, the sign of a truly accomplished woman!"

Kitty did not understand her sister’s reference so turned back to her letters. Lydia, Mary and Jane’s letters should be answered first, they were after all her sisters and they were happy for her, and she was happy for them.

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"Do pay attention, Ash," said Darcy, annoyed that his cousin was staring out the window. "Catherine is well. I should be more alarmed about Elizabeth wishing to stray so far from the house."

Ash stepped backwards suddenly and turned towards Darcy, "They are not 100 yards from the house, and I suspect your wife will suffer your protectiveness as well as mine does."

"I wish to talk about this Mr Yeates." Darcy had been slightly alarmed when Lydia Bennet had met the penniless artist during the season, but he had been distracted by their disappointment and then joy when Elizabeth was with child again. He had not realised that Mr Yeates had returned to Longbourn, to paint the local churches, and then to Bingley's new estate in neighbouring Staffordshire, ostensibly to paint the local moorlands.

"If you are still under the impression, like Lydia, that Mr Yeates is a penniless artist and not the younger son of Lord Wettenhall, I will wash my hands of you."

Darcy sat down. "Winsford's brother? The family name is Yeates?"

"Aunt Catherine has not written to me since my marriage." Darcy did not wish to be estranged from any of his family, but his aunt's language against Elizabeth had been unpardonable. He could only imagine what her reaction to Ash's marriage had been.

"Sadly our Aunt is still in communication with Richard, and she has not changed her position or the tone of her abuse." Ash did not sound particularly surprised or upset. "And you will take Mrs Bennet with you when you depart?"

Darcy laughed. "Yes, but only as far as Bingley's."

"There is no talk of Mrs Bingley being unable to travel?"

Darcy shook his head. "We should hunt. Go Shooting. Anything but continuing to gossip like fishwives!"

Freddie, who was stretched out on one of the chaise longues, sat up at Darcy's words. "That is the first interesting thing you have said in days."

"I was not aware that anything, or anyone, was forcing you to remain at Matlock, Freddie," was
Ash's response.

"No, but I had a lucky escape, I do not intend to push my luck any further."

This time Darcy did roll his eyes. Freddie should have known that any invitation to a house party would involve said house being stuffed to the gills with young ladies and their determined mothers. To hear Freddie speak of it, he had been pursued with alacrity, once during a game of croquet even physically.

"How very good it is that we are husbands now, Darcy, and do not have to worry about the hidden meanings in invitations," drawled Ash.

"And very happy ones," replied Darcy, smiling at his cousins.

Really The End

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