The Pemberley Effect

by Shem

Summary

Authors Note: This is a companion/side-along piece to the Brighton Effect.

I wanted to tell the story of Lizzy and Darcy but I found it difficult from a strict Kitty POV (and there are only so many times you can have Kitty lurking in bushes to eavesdrop. I will note which chapters correspond in the Brighton Effect. This chapter corresponds with Chapter Nine.

Summary: Lizzy returns from a pleasant and illuminating Derbyshire visit to discover just how close her family came to ruin while she was away.
Chapter 1

Part One  (Chapter Nine)

It was, she reflected, not unlike her return from Kent. She had so much to conceal! Of course, that was not likely to be possible with her Aunt and Uncle Gardiner. They had no conception of what should be concealed and why and Lizzy had seemingly no inclination to tell them.

Lizzy watched the landscape trickle by as her aunt and uncle discussed what they had seen in preparation for the inevitable onslaught of questions. Although Lizzy doubted her mother would be interested in the architecture of Blenheim.

Why had she not told her Aunt about Mr Wickham’s perfidy? It wasn’t because she was keeping Mr Darcy’s secret; she had told Jane after all. No, she did not want to expose herself to her aunt. She who prided herself on her judgement, to be so taken in by such a man! It was humiliating.

Then there was Mr Darcy. There was the chance that Mrs Gardiner would not understand Lizzy’s refusal of such a man; a man who could provide everything for her family. Mrs Gardiner did not believe in imprudence. Neither did she believe in marriage without respect nor affection, but Mr Darcy’s behaviour to Mrs Gardiner would make it difficult for her to believe that Lizzy could truly think that the necessary respect and affection was impossible.

Of course, Mrs Gardiner had at first not believed what had been said about Mr Darcy at Pemberley. Mr Wickham was too charming, too associated with her nostalgia for Derbyshire and Lizzy too certain, for her opinions to be swayed by some long-time servants who would have affections of their own. But then Mr Darcy had appeared and worked his charm too and Lizzy knew that Mrs Gardiner was wondering how her favourite niece could be quite so wrong.

Lizzy could not speak because she did not know what to say. She had been mortified when Mr Darcy had arrived early and found them touring his estate. His ease of manner and insistence in being all that was gentlemanly confused her further.

Mr Bingley had been as he ever had been; charming and eager. Mrs Gardiner had remarked she found him quite like a puppy, which explained the ease in which he was led by his friends and his sisters.

Mr Bingley’s sisters were unchanged also, and Lizzy congratulated herself that there her opinion and judgement had not been faulty. Miss Bingley was indeed jealous and made herself less appealing by her manner of recommending herself, and her sister guarded Miss Bingley’s interests. Mr Hurst they need not even discuss.

But Mr Darcy! Lizzy could not credit it. Was this the work of her words to him in Kent? The intelligence of his servants made that unlikely. But still she did sense that he was trying to prove to her that he could behave in a gentleman-like manner.

Had he truly wished to fish with her uncle, a man in trade, who should be so far beneath him? Did Mr Darcy find him good sensible company, or was he acting the part? Or was it that his surroundings made him comfortable and able to be affable?

Lizzy saw now the genius of Mr Wickham’s tales. Had she and her family now landed in Mr Darcy’s mind as the type of people who were worth his while? For even according to Wickham, where he found such people Mr Darcy could be liberal-minded, just, sincere, rational, honourable, and perhaps agreeable?
No, she could not believe that to be true; it was another of Mr Wickham’s misdirections. If Mr Darcy wished to show her, her error in refusing him her mistakes in judgement, her pride and her prejudice, he would not have been so attentive.

A simple invitation to visit with the ladies and taking Mr Gardiner fishing would have sufficed. But he had invited them to dine twice, and had taken charge of organising on one of those days a tour to places that were hidden from the guidebooks. He had played host to them and not given one sign that their presence was unwelcome or that their situation in life was unpalatable.

Lizzy felt that his feelings towards her had not changed. She tried not to feel too puffed up that his feelings for her had survived such a wounding of his vanity and pride.

What she could not make out were her own feelings. She had had a strange sensation upon first seeing Pemberley and realising of what she could have been mistress. But to accept a man because of his fine house was too much like Charlotte accepting Mr Collins for her to think on it any further.

Lizzy could now identify the many qualities that made Mr Darcy a better man, and a better match, than Mr Collins but to be so mercenary to accept a man because he liked her and he had extensive grounds was an abominable thought.

She didn’t know whether Mr Darcy was necessary to her happiness. Lizzy had never been in the deepest love that she felt was necessary for matrimony. She had felt a great deal of affection, and feelings of a less noble baser origin, for a number of gentlemen. But nothing that had lasted, nothing that fostered the kind of respect she needed in a husband.

Mr Darcy intrigued her certainly, and his interest was highly flattering, but she did not know him. She thought she did, but she had been wrong.

The five days acquaintance at Pemberley was certainly not enough to be sure. Was it?

“We are almost there,” said Mr Gardiner, looking out the window.

“Yes,” said his wife, “Your sister will be very pleased to hear that Mr Bingley is likely to come shoot.”

Mrs Gardiner could have been speaking to Lizzy or her husband and thus of Jane or Mrs Bennet, but it did not matter to Lizzy. On behalf of either lady, she begged her Aunt to keep that bit of news to herself.

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The Gardiners had wasted their time reviewing their trip for the best and most entertaining details. Mrs Bennet was more concerned about their encountering bad roads and their arriving so ahead of schedule resulting in her day being quite in disarray. That topic easily segued into the normal neighbourhood problems.

The only thing that piqued Lizzy’s interest was her mother lamenting the fact her husband was being so difficult with regards to her youngest daughters. Mr Bennet rarely interfered in family life, particularly when it came to curbing the entertainments of his daughters. Jane’s last letter to her in Derbyshire had been particularly scanty in news and detail and Lizzy wondered that Jane had not mentioned the uproar caused by these new changes.

Lydia had greeted them on their arrival before demanding Mrs Gardiner’s attentions to her gown, which had been purchased in Brighton at great expense but was, Lydia proudly boasted, made up
to be the height of fashion.

“Lydia has not changed,” said Lizzy to Jane in a low voice. “Papa’s thought that her exposing herself in Brighton would bring her to her senses has not occurred.”

The expression on Jane’s face was troubled and while she attempted to smile it did not reach her eyes. Lizzy wanted to take her sister out of the room that very moment to discover the cause of this distress, but Jane, sensing her feelings, shook her head slightly. Their conversation would have to wait.

Kitty and Mary had been walking to the Lucas’ and thus not been there to greet them. If Lydia had not been improved by Brighton, Lydia’s shadow had little chance of success, but when Kitty entered the room, Lizzy was surprised to note her sister clutched books to her chest. She also had lost some of her paleness and Lizzy thought that perhaps the sea air had done her some physical good.

Lydia and Kitty fell into a squabble immediately, of course, over the books. Lizzy was surprised that Kitty should be interested in the great families of England, but of course she probably thought her sister had met them all on her travels.

Her aunt took this opportunity to tease Lizzy about Mr Darcy and Lizzy felt her countenance change. She should have told Mrs Gardiner not to discuss Mr Darcy, but that would be the top of a slippery slope of information that Lizzy was not sure she wanted to voice.

It was all she could do to remain serene in the face of Mrs Gardiner’s assault. Perhaps she did feel more than she had ever before if she did not wish to discuss her feelings with her aunt. Previously Lizzy had been so open with her aunt about her flirtations and admirers.

Lizzy took refuge in sipping her tea and not thinking about former flirtations when her mother spoke peevishly. "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,” said Lydia from where she was playing spilkins with her young cousins.

The shock she felt at Mr Wickham’s – Mr Wickham, of all people! – name coupled with her sister’s made Lizzy spill her tea.

Lizzy knew not what she did as Jane and Mrs Gardiner took the situation in hand and guided her upstairs, Mrs Bennet’s complaints about the spoiling of the rug ringing in her ears.

“Jane!” Lizzy allowed her sister to pull off her dress, but then she had to speak.

“Oh, it looks as though you are not scalded,” said her sister.

“Mr Wickham, Jane! …what did Mama mean?”

Jane sunk onto the bed and looked at her aunt and Lizzy with a pained expression.

“I did not wish to write to you and worry you on your journey.”

“They are engaged?” Lizzy could not keep the horror from her voice.

“An imprudent match, but he is a charming man, perhaps a little harsh on a certain friend of ours … “ Mrs Gardiner pressed a cloth against Lizzy’s dress.
“No, Aunt!” cried Lizzy. “Mr Wickham is a villain. I did not tell you before because – I do not know. But he is a villain.”

“It is possible to like two people,” said Mrs Gardiner mildly, “without having to take one in violent dislike because the other becomes more attractive.”

“He tried to elope with Miss Darcy, who was then only fifteen years old, for her thirty thousand pounds.” It was out before Lizzy could stop herself.

Mrs Gardiner looked to Jane for the veracity of this and sunk down on a chair. “Can this be? And Lydia is…”

“She is not to marry him. She agreed to leave Brighton with him. Kitty discovered their plot and …” Jane stood up to pace a little. “Poor girl. She did not know what to do. Lydia, well we know our sister…and Kitty is not… well, she is more like me, I think. She insisted that she be taken along too because it would be more proper if there was a chaperone.”

Lizzy groaned and felt wretchedly ill. She could have prevented this. Thoughtless Lydia! Foolish Kitty!

“But they are both safely here,” prompted Mrs Gardiner.

“I have not pressed Lydia on the matter; she will not see that she has done any wrong and our mother…assists her in that view. But Kitty is sincerely distressed. I think she feels everything that she should, but she finds it difficult to speak of it, I think. Colonel Forster wrote. Between the three accounts I believe that Lydia left Kitty alone in Brighton … “

“Oh on the street?” said Mrs Gardiner, clearly not believing her niece to be so cruel or thoughtless.

Jane nodded. “I understand Kitty was rescued by a gentleman of Lizzy’s acquaintance and thus the Colonel was informed and Lydia and Mr Wickham brought back to Brighton. Colonel Forster set out with the girls almost the very next day. Oh, Lizzy! Oh, Aunt! Mr Wickham has such debts – and not just debts. I did not think it was possible.”

“Oh, I did,” said Lizzy, avoiding looking at her face in the mirror. “What do you mean a gentleman of my acquaintance?”

“Colonel Fitzwilliam is billeted in Brighton.”

Then Mr Darcy would know was Lizzy’s first thought and how he must congratulate himself on his lucky escape.

Silence descended upon the room as the three women mediated on their own thoughts. Mrs Gardiner broke this silence first.

“Well, I am sure there is some gossip in Brighton, but Lydia is safe here, as is her sister, and soon it will be as if it never happened. It has been a very lucky escape, and we must hope that we can impress upon Lydia the magnitude of what she has done.”

“You may try Aunt; I do not think I care to.”

“Lizzy!” said Jane.

“No, Jane. Colonel Fitzwilliam, of all people! He too must wonder at how I should have such a family. Ungovernable mother and sisters. He shall tell all of his acquaintance.”
“You spoke of him as a gentleman, Lizzy,” said Mrs Gardiner.

“He is Miss Darcy’s guardian he knows Mr Wickham’s true nature,” added Jane.

Lizzy would not be comforted.

“And what should it matter if he did?” asked Mrs Gardiner.

“Do you think Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley will return to Netherfield once they hear of this?”

Lizzy closed her eyes; she had not meant to say that! Jane turned away, but not before Lizzy saw the pain in her eyes.

“I think if a young man chooses to take aversion to a woman – a family – he admires and appreciates, because she has foolish sixteen and eighteen year-old sisters who were taken in by a practiced seducer, then he is not much of a young man and certainly not one I want marrying my niece.”

“And, Lizzy, there was never much hope Mr Bingley was going to return. You must not think I hope for that anymore.” Jane squeezed Lizzy’s hand before leaving, no doubt to privately grieve.

Mr Wickham seemed entirely forgot during the rest of the evening, and so, it seemed, was Mr Darcy. Lizzy was glad for it, and forced herself to speak easily of all that she saw, although it was obvious that no one was much interested, except perhaps her father.

Mr Bennet looked older than Lizzy remembered and she wanted to comfort him, but she did not know what to say. It would be better to speak to him the next morning when she could speak more rationally. At the present, time despite her sorrow that he had been so hurt and disillusioned, she could only think that she had warned him.

After she had retired for the evening, she tried to think of how she could relieve her father of some of his burden of his guilt and whether she wanted to when Kitty interrupted.

Kitty took over the brushing of her hair, and Lizzy could only think of an eager to please ten year-old Kitty who had always been available to brush her sister’s hair. Lizzy had noticed Kitty watching her through dinner; at one moment after dinner Lizzy had thought she would, speak but she had changed her mind.

"Did you know about Mr Wickham?"

It was a blunt question and Lizzy was surprised at it.

"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."

She should have exposed his character; she had discussed it with Jane and then allowed herself to be persuaded. No, that was not accurate: Lizzy had not wanted to attempt the impossible. She did not want to expose herself and her bad judgement.

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

Kitty echoed her thoughts so precisely that Lizzy had a difficult time believing this to be the same cipher of a sister who had left for Brighton two months ago.
"I did not think I should be believed. Is Mr Wickham daily expected? Jane says no one but Mama and Lydia has any real thought to it, but…"

Jane had been reassuring, but Lydia rarely confided in anyone but Kitty and while Kitty might be no longer in Lydia’ good graces, she was the sister who knew Lydia best.

"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."

Lizzy let out a sigh of relief. The damage was not material to Lydia. Wickham could not have picked a better target. She had seen for herself the damage caused to a sensitive heart. Lydia would not need much to recover as long as she did not take it upon herself to run away.

"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."

What would have Kitty made of Colonel Fitzwilliam? He had a red coat but was not handsome or so very young. What had Colonel Fitzwilliam made of her and how had he compared Lizzy to Kitty and Lydia?

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

Lizzy nodded, startled. She had not thought it would be so obvious when and where she had come by her knowledge. It was best, though, that Kitty continued to think it was Colonel Fitzwilliam. Lizzy could not expose Mr Darcy, not now.

They were interrupted by Jane; Lizzy had forgotten she had asked Jane to come see her before she retired. Jane was spending her nights with her cousins, who were going to miss her deeply when they returned to London shortly.

Lizzy did not feel able to send Kitty away, so it was with an audience that she told Jane about Mr Bingley’s presence at Pemberley and the possibility of his coming to shoot. She could only hope Kitty had enough sense now not to gossip.

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Her father was hiding. He was not hiding particularly well, considering he always was to be found in his library.

“Am I to get no peace?” cried Mr Bennet as he saw her.

“Papa,” she admonished.

“I hope you have not come to lecture me again. I have learnt my lesson you will see.”

Lizzy did not think that he had learnt his lesson, or at least for very long and that saddened her. She loved her father very much but as she grew older and hopefully wiser she saw more of his foibles.

“No, I was just going into the garden and wondered if you had any requests for the dinner table?”

“Something somber,” was his joking response.

“This is as peaceful as this house will be,” said Lizzy. “Normal gossip and goings on, no
gentlemen to disturb, our little cousins returned to London with their parents.”

“Then we must hope it will last.”

It was not to last. Mrs Phillips arrived with news that Lizzy both dreaded and anticipated. Mr Darcy – with Mr Bingley – was returning to Netherfield.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Corresponds with Chapter Ten of the Brighton Effect. This is Lizzy (and Darcy's) POV on events.

Part Two (Chapter Ten)

“You cannot deny that your Mr Bingley is not prompt!” said Lizzy, helping Jane into her gown as Mrs Bennet fluttered about.

“Indeed he is prompt! He has come to propose!” Mrs Bennet was certain.

“Mama, we have not seen each other since November, I hardly think – “ Jane could have been talking to a brick wall for all their mother paid her any attention.

“Oh and they will be down there alone with your father and you know he will drive them out of the house.”

“Mary and Kitty are downstairs,” soothed Jane, seeing to her hair.

“Hang them! What are they to this? They are not you, Jane! You cannot be this beautiful for nothing.”

“Mama, attend to your own dressing and then we shall all be down together much quicker,” said Lizzy in exasperation.

“Oh! And he has brought that odious man with him.” With that, Mrs Bennet took herself off to her own room.

“Odious man?” said Jane. “She cannot mean Mr Darcy, can she?”

“I think she can,” Lizzy sighed. “Mr Hurst is the only other option and I do not think I have ever imagined him on horseback.”

Jane giggled and made one of her curls crooked.

Lizzy was determined to pay no attention to her own attire. Why should she fuss and fidget over her hair just because Mr Darcy had come?

Most likely this was another of his actions to prove to himself and the world that he was not the man she thought he was. He was here only to support his friend. Nothing else.

No one was looking at Lizzy as they entered the room. Everyone’s first thought was Bingley and Jane, and for that she was glad. It allowed her to observe Mr Darcy’s profile. She thought he did not look as uncomfortable as he once had in their society.

Only Kitty and Mary were there in the room and it was doubtful that Mary had contributed anything to the conversation, so Lizzy was pleased to see Kitty had clearly not managed to give him a disgust of them immediately.
His standing to greet them was overshadowed by Bingley’s effusive greeting, which Lizzy could not help but smile at. Then she met Mr Darcy’s eyes and she thought she read in them some amusement.

She took a seat where she could watch the room but she purposely chose one that was not close to Mr Darcy. She wished to ask him about his sister and Pemberley, and indeed, see if she could make out his character further, but she felt a sense of constraint.

That feeling grew as Mrs Bennet seemed determined to be her most amiable and her most ridiculous. There could be no doubt to anyone in the room that Mrs Bennet had expectations of Mr Bingley. It did not matter if Mr Bingley intended to oblige her; the mortification was felt by more than one in the room.

Even her offer that Mr Bingley should come and shoot her father’s birds was ruined by the lack of respect and lack of consideration shown to Mr Darcy. Her mother’s half hearted invitation to him made Lizzy’s cheeks burn.

Mr Darcy had not said a single word and Lizzy could not understand it. Surely he could make some effort to speak? Mr Bingley took all the burden of their visit upon himself, thanking Mrs Bennet for her invitations.

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

“Yes, I did hear in the village that Mrs Nicolls was preparing for a large party,” replied Mrs Bennet.

Lizzy was curious as to the additions of the party, although she suspected it would just be Mr Bingley’s sisters. They could hardly let him back into Jane’s company without one final attempt to dissuade him from matrimony.

“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.”

Mr Darcy’s cousins! Now there would be an opportunity for Mr Darcy to show his better side to the neighbourhood, thought Lizzy. She hoped they were more like Colonel Fitzwilliam than Anne de Bourgh. It may even be Colonel Fitzwilliam, although her father had mentioned that gentleman had written to him and made no mention of being able to visit Longbourn.

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

It was not to be thought that Mrs Bennet could take such a comment with composure, and Lizzy found herself trying to divert her mother’s attention and explain away Mr Darcy’s comment.

That led to the revelation that the cousin in question was clearly Colonel Fitzwilliam’s older brother. The Colonel was a pleasant gentleman, although one who thought highly of the importance of a prudent and equal marriage. Lizzy wondered what his brother would be like, and found herself pleased that to listen to Mr Darcy’s description he was a much older gentleman for all his being unmarried.

A handsome young single Viscount would be too much for the neighbourhood to bear!

Lizzy wished her mother could finagle her information more delicately. She saw Mr Darcy’s countenance change as Mrs Bennet continued her interrogation and how obvious it was that Mrs Bennet was thinking of Mr Darcy’s cousins as possible husbands for her daughters.
Lizzy could have kissed Jane for turning the conversation before he was entirely revolted by Mrs Bennet’s mercenary nature. Lizzy thought time had dulled Mr Darcy’s memory of her mother and now he was being reminded of all of his original objections to her family.

She should have known that her mother would not long allow the conversation to remain on safe topics. Mrs Bennet then wanted to know all about Mr Fitzwilliam. Mr Darcy stood to stalk to the window and Lizzy felt desperately for herself and her sister that this reunion was to be spoilt.

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

Mr Darcy turned at the sound of her voice and he looked at her with a softening face. “Yes, his regiment is in – “ He stuttered for a moment; that was quite unlike him and Lizzy knew he was about to say Brighton but had decided against it. Lizzy wondered whether he really did know of Lydia and Kitty’s aborted flight. “He is much occupied with regimental duties,” finished Mr Darcy.

That seemed to be the extent of Mr Darcy’s contribution to the conversation and Lizzy was forced to watch his back as Mrs Bennet continued her onslaught of Mr Bingley and the absent Mr Fitzwilliam.

She desperately suggested a walk, but this only had the result of the gentlemen recollecting they should not neglect their guest.

As they walked Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy out of the house, Mr Darcy inclined his head towards her and she saw he was holding a letter.

“Miss Bennet, I have been charged by my sister to deliver this. You will, I hope, inform her of my diligence?”

“Of course, Mr Darcy.” Lizzy took the letter and admired the penmanship. Lydia was the same age and she never wrote so finely, neither did Kitty.

She was not able to read the letter straight away as Jane had fetched their bonnets and pelisses, clearly wishing to speak to her sister privately.

“You see, Lizzy, I am safe,” said Jane when they were safely outside, walking arm in arm.

“You are not safe,” replied Lizzy.

“I am not so … “

“He is in love with you.”

“After twenty minutes when we barely had a chance to speak a word to each other? I did not think you so romantic!” Jane took pity on her some moments later. “I hope that we will be able to go on smoothly from here. I shall be able to meet Mr Bingley and you shall be able to meet Mr Darcy.”

Lizzy pulled her arm from Jane’s and walked away with no purpose but to turn around again and walk back to Jane.

“How can I meet him? Did you not see him as Mama was …exposing us all?”

“It seems we do a lot of exposing,” said Jane mildly.

“You do not mind that all she can think of is marrying her daughters and her every effort is
designed to make that impossible? Except with gentlemen we have no interest in, like Mr Collins!"

“Our Aunt is right, Lizzy. I do not want to marry a gentleman who cannot see that Mama wants the best for her daughters. And that we have sisters who are exuberant and full of life. I love Mama and I love my sisters. I know you feel the same.”

Lizzy pulled off her bonnet with some impatience. “Oh, Jane. You know I do. I just wish I was still a hundred miles away from them! You cannot deny that we show to much better advantage away from them.”

“What I cannot understand is why you should care so much about Mr Darcy?”

“I do not – Oh, Jane, I do not know what I think. He is so different. So different here, to what he was in Kent, to what he was at Pemberley. It is like he is a different man in each locality! Perhaps he is actually a triplet!”

Jane laughed, but Lizzy could not laugh. She needed a nice long walk to clear her mind.

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“We should have stayed and taken a walk,” fretted Bingley.

Darcy knew he would begin to fret and could have set his watch by it.

“I do not think leaving Freddie to himself at Netherfield is the action of a good host.” Nor a good idea, Darcy thought privately.

“But I hardly got to talk to Miss Bennet!”

“There will be time enough for that.”

Mr Bingley made some exclamation and continued to talk away about Miss Bennet and his prospects.

Darcy had observed the countenance of Miss Bennet and he would have to observe her again, but he was convinced her sister was right and Miss Bennet did feel for Mr Bingley everything a wife should feel for a husband. He would have to confess to Bingley sooner rather than later, and after that he expected they would be engaged.

But it had not been the eldest Miss Bennet that had captured his attention. Elizabeth had been his first thought. She did not look materially different than she had been at Pemberley. But he thought she had been uncomfortable.

She had certainly been embarrassed by her mother’s behaviour and Mr Darcy felt a pang at that. He had not meant for her to be discomforted, to such a degree, by her own family.

It was no recommendation to himself or to her if she now felt herself above her own family. He would always find Mrs Bennet’s character disconcerting, and Mr Bennet lax in his duty, but Mr Darcy could now own that he himself did not have relations without fault.

He had felt severe mortification at Lady Catherine’s behaviour in Kent, but he had not realised the parallels until Elizabeth’s strong words had woken him from a dream.

If Elizabeth could accept Lady Catherine, then he could surely accept the Bennets?
Darcy shook his head and told himself that it could never be. He thought he had excised that hope from his mind, but seeing Elizabeth at Pemberley and showing her his home and his hospitality, he found he had hoped.

He still had hope, but it was such a tiny spark that he dare not blow on it in case it went out. Darcy tried to pay attention to Bingley in order to clear his thoughts.

“We spoke more to Miss Kitty than Jane, and listened more to Miss Mary’s concerto – We should not have gone so early. I do not know why you were so eager…”

He had been eager to see Elizabeth, a foolish childish notion. She could never love him. He must be glad that she no longer hated him, and was not disgusted by his company. She would always be the woman that he would hold other women up against.

Darcy’s disappointment had been almost matched that of Bingley’s when they had been given the choice of Mr Bennet and his books and the younger Miss Bennets.

He was glad, however, his friend had chosen the younger Miss Bennets. It gave him a chance to study Catherine Bennet at least.

Richard had written to him from Brighton informing him of Wickham’s latest ‘difficulties’ … a euphemistic term if ever Darcy saw one. He was pleased to know that the full bureaucratic might of his Majesties Armed Forces was being thrust upon Wickham. It was a neat solution to a problem that had troubled Darcy for some time, but he had not seen how to solve it without exposing Georgiana.

Darcy had at first assumed that Wickham had planned his flight from Brighton in order to revenge himself more fully on Darcy, but he could not see how that would be. There was no possible way that Wickham could know of his interest in Elizabeth, and even if he did, Wickham would not credit that Darcy would do anything about his interest.

No, Miss Lydia Bennet was the sort of girl who would find it a grand adventure to run away with an officer. Wickham had just found himself very much in luck when he’d wanted to fly. Then his luck had run out when Richard and Ash had been in Brighton.

Richard had written that Wickham was entirely to blame. Knowing the two young ladies in question, Darcy did not quite believe that but Richard had rather peculiarly written and underlined that Ash would not have it that the young ladies should be blamed or that the story should be spoken of.

Darcy thought the likelihood that the story should be circulated to be quite high; a household that encouraged an elopement could not have discreet servants. It seemed that his cousins had already thought of this, but Darcy wondered how much money had been parted with to secure this outcome. Although knowing his cousins, a mere talk may have been all that was necessary. What the Viscount of Ashbourne required to happen generally occurred without delay.

With his cousin’s letter in mind, Darcy had been surprised in Catherine Bennet. She had been civil and managed to keep a conversation going without resorting to gossip. She had smoothed over his faux pas when Darcy failed in his determination to say nothing that could be considered an insult to either Hertfordshire or the Bennets.

She had even seemed rather disinterested in his cousin’s arrival, which was more than could be said about her mother. Darcy found himself at little surprised at that; if there was one thing Lord Ashbourne did exceedingly well, it was recommend himself to young ladies. Perhaps the manner of their meeting rendered his charm moot.
“We should visit tomorrow,” said Bingley as he handed his horse to a groomsman.

“Your sisters and Mr Hurst arrive tomorrow,” reminded Darcy.

“Oh, I do not have to be here to ...” Bingley broke off in agitation. He was too good natured to be such a poor host and he did not have it in him to listen to Miss Bingley’s complaints if he were not there to meet her.

“Allow the neighbourhood to grow accustomed to your arrival,” counselled Darcy, following Bingley into the house.

“You shall be no assistance; I know you, Darcy, you will hide yourself where my sister cannot find you.”

They found Freddie in the saloon. He was lying on a sofa with his legs crossed at the ankles.

“Where have you been? I had to have my breakfast alone.” Freddie did not get up to complain; rather, he continued to lament from his prone position. Darcy knocked Freddie’s legs off the sofa and received a glare for his troubles. Darcy took no mind. His cousin was twenty years old and, in Darcy’s opinion, in great need of suppressing.

Bingley apologised for their absence and Darcy told Bingley not to.

“They always treat me terribly,” said Freddie. “It is not my fault I am so much younger than my brothers and Darcy.”

“If you did not deserve to be treated terribly…”

“And now I find you have invited Ash!”

“I thought that you – “ Bingley looked mortified that he may have inadvertently invited two warring brothers to stay under the same roof.

“If Freddie does not care to see Ash, then Freddie may go.”

“I shall not go, I was here first. He will not come, I daresay. Did you know the last time I saw him, he made me go to his tailor to get new jackets fitted! And he read me such a homily.”

“Oh your cravats?” Darcy did not blame Freddie’s pique. He himself had been privileged to hear Lord Ashbourne’s extensive thoughts on men who did not take pride in their appearance.

“Yes, amongst other things.” That was said in such a way that Darcy wondered what his cousin had been up to and what his oldest cousin meant by inviting himself to a shooting party in a place of little consequence.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

This corresponds with Chapter Eleven of the Brighton Effect. This is Lizzy and Darcy's POV from the period of time that chapter covers.

Part Three (Chapter Eleven)

As their carriage rattled towards Netherfield, their presence commanded rather summarily by a recently arrived and injured Miss Bingley, Lizzy felt much as she expected Marie Antoinette did on that cart.

Jane expressed no sympathy. “And you say Lydia and Kitty are the fanciful ones!”

“A morning with Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst!”

“We shall be better informed about the latest fashions,” replied Jane placidly. At least Jane continued to be unconvincing in the sincerity of the Bingley sisters’ friendship. “Are you sure you are not angry that Mr Darcy has returned to town?”

Miss Bingley had been most explicit in her letter of invitation about Mr Darcy’s absence and the fact the other gentlemen should not be seen, for they were to shoot. Lizzy was sure she had only been invited to ensure that Mrs Bennet did not attempt to send Jane on horseback again.

“Not at all! I have no feelings about his movements! I do think it odd that he should come and go so quickly.”

Jane just smiled and Lizzy wondered when her sister had found herself capable of mocking. It was not fair that Jane had all the ability to hide her feelings behind a serene countenance, and at least she knew what her feelings were. Lizzy was still not sure how she felt about the master of Pemberley. She was disappointed at his leaving but she was not sure of her reasons. Did she miss his company or was it because she worried that his leaving meant he was, after all, the man she’d thought he was all those months ago? Was Mr Darcy really the sort of man who despised company he considered beneath him and made little effort to improve his acquaintance with said company having already made a judgement upon them?

Miss Bingley was laid up upon a sofa and had a bandaged ankle stretched out in front of her.

“Do forgive me for not rising to greet you, my dear Jane, Miss Eliza. It was most distressing to twist my ankle after such a long carriage ride!”

Lizzy and Jane forgave her most freely and greeted both Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst before sitting down to exchange commonplaces.

“Did you enjoy town, Miss Bennet?” said Mrs Hurst. “I am so sorry that we should always have been missing each other.”

Jane smiled, “I had much to occupy myself, Mrs Hurst; do not think about it any further.”
“And, of course, Miss Eliza, we saw you in Derbyshire and heard all about your travels. Are you much distressed now to be back at Longbourn?” Miss Bingley did not wait to hear Lizzy’s answer and added, “but of course you are not! Now that Netherfield is occupied once again. We have had half the neighbourhood calling.”

“The Netherfield estate is an important one for our little part of the world,” replied Lizzy evenly.

“Though the gentlemen only think of their sport,” said Mrs Hurst.

It fell to Lizzy to ask how Mr Bingley fared, as Jane would not mention his name.

“My brother continues well. We are very sorry to see Mr Darcy go, but we suspect he will return with a very great friend.”

“Mr Darcy did mention that he was expecting his cousin, Lord Ashbourne. Did Mr Fitzwilliam accompany him to town?” If Lord Ashbourne was a great friend of Miss Bingley that did not speak in his favour, although Lizzy was determined not to prejudge. She had been so faulty in her first impressions over the last year!

“No, Mr Fitzwilliam remains for the shooting.”

“And I hope he is a pleasant house guest,” said Jane.

“Indeed. A very pleasant man.”

That seemed to be all that could be said about Mr Fitzwilliam unless either Jane or Lizzy began to question the Bingley sisters. Neither Lizzy nor Jane would give the satisfaction of seeming to be pert inquisitive young ladies out on the hunt for information about single young gentlemen.

In the end Miss Bingley, herself, had to answer what had not been asked.

“Mr Darcy, it seemed was a little forgotten, after all what was his wealth, his manners, his income and his family? This amused Lizzy.

Lizzy and Jane could have no share of this conversation; they were merely there to be awed. By this time, Lizzy thought, Miss Bingley should have been aware that all attempts to awe and intimidate only made her courage rise.

The image Miss Bingley painted was entirely spoilt when a young gentleman entered the room rather gracelessly. His coat was stained and his cravat quite ruined. He had clearly come straight from the shooting.
“Oh, you are in here.” He looked displeased to have found himself in the middle of a tea party.

Miss Bingley beamed, “Mr Fitzwilliam!”

“Miss Bingley,” Mr Fitzwilliam made a perfunctory bow to her and then to Mrs Hurst.

“Miss Bennet, Miss Eliza Bennet, may I introduce to you Mr Frederick Fitzwilliam? Mr Fitzwilliam these are our neighbours the Bennets.”

Mr Fitzwilliam made his bows to them far more generously.

“I say! Are you the young lady who recently visited Pemberley?”

Lizzy had to own that it was so, and Mr Fitzwilliam sat by her and seemed interested in her opinions of the place.

He was not quite the picture of the flower of nobility that Miss Bingley had attempted to conjure up, but he was extremely pleasant although rather young. He had clearly been given all the benefits of life and none of the hardships.

She found it easy to talk to him and was glad for it, because Mr Bingley and Mr Hurst followed after him. Mr Hurst stretched out and went to sleep, but Mr Bingley could not be moved from Jane’s side. Without Mr Fitzwilliam’s company, Lizzy would have had to be silent or worse still talk to Miss Bingley and her sister.

In very short time they found out they shared almost the same birthday – that made Mr Fitzwilliam almost of age along with herself – and that Mr Fitzwilliam did not hold his cousin in wonder.

Lizzy would be sure to mention some of Mr Fitzwilliam’s tales of his childhood to Mr Darcy. It would do him good to be discomposed.

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The house felt empty. It had never done so before. Darcy chose not to examine the fact it was only since his return from Kent that it felt like a mausoleum. Not even Georgiana’s presence could enliven it, although she was still safe at Pemberley with Mrs Annesley.

Why had he gone to Netherfield? There was no reason, except to ensure that Miss Bennet did truly esteem Bingley, and he had not even done that!

He was sure Elizabeth’s view was correct and one look at Jane Bennet proved that she was a serene girl, who was unlikely to show her true feelings to the world. But one glance was not enough to say she was certainly in love with Bingley and that he had fulfilled his duty to Bingley’s best interest! Certainly it did not explain his hurried removal.

Darcy feared he was becoming like Bingley, inconstant and easily swayed, always going hither and thither bending to the wills of others and capable of sudden caprice.

Worse still, Freddie had refused to join him in returning to London. Darcy would have to return, he could not in good conscience and good manners leave Bingley to host his cousin without Darcy’s presence. There was not such a degree of acquaintance between Freddie and Bingley that it would be acceptable.

Then there was Ash. Darcy did not understand why the viscount had made plans to join them.

Richard had assured him that it had been settled between them that Richard would write to Mr
Mr Bennet would hardly expect Lord Ashbourne to call to discuss Miss Lydia’s aborted elopement.

It was one of his cousin’s whims and would probably come to naught. Indeed, Darcy had hoped to catch his cousin and persuade him to go Newmarket or attend one of the many house parties to which he had no doubt been invited. It was possible even that Darcy could accompany him.

There Darcy might meet a young lady of eminent respectability, who would adorn Pemberley, whose family would never cause him a moment’s embarrassment or give him a disgust of them.

There was Darcy’s problem. He loved Elizabeth and yet her family! At Pemberley it had been so easy to think of her there, and to forget the troubling aspects of her family. Just as he forgot Lady Catherine, so too could Mrs Bennet, Mr Collins, and her silly sisters be consigned to oblivion.

He paced and came no closer to a conclusion. Should he stay away from her so he should not be in danger? Should he return for an inoculation?

Did any of these thoughts matter when she did not like him, let alone esteem and love him?

Bingley would propose to Jane Bennet and then there would be no severing the connection, unless Darcy distanced himself from Bingley, which Darcy had no desire to do. He enjoyed Bingley’s company; with Bingley he could act as mentor and friend. Unlike his cousins, Bingley did not poke fun at him. No, he had known from the minute that Elizabeth had mentioned, over dinner at Pemberley, that her sister had been in town all those months, that Bingley and Miss Bennet’s union was inevitable.

He was surprised Bingley had not ferreted out Darcy and his sisters’ interference. Darcy knew he would have to confess to that, but he would do so after Bingley had proposed and was in a better frame of mind.

“Darcy, why are you pacing in your own hallway?” His cousin looked baffled and was still in his greatcoat.

“Ash?” Darcy stared at him.

The viscount held a card between his gloved fingers and had a perplexed look upon this face, “You invited me? Have you perhaps been out in the sun?”

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Lizzy found she had little amusement in the card party thrown by Mrs Goulding. It was clear that worthy woman was revelling in the fact she should be the first to host Mr Bingley to a formal party, that her rooms should be where the neighbourhood could watch Mr Bingley and Jane and gossip freely about their reconciliation.

She saw that the Bingley sisters were watching all that went on with judgement in their eyes. Lizzy did not know why she cared. It was doubtful that they could convince their brother that Jane did not love him. It was doubtful that Mr Bingley would care about her family and their circumstances. He was an affable man who believed the best in people.

So why did it pain her, that her friends and acquaintances were exposing themselves and to such people? The Bingley sisters were not models of propriety, with their sharpness and ill-judged remarks.
She did not want to think that her enjoyment of the evening was spoiled by the fact that Jane looked as if her fondest wish was about to come true and Lizzy had no prospects.

“Miss Elizabeth, is it not customary to smile at such events?”

Lizzy looked up to see Mr Fitzwilliam and a glass of lemonade. She accepted it gratefully and did not mind when he sat beside her.

“Do you not enjoy cards? I understand from my cousin, Georgiana, that is, not Darcy, that you take pleasure in a great many things. If that is so then I cannot fault you for disliking cards.”

“I do enjoy cards, sir, but I have little inclination to play this evening. I feel rather dull and should disappoint my partner. Have you received a letter from Miss Darcy recently?”

“This morning, but she only wrote because I fear she was waiting for a letter from a much better correspondent.” He looked pointedly at her.

“If you mean me, then I wrote to her on Saturday.”

Lizzy had been pleased to have received the letter from Miss Darcy. They had spoken of writing to one another, but Lizzy had not been sure whether that was just politeness. Miss Darcy had written of commonplaces and Lizzy could sense her shyness and reserve, but Lizzy had been determined not to let her own awkwardness show in her reply.

Miss Darcy surely needed practice and support. It did not seem that she had many female friends of her own age. Miss Bingley’s condescension did not count.

Mr Fitzwilliam and herself spoke of Miss Darcy for a while and then of the party in general, before he asked to be introduced about. He might be Mr Darcy’s cousin, but Meryton society soon decided Mr Fitzwilliam was a very different sort of man to his cousin and found him to be much more in Mr Bingley’s style of manners and thus much more to their liking.

Lizzy might have been distracted, but she could not fail to note that Jane and Mr Bingley were never more than three paces away from each other; a fact she mercilessly teased her sister about when they were retired to bed.

But Jane, it seemed, was not as convinced as Lizzy – or indeed the whole household – that there would soon be a proposal.

“Jane, you cannot still think he does not admire you?” They were walking around the garden the next morning while the others played about them.

“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.”

She had thought longer on the subject than before and now believed it would be impossible for the Colonel to act so ungenerously, particularly in light of Miss Darcy’s aborted elopement.

“Then what else explains his odd behaviour, his coming here and going away so quickly?”

“It is not like you to be suspicious, Jane.” Lizzy spoke lightly for she did not want to allow Jane to continue her line of questioning. She knew Jane was suspicious of her feelings, and wanted to know whether now Lizzy would speak of them.

“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?”

Yes, Jane had now decided that the moment was right to delve into her sister’s emotions. Lizzy had wanted to be open with Jane in everything, but not when she was so confused and not when the situation with Mr Bingley was unresolved. Although, Lizzy knew that very soon she would not have that excuse.

“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.”

Jane took Lizzy’s hands in her own and would have spoken more except for Hill interrupting them.

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It seemed that Jane’s happiness would be thwarted once again because when Mr Bingley next visited he did not visit alone. They had certainly expected to see him. No one who had seen them together the previous evening would have been surprised by his presence at Longbourn.

This perhaps explained why Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst were so diligent in their calling; it was one last attempt to prevent the inevitable.

While Lizzy could not fault the outcome, she cringed when Kitty suggested a walk and then when Lydia in her carrying voice announced that they should walk faster, so as to out pace Jane and Bingley.

The Bingley sisters had decided not to join them perhaps realising the futile nature of their plan or not realising that the Bennet sisters would abandon Jane and their brother.

Lizzy, in the end, decided that no one should see their defective chaperoning and they almost ran towards Meryton, talking about Jane and Bingley, and the unpleasantness of his sisters.

If Bingley did not take his opportunity, he was a fool, thought Lizzy, as they slowed their steps down Meryton’s high street. Lydia had taken the first opportunity to enjoy herself in one or all of the shops, but Kitty seemed satisfied to merely look in the shop windows.

“Miss Elizabeth!”
Lizzy turned her head to see Mr Fitzwilliam crossing the street to join them.

“Miss Elizabeth, it is fortunate that we meet again and this must be one of your – “ Mr Fitzwilliam stopped short and seemed struck by Kitty. She was the same; suddenly still in Mr Fitzwilliam’s presence.

Lizzy tried to see Mr Fitzwilliam through her sister’s eyes. He was a handsome man, he was certainly eligible, and he had a winning smile. Kitty was certainly unable to drag her eyes away from his and Lizzy blushed for her blatancy. The only consolation was that Mr Fitzwilliam seemed just as transfixed. Kitty was certainly a pretty girl, but surely Mr Fitzwilliam had seen prettier.

“Yes, Mr Fitzwilliam, this is my sister. Kitty, may I introduce Mr Fitzwilliam?” Lizzy hoped speaking would bring them both back to their senses and remind them they were standing in a public street.

“Mr Fitzwilliam?” said Kitty faintly.

“Yes, Mr Darcy’s cousin?”

Kitty, it seemed, would not be brought to mind her surroundings, and Lizzy wondered if she had been this disordered in Brighton by all the officers, many of whom surely would have been as handsome as Mr Fitzwilliam.

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Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

This corresponds with Chapter Twelve of the Brighton Effect. This is Lizzy and Darcy’s POV of the period of time that chapter covers.

Part Four (Chapter 12)

The awkwardness between Kitty and Mr Fitzwilliam remained for some moments longer until Lizzy noticed another man crossing the street to join them. He was, perhaps, Mr Darcy’s age and as well tailored, if not more so.

His identity surprised her when Mr Fitzwilliam, who managed to tear his eyes away from Kitty’s, asked Lizzy’s permission to introduce her to his brother, Lord Ashbourne. Mr Darcy had led them to believe the viscount was a much older gentleman, and for some reason Lizzy had supposed him inclined to corpulence.

She hoped that Lady Upton was reasonably plain; otherwise it would be very unfair to Colonel Fitzwilliam to be the only plain Fitzwilliam sibling.

If Lord Ashbourne noted the strange behaviour of his brother and her sister he made no sign of it, asking where they were walking and offering to accompany them. They turned towards Netherfield and Lizzy was sure the viscount would grow tired of dancing attendance on them and in time she and Kitty would be able to circle back to Longbourn.

“Do you often walk into Meryton?” asked Lord Ashbourne.

“Frequently, we country mice have little other entertainment.”

“I understand from my cousin that there is a monthly assembly, do you often attend?”

“I am a young lady with four sisters there is only one answer to that question. Do you speak of Mr Darcy? Has he returned to Netherfield?” Lizzy hoped she sounded indifferent.

She was a little distracted not least because Kitty and Mr Fitzwilliam were walking very close together. They were whispering together, and they had known each other for five minutes! She saw Miss Watson peering at them from her parlour window and Lizzy blushed. Their walk and Kitty’s behaviour would soon be common knowledge.

“Yes, Darcy. He obligingly came to London to fetch me in case I should forget my way.”

The viscount had an easy manner, but Lizzy noticed that he too had half an eye on his brother. She was mortified that he should have perceived it. They were giggling together now like children, but they were not children and Kitty should not forget it. Lizzy thought that her sister had grown up after her experience in Brighton, but she still flirted when she should contain her emotions and not excite talk.

Lord Ashbourne’s eyes may have noted the behaviour in front of them, but his conversation and tone did not change as they walked along. They spoke of nothing of importance and Lizzy did not
press him over his cousin.

They reached the outskirts of Meryton and Lizzy made her curtsey. “Well, here we must part ways,” said Lizzy with a smile

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.”

Lizzy cast her mind around for some excuse when Kitty stepped forward, her eyes bright and cheeks flushed and spoke.

“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.”

“Kitty!” Lizzy was alarmed that Kitty would speak so immoderately in front of strangers and about details so very private. This was the Kitty who existed before the summer and Lizzy blushed for her.

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

“It is not at all necessary. My sister misspoke … “ said Lizzy in an attempt to dissuade him, but he would not be dissuaded.

“There is not need for talk of necessity! I have nothing better to do, except acquaint myself with the town, or to acquaint myself with the manner of sport that might be found here.”

Lizzy recovered a little, “Well, I confess… your brother or Mr Bingley, or if you are acquainted with Mr Hurst, they are who you should turn to with your questions of sport.”

“Then you will assist me with the town? I hear that a former mayor – a Sir William Lucas – is giving a dance. Is that correct?”

Lizzy confirmed that it was so.

“And what manner of man is he?”

In this way they spoke until they returned to where they had first met. Lizzy was relieved to hear from some of the young Lucas boys that Lydia had found Maria and returned to Longbourn. But there was no sign of Jane and Bingley.

“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 Lizzy practically dragged Kitty in the direction of Longbourn. Lizzy did not look backwards.

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

“You think Mr Bingley will not propose?”

“That is not the point!”

Lizzy attempted to make her sister understand that her behaviour was wrong, but Kitty could only think of Jane and the romance of a proposal.

Kitty was not to be disappointed, Maria Lucas ran out of the house shouting that Mr Bingley had
Kitty was not to be disappointed, Maria Lucas ran out of the house shouting that Mr Bingley had proposed. She would have continued her story, but Lydia catching up to her told them all the details.

“He proposed not moments after we left them; see I told you it was a good idea, Lizzy. La! You should listen to me more often. He was most violent in his affections and insisted on speaking to Papa immediately. He has left now, to follow his sisters back to Netherfield to acquaint them of the good news. I expect they shall look sour!”

Lydia was correct in her assessment, so Lizzy did not feel able to admonish her, although she knew that she should be a better example of behaviour for her sisters.

But first she must speak to Jane. She found Jane upstairs in their room.

“Oh Lizzy! Can anyone be as happy as I am? ’Tis too much! By far too much. I do not deserve it. Oh! Why is not every body as happy?”

“Because you are too good, Jane, and do not say you do not deserve it; you who have borne so much.”

“Oh, Lizzy it was only a persuasion of my being indifferent that made him go away. How right Charlotte was, if only I had given a little sign, I could be long married.”

“If you had given a little sign you would not be my Jane.” The sisters embraced and only a small part of Lizzy was jealous.

They returned downstairs to listen to their mother’s raptures, which soon turned into sorrow when she realised that Jane’s first appearance as an engaged woman must be at a dance given by Sir William Lucas.

Their mother’s annoyance at this fact was only allayed when she realised how much Lady Lucas would be envious of Jane’s good fortune. Indeed all the mothers of the neighbourhood would surely be green-eyed of Mrs Bennet’s genius at attracting suitors. That put her in a much better frame of mind, even if it made Jane quite distraught. Jane had wanted to conceal her engagement so as to not spoil the evening for Miss Emma Lucas, who would be coming out at the dance.

“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.

Their discussion of the wedding and all Mrs Bennet’s concerns about the ability to put decent food on her table for the wedding was interrupted by their Aunt Phillips. She looked full of news and curiosity.

“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 who was collapsed in a chair only now beginning to be interested in the conversation.

“Mr Darcy has returned to Netherfield and brought his cousin.” Mrs Phillips straightened and smiled.

“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 and Lizzy noted that both she and Kitty tried to meet her look with indifference.

“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 – “ Aunt Phillips was triumphant.

“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.” Lizzy was not Aunt Phillip’s favourite, but one could forget that fact based on how she was now looking at her second niece.

“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 refusing to give into too much speculation.

Mrs Bennet knew her daughter too well to think that Lizzy would divulge any further information, so she turned the conversation back to her sister and had to be satisfied with Mrs Phillip’s knowledge of the new arrival.

Jane seemed complacent and not at all unhappy that she was no longer the centre of attention, even teasing her sister over whether she had 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.”

“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. She refused to think about Mr Darcy and what it might mean that he had returned to Netherfield.

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“I think we have the best carriage,” said Ash stretching out his legs. “Is Miss Bingley always so enthusiastic?”

“That is not a word I would have used to describe her,” replied Darcy looking out the window as they approached Lucas Lodge, “but then I am not the heir to an earldom.”

“You always assign the basest of motivations to people, Darcy.”

“You think I am wrong?”

“Frequently. In this case perhaps not. Miss Bingley certainly has enough money of her own that she might marry comfortably to a gentleman she esteemed, rather than switch her allegiance so readily. Or am I mistaken?”

Darcy shook his head, “I did not encourage her.”

“You encourage no one,” was his cousin’s response.

Freddie stuck his head out the window, “It looked a decent sized house, there should be enough
dancing, and luckily Mertyon has enough pretty ladies so that we shall not be confined to the Bingley sisters.”

Ash inclined his head to see past his brother’s, “It is a sizable house. Sir William must be profitable in his business.”

Darcy snorted, “His elevation to the knighthood gave him a disgust of business and he has retired here. His children will have little. The eldest daughter married Mr Collins, who has the unfortunate, although he will never think so, position of being Lady Catherine’s parson.”

Freddie made such a face at this disclosure that Darcy could not help but laugh.

“Country society,” said Darcy as the carriage came to a stop.

“You think the ton does not have such foolish and short sighted men? Come you are not so stupid, or so ignorant,” responded Ash.

Countless times before had Darcy wished he had his cousin’s ease of address and wondered whose blood caused it. None of his Darcy cousins had such charm and address so Darcy presumed it was the Darcy blood that reigned supreme within himself, but upon reflection it could not be the Fitzwilliam blood that held all the charm because Cousin Anne was not at all at ease with others. However, since Freddie, Annabelle, Richard, and Ash all had reasonably equal measures of charm, Darcy was at a loss to explain it since the only blood they shared was Fitzwilliam.

Freddie had certainly come ready to dance and be merry. Ash was more guarded and Darcy could not tell if he was play acting the generous lord, or whether he truly found the society pleasing.

Darcy watched Bingley give all his attention to Miss Bennet, whose smiles were nothing like they had once been. Gone was the reserve and serenity. Her modesty had not allowed her to hope or expect anything of Bingley but now she was assured of his love, she was free to show hers. Darcy envied her.

He found himself drawn into a conversation with his cousins and Sir William Lucas; or rather he stood at the side of the little party and listened as Sir William discussed St James’ Court. Miss Bingley, and many others of his acquaintance, would have shown their contempt, but his cousins did not.

“Miss Lucas, I expect I am too late, but if you have any dances free, would you do me the honour of standing up with me?”

This pretty phrasing had Sir William all effusive pleasure, and allowed Lady Lucas to remind the viscount that he was in the country now; they rarely filled up their dance cards beforehand.

Thus Ash was manoeuvred into leading Emma Lucas out to open the dancing. She was pretty, but no doubt as empty headed as Miss Maria Lucas who had not said many words of sense together when she had been at Kent.

Darcy was surprised that Ash had allowed himself to be tricked in such a way, but as he watched his cousin make Miss Bennet his next partner, Darcy thought Ash might have a plan.

Miss Bingley reminded him of their dance, which Darcy had not remembered offering, but it would do him no good to stand around on the fringes of the dancing all night. He should have lead her off the dance floor and offered to get Miss Bingley some refreshment, but his manners were forgot when he saw that Ash was next soliciting Elizabeth for a dance. He could not help but drift towards them.
“Miss Elizabeth, I hope you shall do me the honour of the next?”

“You shall be quite tired if you dance every dance, my lord, but you will be very well liked.”

“I am fond of being liked, so I shall remind myself tomorrow when I do not wish to rise from my bed. Darcy, you will dance with Miss Elizabeth next after this, shall you not?”

“I had – “ Darcy had not thought Ash had even noticed him there. “If Miss Elizabeth does not object.”

“I expect he will stand on your feet and be disagreeable in his choice of conversation, but if you do not dance with him I do not know who will. But I sense you are a woman of great fortitude.”

Elizabeth laughed, and then blushed. “If Mr Darcy has no objection to dancing with me, then I should be honoured.”

“I have no objection indeed, quite the reverse,” said Darcy feeling lightheaded.

The feeling did not abate even when he took her hand in his after Ash relinquished her.

Darcy could not have told you of what they spoke, nor could he be sure he had acquitted himself correctly. But Elizabeth seemed to have no issue with allowing him to bring her some punch and he counted that as an improvement from their last dance.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

This corresponds with Chapter Thirteen of the Brighton Effect. This is Lizzy and Darcy's POV of the same period that chapter covers.

Part Five (Chapter 13)

Their maid was detained helping Mrs Bennet into her nightclothes. Their mother always wanted to talk over the night immediately and the maid was the lucky recipient of her confidences.

Sally was not a bad maid by any means; she just came from a local family whose siblings had all gone into service. Sally saw nothing wrong in telling her family the Bennets’ concerns, and thus it was that the neighbourhood knew almost everything Mrs Bennet chose to confide in Sally.

There was nothing Lizzy could do about that, so she focused on helping her sister with her hair.

“I do hope Emma had a lovely evening,” said Jane.

“She was led out to dance by a viscount; if she did not have a lovely evening, then she is hard to please.”

“I thought that was very kind of Lord Ashbourne. His manners are pleasing, but I found him more reserved than you led me to believe.”

“Reserved?” That was the opposite of what Lizzy would have described him as.

“Yes, I think some of his pleasantry are rather studied. He means to give no offence so he does not, it is not that he is truly – I cannot explain it, but surely you see the difference between the genuineness of Charles and the viscount?”

Lizzy had not thought of it like that, and now that Jane had remarked on it, she revisited his actions and words.

“You think him insincere?”

“No, but he is a very great gentleman. Our concerns can be little to him. I think it reflects well that he does not – well, Mr Darcy has been our guide of rich young men recently, has he not? And he does not have the manner of goodness even though we know he does have much goodness within him. But we shall probably see little of Lord Ashbourne.” Jane turned to assist Lizzy with her hairpins. “Mr Fitzwilliam, however … “

“You think he shall stay in the neighbourhood? He does not strike me as a young man who likes to be in one place for very long.”

“Did you not notice he danced two dances with Kitty?”

Lizzy had not noticed that, she had been so focused on Mr Darcy that she had not seen anything. “I did not remark it.”
“Then you were the only one. His attentions were very marked, and Kitty was distracted during every other dance. Kitty is never distracted during dances, she enjoys them too much.”

“I did not tell you their manner to each other upon their meeting. It was if they were struck dumb by one another,” said Lizzy. “Oh, I expect Mama and Sir William will be planning another wedding. I know that Papa swears by life being nothing more than us making sport for our neighbours and then laughing at them in our turn, but I feel it is never our turn.”

Jane gave Lizzy a hug. “Dearest Lizzy, you will be happy too, I promise.”

“If you will allow me to teach your ten children to embroider, I will be.”

“It is possible that Mr Darcy …“

Lizzy shot Jane a look.

“ – or some other young gentleman you come to admire (after all, I am sure Charles has many friends,) will wish to make you his wife, and you will wish to become his. Do not give up quite so early; you are not even one and twenty.”

Lizzy threw one of Jane’s ribbons at her.

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The next morning, the dance was the sole topic of conversation in the Bennet household and when the Lucas women had exhausted all of their own words on the topic, they came to visit so that both Bennets and Lucases could discuss the dance some more. Then, the next day, they went to Church where, besides the sermon, they could hear everyone else’s opinions on how the evening had gone.

Lord Ashbourne figured a great deal in the conversation and Lizzy and her father had some fun in teasing Mrs Bennet. Mr Bennet because that was his chief source of amusement and Lizzy because she did not want her mother to see Lord Ashbourne as the property of one or other of her girls. She would be disappointed after all.

Lizzy was surprised that Kitty seemed so discomforted about the attention she was being shown regarding her having made a conquest of Mr Fitzwilliam. Was it possible that Kitty really had fallen in love at first sight?

Normally Lydia and Kitty were happy to discuss their flirts; indeed they did not wait to be asked about them. This Kitty was reticent and blushed and looked confused as if she did not understand what was being asked.

“Shall we see your name being read in the Banns, Miss Kitty, you sly thing,” said the eldest Miss Long.

“I do not know what you mean. I wish to pay attention to the sermon.”

Lizzy had never seen her sister pay such dutiful attention towards anything before; their rector had never been a very great sermon giver, any topic in his hands turned brittle and dry.

It did not dissuade the interest of the Miss Longs, who captured Kitty’s attention outside of the church by way of blocking her path.

“Mr Fitzwilliam is fearful handsome. He should enlist; a red coat would perfect him. Has he any intention, do you know?”
“Why should I know of Mr Fitzwilliam’s intentions?”

The Miss Longs laughed. “Oh, Kitty!”

On their walk back to Longbourn, Lizzy ventured to suggest that Mr Fitzwilliam was very handsome and attentive.

“Oh, not you too, Lizzy!” was all Kitty would say which puzzled her greatly.

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“I do hope, Mr Darcy, that you are not regretting your return,” Miss Bingley clung to him as they made their way into Longbourn.

“Is there a reason I should do so?”

Miss Bingley laughed. “They will not be happy with just Miss Bennet married. She is a charming beautiful young lady and I am happy to have her as a sister, but her family! You cannot be blind to their faults.”

“I endeavour not to be blind to faults,” was his only response.

“Oh, and Mr Fitzwilliam! I do not know what he is about bringing that object. He dropped it on the way here and I quite think my toe may be broken.”

Darcy could not help but notice that Miss Bingley’s affection for Freddie had faded fast. She had no doubt noticed he was a young puppy and none of her skills could draw him in, so she had no use for him.

Darcy, too, wondered what had possessed his cousin to bring what looked like a wrapped book to Longbourn. He detached himself from Miss Bingley and slowed his cousin’s step.

“I hope that is not from Bingley’s library?”

Freddie started, “What? Oh this? No, no, this is my own book.”

“You brought books in your trunk?” Darcy did not believe him.

“No, I sent for it, from London,” said Freddie, “On Saturday. It is a gift…loan.”

“For whom?”

“Darcy, are you intending to loiter about all evening?” Ash called to them from the entrance hall.

The mystery of the wrapped book was soon solved, as Mr Bennet noticed it and asked directly.

Darcy watched as Freddie handed it to Miss Catherine Bennet, who seemed as surprised as anyone. He saw the bemused expression on her face when the novel was revealed and she looked up, not at Freddie, but directly at Ash.

Ash was not looking at her; instead he was intently studying the stucco, which instantly made Darcy suspicious. Freddie was too young to marry unless he fell into a lasting and deep love, something longer than an acquaintance of a sevennight could engender.

Ash loved his brother too much to see him do something foolish, so what was he about to allow this gift to be given so brazenly?
Darcy could see that the conversation was troubling Miss Catherine and chose to ask Mrs Bennet about her plans for the wedding. He received an approving look from Elizabeth, but she did not come to join him; instead he watched as she went to speak to her sister and Freddie, leaving him to discuss the finer points of lace as best he could.

He was rewarded for his pains by being seated next to Elizabeth at dinner.

“I see that your mother has ordered all of Bingley’s favourite dishes.”

“Is it not said that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach?” She smiled at him briefly before surveying the courses before her.

“I think she should be secure of Bingley.”

The conversation lapsed until Elizabeth told him she had lately received a letter from Georgiana. “This one through the medium of the post, rather than hand delivered. Your sister is a credit to you.”

“I am very glad she values your friendship, you may provide what I cannot. I am not equipped to converse easily on all subjects that a young lady may wish to.”

“Whereas I, being a young lady and one with many sisters, am eminently qualified.”

“If it is not too much trouble.”

“Your sister could be trouble to no one,” Elizabeth frowned at saying that, clearly thinking of Wickham.

Darcy wanted nothing more than to reach out and tell her that he did not mind her knowing about Georgiana. He had wanted to tell her, wanted her to know, he trusted her with that knowledge. He also wanted to tell her that Wickham imposing himself on sisters was not her fault. But he had no right to talk to her on such matters or reassure her; for all he knew, she blamed him. After all, she must have felt constrained in being able to warn her family and friends about Wickham.

His own behaviour in Meryton had given everyone such a disgust of him that any attempt to reveal Wickham’s true nature would be more difficult than if Darcy had just made an effort to ingratiate himself. But he always thought such artifice beneath him.

He never deigned to learn about other people beyond his first cursory impression of them. He had not noticed before that if a gentleman was rich and belonged to the right society, he was more likely to give them time to display their qualities than if they were poor and coarse. The exception was his own tenants and was that because he knew himself to be in control of their destiny?

Darcy was so wrapped up in these thoughts he hardly noticed the ladies leaving the table.

Mr Bennet passed the port to Freddie. “I should by rights give my new son-in-law the bottle first, but you, sir, have raised many expectations this night.”

Freddie looked like a rabbit caught in a trap. He did not look at all like a young man giving a lady he admired a gift.

As blunt as Darcy had found Mr Bennet’s statement, he had to concede there had been no point hiding such a notion; once they rejoined the ladies, Mrs Bennet seemed unable to talk of anything but Mr Fitzwilliam’s generosity.

It was only a novel and a rather lurid one at that! As if every woman who received a torrid novel
was eventually married to the gifter!

Darcy made his way to the coffee and took himself a cup; Ash was doing the same.

“Do you think this quite wise…” he gestured at Freddie, who was being most cordially thanked by their hostess.

“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.” Darcy knew Ash had heard Mr Bennet and was not blind to Mrs Bennet either.

“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?”

“The fact your brother does not seem very committed to the object of his affection does not worry you?”

Ash looked at him in some surprise.

“He does not look as though he wished to give her a present. He likes her, that is clear enough, but it is nothing more than a flirtation.”

“She likes him,” was Ash’s simple answer.

“She likes him so well that she looked first at you when she opened the present.”

The spoon clattered as it came to rest on Ash’s saucer and Darcy closed his eyes briefly, trying to think what this might mean and when he had opened them Ash had moved away.

Darcy looked back at Miss Catherine sitting by herself on the sofa near them. She was tolerable enough, but not at all his cousin’s usual flirtation.
This corresponds with Chapter Fourteen of the Brighton Effect. This is Lizzy and Darcy's POV of the same period.

Part Six (Chapter 14)

Despite Kitty’s reaction to Mr Fitzwilliam’s gift, Lizzy saw that she had spent all night pouring over it and fallen asleep upon it. Lizzy would not have remarked upon it but Lydia was not so kind to her sister.

“Your lover is very handsome, Kitty. Did you dream of him all night?”

“Lydia!” said Jane, blushing red.

“He is not – It is just a book,” said Kitty, not sounding very convincing.

“A book from a man who wants to marry you! Oh, Mama, two daughters married and very well indeed,” said Lydia winningly.

Mrs Bennet smiled, and ignored the fact Kitty took herself back to her bedroom before she had even finished her breakfast. “Indeed. I think they shall do very well together.”

Mr Bennet grunted. “Well, perhaps he likes stupid women; he seems rather silly himself.”

“Papa!” Lizzy could not help but exclaim; if her father kept denigrating her sisters, then they had no motivation to be better, and Mr Fitzwilliam was young, not silly.

“I just hope he does not keep her waiting as long as Mr Bingley did Jane.”

Lizzy was glad that Mr Bingley and the other gentleman from Netherfield called, so she could escape from this conversation and the house.

She observed Mr Fitzwilliam and did not think he acted like a man violently in love. He did not question Kitty’s absence; he did not grow silent and refuse to speak to anyone else. Nor did he even throw a glance or two towards the house.

“You enjoy reading, Mr Fitzwilliam?”

“Not particularly. Of course I read about all the latest farming practices, deadly dull but it would not do to fall behind. I prefer to read the gentleman’s magazine if I read at all.”

“You are conscientious in your duties?”

“I cannot afford not to be! My brothers would not let me waste my inheritance!” Mr Fitzwilliam laughed. “I have no real duties; a small estate is not such an encumbrance.”

That was spoken like the son of an Earl, thought Lizzy. Or one who applied himself diligently to his work and did not let things get behind like her father. Lizzy wondered if Longbourn could be
better managed by someone interested in its management. It was not likely to get that in Mr Collins so they must hope that his sons would rescue the estate.

“I have no interest in being a great man like my brother. I think it lucky he was born first.”

Lizzy looked over at Lord Ashbourne, who was walking with Jane and Mr Bingley. “Or perhaps it is because he was born first.”

“I know many a first born and it is not always the case!”

Their conversation was interrupted by Mr Bingley speaking loudly so they could all hear.

“What does everyone say to a picnic?”

The look that crossed Mr Darcy’s face made Lizzy sure of his feelings on the matter, and she tried not to think why she first looked to him.

“The weather is not likely to hold, Bingley,” he said.

Lord Ashbourne waved his hand in dismissal, “If the weather does not hold, we retire to Netherfield or Longbourn or some such place.”

“Indeed!” said Mr Bingley. “I think it would be the most supreme fun.”

“At some great expense and management, I think,” said Mr Darcy. “You cannot expect Miss Bennet to plan for a picnic and a wedding.”

This was a sensible thought, but Lizzy wished Mr Darcy was not the one to raise it; it would do him no credit in the minds of Meryton!

Jane demurred announcing herself to be quite up to the task, the same moment Bingley demurred that he should take on the entirety organisation.

Their brief moment of domestic infelicity was broken when Kitty barrelled out of the house looking a frightful mess. She came to a sudden stop at the edge of the lawn and blushed.

Lizzy looked to Mr Fitzwilliam and could think of no other reason that Kitty should bring herself downstairs looking so disordered. She normally thought much of her own appearance.

Mr Bingley saved the moment “Miss Kitty! Just the very person!”

Lizzy was sad that Kitty looked a little baffled that she should be so wanted. She really should try to be a better sister and guide Kitty.

“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?” Kitty sounded surprised.

“I do not object to a picnic. I merely commented on the effort that much be expended and the – “ Mr Darcy sounded stilted. Lizzy felt for him keenly; to be reserved amongst so many sociable creatures.

“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 sounded teasing but Lizzy was not quite so sure how close the cousins were.
“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 …”

“Caroline may prefer carriages and servants and tables and chairs, but the Miss Bennets are harder 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 was very pleased with his own 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…”

Lizzy sighed as Jane and Mr Bingley resumed their arguing, as much as two people of their disposition could be said to argue.

“They are a well matched pair – “ said Mr Fitzwilliam, who, Lizzy could not help but note, had drifted towards Kitty.

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.

“You think they will come to some conclusion?” Lizzy felt surprised.

“No but - ” Mr Fitzwilliam’s explanation was cut off by Lord Ashbourne, who had been standing at the edge of the party, not paying much attention Lizzy would have said.

“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. And those who find it too childish can stay home with a book.”

Lizzy knew then what Mr Fitzwilliam had meant about his brother, and found herself obeying when she was summoned to assist with the list of guests.

Of course Lord Ashbourne had not picked a location for their picnic, but this was hardly surprising as he was not a native of the area. The Bennet sisters picked the location – a river that Lizzy remembered from their childhood. They had picnicked there regularly until their father had become tired of going, and then all that was left to do was deliver the invitations.

Jane and Mr Bingley were to do that, until Kitty invited herself along. Lizzy did not understand her sister’s plan until their return, when Jane had mentioned they had gone to Netherfield.

Would Kitty never be restrained in her feelings and affections? Had she not seen the way Jane had been disappointed and the centre of attention, of kindly meant but hurtful consolations? Lizzy was glad her romances had been so ignored by society.

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Darcy waited for his turn to take a shot, and idly listened to the other gentlemen discussing the picnic.

He waited until Ash had shot, successfully, of course, before joining his cousin.

“I think you are in ignorance of the type of picnic this shall be.”

“One with rugs and food?”

“The persons that have been invited; the Miss Lucases and the Miss Longs! You, who avoid Almacks…”

“I do not avoid Almacks,” said Ash with a creased frown.

“You avoid the marriage mart.”

“You think I should not go on this picnic because I shall find myself wed? Do parsons often officiate marriage ceremonies by rivers?”

His cousin was being flippant and Darcy could never speak to him in this mood, so he made to walk away. Ash caught his arm.

“Darcy, it is acceptable to enjoy oneself with a pretty young lady. I would have thought you would be thinking of ways to separate Miss Elizabeth from the party. A romantic stroll by the waterside, just the thing to convince a young lady she was wrong about you.”

Of course, Richard had spoken to his brother. Darcy had never told Richard outright of his rejection and love of Elizabeth, but Richard did have eyes.

“That was folly. I should have thought more about myself and my position, and her situation in life.”

Ash reloaded his gun; the loader they had brought out was busy with Mr Hurst and, as the Earl always said, a man should know how to handle his own guns. Darcy was glad he still had his uncle in his life to guide him. Sometimes he felt his father’s loss keenly; this was one of those times.

“And I was in such a good mood, Darcy, do not spoil it.”

“You misunderstand me. I should have thought more of whether I would make her a good husband. I misunderstood her every look and – the more I think of it, I wonder if we both had a lucky escape. How can you ascertain from such limited connection whether you could make each other happy for the rest of your lives? That you should be able to raise children successfully?”

“You have thought about this,” said Ash lightly.

“I have. I admire Miss Elizabeth Bennet immensely. I have not met a woman I respect more. I do not, however, respect or admire her family. Nor would marrying me be an easy choice for her. Your father will welcome her, no doubt, and Georgiana already thinks of her as a sister, but can Miss Elizabeth be willing to be suspected and talked about by the rest of my acquaintance? Not all admiration leads to lasting happiness.”

This serious conversation was interrupted by Freddie almost shooting Darcy’s hat off. After that, there seemed nothing for it but to return to the house. Ash and Freddie came with him, Freddie apologising for his unpardonable aim and Ash lecturing him.
They were so intent on their squabble that they did not notice that Mrs Hurst and Miss Catherine Bennet were walking in the shrubbery. Their meeting was awkward and Darcy blushed that they should be found in such an un-gentlemanly discussion and so informal an attitude.

Mrs Hurst recovered her surprise first and claimed Darcy’s arm. This left Miss Catherine to his cousins. Darcy wondered how Ash would feel to be so left out as it was likely that Freddie and Miss Catherine would talk of the book Freddie had given her and other such nonsense.

They went inside to find Bingley in raptures about the way their invitations had been received. Darcy should have liked to go and change from his dirty clothes but Miss Bingley was as sour on the idea of a picnic as she had been the night before and required his assistance.

Darcy did not find he could assist, as while he had reservations about the picnic, he had raised them and that was that. He would not continue to voice his complaints when others were so looking forward to the entertainment. That would be churlish.

Where Darcy struggled to assist the siblings find some common ground, Miss Bennet did a little better to soothe the siblings before she decided retreat was a better option and collected her sister and returned to Longbourn. Jane Bennet had more sense than Darcy had given her credit for, so Darcy decided to follow her lead and he went to finally divest himself of his coat and mud encased boots and left Bingley and Miss Bingley to continue their argument.

He crossed the entrance hall and paused when he heard Freddie’s voice echoing from the billiard room.

“So discomposed! It is not like you to be out manoeuvred! I think this is quite a different case than you were thinking, and I must say I’m glad that you have been set straight – perhaps you will listen now since you would not listen to me!”

Ash apparently did not care to stay and listen to his brother further and stalked out of the billiard room with a strange expression on his face. He stopped upon seeing Darcy.

“You have given me much to think on,” was all he would say, leaving Darcy none the wiser. Darcy was unaware that he had said anything to Ash, especially anything he meant Ash to ruminate upon.

Unless Ash meant to think upon Elizabeth and Darcy’s relationship? Darcy did not know whether he wanted his cousin’s support in their leaving immediately and giving Darcy a chance to reclaim his heart, or his cousin’s support in his eventual marriage into the Bennet family. He was concerned by either outcome.
Part Seven

Chapter Summary

This chapter matches with Chapter 15 of The Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Seven (Chapter 15)

“You see, Lizzy, we do not have to ride with Miss Bingley,” said Lydia, laughing.

Lizzy tried to shush her sister, not that it had any effect; Lydia would never be suppressed.

“She is allowed to be escorted – without a chaperone I see – with a Viscount.” Lydia’s tone was strange and Lizzy did not quite understand her meaning. Her words were clear enough but Lizzy still felt as if she were missing something.

All of the Bennet sisters were crammed into one fragile open carriage, and the other ladies were similarly conveyed. The men all chose to ride, although Mr Bingley came very near the Bennet’s carriage... sometimes near enough to alarm them.

“It shall be better when you are married,” said Lizzy with a laugh.

“Temptations should always be removed, and passions restrained,” said Mary solemnly.

“We should have left you at home,” sighed Lydia. “Kitty, you are squashing me.”

“We are sitting three across, I cannot help but sit very close,” was Kitty’s petulant response.

The picnic had been all Lydia had been able to speak of over the past days; even if her particular friends and flirts were not invited, she was still young enough to find it adventurous. Lizzy was surprised that Kitty was not similarly excited.

Instead, Kitty had been in a sulky mood, which did not quite tally with her being in love with Mr Fitzwilliam. Perhaps something had occurred between the two of them.

He was certainly young enough to have a careless address and she was old enough to be sensible of a slight. Or perhaps, more likely, something had been said that made it obvious they would not be able to marry.

If the Earl of Matlock and his wife were anything like his sister, then Lizzy could not imagine them welcoming Catherine Bennet of nowhere Hertfordshire into their family.

It was not only Kitty who did not seem pleased to be picnicking. Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst found much to fault.

They faulted the spot by the river, the rugs brought, the cold spread, and even the direction of the wind. Lizzy could understand, although not agree, with the first complaints, but the wind was entirely out of anybody’s control.

“I think you must be glad Miss Darcy is not with us, to sit on such wet ground would be injurious to her health.” Miss Bingley exclaimed as she was being helped down from the curricle.
Mr Darcy seemed surprised at being so addressed. “My sister is of an excellent constitution and the ground does not seem damp to me.”

The Miss Longs, Miss Goulds and the Miss Lucases seemed quite cowed by Miss Bingley and so for some time they all sat in silence while the gentlemen saw to the carriages, horses and other arrangements.

Miss Bingley only wished to speak again when the gentlemen returned. “Will we be seeing your dear sister for the wedding?”

Mr Darcy ducked his head, and Lizzy was surprised he seemed embarrassed by such a question. It was hardly impolite! When he looked back up he looked so intently at her that Lizzy wondered what he was about.

“My sister has inquired if she may journey for the wedding, if that is acceptable to you, Bingley and Miss Bennet?”

Jane very much wished to meet Miss Darcy, so she had no objections and Bingley would never have any objections to his greatest friend’s sister.

“She wrote very fervently about coming, so I am glad she will find such a welcome.” Still he looked at her.

“I do hope she knows it will not be a fashionable wedding,” said Miss Bingley, “Of course it will be very pretty, Jane, and we shall all celebrate, but Miss Darcy will be used to much finer events.”

“I do not believe she has been to a wedding before, Miss Bingley.”

Miss Bingley was shocked. “But surely she attended Lady Upton’s wedding?”

Mr Darcy coughed., “Theirs was a very small wedding party, and Georgiana could not make it in time.” Then he stood up and walked off towards the river.

Lizzy wondered what the story was there or whether Mr Darcy had found himself at the end of his patience for questions.

Miss Bingley continued to praise Miss Darcy and denigrate everything and everyone else to such a degree that Lizzy could not blame Lydia for standing up and announcing she wished to explore.

“That sounds an excellent notion,” said Mr Fitzwilliam.

“We, ladies shall walk in this direction, we shan’t want any of the gentleman, shall we, ladies?”

Lizzy found herself blushing, once again, for her sister, but no one contradicted Lydia and the gentlemen followed Mr Darcy and the ladies, Lydia. Most of the ladies of course, Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst were happy enough on their damp rug it seemed.

Lizzy did not notice until they were around a bend and hidden from their picnic spot that Mary, too, had chosen to remain behind.

“I do wish she would join us; it cannot be good for her to read nothing but books. Surely she should see nature and how the world – you cannot learn everything in a book,” said Lizzy, linking her arm with Jane.

“She is very serious, Lizzy. Very different from her sisters.”
“But Jane! If she took the time to practice social graces the way she does her piano – “Lizzy cut herself off when she saw Jane’s expression and she had to concede she was being hypocritical. She could hardly insist Mary practice when Lizzy herself had no fortitude for doing things she disliked. Her parent’s lenient approach to parenting had meant that none of the young ladies had the accomplishments standard to their class. They could do bits here and there where their passion took them, but put a watercolour palette in front of them and Lizzy did not think any of them would know what to do.

Jane stopped suddenly., “Oh, Lizzy!”

Lydia had begun to remove her shoes and stockings and, quick as anything, was barefooted by the edge.

“Lydia, put on your – the gentlemen could…” Jane was shocked and Lizzy hardly less so. Lizzy remembered that they had done this as children, but they were no longer children and they must remember that it was not father who had escorted them.

“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.

Lydia’s idea was infectious and soon the Miss Lucases, Goulds and Longs were also finding places to sit down to pull off their shoes.

“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. Lizzy was glad it was an unseasonably hot day, otherwise they might all come down with colds, or their dresses would not dry in time to return to their party as respectable young women.

“I think that is likely to have them descend upon us with alacrity,” retorted Lizzy, but she knew was fighting a losing battle.

“Lizzy, I shall go back and ensure the gentlemen do not come this way,” whispered Jane as she retreated back along the river.

Lizzy sat down on a log to watch the girls. They were certainly making enough noise to attract attention. She felt quite jealous that she had to be responsible. If only Mr Bingley had been the only gentleman to accompany them, him and perhaps Mr Fitzwilliam. Then there would be no difficulty, Lizzy could paddle to her hearts content.

&&&&&&

Darcy was glad to put some distance between himself and Miss Bingley, and if he was honest to himself, Elizabeth.

“Darcy, this is supposed to be a restful trip,” said Bingley, struggling to keep up, and almost tripping over a tree root.

“The view is much better from along here,” said Darcy shortly.

Bingley, good man, did not retort that Darcy had never before in his life stepped into this part of
Hertfordshire, Freddie had no such restraint.

“And when have you walked along this river bank? Bingley, you give him too much credit. Just because he says everything in such a determined, knowing way does not mean he has any idea of what he speaks! You conflate his tone with his intelligence.”

Bingley laughed, “But Darcy is so often very right with his guidance.”

“I expect when he gets it wrong, he gets it very wrong,” retorted Freddie.

That did not make Bingley laugh and Darcy knew then that Bingley had suspicions about his role in keeping him from Miss Bennet.

“Have you told your brother your theories? Do they hold true for him as well?” said Darcy.

Freddie laughed. “No. See he was even canny enough not to join us on this muddy walk.”

Darcy looked behind him and saw that Ash had not joined them. Nor had Mr Hurst, but that was unsurprising; the surprising fact was that Mr Hurst had consented to leave the sofa at Netherfield if he was not to be allowed to shoot.

Freddie overtook him and then stopped. “I have changed my mind, Darcy. You do always know what you are doing.”

It took Darcy a moment to understand his cousin, but then he realised that their picnic spot was in a bay of the river, and if the young ladies had walked one direction and they the other, they now were overlooking where the young ladies were. The young ladies had taken to river bathing, just splashing about but Freddie was transfixed.

Bingley tried to play propriety, but Darcy could see he was seeing if Miss Bennet was indulging.

Darcy could say nothing in response, because he had first looked to see if Elizabeth’s no doubt shapely ankles were on display, not that they could see a great deal from this distance.

“Charles?” Miss Bennet’s voice floated through the foliage and Bingley looked stricken.

“She cannot see – that we ….” Bingley was in somewhat of a fluster.

“Then you go and meet her, Bingley,” said Darcy patiently, and his friend took his advice.

“You give such sound advice,” said Freddie, “I see why Bingley needs you.”

Darcy did not deign to answer him and instead followed Bingley back towards the picnic spot.

Miss Bennet clearly knew what her sisters and friends were doing; indeed they could hear them laughing gaily, and Miss Bennet was determined they not walk any further than the rugs.

“I do wish I could be so carefree,” said Miss Bingley picking at some cake. “We took a little walk, but found nothing of gaiety.”

“Do you not wish to go see what delights the young ladies, Mr Darcy?” Mrs Hurst, clearly also knew or suspected what the young ladies were doing.

Darcy announced his lack of curiosity and was rewarded with one of Miss Bennet’s smiles. He preferred the reward of Elizabeth returning to their picnic spot, except she looked perplexed.

“Has anyone seen Kitty?” Elizabeth looked about and then added, “Or Mary?”
“Perhaps they have taken a walk with my brother, he is not back either,” replied Freddie, stretching himself out upon the ground and attacked some fruit with some gusto.

The mystery of Miss Catherine and Mary Bennet was solved when, after some time, a dishevelled Miss Lydia returned to the party.

“Lord, Kitty twisted her ankle and has been taken home.”

Miss Bennet seemed quite alarmed, but Miss Lydia was so very unworried. If it had been anyone but Miss Lydia giving the news, Darcy should have said it would be Miss Bennet overreacting.

“Oh but who has gone with her, Lydia?” said Elizabeth, drawing her sister’s attention.

“Lord Ashbourne has taken her and Mary too. I think it paltry of her. Kitty, I mean, of course Mary would take any opportunity to return home to play the piano poorly. I thought Kitty had more heart than that.”

“Shall we call the young ladies back from the water?” said Bingley, determined to return the party to some good humour.

Miss Lydia said she should go with Bingley and Freddie, and Darcy hoped that the young ladies had finished their bathing. Perhaps Miss Lydia had made some sign to her sisters that they had finished, for he could not imagine Elizabeth or Miss Bennet exposing the young ladies, although the sisters seemed distracted by Miss Catherine’s accident.

“I assure you both; my cousin will take very good care of her. He has a sister.” Darcy did not add that usually he was not so polite to young ladies who had such accidents around him. Darcy could only assume that Miss Catherine had genuinely injured herself; otherwise Ash would have found Bingley and handed Bingley’s future sister-in-law into his care.

Elizabeth murmured, “Must we always be indebted to your family?” She could not have meant him to hear her, and indeed her sideways glance made Darcy sure she did not mean to say it out loud.

“Perhaps you would accompany me to speak to the coachmen, Miss Elizabeth? They can reassure you of your sister’s condition.”

Elizabeth did not demur and he accompanied her towards the carriages.

“Miss Bennet,” He did not ask her to stop but she heard his request. “You should not feel indebted to my family. I know that my cousin counts himself lucky that he could render your sisters such a service. We who knew who Mr Wickham was should have – I should have thought it a worthy ambition to prevent him taking advantage of any young lady and not just ensured my sister’s safety. My sister is precious to me, but all women are someone’s sister or daughter. I forgot that.”

He did not pretend to comprehend the entirety of the gamut of emotions that crossed her face. He thought he saw relief and a realisation that neither himself nor the Viscount held any lingering assumptions about her family. Lydia Bennet might be a foolish stupid girl, but she did not deserve Wickham’s attentions and machinations.

“Thank you, sir, and thank your cousin too. I admit I am troubled that your cousin spread the story but I do understand it, your being so closely concerned to Mr Wickham’s affairs.”

“If you wish to thank my cousin for his actions, you may do so yourself, though I suspect he will not welcome them, having no expectation of their being necessary.”
“Oh, will he be attending the wedding?”

Darcy was confused by Elizabeth’s question, but did not get a chance to clarify as there was a sudden shrieking behind them.

They turned, but could not see the commotion. Darcy strode towards the sound, but was intercepted by Freddie.

“One of the Miss Lucases had a fright. Your barging in will not assist.” Freddie had a grin and Darcy tried to hold onto his charitable thoughts about Miss Lydia Bennet.

His only consolation was that Elizabeth did not look as if she was thinking benevolent thoughts about her youngest sister either.
Part Eight

Chapter Summary

This chapter matches with Chapter 16 of The Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Eight (Chapter 16)

Lizzy was glad to be finally home, the picnic had indeed been better in theory, not practice. Oh, no doubt most of the young ladies enjoyed themselves and Mr Fitzwilliam and Mr Bingley could never be displeased. But Lizzy was glad to be rid of them all.

“Lizzy, what did Mr Darcy say to you? You did not seem at all happy after you spoke,” Jane pulled her sister away from the carriage stopped her before they entered Longbourn.

“Nothing of consequence…. we should see to Kitty.”

Kitty was lying on her bed, her ankle securely wrapped, but for a young lady deprived of fun she seemed very buoyant in spirit; eagerly listening and questioning with no sense of ill-use over her accident. Although Lizzy sensed Kitty would be happier hearing any voice but Lydia’s!

“And did Mr Darcy, in the end, have a pleasant time?” Kitty looked at Lizzy, which surprised her. Why should her sister think that she was the arbiter of Mr Darcy’s mood?

“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 – “ Jane was all goodness.

“Perhaps, Jane, but does he have a reason to be uncomfortable here?”

He should not be uncomfortable around her; he was not so at Pemberley. There he was all kindness and ease. If it were merely her rejection, he should have been uncomfortable there.

She knew Mr Darcy did not feel at ease around strangers, but there were no strangers here at Longbourn any more!

“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.”

Lizzy winced at her sister’s words, but she could not disagree with the lurking and looming and judging.

“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!”

She tried to imagine Mr Darcy rescuing Kitty and denying his own pleasure for no other reason but that Kitty was injured and in need of assistance. She could not imagine him putting himself out
so, unless, of course, the young lady in question was a particular friend of his.

“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 for his opinion there!”

“You do not know what his opinion is! Perhaps he is ashamed of ever holding such an opinion!”

Lizzy was mortified she had spoken so openly and had to leave the room before she said anything more. She shut herself away in her bedroom but she could not expect to be alone for long.

“Lizzy! Now, I do not wish to press you but…”

“Oh Jane! Why must Lydia mortify me? I feel ashamed because I am ashamed of my sister, and then I feel ashamed of her behaviour. I do not know what to think.”

Jane sat on the bed and looked kindly at her.

“And Mr Darcy does not assist. He does not know what to feel or think either and thus he is himself and then he recollects himself and…oh why is it such a muddle? I wish he had proposed at Pemberley.”

“You wish he had proposed?” said Jane.

Lizzy stopped and thought over what she had said. Had she meant it? She had not thought of it before it had come tumbling out, but that did not mean …

“Yes. I think I do. Although I do not know what I should have replied. I expect I should have said yes. But now I am not sure what I should say. There I would not have thought whether he would separate me from my family. He was so kind to Aunt and Uncle Gardiner after all. There he displayed his best temper and I should not have wondered whether he was prone to fits and starts and whether I wanted that in a husband. It should have been easier.”

“Mr Darcy is not even tempered, it is true, but he is not a violent man. I should call him passionate from your descriptions. He needs someone to tease him out of his bad humour.”

“Is that my role in marriage: to be a tease?” said Lizzy with a laugh. “Oh, Jane, I can laugh myself out of a bad temper, but can I do that for two?”

“He is a good man, a respectable man. He cares for you, so he is not a stupid man either.”

“Oh, Jane! But will he propose again? I do not know.”

“We may hope he does, and that he waits until you are more sure of your mind.”

Lizzy sat upon the bed next to her sister with a sigh. “Sometimes I think it should be much easier upon women if they could propose to the gentlemen.”

“I should not dare!”

“Yes, how mortifying to be rejected. I could not bear it, and yet I think I wish Mr Darcy to expose himself to the possibility again. And my pride will not allow me to be so obvious in case I am the one rejected.” Lizzy flopped back on the bed. “At least you shall be married and I will have something to do.”
“I do not know why you are so insistent on teaching my ten children to sew very ill. I do not intend to have ten children and you are quite a competent seamstress.” Jane mused before Lizzy pulled her down beside her.

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“Oh, I do believe we could not have had a pleasanter time, do you not agree, Caroline?”

Darcy tried not to laugh at the look on Miss Bingley’s face; he could only see her from the side as they were placed next to each other but he could imagine it in its entirety. It was one he himself might make.

“Indeed, Charles, to travel such a distance to sit upon the ground, I do not know when I ever had such fun.”

Bingley did not attend to, or perhaps notice, his sister’s sarcasm and continued to regale the party with his delight.

“You, I am sure, Mr Darcy, were glad your sister has not yet arrived. To be exposed to such exuberant young ladies and…ankles.” Miss Bingley spoke warmly.

“Indeed, Georgiana has not had many female companions and would be likely overwhelmed.”

“I was very glad to see that Miss Bennet did not indulge in the waywardness; I have always said she was a very good sort of girl. It is much to be lamented that her family should be as it is.”

Darcy could only nod. What else could he say? He agreed with Miss Bingley. Miss Bennet and Elizabeth were the best of their family.

He did not know how they had grown to have so much sense and refinement when it seemed they had no guidance. There were glimmers of sense in the next two daughters, but that was all.

Miss Bingley, sensing Darcy was not in a talkative mood, turned to her other companion.

“You had the good sense to flee the picnic, my lord, and in quite the gallant way.” Miss Bingley paused, “I hope you do not have any apprehension that Miss Kitty deliberately drew your attention?”

“Since I observed her twist her ankle and she could have had no notion I was there, I think I am safe to draw the conclusion that it was indeed an accident. You should not worry about me, Miss Bingley, I am an old hand at those sort of tricks.” Ash calmly continued with his dinner.

Miss Bingley lapsed into silence until the ladies removed.

“Darcy, you cannot really have disliked the picnic?” said Bingley, passing him the port.

“We have different temperaments, and I did not dislike it.”

Darcy had not liked it either; there had been far too much exposing of young ladies ankles and not enough quiet talking with Elizabeth.

He loved her still, which no longer surprised him, but how strong was that love with all the inducements to quit her? Could their love be just about themselves?

If he decided in the positive, he would have to lay himself bare once again and he was not sure he could be rejected again. But how could he know if his proposals should be welcomed? She was a
lady, and no doubt did not wish to be rejected herself, so it would be difficult to tell. Her calm acceptance of his presence could be friendship and a desire to make amends for her first impressions, or it could be a flowering of love, but how to tell one from the other?

“I am sure Darcy is meditating on the fact we were allowed glimpses of the fair maidens,” sighed Freddie. “You missed the fair maidens, Ash, although I am sure you have seen many a fair maiden in your time.”

Darcy tried not to laugh at his young cousin. Ankles were perhaps not so very shocking and Freddie needed some experience of ankles at his age. It was a pity perhaps for Freddie that Miss Catherine had injured herself.

Darcy would have asked Freddie, but Mr Hurst grunted and insisted the port be circulated faster.

“Must we every day be newly mortified, Jane?” said Lizzy shutting the door firmly. They had not been home from church two minutes before Lady Lucas had shepherded two of her daughters up the drive looking as if she were a thundercloud.

Lizzy and Jane had known that Lydia had led Mr Bingley and Mr Fitzwilliam to the young ladies, but had been so sure that it had only been the shock of what the gentleman might had discovered if they had been moments earlier that had made the girls giggle and blush. They had not known that Emma Lucas had still been in a state of undress. If they had not been distracted by Kitty’s being hurt, Jane and Lizzy might had sensed Lydia was playing a joke.

Jane looked as if she might cry. “I should scold you for overuse of that word but it is very lowering, and I feel quite…”

“Oh, Jane, do not worry. Lady Lucas is not so shocked! She just wishes it to be known she is shocked.”

“We should have taken better care!”

“How should we have done so? Would you have tackled all of the young ladies and tied their shoes and stockings on? I grant you, perhaps we should have suspected Lydia but…when must she answer to her own crimes?”

“She is sixteen and I am quite seven years older,” said Jane, “I think in this case we are to blame.”

Jane would not be persuaded from this, or from the fact it was not their responsibility to apologise to Lady Lucas.

“Mama and Papa should take their responsibility too! But no, Papa finds it amusing and Mama will not think as she ought. At any rate, Lady Lucas may change her mind when she discovers that the escapade did no injury to Mr Fitzwilliam’s regard for Emma.”

“Poor Kitty, I do hope she does not take it hard, if Mr Fitzwilliam does come to care for Emma. Although they did seem very taken with one another… Kitty and Mr Fitzwilliam, I mean.”

“Yes, no one could ignore their behaviour to one another,” said Lizzy. “I quite hope that Mr Fitzwilliam does move his interest or at least be not so direct in it!”

Jane smiled. “You are such a good sister, Lizzy, to be so worried about Kitty.”

Lizzy did not disabuse Jane of this notion, but Lizzy was thinking more of herself than Kitty.
It was not to be thought of that Mrs Bennet could forget Lady Lucas’s impudence in objecting to her daughters’ behaviour and it was the sole topic of conversation even the next morning, and Lizzy had to call upon all of her patience to sit reasonably silent.

“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 this when the ladies retired to the parlour for their morning activities.

“Mama!” remonstrated Jane. Lizzy left it to Jane to try and plead their mother into a better frame of mind.

Kitty seemed distracted by the window and began whispering to Mary, who left the room and returned with Kitty’s shoes. Lizzy found this behaviour strange until the door opened and Lord Ashbourne was announced.

Mrs Bennet was all aflutter that she had been caught unawares, but Lord Ashbourne did not seem to note anything amiss. He had come, it seemed, to inquire into Kitty’s health.

Lizzy tried not to express her feelings when it became clear that Mrs Bennet had entirely forgotten about Kitty’s ankle. Again she admired the viscount’s manners in not noticing this unmotherly behaviour.

“I also came to inquiere whether Miss Catherine would wish to take the air, if she is recovered?”

Lizzy saw Kitty stand very swiftly for a young lady so recently injured and wondered at it. “I am quite recovered.”

“Of course she will take the air,” said Mrs Bennet. It was not to be thought Mrs Bennet would suggest a chaperone so once again it would fall to her or Jane, thought Lizzy.

“Kitty…” said Lizzy in a low voice, “you cannot go alone.”

But Lord Ashbourne had thought of this as well and explained his curricle was quite comfortable for three. He was a very gentlemanly man, thought Lizzy with a smile. Quite avuncular.

The surprise was not at the suggestion, and the taking up of the suggestion, of a chaperone; it was the fact Kitty asked Mary to come with her. Lizzy would not choose to have taken the air with Mary, if she were Kitty; it would be a most peculiar ride with Lord Ashbourne and Mary!

Lizzy moved to the window seat to see if Lord Ashbourne had been the advance party, but she was to be disappointed. The other gentlemen did not come near Longbourn.
Part Nine

Chapter Summary

This chapter matches with Chapter 17 of The Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Nine (Chapter 17)

Lizzy had thought it politeness that had brought Lord Ashbourne to Longbourn the previous day: his attempt to cheer up a patient with what he had in his gifting. But she was astonished to discover the next day Lord Ashbourne arrived again to take Kitty and Mary out in the curricle.

It was very particular and attentive.

“What do you make of it, Jane?” said Lizzy.

Jane looked puzzled. “Of what?” Jane was busy embroidering.

“Of Lord Ashbourne.”

“It is very handsome of him.”

“He could be shooting with the others; I would think that a vastly more pleasant occupation for him! Is that why Mr Bingley neglects you?”

“Charles does not neglect me; he had some business in London.” Jane blushed. “Some arrangements for us.”

“So Lord Ashbourne is alone at Netherfield, with only the superior sisters for company? That explains much.”

“Oh no, I think Charles went to London alone, he only means to be a night.”

That was peculiar then, but perhaps the viscount wanted to know Kitty better if he thought his brother might fix his interest.

It seemed that Lord Ashbourne must have a great deal of questions, because they did not return for an age. Lizzy tried not to look out the window for them, but she could not help it.

“They have been gone a very long time,” said Lizzy.

“Have they?”

Lizzy was exasperated at Jane’s lack of interest and went to find Hill.

“Hill, did Kitty say when she was expected back? They shall miss dinner if they are not careful!”

“Back, Miss Lizzy? Did you not hear them running upstairs? They have been here this quarter of an hour at least.” The housekeeper shook her head at Lizzy.

Why did they not come by the drive, thought Lizzy as she walked upstairs. She was going to her
room, she told herself; she was not spying on her sisters.

There was no need for subterfuge in the end because she ran into Mary.

Mary was in her slip and carrying the gowns and pelisses that she and Kitty had left the house in. Lizzy could see that they were caked in mud.

“Mary! What happened?”

“There was some mud,” Mary replied unnecessarily and flatly.

“How could there be so much mud?” Unless the two young ladies had started to roll around in it, Lizzy could not understand it. Even less could she understand Mary doing anything of the sort! Kitty might wish to show off for a handsome man, but Mary would not.

“I must get these downstairs, otherwise they will be entirely unsalvageable,” said Mary.

Lizzy followed her down the servant’s stairs.

“Mary, nothing improper happened, did it? You can tell me if it did, I should not judge you.”

Mary stopped and looked at her. “I am unsure of your definition of improper. I suspect it would be vastly different from my own. But if you are suggesting Lord Ashbourne made improper advances…”

“That is not what I am suggesting,” said Lizzy firmly.

“… or that Kitty and I behaved improperly, you are wrong. There was a little splatter of mud, that is all. There was some rain last night, I believe.”

Lizzy was still perplexed and since Jane would only nod and say ‘Oh yes, it did rain a little last night’ when Lizzy relayed the news to her, she was forced to ponder on her own.

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Darcy reloaded his gun, promptly shot a tree and decided to retire for the day.

He’d wanted to go to Longbourn, although Bingley’s absence would have made an impromptu visit a little awkward.

But Ash had taken himself off that morning to goodness knows where and Freddie however had preferred to shoot. Darcy would not go alone and so he was stuck at Netherfield.

His spirits lifted when he noticed Ash’s curricle returning to Netherfield. It was not so late in the day that they could not call at Longbourn. He hailed his cousin.

“Darcy!” said Ash, jumping down and handing the reins to an obliging groomsman.

Darcy stared at the mud. “Where have you been… or should I ask, what have you been doing?”

“I took two of the Miss Bennets for a drive,” said Ash.

Darcy grimaced; if Ash had already been to Longbourn then he could not accompany Darcy back again. “Did you take them through a bog?”

Ash laughed. “Not at all.”
“Which Miss Bennets?” He had a sudden fear that Ash had taken Elizabeth.

“Miss Catherine and Miss Mary.”

“Did you not drive them out yesterday, after you inquired into Miss Catherine’s health?”

“Yes, may I not do it more than once?”

Darcy had much to say to that, but nothing his cousin would like to hear, he was sure. Two trips into the country, no matter how many sisters were clinging on behind, would raise expectations.

What would the neighbourhood do if it seemed as if one of the Miss Bennets was being courted by two eligible brothers?

Darcy followed his cousin into the house. “You do realise it looks peculiar. I do not remember you ever showing such attention to a young lady.”

“Have I not?” Ash looked surprised but he kept walking, making it necessary for Darcy to lengthen his strides to keep up.

Ash knew very well he had not; he was very precise in not raising expectations. If one was an eligible bachelor, one had to learn such niceties. Darcy was always telling Bingley not to be so open, but it did not matter much now he supposed.

This did not answer Darcy’s question as to whether Miss Catherine was being shown such deference on Ash’s behalf or Freddie’s? There was little point asking Ash directly as Darcy knew he would not get an answer. Nor was Freddie likely to answer either.

Darcy’s knowledge of the Bennets made him think that in some unspecified point in the future that Miss Catherine might make the sort of wife that Freddie would need. His knowledge of his cousin, however, made him think that it was Ash who had the interest.

If it were, he had picked a terrible flirtation for his cousin’s sake! If Ash broke Miss Catherine’s heart, Elizabeth could hardly feel more cordial towards him!

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“This is beyond everything, Jane!” said Lizzy, watching the curricle containing Lord Ashbourne, Kitty and Mary leave Longbourn. “What does he mean by it?”

“Perhaps he enjoys their company?” said Jane.

Lizzy shot her sister a look. “What is the fascination? I am sure he has many young ladies he may devote himself to. Does he mean to separate his brother from Kitty by the use of such flattery?”

Jane put down her sewing. “I hope he would not be so cruel.”

“He would not see it as cruelty. His brother is very young and could do better than Kitty as a bride.”

“But if Kitty should fall in love with Lord Ashbourne only for …”

“If she does fall in love with him, she proves her inconstancy!” exclaimed Lizzy. “Perhaps that is what he does.”

Jane looked pained. “Should I ask Charles?”
Lizzy turned back to her sister, “No, I do not think we need to worry your Mr Bingley. He takes Mary with them and Kitty is likely to be falling in love every second moment for some years yet. What does Papa say? A woman likes to be crossed in love; although I did think her very much struck with Mr Fitzwilliam.”

“So did I! But then I wondered…Lizzy I did not tell you this,” Jane lowered her voice even though they were alone and in their own house and Lizzy felt a surge of affection for her sister, “because I did not tell you about Brighton how I should have liked to. I forgot to tell you that Colonel Fitzwilliam was attended by his brother.”

Lizzy sat down abruptly next to Jane. “By his brother? What do you mean?”

“Only that Colonel Fitzwilliam and his brother found Kitty on the street in Brighton.”

“Which brother?”

“That I do not know. Kitty only said ‘brother’ and she was in such a state. This was when they had first arrived home. Afterwards, I did not wish to press her on the matter. It was only when both Mr Fitzwilliam and Lord Ashbourne arrived that I remembered and wondered. I did not know whether to say anything. There is not another brother, do you think? The behaviour of both …”

“No, neither has acted as if they were intimately acquainted with the sad business of Brighton. Although Kitty was very shocked to see Mr Fitzwilliam.” Lizzy frowned. “But I cannot imagine that he would be very helpful at such a time, that seems more Lord Ashbourne’s manner.”

“I agree, although if it is so, he displays an uncommon sensitivity; I should have no notion he had seen either Lydia or Kitty in such a sad situation.”

“Perhaps that is why drives out with them. He knows Kitty would not be a good wife for his brother.”

If Lizzy hoped that the attention would not go to Kitty’s head she was mistaken. Kitty looked quite devastated to be home again and spent much of her afternoon staring into the distance and sighing. Then she would look at her hands and sigh again.

“Kitty, are you quite all right? You have been staring at your hands for a quarter of an hour,” Jane sounded concerned, which was why Lizzy was glad she had asked. If Lizzy had inquired, Lizzy was sure she would have sounded scolding.

“I am perfectly all right. I was just thinking about our all possibly driving, or walking, to Oakham Mount tomorrow. Lord Ashbourne suggested it. A picnic for the one I did not get to enjoy.”

Lizzy wondered at Lord Ashbourne and what his scheme was.

“That was very kind of him,” said Jane. “Have you been enjoying your excursions?”

Kitty’s whole face lit up and Lizzy felt her heart sink a little. Her little sister unaffected by the addresses of a charming man? No, indeed.

“Very much so!” Kitty cried and she would have said more, Lizzy was sure, if their mother had not interrupted them.

“There you are, Kitty! I am very cross with you! You have been neglecting Mr Fitzwilliam! You have abandoned him!”

Lizzy saw that Kitty looked confused. It was hard to tell whether she had forgotten about Mr
Fitzwilliam and was now remembering him or whether it was regret that she had two gentlemen admiring her and had now a difficult choice to make.

“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!”

Lizzy did not agree with her mother about many things, and indeed most of what she had just said was nonsense, but Mr Fitzwilliam was certainly a better prospect for Kitty – a harmless childish flirtation – than Lord Ashbourne, who, Lizzy sensed, knew just how to injure a woman’s heart.

“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 sisters that we are not all in the hedgerows.”

Lizzy gave in gracefully and hoped that Kitty had heard a least the part that reminded her that she did not have to chase and choose a husband quite so soon.

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“Is there to be no sport today?” asked Mr Hurst.

“Unless you profess to be a swimmer, I think not,” said Darcy.

“What wretched luck, “said Bingley. “I return to see Jane and this is the weather I receive.”

“You might still ride over,” said Ash. “Or order the carriage.”

“My brother had better attend to Netherfield. He should not wish it to fall about his ears when he brings our dear Miss Bennet here.”

Miss Bingley seemed the only one pleased by the rain. Darcy could not blame her; she could not come shooting, and even if she were proficient in the saddle, this was not hunting country.

Since the gentlemen chose to divide their time between shooting and Longbourn, Miss Bingley had little to do except converse with her sister. No, it was natural she should be happy that the party was confined indoors. It just did not mean that Darcy must also be happy.

He could at least employ his time well and write to Georgiana, although he was not sure whether he should address his letter to Pemberley or town. He had arranged it so that she might go to London to see their aunt and uncle before coming to Hertfordshire.

Darcy told himself it was only sensible, but in reality he wondered whether he wanted a way of putting Georgiana off. His sister had sensed his feelings for Elizabeth and would no doubt wonder why they were not yet engaged.

He would not normally worry about her unduly interrupting his plans, but with Ash and Freddie in attendance there was some danger. Georgiana might be emboldened by them.
Although that was not an entirely unpleasant thought, Darcy mused.
Part Ten

Chapter Summary

This matches with Chapter 18 of The Brighton Effect which is Kitty’s POV

Part Ten (Chapter 18)

The third day of rain frayed tempers. Bingley, who was so normally even tempered, seemed the most affected and even if the rain cleared the following day, it would be Sunday which would curtail any plans to meet with the ladies of Longbourn.

Darcy was pleased to have time to read and have some solitude, although not as much as he should like.

“Well, I am pleased to have your company at last. I did not come into Hertfordshire to be so marooned,” said Miss Bingley. “What book do you read, Mr Darcy?”

Darcy was saved from answering by Bingley’s petulance.

“You could come to Longbourn with us, Caroline; there is no reason why you should stay away from your new sister.”

Miss Bingley laughed, “I welcome Jane with all my heart, Charles, as you well know. But what are the attractions of Longbourn to me? I shall not be talked to there any more …indeed, even less than I am here with Louisa.” Miss Bingley flipped idly through a magazine which lay discarded by her side. “Oh see here, look at the London theatres! That is amusement indeed! I should have liked to have attended. Why must you have chosen to remain here all these weeks, Charles? You are secure of Jane, after all!”

Bingley turned from the fire and looked as angry as ever Darcy had seen him.

“You may leave whenever you choose, Caroline, I do not compel you to stay here.”

Miss Bingley looked upset by her brother’s words and Darcy did not much feel like being part of a sibling fracas.

Ash did not enjoy the prospect either, for he sat forward to address Miss Bingley no doubt in the hope of distracting her. “You enjoy the theatre?”

But Miss Bingley did not attend to him. “What do you mean, I may leave? Do you expect me to leave? I am your sister! Is this to be how I am treated, I am only useful until you are married?”

Ash stood up. “I do not think Bingley means any such thing. He is a gentleman and he knows his duty to his family.”

Bingley looked mortified that he had been so unpleasant.

“Caroline, I beg your pardon. I beg all of your pardons. No, I do not wish you to leave. Your home is my home.”
“I shall be regulated to visitor,” said Miss Bingley in some distress. “Miss Bennet will hardly welcome me.”

Darcy thought Miss Bingley’s fears were well founded; only one in a hundred women would forgive Miss Bingley’s behaviour towards them and her interference in their courtship. How lucky for Miss Bingley that Miss Bennet was that one woman.

Bingley tried to reassure his sister and mentioned Mr and Mrs Hurst, which was entirely the wrong thing to say.

“I must live with Mr Hurst?!”

“I only meant you had the choice!”

Ash and Darcy judged this moment to be the best one to leave Bingley and his sister to themselves.

“I am glad my sister does not make such scenes,” said Darcy as they retired to the billiard room.

Ash racked up the balls. “Give her a few more years.” No doubt he was thinking of his sister, Belle.

“When do you mean to quit Netherfield?” asked Darcy.

“Should I mean to quit Netherfield? I should stay for the wedding, do you not think?”

“But after that you and Freddie will go, I assume? Newmarket, the Quorn?”

“I had not thought that far ahead.”

“I do not believe you.” Darcy knew his cousin’s languorous temperament was a study, an affectation. My lord of Ashbourne seemed to care little for anything but fashion and sport, but his family knew differently.

Ash looked at him and silently challenged Darcy to continue to call him a liar. That Darcy would not do, he respected his cousin too much to press him if he did not wish to be pressed, and Darcy knew in any competition he was likely to lose.

“Now, shall we play?” said Ash.

Darcy inclined his head. He wanted to talk, but he did not wish his partner to be keeping his own counsel, while Darcy was laying himself bare. Perhaps it did not matter as he could imagine some of his cousin’s expressions to Darcy’s concerns.

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“Why does it still rain!” cried Lizzy. She was sick to death of being trapped. She’d donned her bonnet and almost set off on a walk the day before until her mother had caught her and lectured her for her stupidity.

“Wishing will not bring the good weather back,” said Jane calmly.

“At least Netherfield must be wishing for a return to clear skies as much as we are,” said Lizzy.

“Yes, Mr Darcy might think better of us after close confinement to his own party for so many
days.”

“That is not what I meant, Jane.”

“Is it not?” Jane sounded innocent and Lizzy wondered where her good natured sister had gone.

“Well, not entirely. I find I do miss him and think quite fondly of him.”

“Such warm feelings.”

“Do not tease me, Jane.”

Jane put aside her work basket. “I do not mean to tease you. I know you do not see things so certainly as I do, but I cannot believe that you will not be made happy, however that might come to be.”

“Happiness does not come to all that deserve it,” said Lizzy. Mary started up a new dirge in the adjoining room and Lizzy sighed, “Mournful music. Although I think she is playing better. Less study and more passion, and her hair!”

“I believe that is Kitty’s doing,” said Jane. “I think it looks very well.”

“I am surprised Kitty managed to convince her to change it. Oh look at us, Jane, we are reduced to gossiping like fishwives about our own sisters. We must get out!”

Jane just laughed at her. Lizzy was silent for a little while longer before she grew restless again.

“Kitty seems very busy. I am surprised how diligent she is about sewing Papa’s shirts. So industrious!”

“More industrious than you have been,” said Jane.

“Indeed. I should have thought her even more downcast than I am for the rain. But she seems unaffected except for her peculiar conscientiousness.”

“We misjudge her then, she cares only for Lord Ashbourne and Mr Fitzwilliam as an acquaintance ought.”

“I wish I could believe that.”

*If any part of Lizzy had believed, it was extinguished when Kitty’s efforts at shirt making were revealed.*

“Papa, is that my shirt?” Kitty sounded excited.

“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. Lizzy herself could hardly contain her laughter; how peculiar their father looked!

“Lydia! It is a very fine shirt, Kitty.” Jane was more composed.

“Indeed, it has two arms and a hole for the neck,” said Lydia throwing herself back in her chair laughing heartily.

“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.”
Mr Bennet indeed was not tall enough for the shirts, nor was he as broad in the shoulders as they required.

“But they are well made?” said Kitty. Lizzy was surprised Kitty had not begun to sulk.

“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.”

“Whatever, or whoever, were you thinking of,” giggled Lydia.

Until that moment, Lizzy had not thought Kitty could have been making the shirts while thinking of someone else, she had just thought her sister a bad judge of measurements.

Lizzy looked at Jane and saw her sister was thinking the same: had Kitty been thinking of Mr Fitzwilliam or Lord Ashbourne?

Lizzy wondered if she should inquire, but Mary commented that the rain had stopped and Lizzy could not prevent herself from rushing to the window.

“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, had a peculiar idea of love. More proof she did not feel as she ought, thought Lizzy with disappointment. A gentleman to Lydia was just a method by which she could obtain freedom, money and notice.

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“Charles, it has only just stopped raining, you cannot mean to leave immediately?” Miss Bingley sounded horrified.

“I should have rode through the rain except …” Bingley stopped, clearly not wanting to remind his sister of their quarrel.

“You cannot all mean to go!” said Mrs Hurst unnecessarily. “Do you wish us to have our dresses entirely spoilt by the mud? You are unaware of the cost of silk, Charles.”

“Lord Ashbourne, you are not also abandoning us?” said Miss Bingley, seeing that Ash was dressed for riding.

It was Ash’s fault, thought Darcy. He had played the gallant in almost ordering Bingley out of his churlish behaviour.

Darcy knew he had been short with Miss Bingley in recent days; she could not help but talk in a callous fashion about the ladies of Longbourn and Darcy found he could not stomach it. He had not liked it last year, but now it was unbearable.

He was sure Freddie would not like it either, but he just avoided Miss Bingley. Of Ash, Darcy
was not sure; certainly Miss Bingley’s manner of recommending herself to him would not appeal, but of her chosen topic of denunciation Darcy was not sure.

It seemed Miss Bingley was not sure either, for it fell to Ash to have Miss Bingley’s attention over the previous evenings and mornings.

Darcy felt a little sorry for Miss Bingley; it seemed she was forever choosing gentlemen who would never choose her.

“I am afraid if I do not ride Ajax, he will quite disown me,” said Ash mildly.

“Oh, do not worry about such a thing. I never ride Fancy!”

Another sign that Miss Bingley did not understand his cousin, Ash would never look on such profligateness (for keeping a horse one did not use and want) and disregard for a horse’s needs with a good eye.

Miss Bingley held no sway with them and the four gentlemen set off for Longbourn.

Darcy felt his heart jump when he saw Elizabeth and he thought she was very glad to see him. Indeed, the household welcomed them all with open arms.

“Shall we not walk in the garden? Three days of straight rain and four sisters I find drive me quite wild to be outdoors.”

Darcy could not but smile at the wistful tone in Elizabeth’s voice. He was surprised the rain had kept her indoors so long.

“Lord Ashbourne, should you not like to walk in the direction of the home farm? You may find it interesting.”

Darcy could not help but overhear Miss Catherine and wondered at his cousin that he should be taken in by such obviousness. If Ash was not taken in then Darcy did not know what he could be about.

“Might I? Then let us of course proceed in that direction.”

“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.” Mrs Bennet insisted from the doorway.

“I should be delighted,” replied Freddie.

Darcy might have been pleased at Mrs Bennet’s intervention if he had thought it had stemmed from any sense of propriety. He knew she was trying to promote a match between her daughter and Freddie.

He was distracted from these thoughts by Elizabeth.

“It is not the home farm, but there is a nice walk in this direction.” They turned their steps towards it almost as one.

“Mr Darcy, I wished to speak to you a little. Do not be alarmed, it is nothing so very bad. It is just …” Elizabeth stopped.

For a moment Darcy wondered if she was to speak to him, and he did not know what he thought
about that.

“…my sister, Jane, has only just told me she believes that one of Colonel Fitzwilliam’s brothers was also at Brighton and assisted my sisters.”

Darcy nodded. “Lord Ashbourne was in Brighton, Miss Elizabeth.”

Elizabeth nodded. “Thank you. We were not sure you see which of the brothers it was. I am not sure whether I have the courage to mention it to him directly; I do hope he understands our gratitude.”

“He would not wish to be thanked for doing his duty. As I believe I mentioned before.”

“I thought you were talking about the Colonel, but they are probably not so very unlike, being brothers.”

“You are not like your sisters,” said Darcy.

“Is that a compliment? I am not sure a lady likes to be so complimented, it sounds as if there were something amiss with my sisters.” Elizabeth looked archly at him.

“It is a compliment. I thought that young ladies liked to be discernible from their sisters. Brothers certainly wish to be discernible from their brothers. I mean no disrespect to your sisters, I only mean that – “ Darcy stopped and wondered how best to choose his words, but maybe he did not need to finish his sentence as he saw some colour come into Elizabeth’s cheeks. She would understand that he meant he found her pleasing above all other women. It would be better if he did not declare himself so openly.

“I understand your meaning, sir,” said Elizabeth with a smile that made Darcy hope that she did truly understand him. “We should walk on.”

“Yes, and you might tell me about the garden.”

“Our garden? It is nothing to Pemberley’s.”

“Perhaps, but I had little to do with the creation of Pemberley’s. It was all my mother’s work.”

They walked on idly in this fashion and Darcy felt his bad temper, caused by the rain, melt away.
Part Eleven

Chapter Summary

This matches with Chapter 19 of The Brighton Effect which is Kitty’s POV

Part Eleven (Chapter 19)

Darcy smiled as he looked at the letters on the tray. Georgiana’s hand stood out.

“What does my cousin say?” asked Freddie from around a mouthful of toast.

“I do not know since I have not had a chance to read it,” said Darcy. Normally he would not read at the breakfast table, it was impolite, but only Freddie and he were at the table and if Freddie would not mind his manners, then neither would Darcy.

Half of her letter was written from Pemberley and was chiefly composed of the excitement of going to London and then to Netherfield and her regrets at leaving Pemberley. The second half was written the day before from the Matlock townhouse.

Darcy smiled at the light and easy tone, so different from the Georgiana of the previous year. It was certainly correct that time healed all wounds, even those inflicted by George Wickham.

He smiled less at Georgiana relating a conversation she had had with her aunt. Lady Matlock, it seemed, could not conceive of the reason her stepson and son were remaining so long at Netherfield.

‘There must be some very pretty girls, my aunt declares. Otherwise she cannot understand it; your remaining must be natural as Mr Bingley cannot bestir himself without your guidance. I kept your confidence and did not mention Elizabeth Bennet. I do hope you have proposed and are waiting to surprise me in person, otherwise I cannot understand it, Fitzwilliam. I did not understand why you did not ask at Pemberley.’

There were perhaps drawbacks from Georgiana recovering. Darcy folded the letter and thought on her words.

Why had he not proposed at Pemberley? Georgiana, of course, did not know about Kent. She suspected Darcy had had a disappointment but no doubt she thought it was an argument or Elizabeth flirting (quite innocently) with another man and Darcy had been overwrought. She would certainly never suspect that Darcy had proposed and been refused in such a brutal and honest manner.

For that was the reason he had not proposed at Pemberley; his spirits and hopes had been lifted but it had seemed unfair. He wanted Elizabeth, but not if seeing his beautiful grounds was the only thing that had changed her mind. That was certainly unfair to her sense of justice and goodness, but he could not help wonder.

Pemberley was also not neutral ground. It was his dominion and it seemed unjust to propose to Elizabeth there, where she was so unequal. Not unequal in the way he had spoken about her
situation in life at Kent, but that at Pemberley she was a stranger with little support. Kent had been the ideal place to propose, neither of them had the upper hand. Maybe that was the reason he felt unable to propose even now? This was her home; she was supported by all of her family.

That and time hadn’t quite healed all his wounds yet.

“So my cousin does say something, certainly interesting enough for you to stare off into space and not notice I have stolen your toast,” said Freddie.

Darcy stole his toast back before answering. “Your mother is surprised at your remaining at Netherfield. She thinks there must be pretty girls involved.”

“Dear Mama,” said Freddie fondly. “She is not concerned for me. But I think she and Mrs Bennet could have many a conversation about intractable children not marrying for their convenience. She cannot understand why Ash and the Colonel are still unmarried.”

Darcy had never thought of Lady Matlock as one of those ladies and told Freddie so.

“Well she is quite subtle; she understands her quarry, you see. But she has tried very hard to introduce eligible parties to both of my brothers. She thinks she should have succeeded with Ash at least! Richard requires an income and one does not wish to look a fortune hunter, whereas surely Ash’s needs are not so exacting.”

“She is not concerned about me?” said Darcy.

“Of course she is. Did you not notice the two young ladies at Matlock this summer?”

Darcy tried to recall, but his heart and mind had been too full of Elizabeth and his hurt for him to see anything.

Freddie nodded, “She was very disappointed. But she won’t be soon, will she! I expect she will throw a party.”

Darcy stiffened; he did not wish to talk to Freddie about Elizabeth. “I do not pretend to understand your meaning.”

Freddie just grinned and Darcy wondered whether he might have made a mistake and Freddie was not talking of him.

He continued to wonder when he discovered that before the rain Miss Catherine Bennet and Lord Ashbourne had proposed an impromptu picnic at Oakham Mount. Now that the rain had ceased they revived their plans.

Bingley and Miss Bennet declined due to some fear of rain which Darcy could not understand at all, but made no complaint, he was indeed looking forward to this picnic.

“Jane should have not deferred to Mr Bingley; she is not so prone to catching cold, and it really does not look like rain.”

“Jane has not your temperament, or my temperament. She is happy to defer to others if it does not materially disadvantage her.”
Lizzy was walking with Kitty to Oakham Mount for their picnic, and it was glorious to be out of
the house. Even Mr Darcy seemed to have no complaint.

“Mama discussing the wedding breakfast for the twelfth time today is a very great disadvantage.”

Kitty spoke a great deal of sense, but Jane would ever be docile and obliging and if Lizzy had not
managed to jolly it out of her in almost twenty one years, it could not be expected that impending
marriage would change her.

“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?”

Their mother would not doubt turn her mind to the next possible match. Lizzy wondered if Kitty
thought of herself. Mrs Bennet no doubt thought the next prospect was Kitty and Mr Fitzwilliam,
or at least Kitty’s prospects in general.

“And Jane living so close!”

“You should not wish to live close when you marry?” said Lizzy. They had never spoken of
gentlemen and marriage. Kitty and Lydia’s giggling over the handsomeness of their acquaintance
had not seemed very serious before. Now Lizzy was not so sure.

“I should not wish to live in isolation, but walking distance! …I think you should wish the same,
Lizzy.”

Kitty was right. Lizzy did not wish to be separate from her family, but she would not wish for her
mother to be able to burst in on them at any time. Mr Darcy should not – Lizzy tried to clear her
head. Her future husband would hardly like a mother-in-law in such close proximity. A Mr
Bingley was not in Lizzy’s future, she was very sure.

That Kitty should feel the same way made Lizzy wonder if she was thinking of a particular
location or a particular estate.

She and Jane were still confused by Kitty’s behaviour. She happily talked of Mr Fitzwilliam but
she continued to show herself extremely eager to jump to Lord Ashbourne’s command. The
affection she showed was very real and obvious. Lizzy thought that even their mother might now
be noticing and it usually took a great deal to dislodge a thought from her mind. Yet when asked
what they did on their rides, Kitty just looked a little blank and said they did not talk of anything
of significance.

Lizzy chose to test her sister.

“Indeed. Mr Fitzwilliam is very handsome.”

Kitty eagerly agreed with Lizzy so Lizzy continued, “His brother is also very handsome.”

Kitty did not answer; instead Kitty stated that Mr Darcy was very handsome and far less
disagreeable than before. Lizzy could not help her blush and was annoyed at herself for giving
herself away.

She had no other opportunity to talk to Kitty because her attention was claimed by Lydia and
Kitty went to walk and talk with the brothers in question.
Lizzy took the gentlemen to see the view and although Lord Ashbourne and Mr Fitzwilliam took their fill and returned to the picnic baskets and perhaps Kitty, Mr Darcy remained with her.

“I know it is nothing to the views in Derbyshire.”

“They are different, that is all,” he replied. “Do you often walk this way?”

“Yes I do, it is a favourite walk of mine,” said Lizzy, then she smiled. “And I do not tell you so you may avoid it.”

He looked a little puzzled and Lizzy was a little hurt that he did not recollect her telling him so frequently at Kent about her favourite walks. Then she spoke so that he might avoid her, but he had thought that she was encouraging him.

Presently, she could clarify her meaning, but Lizzy chose instead to point out Purvis Lodge.

They walked a little more in comfortable silence. “Your sister seems very pleased to be going to London. The Matlocks are kind to her?”

“Yes, should they not be?”

Lizzy blushed; she had been thinking of Kitty rather than Georgiana when she spoke. Of course they would be kind to their niece, but Lizzy rather thought they would not be happy to know of the expectations being raised in possibly more than one quarter with regards to her sister!

“No, I just wondered if they were…”

“Like or unlike Lady Catherine?”

“She is a very formidable lady. I was quite terrified of her and your sister is very shy. I was hoping she had relations who were less forceful. For her sake.”

“You dissemble,” said Mr Darcy and Lizzy’s foot slipped on a rock due to her carelessness. Luckily, Mr Darcy caught her arm and explained his meaning. “I do not think you were ever terrified of my aunt.”

“I am capable of being terrified, but no, your aunt did not have me cowering in front of her. I should not have tried to claim that, not with your being there to witness our interactions.”

“I wish all of my relations could have seen you. We often choose to humour my aunt in order to prevent an argument.”

“Well, I do not claim to be entirely sensible all of the time, Mr Darcy. It would be better not to provoke all of the time.”

“I would miss it if you did not.”

Lizzy turned to hide the look upon her face. “So the Earl is unlike his sister?”

Mr Darcy took the change in subject well. “He has a scientific mind. Rationality is his watchword! He is a great patron of the sciences. I am very blessed to have him to guide me. As are his sons.”

“And Lady Matlock, is she scientific?”

“No, she comprehends but it not a passion of hers. The first Lady Matlock entered into my uncle’s feelings more.”
Lizzy wondered how Lord Matlock had found his first wife amongst society ladies. A Lady who appreciated the sciences was difficult to find, particularly she imagined amongst the *ton*.

Darcy tried not to let his disappointment show when he realised he had misjudged Elizabeth. He knew her to be an excellent walker, so it had not crossed his mind he had never seen her on horseback.

He felt foolish standing between Fancy and his own Oberoo; why had he allowed Ash to talk him into this excursion? They would have been better off suggesting a walk to the young ladies, rather than arriving at Longbourn with ladies mounts.

Darcy ignored the fact that when Ash had suggested the plan Darcy had heartily supported it.

When it had been discussed over port the evening after their Oakham Mount picnic, Darcy thought that a ride should be just the thing to continue their conversation from that day. He’d been so encouraged by Elizabeth that he had not stopped to wonder whether Elizabeth could ride, or indeed if she even liked riding.

No, he’d imagined that they should ride together, perhaps a little faster than the others, find a pretty spot, and be as private as they wished. Darcy had thought he might have something particular to raise with her. He might not declare himself but he wanted to give her no doubt of his own feelings so that he might judge her own.

Now that was likely to be impossible!

“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.”

Darcy thought she looked distressed to own to such a fault.

“Well I am not going riding,” said Miss Lydia, “How dull. I am going to Lucas Lodge and then to Meryton.”

“That could be accomplished faster on horseback, Miss Lydia,” said Ash easily but Miss Lydia did not heed him, instead gave him a look and scampered off.

Darcy could not be so easy or ignore such behaviour. Lydia Bennet was sixteen; she was not a child to be so ungoverned. It reminded him of the very real faults of Mr and Mrs Bennet, to raise such a woman. It was miraculous not more of the Miss Bennets were so.

At last Elizabeth agreed to the ride, perhaps to make them forget about her sister’s rudeness. However his luck was not to hold.

Ash’s was, though, which made Darcy envious. Bingley and Miss Bennet went forward easy and merry, Miss Bennet on the mare that Bingley had specifically chosen and had brought from London to welcome Netherfield’s new mistress. This allowed Miss Catherine and Ash to fall behind allowing them to talk privately if that was Ash’s design, which Darcy was still not sure of.

Darcy, however, was forced to remain with Elizabeth and an unwanted chaperone in the guise of Freddie. Elizabeth was not such a bad rider as she claimed, or Miss Bingley’s Fancy was unlike her owner and was effortless to control.

He looked behind them to see that Miss Catherine had seemed to have driven her horse into a hedge.
Darcy did not know whether he admired her or nor for it. Miss Catherine certainly did not allow for the possibility of being misunderstood, although she had chosen the wrong man to play her tricks with.

He knew he was being unreasonably irritable. Everything just seemed so easy for everybody else. Bingley and Miss Bennet just had to smile at one another and their fates were sealed! He did not understand what Ash was about but nothing ever gave him any trouble.

“See you are much better than you thought you were, Miss Elizabeth,” said Freddie.

“It would still be faster to walk!” replied Elizabeth.

And now Freddie found it easier to talk to Elizabeth than he did!

Darcy spurred Oberon and went ahead hoping his mind would clear with a little air. He was not allowed his moment of privacy because Elizabeth came along side him.

“It seems she will not allow us to be parted,” she said with a smile and a teasing tone. Elizabeth was referring to the mare.

“Indeed.”

Elizabeth spoke lightly some more but Darcy did not hear her; he was looking behind him and saw Miss Catherine in his cousin’s arms.

“Your sister indeed cannot bear to be parted from my cousin,” said Darcy.

Elizabeth looked behind her and looked concerned. “Kitty is not a proficient rider, it is true. It is kind of Lord Ashbourne to be so patient with her.”

“She is certainly proficient in other things.”

The colour rose in Elizabeth’s cheeks and Darcy did not know what devil prompted him to say such a thing. Freddie was looking at him astonished.

“I do not understand you, Mr Darcy,” replied Elizabeth.

“I mean, Miss Bennet, your younger sisters are better hunters than my best pointer could ever be.”
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

This part corresponds with Chapter Twenty of the Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Twelve (Chapter 20)

There were moments when Lizzy did not appreciate Jane as she ought, and this was one of them.

“I am sorry if you did not wish to ride.”

“It is not your fault, Jane,” Lizzy hoped Jane would cease her questioning.

“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 …”

“I did too, Jane.” Lizzy broke her thread in her haste and sighed. She had thought that they were …friendly did not seem the word, but it was the best she had. She had thought that they understood each other.

“Was it Lydia?” said Kitty. “She was very rude, I thought.”

Lizzy cast her sewing aside. “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 and Lizzy did not blame her; she was not sure herself why she’d said it. She had thought they were comfortable and then he had snapped and once again judged her family.

“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 reasonably.

“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 knew she could not be rational so she left the room.

Her mood was not improved when Jane joined her.

“Lizzy, did you know that Kitty knows about Mr Darcy’s former regard for you?”
“That is all we need. How did she discover it?”

“I do not know,” said Jane. “She thinks it common knowledge. Perhaps that is why Mr Darcy was irritated. He strikes me as a private man, and if others should know of his rejection...”

“Well, I could accept his anger if he had not spoiled my day.”

“What did he say, Lizzy? I cannot think him so very intemperate.”

“Nothing I did not know already. That my sisters are ungovernable and he does not like them. “Lizzy took a breath, “Kitty flung herself at Lord Ashbourne. Why does she not understand how it looks?”

“And you were not planning to draw Mr Darcy off privately?” said Jane.

Lizzy rolled her eyes, “That is different.”

“How?”

“I have some hope, and I should not have flung myself bodily at Mr Darcy.”

“She dismounted because she worried for her safety. She is not an able rider, as you well know.”

Lizzy shook her head. “Oh do not be reasonable with me, Jane. Why must Mr Darcy have such an uneven uncertain temper? Why must he have told me that his good opinion once lost is lost forever? I cannot make him out.”

“I think you like that you cannot make him out,” smiled Jane.

&&&&&&

Darcy cursed himself for a fool. Could he not hold his tongue and his temper? Once again, his rash words had spoiled all their comfort.

He had spoken out of pique, but she was not to know that. She thought he was speaking from the same place as his words in April. She could not know, unless he told her, and he doubted that she would listen now, that he was envious. He wanted his Miss Bennet to look at him with adoring eyes and trust him enough that he would catch her.

He knew that Elizabeth’s personality was not her sister's and certainly he was not his cousin. Thus he knew it was not possible, but it did not mean he did not wish for it.

Although perhaps not quite the same level of adoration: he wanted a spirited woman who could argue back, not one who would never speak a word against him. He’d not known that until he met Elizabeth.

At least it was only three days until Georgiana would be with him; he always displayed better when she was around.

“To whom do you write so secretly, sir?” Miss Bingley looked over from the card table toward Ash at the writing desk.

“It is not a secret, I write to my cousin.”

“Georgiana?” Miss Bingley sounded hopeful.
“Indeed.”

“Oh how I long to see her! Do tell her I long to see her!”

“You will see her in three days,” said Darcy shortly. “Why are you writing to Georgiana?”

Ash looked at him an eyebrow raised. “Am I not allowed to write to my cousin?”

“Well you shall see her in three days,” replied Darcy.

“I am strangely familiar with that fact. I am making a request of her.”

“What sort of request?” Darcy stood up to go look at the letter. Ash shielded it with one arm.

“Darcy.” It was not the sort of tone to be argued with so Darcy stalked away to pick up his book. “I understand you must be a protective sort of brother, but this is outside of enough. If you must pry, I wish her to bring her mare with her.”

“Oh, so we may all ride!” said Miss Bingley, who had come round to the idea of actually making use of her Fancy.

“Indeed. I had also hopes of teaching one of the Miss Bennets to ride. Darcy will have chosen an ideal sober mount for a young lady.”

No one had to ask which Miss Bennet he meant.

“You are very solicitous,” said Miss Bingley turning back to the card game.

“Indeed you are,” said Darcy. He dropped his voice, “You need not be. I think Freddie is quite safe now.”

“I did not think Freddie to be in any danger, of what do you speak?”

Darcy did not answer him, instead he went to bed.

He woke in no better mood and decided to spend his morning improving his mind with extensive reading. But even in that he was to be frustrated.

“Here you are, do you not go to Longbourn? It seems only Bingley is to go this morning.” Freddie took no notice of the fact Darcy did not look up from his book. “You know, you had better make up an argument as soon as possible. I find it best to apologise immediately to a young lady and you cannot do so from here.”

That had been the other outrage; Darcy had spoken so rashly in front of Freddie! Allowing Freddie to come and offer advice!

“I, of course, bow to your better knowledge of the female sex,” he told his cousin drily.

“Well, you may be older but I do not think you wiser.” Freddie dropped onto a sofa and stared at the books with some distain. “You know I was never in love with Kitty.”

“Kitty, is it?” said Darcy, turning a page.

“There are too many of them to be really bothering with the formalities. It will be better no doubt when more are married. Less Miss Bennets.” Freddie played with a fringe.

“I had not thought you in much danger of being irrevocably in love. You have many years before
you should fix your interest.”

“How very rational. Perhaps that is your problem, you are too rational: you should just take Lizzy ...

“Frederick.”

“Oh very well…Miss Elizabeth and …” Freddie stopped because Darcy had closed his book and fixed him with a look.

“Well, you may do better with actions rather than words.”

“I shall not discuss this with you.” Darcy paused. “What does your brother do, do you think?”

Freddie laughed and put a finger over his lips. “I shall not betray a confidence.” Freddie took himself off, no doubt not trusting himself to keep his brother’s confidence if he remained any longer.

Darcy’s idea was that what had begun as an attempt to prevent a romance between Freddie and Miss Catherine Bennet had evolved into Ash taking a liking to amiable company.

Indeed, with the choice often being between Mrs Bennet’s and Miss Bingley’s company, no wonder Ash had taken to driving about the countryside with a young lady who no doubt regarded him rather like a deity.

&&&&&&

This idea was shaken a little when finally the day dawned that Georgiana would join him and in anticipation of her arrival Darcy decided to ride off to meet the carriage. At least while riding Freddie could not ask him why he did not go to Longbourn.

He was not two miles from Netherfield when he saw a curricle being driven by a familiar team of greys, but the team was moving so slowly Darcy could not credit it. Neither could be quite believe who was holding the reins.

Ash sat between the two Miss Bennets in an attitude of repose; Darcy noted that Miss Mary Bennet did not look so sanguine.

“Darcy! Are you off to meet the carriage?” Ash greeted him with a wave of the hand.

“Yes.” Darcy stared at the little party for a while longer. “And to what does this tend?”

“What does it look like, Darcy? I am being driven about the country.”

It looked as if it was being ambled about the country and that he was teaching Miss Catherine to drive a team. However, he could not understand it. He looked to confirm it was indeed his cousin’s favourite greys, that it was Ash and that it was indeed Miss Catherine controlling them.

“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,” Miss Catherine retorted with far more spirit than Darcy thought she possessed.

He took his leave of them, but he could not help look back over his shoulder.

Ash was loath to allow him or any other person of his acquaintance to take any of his horses! And yet he was happy enough to allow …
This spun a different complexion on proceedings that Darcy did not have time to process as he was soon upon Georgiana.

“Oh, Fitzwilliam, you did not have to come meet me!” cried Georgiana from the carriage.

Darcy had not thought that his sister would hang out the window of the carriage for the two miles back to Netherfield, exposing herself to all of the countryside while she chatted to him riding alongside. He cringed that he had often thought ill of other young ladies for doing the very same thing.

Although no one hearing Georgiana’s effusive praise of everything she saw and expected to see would think Miss Darcy at all in the same line as her brother.

Netherfield bore the brunt of her excitement, until she lapsed into some silence after being greeted by the Bingley sisters. Darcy wished Georgiana was not so reserved in company, but he had hopes she would be more open with Elizabeth.

“We are so glad you have come, Miss Darcy. They quite abandon us every day for Longbourn and the Miss Bennets. You will save Caroline and I from quite murdering each other; sisters can never be alone for too long.”

The Bingley sisters were to be disappointed because Darcy had determined to take Georgiana to Longbourn the very next day. Darcy was glad to note any concerns over Georgiana being exhausted from the journey were waved away by Georgiana herself.

Darcy had tried to explain to her that he and Elizabeth had no understanding and indeed they were at the present in a misunderstanding, but he found his sister would not listen. He had hoped he might take her in the carriage so he might prepare her for the Bennets, but he had apparently left a request he had not known he had to make too late.

“Georgie, are you quite sure you wish to go in the curricle,” said Darcy a trifle desperately. “I could call the carriage?” Ash would not prepare Georgiana for Mrs Bennet and the multitude of persons she was to meet.

“I am quite happy here. I have not spoken to Ash since my arrival and you cannot fear he will overset us!”

Darcy sighed and mounted Oberon. Ash did not allow him to ride so very close to discover of what they spoke. He could only see that Georgiana laughed a great deal and they put their heads together very close as if they were discussing things of great importance.

&&&&&&

Lizzy was so glad to see her Aunt that she embraced her for a full two minutes.

“Lizzy, what is this? We have not been parted for so long, and this is a happy occasion.”

“Oh I know, Aunt, but I have missed your counsel.”

“Have you indeed,” Mrs Gardiner unfolded several of her gowns. “I must admit I was surprised I was not being asked to attend two weddings.”

Her aunt was always so perceptive. “I do not think that will happen.”

“You find you do not care for him so very much?”
“I think perhaps he does not care so very much for me! No, I think he does. I just think… oh it will not be comfortable, aunt. We tease and vex each other.”

Mrs Gardiner smiled. “Well my child, you would not be happy with so a gentlemen so acquiescing and reasonable as Mr Bingley. You require excitement.”

“But how to tell when that is all it should be and not a sign that I should be made unhappy.”

Mrs Gardiner put down one of her pelisses. “I did not think it was you who read all the novels. You do not think Mr Darcy has a dungeon below Pemberley, or attics with very good locks, do you? He is, I am sure, the type of young man who if roused to feeling would find it quite difficult to say no to his beloved. Particularly if she was such a woman as my niece.”

Lizzy rolled her eyes and could not speak sensibly to her aunt any longer on the subject.

“Now, here I have found my presents for you all, let us take them downstairs.”

They gossiped over the lace and other fine things Mrs Gardiner had brought from London until they were interrupted. It Kitty who saw them first, as she normally did.

“Oh, we have visitors!”

Mrs Gardiner joined her immediately. “Well, you did say there was a fine party at Netherfield, Lizzy.”

Lizzy and Jane joined them at the window.

“Is that lady Miss Darcy, Lizzy?” asked Jane.

“Yes,” said Lizzy, looking at Miss Darcy sitting beside her cousin. She looked unchanged from when they had met in August.

“It is a great honour that Mr Darcy should bring her to call so soon; he makes a habit of it, I see. Are they often at the house?”

Lizzy ignored her Aunt’s teasing and turned away from the window.

“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. Lizzy could not understand how her Aunt could tease their mother. She should not encourage Mrs Bennet to think of every single gentleman as their own!

“My girls would do for anybody, but even I cannot expect such good fortune as to have them all marry my daughters!”

The Netherfield 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.

Mrs Gardiner spoke civilly to Lord Ashbourne and Lizzy was surprised to hear that he had no plans to remove himself after the wedding on Monday. Their little part of the world could not be very exciting for him, and even a slight amusement with Kitty could not compare to the delights open to a single rich Viscount.
Miss Darcy came to sit by Lizzy and distracted her from the conversation.

“I am so very glad to see you again, Miss Bennet.”

“And I you, Miss Darcy.”

Miss Darcy smiled at her. “You have such a lively family.”

There was no judgement in this Darcy of her high-spirited family.

“Sometimes they are too energetic for me,” said Lizzy. “You will be able to escape at Netherfield. I understand the library is not as good as Pemberley’s, but I am sure it is very fine, and they do have a pianoforte.”

“Oh I do not think I shall hide myself away entirely. I have every intention of getting to know everybody better!” said Miss Darcy with a smile. Lizzy saw her look over towards Kitty. “Is that your sister, Catherine? I am afraid I found it hard to attend to all of the introductions.”

“Yes, that is Kitty. And I do not blame you; five daughters can become quite confusing.”

“Oh, I did think that must be her. Do excuse me, Miss Bennet,” and to Lizzy’s surprise, Miss Darcy went to talk to Kitty.

Her curiosity got the better of her, that and her fear that something might be said to upset Miss Darcy. She went to stand close by them, but their conversation was about horses. Lizzy was surprised to hear that Miss Darcy wished Kitty to learn upon her own mare.

She was even more shocked when it was discovered that Miss Darcy enjoyed the novels of Ann Radcliffe. She could not help but look at Mr Darcy in some surprise.

Lizzy had tried not to think of Mr Darcy, or watch him but now it was involuntary and she could not look away. He looked somewhat bashful that his sister’s taste in novels should be so exposed and Lizzy had to laugh at him.

She was glad he took it in good spirits.

&&&&&&

Lizzy was overjoyed to stand up with her sister, and that Mr Darcy stood up with his friend, that Monday morning and watch as Jane plighted her troth to one of the best men in England.

She was sad to be losing Jane and sad that she was herself not to be married, but that was selfishness.

Any depression in her own feelings was heartily made up for by her mother. Upon walking back towards Longbourn for the wedding breakfast all Mrs Bennet could speak of was how her other daughters should be soon married if she had her way.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

This part corresponds with Chapter Twenty One of the Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Thirteen (Chapter 21)

Lizzy was desperate to see Charlotte. Of course, she’d seen Charlotte at the wedding, but they’d had no opportunity for a private chat. She looked well, and Lady Lucas had shared with them, and everyone else in the neighbourhood, Charlotte’s special news. Mr Collins had however already shared his news about the impending olive branch in his congratulatory letter to Mr Bennet on Jane’s engagement. So Lady Lucas was disappointed in the reaction to her news, particularly amongst the Bennets, whom one would expect to have a lively interest in Collins heirs.

Lizzy had expected to see Charlotte the day after the wedding, but Lizzy was disappointed and she’d had to make do with Miss Darcy.

That was uncharitable; she found her friendship with Miss Darcy grew, particularly as the younger girl unfurled, but it was not to be compared with the depth of feeling that Charlotte and herself had shared. Lizzy needed the advice that Charlotte could give as both married woman and one who was most certainly not Mr Darcy’s sister.

But that was the problem: Charlotte was now married and was not at her own disposal, thus Lizzy had to wait.

When she finally did have Charlotte to herself, Kitty had already taken up residence in the parlour and was sewing. Kitty’s sudden interest in household matters perplexed Lizzy, but it did not seem a passing fancy. Indeed, Lizzy had sought to distract herself and found that Kitty had already done everything Lizzy had inquired about. It was most unlike Kitty.

Even though Jane’s wedding had been discussed and discussed again to the limits of Lizzy’s patience, she did not mind talking over it over again with Charlotte and discussing all the other news. Somehow it was like Jane was with her again. Lizzy loved her sisters, but they did not have the same views on life as she did.

However, it seemed Charlotte had her own reasons for seeking Lizzy out.

“I wanted time to talk to you privately; Lizzy, I am afraid I forgot myself.” Charlotte could only mean she’d forgotten herself in front of Lady Catherine. She was the only person of Charlotte’s acquaintance that could have any impact upon Lizzy’s happiness. Lizzy was of the opinion that her ladyship’s impact could only be minimal, but to Charlotte who was daily shown condensation by the mistress of Rosings, the interference of Lady Catherine would loom large.

“You? Forget yourself in front of Lady Catherine? Never!”

“No, 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. She knew her friend had had thoughts about Mr Darcy’s regard long before Lizzy herself had known of them. However, she had not thought Charlotte capable of sharing them with her husband!

“Why should this concern me, Charlotte?” Lizzy tried for nonchalance. She did not know why she tried, considering this really was the subject she wanted to discuss. Nonetheless, this was not what she’d wanted to hear. Lady Catherine might mean nothing to her, but she quite possibly had some sway over her nephew who already did not think well of Lizzy’s family.

“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 she knew it was false, and Charlotte would know 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 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?”

“There are many baser reasons, Lizzy! You will be well situated. If you like him, then why should you not be happy?”

She should have expected that from practical Charlotte, but Lizzy found she had not so much. To marry a man for practical reasons when he wanted her for his wife due to impractical ones seemed a betrayal.

“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.”

Kitty suddenly stood up and swiftly exited the room. Lizzy had forgotten that her sister had been sitting there and blushed to have spoken so in front of her.

Charlotte smiled at her, and inclined her head towards the door.

“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. I am all seriousness, Lizzy; these little tasks she has set herself can only recommend her to other gentlemen.”

Lizzy sighed, “She does not think of other gentlemen!”

“Nor do you,” said Charlotte with a smile.

“But my affairs are not discussed up and down Hertfordshire. Is it really such a topic of – oh you do not have to tell me. I am surprised you can tell Kitty’s seriousness from the fact she is sewing shirts!”

Charlotte laughed, “That and I have seen them at the wedding breakfast, and seen them driving past the Lodge at least twice since I arrived. You see, I do not judge purely on other people’s opinions.”

Lizzy could not help but laugh. “I could but wish no one would have any opinions!”

“Well he is a handsome single viscount; you cannot expect this neighbourhood to ignore his every coming and going, can you? You should be happy. It has diverted notice from Mr Darcy’s attentions to you.”

“‘Yes and his insults of my family.”

Lizzy relayed what Mr Darcy had said to her during their ill-fated riding expedition.

“That was badly done. He was most likely blaming himself for choosing so poor an activity to recommend himself to you. That and you did not make the most of it!”

That made Lizzy exclaim, “Charlotte, what do you mean?”

“Well, it sounds very much like your sister took the opportunity, and you did not.”

“Should I have done what Kitty did and throw myself into Mr Darcy’s arms? The idea is insupportable!”

“But he should have been in no doubt of your feelings for him. You wrote very warmly of him from Lambton. Yet now you seem unwilling to admit your feelings, because Mr Darcy still finds himself reserved around those he does not have a close relationship with?”

“It is a little more than that, Charlotte. I do not see that it was mere pique that his romantic advances were hindered!”

“Well, have you asked him?”

Charlotte was not Jane, but sometimes she did get to the heart of the matter quickly and effectively.

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Darcy frowned when he noticed whom his personal letter was from. He’d noticed that morning that two letters were from his steward, one of which had gone astray, and they, of course, required immediate attention, but he’d only registered that the third letter was not from his steward.

Now he saw it was his aunt’s hand. Lady Catherine wrote regularly, never irregularly, and he had already received his monthly missive.
Darcy opened the letter and cursed himself for having applied himself to his duty first. Lady Catherine by some method or other had discovered Elizabeth. Or rather she had discovered Darcy’s affection for Elizabeth.

To say his aunt’s language was immoderate was an understatement. She spoke of Pemberley being polluted by Elizabeth and seeing everything that he’d once thought about Elizabeth’s situation in life and her family written so starkly, Darcy wondered how he’d ever thought such things. Of course Lady Catherine, unlike Darcy in his worst time, did not see that Elizabeth’s personal recommendations outweighed anything else.

Darcy would have to respond, otherwise Lady Catherine would no doubt take it upon herself to come into Hertfordshire herself. Darcy had no fear that she would involve the ‘head’ of his family. Lady Catherine considered Darcy to still be primarily a Fitzwilliam and thus he should naturally defer to the Earl. However, Lady Catherine considered that her brother had some severe defects in his ability to provide strong leadership, a willingness to listen being no doubt first on her list, and had for many years considered herself to be the Earl’s representative in all family matters.

He was ready, however, to just throw the letter aside and leave the difficulty of composing a reply that would not make his Aunt order her carriage the moment she read his intemperate words for a later date. That was until he saw his Aunt’s closing remarks.

“I will not make the journey at present, because I have every faith that your cousins will prevent you from serious error and because I have heard of these scandalous falsehoods for some time and it is only the seriousness of Mr Collins’ present tidings that have compelled me to write. I have already written to Lord Ashbourne and I have every faith that, while he displays undue levity in most situations, he will realise the severity of the consequences this entanglement would entail.”

His aunt was not clear: had she written to Ash as well as to Darcy, or had she previously written to him? Was that why he had invited himself to Netherfield? Why he remained and why he seemed to be paying extraordinary attention to Miss Catherine Bennet?

Darcy found Ash, in another corner of Netherfield, writing letters

“Letters of business?”

Ash looked up from the writing desk. “No. Why?”

“I have finished answering my steward’s letters, now I have turned my attention to my Aunt’s letter; Aunt Catherine that is.”

“And you wonder if I too have received a missive?” Ash did not wait for Darcy to respond and passed him a sheet of paper that had been sitting above his own.

There was little new; Lady Catherine extorted her eldest nephew to separate Darcy from Elizabeth and remind Darcy of his duty.

“Is this the first letter Lady Catherine has written to you on the subject?”

That did make Ash stop writing. “I beg your pardon?”

“I wondered if ... “

“You wondered if I were on a secret mission from our Aunt? “ Ash turned in his seat and fixed Darcy with a look.
Darcy’s shoulders slumped. “Only for a moment. I apologise. I am afraid I am overset.”

“By a simple letter?” Ash’s eyebrow rose.

“I find myself unable to read any objections to Miss Bennet. Even objections I might have once held myself.”

Ash laughed. “Well, I suggest you allow me to soothe our aunt’s fears.”

Darcy stiffened. Lady Catherine’s fears could not be soothed. They had their basis in reality. “May I see the response?”

“You do not trust me?” But Ash pushed his chair back and allowed Darcy to view what he had been writing.

“I am highly gratified by the faith you place in me, Aunt. I will endeavour to deserve it. I can reassure you that under no circumstances shall Darcy act in a way that I myself would not. His views on the marriageability of a woman born into such a family as the Bennets will soon be aligned with my own.”

“I think that should be sufficient,” said Ash before he signed with a flourish. His signature invited comment and his cousin clearly waited for some praise of his penmanship, but Darcy could only stare.

“Good god!”

“You feel Lady Catherine will not accept my assurances?”

“No, she will, but Good God!”

“I believe you said that already,” Ash sounded amused.

“You are in love with her. It is not some passing fancy!”
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

This part corresponds with Chapter Twenty Two of the Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Fourteen (Chapter 22)

Darcy stared at his cousin. “Good god!”

Ash looked irritated but did not speak.

“I cannot understand it. What are you about?” said Darcy.

“What am I about?” Ash stood up and sounded offended.

“It is beyond all credibility! So foolish!” Darcy began to pace.

“Foolish? I beg your pardon.”

“You raise all expectation and …” Darcy threw up his hands.

“You are my cousin so you will understand my reluctance to lay a hand upon you, but so help me, Darcy, I will if you continue in this offensive way.”

“Offensive way? I offend you because I am astonished you have not proposed?”

Now it was Ash’s turn to look confused. “I beg your pardon?”

“You cannot be blind! You would be accepted! I have never seen a young woman more devoted and I have seen many a young lady throw themselves in your way. And yet you continue in this manner! A manner so detrimental to my happiness!”

Now Ash looked amused, “Forgive me if I fail to understand how my own private concerns could have any effect on yours.”

“Of course you could not!”

“Then perhaps you better explain it to me.”

Darcy ran his fingers through his hair. He could not explain it. It was not Ash’s fault that his own jealousy and envy meant he behaved badly to Elizabeth. It was not his fault that Darcy needed some proof that his entire family were not as ill-tempered and awkward as himself.

“Why do you not propose?!?” was all he could manage.

“Why do you not propose?” Ash retorted.

“I think we should not stay,” said a third voice and both gentlemen turned to see Georgiana tugging at Freddie’s arm. “Come, Freddie.”
“Oh you may go, Georgie; I am too amused. I wish to hear more of this argument. Why don’t you propose? I am fascinated.” Freddie sat down on a chair and crossed his legs settling himself for what seemed to be a long duration.

Darcy wanted to throw his young cousin out of the room but Georgiana’s presence restrained him. Ash however just laughed.

Georgiana excused herself and despite Freddie and Ash’s objections, she closed the door behind her. Darcy could not be sorry about her departure; he would rather not have this conversation in front of his sister, and he would rather not have this conversation at all.

“So?” prompted Freddie.

Lizzy’s determination to speak to Mr Darcy was thwarted when he would not come.

His cousin came again and brought Miss Darcy. It seemed Lord Ashbourne brought her only so she might show that she had no objections to her horse being used to teach Kitty to ride.

“You are very good, Miss Darcy,” said Lizzy, looking at the little party crossing the lawn to one of the near paddocks.

“In what way, Miss Bennet?” smiled Miss Darcy.

“Young horse.”

“Oh, well she is hardly ridden anyway. I am afraid I am a poor horsewoman, and Ash will see that neither she nor your sister come to any harm.”

“He is very generous.” Lizzy wondered if she dared to ask anything further.

“Your sister, I imagine, has many admirers?” Miss Darcy turned away from the window.

“Kitty?” Lizzy wondered how to answer that question. “Why yes, my youngest sisters take every opportunity to enjoy themselves and are much admired for their stamina for dancing.”

Miss Darcy smiled. “Oh I wish I could dance, but Fitzwilliam will not allow it until I am out. I wish I could prevail upon him at least for a private party. How else am I to make sure I will not make a fool of myself? It is quite different to dance with a young gentleman and not your dancing master. Fitzwilliam says that a practice with him or my cousins is enough, but you do not think so, do you?”

Lizzy laughed. “No, it is quite different to dance with one’s relations, but I only had sisters to practice with. I think that may be why Mary quite detests dancing; somehow she always had the gentleman’s part.”

Darcy steeled himself for a conversation he did not wish to have. He and Ash had decided not to continue their discussion in front of Freddie, but Darcy knew that wasn’t the end of it and he wanted to have it on his own terms.

First, he made sure Freddie and Georgiana were occupied in getting ready for dinner so there would be no interruptions.
He knocked and was admitted by his lordship’s valet, who, after taking one look at Darcy’s expression, excused himself.

“Come to help me with my cravat?” Ash did not look away from his mirror.

“I should have thought it would be the other way round.”

“I did decide to be polite and not draw attention to the abomination that currently adorns your neck.”

Darcy did not rise to the bait. “I thought we should finish our conversation.”

“The one where you seemed determined to think ill of everybody?”

Darcy paced and found himself fiddling with Ash’s hair comb, while his cousin continued to arrange his cravat.

“I do not think ill of anybody. I am…unsure that I should make anybody a good husband, let alone Elizabeth. And I am envious of your ability to be at ease in all environments. I will admit jealousy of the fact your Miss Bennet welcomes your attentions.”

That earned him a raise of the eyebrow. “Sulking?”

“Yes, I do not seem able to say the right thing.”

“Well if we are going to talk about this, I shall not talk in this manner,” Ash pulled the rope summoning his valet and requested some fortifications, before straightening Darcy’s cravat.

Darcy swatted him away, but accepted the glass when it arrived and settled down to pour out all of his troubles. It felt good to tell the whole story to someone, and the expressions on his cousin’s face were rather priceless.

“I did rather let the family down, do you not think? My parents would not have thought so, though I do not think they meant to make me think meanly of all the rest of the world, at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. It was very humbling to hear Elizabeth speak.”

“I would have thought my father…” Ash stopped and put down his glass, “but perhaps not.”

“No, I am ashamed of that, too. I realised while esteeming your father I did rather judge him for your mother, not that I can remember much of her, and what I can remember invited no judgement. I saw it as one of his flaws. I know my father certainly did. Now, I see that it is strength that saw your father choose his bride for her wealth of character rather than for her situation and family or for financial gain. If only I had been taught to correct my temper, or how to follow my principles without pride and conceit!”

“Then you would not be you, I am afraid,” laughed his cousin.

“Since you have been so good to listen to me, you may as well talk to me.”

“With such an offer how could I refuse?” Ash was being sardonic, but he did talk a little, and Darcy was glad he had not truly made his worries know for Darcy had never heard his cousin speak so warmly of a woman who was not related to him.

Catherine Bennet was not the sort of girl Darcy should have picked for his cousin, or for himself, but he was learning the importance of biding his tongue and realising that what was best for him
was not best for everybody.

He was rewarded by an amusing story regarding Miss Catherine’s Bennet’s method of dealing with recalcitrant tenants.

“I shall have to remember that one,” laughed Darcy and he found he meant it; it was not just idle words to please his cousin. “Although I fear I would not have the style to be believed in such a feint.”

Lizzy looked at the prettily written card and smiled at Miss Darcy. “I think I can safely accept for all of my sisters and my mother. We shall be delighted to attend your card party. My father I shall not attempt to speak for.”

Miss Darcy beamed. “I am so glad. We had wondered with Mr Bingley away, but with Freddie’s birthday it seemed …” Miss Darcy broke off.

“I think Mr Bingley would welcome such a party. He is a man who never wants his friends to be unhappy,” said Kitty.

Miss Darcy nodded and then invited Kitty out for a turn around the garden. This left Lizzy with Mr Darcy, who had stood motionless in the window.

“And you, Mr Darcy, will you enjoy the card party?”

“Freddie will enjoy the card party and since it is a celebration of his birth, his is the only opinion that matters.”

Lizzy placed the invitation onto a little side table and wondered whether this was a good time to discuss their quarrel. There might not be another such moment as this, which offered privacy.

“Miss Bennet…” said Mr Darcy just as she claimed Mr Darcy’s attention. She could not help but laugh and was happy to see Mr Darcy smiling also.

“Miss Bennet, I apologise, please speak…”

“You still think badly of my family, Mr Darcy.”

Lizzy was pleased to see that Mr Darcy looked shamefaced.

“Miss Bennet, this is what I wished to talk to you about. I wished to apologise to you. I should be apologising to your sister, but I hope she is unaware of my error in judgement. I wish for you to understand I spoke from …” Mr Darcy turned away pausing for a moment. “I was upset. I had imagined a continuation of our walk. I had not thought you should not enjoy horse riding. That was presumptuous of me, I know.”

“Presumptuous perhaps, but flattering.”

“Any thoughts I may have expressed about your family came from pique… It seems you are always there for my lapses in judgement, and to remind me that I am not perfect.”

Mr Darcy could not have said anything more designed to make Lizzy’s heart melt a little.

“Remember, you have seen me in all my imperfections as well, sir.”

He looked a little surprised by this admission. “You were misled. That is hardly an imperfection.”
“And what caused me to be misled, sir? And I did not keep your confidence.”

“My confidence?”

“About your sister – I told Jane and my aunt,” Lizzy stood up and wanted to reassure him, but she only half reached out for him before she took her hand back. “They will never spread the story any further and I did not mean to tell my aunt. I was distressed by the possibility that Lydia should marry Mr Wickham. Can you forgive me?”

“I thought you were supposed to forgive me? My offence was greater.”

Lizzy was strongly reminded of one of Jane and Mr Bingley’s arguments and laughingly told Mr Darcy of her observation.

“You are teasing me. You think I should be offended at the comparison to Bingley. Maybe I have come to admire Bingley’s methods.”

“His leaving everything to chance, or persuasion? What did you once say? ‘To yield without conviction is no compliment to the understanding of either.’”

“I may have done better to follow his lead there…his way certainly led to happiness. I would have you know that the way of that I was raised was not faultless. I was made to care more about myself and my happiness than others, and taught to judge that my own methods and manners were superior to all others. I could not behave like your family, but then I could not behave like my cousins, and I certainly do not find them wanting.”

“I think you may be improved by a little levity,” said Lizzy.

“Many have told me so, but I have not as yet found anyone willing to become my tutor, and it has only been recently that I have thought I required one.”

Lizzy found herself holding her breath, but Mr Darcy did not say anything further; instead he commented on how improved he found his sister, as he watched Kitty and Miss Darcy perambulate around the gardens in a serious conversation.

“I have not seen her so happy in a very long time.”

“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,” said Lizzy, looking up at Mr Darcy who was leading her towards a card table. Despite her earlier feeling and agreement with Kitty's opinion when she had arrived and seen the extent of the party she had raised some reservations that something so grand should be held at Netherfield in Mr Bingley's absence. She was glad that Mr Darcy saw no real error in it; neither did Miss Bingley and her sister, who seemed determined to be polite and cheerful.

“Shall you play speculation, sir?”

Mr Darcy looked at her. “I am afraid I have little experience, but I am willing to learn.”

“I am happy to be your tutor,” said Lizzy, looking out of the corner of her eye at him, and was
pleased to see him blush a little.

Lizzy was delighted that Mr Darcy seemed determined to be pleased and to have fun. She was also happy to find something he did not excel at, and that he took all her advice most studiously.

He continued his attentions after the charm of speculation had run dry, and allowed himself to be drawn into playing whist with Lizzy as his partner. She found they played excellently together and every thought she had, it seemed he had already had.

Lizzy’s desire not to become a prime topic of conversation amongst the guests made her extract them from playing cards, but she was perversely glad that Mr Darcy did not cease in his attentions and instead offered to fetch her some lemonade.

She knew that their being in perfect charity with each other, a situation most unlike their normal interactions as far as Meryton society was concerned, would cause some talk.

Lizzy allowed herself to look around and found no one was paying them much attention, but she noticed that Kitty seemed to be playing piquet with Lord Ashbourne and had attracted a great deal of attention with her laughing.

“I do hope you are not playing for money, Kitty.” Lizzy reminded her sister of where she was, and who she was, in a low voice. They could certainly not afford to lose the same amount that their hosts could.

“We are playing for pride, Miss Bennet,” said Lord Ashbourne and Lizzy blushed to have been overheard and to have reminded him of the Bennets' situation.

“I have none of mine left,” said Kitty, looking at Lord Ashbourne in such a way. Lizzy hoped no one else could see her. “Now Lord Ashbourne has a surfeit of it.”

Lizzy was startled into coughing. If Mr Darcy had taken over a year to become accustomed to pert young ladies teasing him, how would Lord Ashbourne (who had far better reasons to think well of himself) accept such a comment?

“I am afraid he had a surfeit of it before the game commenced,” Mr Darcy reached them and handed Lizzy her lemonade, which gave Lizzy a little cover so no one could see her reaction to him or his comment. She liked this Mr Darcy. She found that in the end she perhaps liked all of the Mr Darcys.

Kitty did not restrain herself in her reaction and laughed at Mr Darcy and his cousin, and Lizzy found herself smiling and then accepting Mr Darcy’s arm to go listen to Mary play the pianoforte.

Lizzy thought once again that Mary was playing very well and for once the company were not listening in silent prayer for her to be finished.

Kitty and Lord Ashbourne stood near them and Lizzy tried not to roll her eyes at Kitty flattering him about how she was sure he played the pianoforte to perfection.

His lordship's response however tested all of Lizzy’s reserve and she was happy to find that Mr Darcy suffered too, reassuring her that while the Viscount echoed Lady Catherine’s words in thinking that if he had ever learned he too would be a great proficient, he did not speak seriously.

Lizzy was distracted from her amusement by Miss Bingley, who began to press Miss Darcy to play the piano. Lizzy’s heart sank for Miss Darcy, who looked terrified to be so singled out. She also felt badly for Miss Bingley, who no doubt would be mortified if she had realised how she was making her friend feel. Miss Bingley just did not understand Miss Darcy’s character, as she
herself would never hide her talents.

Lizzy wanted to rush forward and say something, but it was a one matter to cover over Miss Darcy’s faults when Mr Wickham was mentioned at Pemberley, it was another to so publically throw herself into such a situation. That would bring more attention not less and raise speculation that might further embarrass herself, Mr Darcy and Miss Darcy. Lizzy sensed Mr Darcy was torn over intervening and drawing attention to his sister’s shyness and reluctance. He too it seemed could not think of something to soothe the situation without making it worse.

Kitty had no such compunction over throwing herself into the situation and at first Lizzy could not believe Kitty could announce that she had no desire to hear Miss Darcy play, but then her sister’s strategy showed itself.

“Did you not say Miss Darcy, that you would assist myself in playing quite the worst duet in the world?”

Miss Darcy would play, but she would not be performing alone and Lizzy could not think of a better solution. Except Miss Darcy clearly thought of a better one, one that meant she did not have to play at all.

“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.”

And Lizzy was forced to watch as her sister and Lord Ashbourne did indeed play very ill together, but with a great deal of spirit and amusement. More than one party in the room whispered to each other. Kitty needed to be careful.

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Darcy was determined to ensure that this Meryton Assembly would not be a repeat of the last one he attended. He was certainly happier and more content than he had been the previous year, and he did not have the excuse of having no acquaintance as a reason not to dance. However, he did have the defence that he must watch his sister. Georgiana had begged to be allowed to attend and promised she would do nothing more than sit and watch the dancing.

Elizabeth, who had suggested allowing her to come with the compromise of sitting out the dancing, was happy to sit with her when she was not dancing. Darcy had not thought that would be very often, but he was amazed how many gentlemen she managed to deftly rebuff in order to continue sitting by his sister.

He could not but consider how well they looked together, as if they were always made to be sisters and companions.

Darcy asked Miss Catherine Bennet to dance for the express purpose of getting to know her better, until he remembered his promise to his cousin. Any undue attention or questions would no doubt make her suspicious, so he lapsed into silence and suffered her bemused expression.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

This part corresponds with Chapter Twenty Three of the Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Fifteen (Chapter 23)

Lizzy had found it impossible to rise from her bed that morning. Perhaps she was growing old; an assembly had never before been the cause of lethargy the next morning!

She hoped she was not becoming ill, not right at the moment she was sure that everything was heading in the right direction.

Her being tired did not even make sense; she had not danced a great deal, and instead she had spent her time with Miss Darcy. The more she grew to know Miss Darcy, the more she saw the pressures Mr Darcy had been under.

She thought of her own sisters, and the tragic misstep they had almost undertaken, the same Miss Darcy had rescued herself from only at the last moment.

The Miss Bennets of Longbourn did not have the same attractions as Miss Darcy or Pemberley, and Mr Darcy had a very different personality than either Mr Bennet or Mrs Bennet. They were happy to allow things to just occur. Instead of guiding or leading, they reacted only to events as they occurred, out of laziness or obliviousness.

No, guiding Miss Darcy safely through the world was just a heavy burden as the ownership of Pemberley, and she found it was one she wanted to undertake with him.

Lizzy finally threw off the covers, dressed, and wandered downstairs. Mary was reading, and Kitty, it seemed, was attempting to embroider. Several discarded books at her side showed her general distraction.

“How empty life feels the day after a ball,” Lizzy sighed before picking up one of the books Kitty had been attempting to read. Edmund Burke! No wonder Kitty had cast it aside.

She looked out the windows and saw no one on the drive. “Perhaps the Lucases will call.” Although she did not much care for that idea; there would be questions about her dancing twice with Mr Darcy and there would be questions about Kitty’s devotion to Lord Ashbourne.

“The gentlemen did call and have gone shooting with Papa. I was not so knocked up from dancing that I was awake early enough to see them.” Mary seemed quite happy to give such news and then refuse to answer any further questions.

“Mary, you are unkind,” said Kitty petulantly.

“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.”
She did not quite believe it, but she must believe it, and she felt she must make Kitty believe it.

They sat on the floor like they had done as children and played at letters. Lizzy soon noticed they were both forming puzzles of words on the same theme. They were both thinking of romance.

Lizzy had not been quite as distracted around Mr Darcy as she once had been and Lizzy had seen the attentions Lord Ashbourne had paid Kitty. But they did not assuage her concerns. Mr Bingley had paid Jane in public such attentions, and he had still left, easily persuaded away with no shame on his conscience, no promise he felt he was breaking.

Everyone else might see clearly what was unfolding; a handsome man chose a lively flirtation for amusement but Kitty did not see. Lizzy hardly blamed her; Lizzy had been flattered into incredibly poor judgement by Wickham and he had half the charm of Lord Ashbourne.

Lizzy knew she hadn’t been the best sister to her younger sisters, but she did not wish any of them to have their hearts broken. Especially not Kitty, who was now taking those efforts to improve herself; the impetus did not matter to Lizzy except for what would happen if it was ripped cruelly away from her.

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Darcy thought it was lucky that the amusement of this morning wasn’t at all to do with the sport, as it was very inferior even to that of Netherfield. For his cousins the primary amusement seemed to be watching Darcy’s awkwardness around Mr Bennet.

Mr Bennet was taking some shooting advice from Freddie, which seemed thoroughly unwise, but it allowed Ash the chance to sidle up next to him.

“Perhaps you should take this chance,” said Ash.

Darcy looked about. “I think we should wait for the others?”

“Is there to be a queue of young gentlemen asking for Miss Bennet’s hand?”

Darcy had handed that to his cousin on a silver platter. “Ash.”

“Well, it is an ideal opportunity. Unless you are afraid of the fact he has a gun in his hand? Do you think Mr Bennet would object to his daughter marrying into one of the richest families in Derbyshire? Will he reject the great Mr Darcy?”

“These sound like questions that you are fearful of, not me.”

Ash laughed. “I am not a man who behaved so disdainfully, and offended the neighbourhood. I am not the gentleman whose request will seem to have come without warning.”

“Without warning!” Darcy was astounded. He had known Elizabeth for a year! He had been in her company in Kent and in Derbyshire!

“Are you about to say that Mr Bennet should be able to divine your attentions at Rosings and Pemberley?”

One of these days, Darcy felt he probably would punch his cousin and then regret it.

“Well then, why should you suppose I should ask Mr Bennet now?”

“Oh I do not suppose it at all. It would be foolish. Plus you would be talking in front of Freddie.”
Ash smiled before wandering back towards the rest of the party. Darcy rechecked his gun before joining the party.

Mr Bennet was his normal droll self, and Darcy found it difficult to gauge his true feelings; which was rather what Mr Bennet was after Darcy thought.

Mr Bennet was a man who had made a poor judgement in marriage, which Darcy had to admit was not a unusual occurrence: Darcy would need more than two hands to count all such marriages he knew of. Another reason to choose a young lady from one’s own sphere: if it did turn out to be a poor choice, there was more understanding and more ability to negotiate oneself out of a personal chaotic hell into at least an arranged ordered one. But Mr Bennet continued to make poor decisions which Darcy did not understand. He did not doubt that Mr Bennet loved his children, some more than others, but not enough to put their needs before his own. Bingley would not be the sort of son-in-law needed to assist the Bennet family that was certain.

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If Kitty and Lizzy were upset that the gentlemen had not come to call that day, then Mrs Bennet was devastated. Lizzy tried to block out her mother, but when her mother addressed her directly it was difficult.

“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.”

“Mama, we may speak of this later, and privately,” although Lizzy knew that was very unlikely to dissuade her mother.

“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-tempered 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.”

Lizzy could not believe her mother noticed; there were others who paid more attention (not to her, of course) and Mrs Bennet was oblivious to them!

“Mama, I do not think my sisters need to…” Lizzy threw a pleading look also to her 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?”

Lizzy wanted to get up and walk away, but part of her wanted to hear her father’s opinion of Mr Darcy as a suitor.

“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. “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.”

Lizzy could not believe what she was hearing, and stared at her sister. When had her sister taken the time to think of Mr Darcy, and to realise his responsibilities?

“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 could not bear to listen to her father’s continuing flippancy and went to think. It hurt to hear her parents talk about her dearest hopes in such a fashion.

Kitty found her after dinner. “I did not mean to make things worse…”

Lizzy took her hand. “Oh you did not, it is my own fault. I know Mama’s temperament but I thought that my father would be more understanding. 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,” replied Kitty.

“No, and I am not sure I should have quite the strength of Mr Darcy if I should have been in his shoes.”

“Fitzwilliam.”

Lizzy blinked at her sister. What on earth did Kitty mean?

“That is his name. Fitzwilliam Darcy. It is not a name that eases off the tongue.”

Lizzy laughed. She knew that was his name but she had not much meditated on it. “No, it is not.”

Though how did Kitty know that was his name? Had Miss Darcy told her?

“Should you name your first son Bennet?”

“I do not see why not, if it is a tradition in the family,” Lizzy answered Kitty’s question before thinking, and then she realised what she had said and was horrified. She was proud of Kitty when Kitty ignored what she had said and turned the conversation back to Jane and Bingley's imminent return.

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Her mother and her father could not apparently scare Mr Darcy off, not now. He came to visit at Longbourn, sometimes with his sister and sometimes without. Their conversations were nothing like their stilted conversations in the Hunsford Parsonage.

Lizzy was happy that they were talking and nothing in their talks ever made her feelings change. Instead she felt strongly that this was the man she was supposed to spend her life with. They complimented each other. They confided in each other more deeply.

“You are not afraid people will talk, Mr Darcy?” Lizzy took his arm as they walked around the garden. He had not brought Miss Darcy on this visit.

“About the garden?”

Lizzy was not sure if he was a good actor or if he was truly baffled. “About our walks.”
“That is a certainty.”

Lizzy stopped and Mr Darcy turned back towards her.

“My aunt?” How perceptive he was.

Lizzy resumed her steps. “Charlotte – Mrs Collins – did say she thought Lady Catherine might write to you. She told me just after Jane’s wedding.”

It was Mr Darcy’s turn to cease his steps and make Lizzy turn towards him.

“She did write. Most intemperately to myself and my cousin.”

“Lord Ashbourne? Why should she write to him?” Lizzy had a sudden fear that somehow Lady Catherine knew about Kitty.

“My Aunt has faith in his ability to persuade me in the correct direction.”

Lizzy found herself biting her lip. She had not thought that Lord Ashbourne would …

“Do not fear my cousin, Miss Bennet. My aunt has faith in him to prevent a misalliance, but I have faith in him. I hope you may judge who of us is the best judge of character.” Mr Darcy paused with a smile, “At least I hope you are convinced I am a better judge than my aunt, even if you cannot credit my judgement above anybody else’s.”

Lizzy laughed and allowed herself to be led back along the path to Longbourn.

Her only concern was while she spent time with Mr Darcy, her sisters were once again being entertained by Lord Ashbourne.

She attempted to speak to her father about the matter, when they were gathered waiting for Kitty and Mary’s return, but he merely smiled.

“You should be thankful,” said Mrs Bennet, pulling idly at her embroidery. “If he did not take such a kindly disposition to Kitty and Mary, you should not be able to slip away so often with Mr Darcy.”

“I am surprised that you are so composed over a Viscount teaching your younger daughters to drive a team,” replied Mr Bennet.

Mrs Bennet tossed her embroidery to one side and played with her handkerchief. “Oh, Mr Bennet, I do not set much by that. But think how other young gentlemen will now be intrigued by Kitty. Perhaps even Mary might benefit.”

“You do not think it likely, Mama, that gentlemen will not wish to court a young lady so discarded? And I think Kitty is very much likely to get her heart broken!”

“Heartbreak made Jane very beautiful and if we had the connections we have now, then of course she would have married very well.”

Lizzy could not even begin to unpick her mother’s reasoning; to call it unsound would be a compliment. Nothing she could say could bring any sense to her parents, and she found the words always stuck in her throat when she tried to speak to Kitty. Anything Lizzy might say sounded in her own ears cruel and designed to damage the fragile improvement in Kitty’s character.
Several times she wanted to talk to Mr Darcy about it, but if she had condemned him for judging her family, she hardly wanted to do the same to his family. Particularly since she did not quite understand what was preventing him from renewing his offer. Everything spoke of his wanting to, and she had not quite thrown herself at him, but short of that she had displayed her feelings quite prominently. Although perhaps she was misreading the situation.

Jane, it appeared, did not think Lizzy was getting ahead of herself.

Jane and Bingley returned in time for Lizzy’s birthday, and they brought with them such an abundance of gifts and not all for her. Although Lizzy received two parcels; one an innocuous watercolour, the other made Lizzy blush. For it was clearly meant to be part of her wedding linen.

“Why does she blush?” said Mrs Bennet loudly.

“Jane has bought her things for her trousseau” replied Lydia equally as loudly.

Lizzy listened in silence as her mother began to speak on her recent most favourite topic of conversation: her surety that Lizzy would soon be married to Mr Darcy. Lizzy wished she had as much assurance.

“Oh, Lizzy I had hoped,” said Jane, drawing Lizzy aside.

“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!”

She confided in Jane everything and Lizzy was pleased to find Jane in agreement with her, that everything sounded so very promising. However Lizzy still could not understand what impediment was preventing her happiness.

&Darcy, your cravat will do very well,” said Ash as they walked the short steps to Longbourn’s door.

“My cravat will do very well for what?” replied Darcy.

“For a proposal, I cannot imagine why you wait.”

“I wait for my own moment,” said Darcy stiffly.

“If you wait too long, you might have found that the moment has passed you by,” said Ash with a smile.

Darcy sighed. He wished the moment to be perfect. To wipe his disastrous declaration at Hunsford from both their minds. He had already begged Elizabeth to destroy his letter but she would not do so, saying that it should remind them both of their faults.

Certainly however his cousin had a point; it was clear, especially from Mrs Bennet’s changed behaviour towards him, that everybody now expected a proposal. No matter how surprised they may have been only weeks ago, or how not disposed they were towards him.

Mrs Bennet shooed them all outside for a walk, and her desires could not have been more transparent.

He would be a poor man if he could not avoid Mrs Bennet’s schemes. However, he had not
counted on his cousin. Before Darcy could object, Ash had taken Miss Catherine’s arm, and Freddie Georgiana’s and they had rushed off towards Meryton.

Elizabeth had unfortunately taken the time to look the other way, her attention captured by some bird or other, and by the time Darcy could regain her attention it would be impossible to catch up with the rest of their party.

The look on her face meant she understood their meaning. Indeed, Darcy now remembered that Bingley had proposed to his wife under almost the exact same circumstances, and it was Elizabeth who had joined her sisters in running very fast in the direction of Meryton.

“I apologise, Elizabeth.”

She started at the use of her Christian name.

“For what, Mr Darcy?”

“My cousins, and my sister, have obviously planned this interlude in order that I would propose.”

“Oh,” Elizabeth looked at him in some surprise.

Darcy wished he could rewind time, and rephrase. “I mean …”

“No, I am sure I understand you, Mr Darcy.”

“I am not sure that you do, Elizabeth; they do not, I fear, understand. You and I have such a complicated history that….”

“If your feelings have changed, Mr Darcy, I release you with the best of all wishes.”

Darcy stared at her. “I…of course if your feelings have not changed, then I too….will never speak on this subject again.”

How could he have misjudged her once again?

They stood looking at each other for some moments, until Elizabeth turned away but then she turned back towards him.

“If my feelings have not changed?”

“Yes,” said Darcy awkwardly.

“I was under the impression, Mr Darcy, that your feelings had not changed, whereas mine had undergone an utter transformation, but you are offended that your cousins and your sister expect you to propose?”

“Offended? No. I just… this is not a very pretty prospect, is it? I had thought after …Hunsford… you deserved … and you also deserve time.”

“Time?”

“Yes.”

“Shall we walk on?” Elizabeth took his arm. “Mr Darcy. I am an excellent walker. I enjoy the countryside. I find that I do not require a great deal of time to meditate on many things.”

“Are you trifling with me?” said Darcy, finding that Elizabeth was having trouble keeping a
straight face.

“I should not call it trifling. I should perhaps call it being your tutor in levity.”

They walked on for a moment longer.

“This is quite a change. You taught me a lesson, Elizabeth, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased. I was vain and expected you to be wishing for my addresses, and now I find I perhaps have gone too far in the other direction.”

“That direction is certainly a better one to err in, Mr Darcy.”

“Fitzwilliam.”

“Fitzwilliam.”

Darcy took both her hands in his and perhaps it was not the ideal moment, or one that would wipe Hunsford and his prior sins, and her misjudgement from their minds, but it would suffice if only she would make him the happiest man on earth.

He was not to be disappointed.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

This Part corresponds with Chapter Twenty Four of the Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Sixteen (Chapter 24)

“Dinner? Tomorrow?” Miss Bingley sighed over the dinner table.

Bingley glared at his sister and she straightened in her chair and gave an insincere smile.

“You mistake my sigh, Charles. I just worry that my dear sister shall be at a disadvantage; you have only just returned.”

“It is only a small family party,” replied Mrs Bingley. “No one shall judge, I am sure. Plus I am sure my mother will be happy to have the opportunity to advise and assist.”

Darcy covered his snort with a cough. He had not thought Mrs Bingley capable of such a remark.

“Of course, but do not hesitate to ask me about anything you require, Jane.”

Mrs Bingley smiled at Miss Bingley, but Darcy would have bet that Mrs Bingley had no intention whatsoever in asking for advice from Miss Bingley or anyone else.

The ladies retired and the gentlemen moved to sit closer together.

Darcy was not stupid; he knew that his cousins had restrained themselves from interrogating him until this moment. They were thwarted by the fact Darcy had made sure once he returned from his walk with Elizabeth he kept to the ladies' company. Ash and Freddie, for all their faults, wouldn’t question him in front of the Bingley sisters.

“So?” said Ash quietly from his left.

“Yes.” There was no point in teasing his cousin, and Darcy found he didn’t want to.

Ash clinked his glass against Darcy’s. “Congratulations, and Mr Bennet?”

“I shall ask tomorrow evening.”

“Courageous.”

Darcy turned to stare and then he blinked, “No, that wasn’t wise, was it? I should have asked this afternoon instead of asking permission in front of the entire county.”

“That is a slight exaggeration,” laughed Ash, “but nonetheless courageous.”

Darcy just smiled, which he thought was testament to his happiness.

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Miss Bingley’s acceptance of the Bennet family for dinner was rather tested when three Bennet sisters arrived early. So Darcy and Ash escaped for a serious conversation that did not involve young ladies or Darcy’s impending interview with Mr Bennet. Darcy would have preferred to claim Elizabeth’s attention all for himself, but he realised she would wish for time with Mrs Bingley and he did not want to arouse suspicion until he had gained Mr Bennet’s consent.

Of course Ash could not resist an allusion to the engagement. “Miss Bingley will be disappointed.”

“She will be doubly disappointed,” was Darcy’s response before he turned the conversation back to politics.

Ash could be a sensible conversationalist and a captivating one when he chose to be, so when they walked into the sitting room, Darcy did not notice Miss Catherine until he was almost upon her.

She smiled at him in such a way that Darcy had to make sure that Ash was beside him and not directly behind his shoulder. Then he recollected that no doubt Elizabeth had, like himself, confided their engagement to her loved ones.

“Miss Catherine,” he greeted her, and expected her to turn her attention to his cousin.

“Do not let him take all the credit,” said Miss Catherine with a saucy smile.

It took Darcy a moment to realise what she meant, and then he looked at the Viscount and smiled. “I shall endeavour not to, but he is rather difficult to persuade out of the notion that everything happens because he commanded it.”

His attention was then claimed by Miss Bingley until the rest of the party arrived for dinner.

He was placed by Elizabeth, and he was surprised to note that Mrs Bingley had not placed Miss Catherine next to Ash. His cousin bore it manfully, but Darcy rather thought Miss Catherine had been harshly used to be placed between Bingley, who had no thought for anyone but his wife, and Mr Hurst who preferred his meals to his companions.

Elizabeth played her part of charming dinner companion admirably and she blessed him with a particular smile as the ladies retired.

Darcy had a rather good fill of the port being passed around the table and managed to request Mr Bennet remain behind without embarrassing himself.

“Did you have something particular to ask me, Mr Darcy?” Mr Bennet gave him a rather knowing look.

That would make this slightly easier. Darcy shuddered inwardly at the thought of surprising Mr Bennet with a request; at least Mr Bennet knew what he was after.

“I feel, Mr Bennet, that you might have some presentiment of what I am about to ask, so I shall come straight to the point.” Darcy took a sip of his port before pushing the glass away. “I have asked your daughter, Elizabeth, to marry me and I should like your permission to do so.”

“You asked her before you ask me?”

Darcy shifted in his chair. “Your daughter and myself have a complicated – I wished to assure myself that she was disposed to accept me.”
“Do you wish for a simple answer? Will you be offended if I require some answers of my own?”

“Not at all, sir.”

“Do you love my daughter?”

“Very much.”

“You will understand if I am somewhat apprehensive. Your attentions have only been very recent, at least from what I have been happy to hear from my wife, and she is very attentive to such things.”

“I have proposed to Elizabeth before, in April. She refused me. We misunderstood each other.”

“So you have worn her down?” Mr Bennet started to look amused.

“Do you think your daughter is likely to be convinced against her will?”

“No. You must have changed her mind. I shall want to talk to my Lizzy, but if she has no objections to you, then I find I cannot gainsay my favourite child.”

“I will do my best to make her the happiest woman in England.”

“All prospective grooms say that,” said Mr Bennet.

Mr Bennet did take Elizabeth aside and Darcy had a moment of anxiety over what Elizabeth might say to her father, how she might fail to convince him that they truly loved each other and any unpleasant behaviour of his was now forgotten.

However, Mr Bennet soon returned to announce their engagement and Darcy found himself being congratulated from all sides but all he could see was Elizabeth and the knowledge she would soon be his, and he hers.

Lizzy had had barely any time to discuss Darcy with Jane. She could not blame Mary and Kitty’s interest, but it had made private conversation with Jane almost impossible. Then of course the moment her mother had been informed of her engagement, any private act of any kind was certainly impossible. Except being able to walk with Darcy: that Mrs Bennet allowed.

Even then, it was only allowed after Mrs Bennet had ensured they had chosen a wedding date. The happy couple had not been allowed to discuss it; rather, they were quizzed relentlessly until Darcy had suggested the end of November. Allowing them enough time to read the banns with some extra time to plan a wedding and marriage.

Lizzy was happy he wanted to be married so soon; she just wished it had more to do with her than it did with his desire to flee her mother. Although to give her her due, Mrs Bennet had been rather calmer than Lizzy had expected.

“Oh Jane, my engagement has been known generally for four days and this is the only time I have had you to myself? I begin to wonder if my decision is a wise one.”

“But when you are at Pemberley, you may write to me,” said Jane with a smile as they walked on Longbourn’s lawn.

“I have picked up my pen several times over the last days, but thought it a foolishness when you
were not three miles away. But instead of being able to talk to you about my happiness, I must listen to Lady Lucas, and Miss Bingley and, in short, everybody I do not wish to hear from.”

Jane laughed. “It is good to hear you so happy.”

Lizzy smiled. “And now that I have you to myself we are going to sit down here and hide from everybody.”

“I am not long married, Lizzy. I am not sure I shall hold all your answers, if it is questions about married life you wish to ask.”

Lizzy did want to ask about being a wife, but that conversation could wait. Lizzy wanted to discuss Kitty first. She’d been distracted by Darcy. She’d known she should talk to her sister, or to others, but every time she meant to, she never knew what to say or her disordered thoughts about Darcy would overtake her.

Jane frowned at her silence. “You are happy, are you not, Lizzy?”

“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.”

Lizzy could see she surprised Jane. “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?”

Lizzy wished to exclaim, ‘Oh Jane!’ for her sister did always think the best of everything and everyone. She couldn’t see the difficulties even if she tried.

“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…”

Lizzy hesitated. She had something to say that she knew would be difficult to say, and that Jane would be disappointed in her, and, indeed, Lizzy was a little disappointed in herself because she should have been a better sister.

“And what Lizzy?” Jane sounded concerned.

“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.”

Her father had not taken her suggestion seriously, although after Brighton he had followed it despite his amusement.

“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.”

Lizzy did not want to confess to Jane how cowardly she had been, and how much she had been waiting for Jane’s gentle nature and better relationship with Kitty.

“My dear Mrs Bingley!”

Jane and Lizzy looked up to see Bingley crossing the lawn with a smile. Normally Lizzy would be overjoyed to see her new brother, but now he was interrupting.

“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.”

Lizzy should have known that Jane would not keep anything from her husband.

“Well your difficult matters are my difficult matters now.”

“It is my sister, Kitty. Her heart is likely to be broken,” said Lizzy bluntly.

“By whom?” Bingley looked startled and Lizzy thought he had been just as engrossed in his own affairs as she had been.

“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?”

Lizzy wanted to laugh at her brother’s face. She felt better now about her own absorption. She at least had not been totally blind.

“Yes, and we do not know what to do, could you speak to him?”

“Me speak to Lord Ashbourne about what?” Bingley looked like a hare caught in a snare.

“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.”

“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.”

Bingley looked thankful that he’d arrived at a solution that would absolve him from any concern. Lizzy did not blame him precisely. She would not wish to speak to Lord Ashbourne on the matter either.

“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 tried to keep some of the bitterness out of her tone.

“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 stopped and sounded distressed and Lizzy wished now she had not brought up the subject.

Bingley went to comfort her and Lizzy moved away to allow them time to discuss their previous hurts.

When it seemed that Jane was calmed, Lizzy spoke again. “So you will speak to him?”

“I will observe him and – hang it, cannot you ask Darcy?”

“I ask Darcy? I cannot become engaged to him and ask him to ….”

She could not agree to marry him and then drag him into a family crisis!

“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.”

Lizzy thought Bingley was exaggerating now. Lord Ashbourne might be a fine figure of a man, but he seemed to her inherently lazy.

“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,” said Jane reasonably.

“Oh Jane, you think the best of everyone.”
“Well it has not failed me, at least not usually,” replied Jane. “And, Lizzy, there is always the possibility that Lord Ashbourne is sincere. Surely he must realise the expectations…”

“And he does not care.”

“But his cousin is engaged to you, and I have married Bingley; he must know he will be called to account by people he admires if he does Kitty wrong.”

“Worse still if he should be trapped into a marriage he does not want.”

Lizzy had had the strength to refuse Mr Collins and Darcy when it would not be in her best interests. Kitty would not have that strength, it was not in her nature; even Jane when she knew she was right had more strength than Kitty, who never seemed sure of herself, except for now!

Lizzy thought of Mr Wickham, and Mr Collins, and even Mr Bingley, Darcy and her father, and how they had consciously or unconsciously mistreated women. It seemed to her very possible that Lord Ashbourne just had not thought much about the long term effect of his actions. If that was the case, he was not to ruin her sister's life or hurt her any further, of that Lizzy was determined.

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Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

This Part corresponds with Chapter Twenty Five of the Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Seventeen (Chapter 25)

Bingley was hovering. Darcy was gripped by a sudden fear that Bingley wished to discuss things of a marital nature with him; either to ask for advice, or to give it.

“Bingley, do not hover in the doorway, come in…” Darcy gestured for Bingley to close the door behind him. Whatever difficult conversation they were about to have he wanted to have, it in privacy.

“I am not sure how to raise this subject with you, Darcy, but I must.”

Bingley began to pace and Darcy let out a sigh. “If the conversation is so difficult to begin, perhaps we should postpone.”

“We cannot postpone, Darcy. I’m afraid some murmurings have reached me.”

They must have reached him via his wife, whatever the murmurings might be; Bingley had paid little attention to anyone but Mrs Bingley since their return, and if Darcy was true to himself Bingley had been more than unusually distracted since he had leased Netherfield the previous year.

“Murmurings?”

“It’s about your cousin.”

“Freddie? What has he done now?” Darcy had hoped that his cousin, under his influence along with Bingley’s and Ash’s had begun to mature.

“Not Mr Fitzwilliam. Lord Ashbourne.”

Darcy frowned at Bingley’s formality. “Ash?”

“You may not have noticed the expectations that he is raising.”

Darcy was right; he did not want to hear Bingley’s conversation. This was worse than marital advice! But he could not help but prod Bingley into more disclosure.

“Expectations?”

“With Kitty...”

“Is this not rather the purview of Mr Bennet?”

“Well I am her brother now, and you too will be soon. It is our concern.”
“I cannot believe that Ash has behaved improperly.”

“No, there is no question of that, but his attentions, and we…I…felt that you should raise it with him.”

“I should go to my cousin and imply that he is raising expectations and will be thought a rake?”

Bingley sat down suddenly with a sigh. “I told Jane it was impossible.”

Darcy couldn’t help but laugh at Bingley’s dejected expression. “You may reassure your wife that my cousin is very well versed in the matters of flirtation.”

“I don’t think that will reassure her.”

“It should,” said Darcy with a smile, but Bingley did not understand him. “I will speak to him.”

It turned out to be a very short conversation.

“If I were you, I should propose before I contrive a situation where you will be forced to propose.”

“How convoluted,” was Ash’s reply. “I’m tempted to wait to see how you arrange it. Your plots have never come to much before.”

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“Are you sure you do not wish to join us at Longbourn? Elizabeth would be happy for your company.”

Georgiana shook her head. “Freddie and I are to take a walk.”

“You have all the time to take a walk with Freddie.”

“I have all the time for Elizabeth to be my sister, do I not?”

Darcy knew that his sister was overjoyed by his engagement. If she had not been at Netherfield with him he was sure her rapture would have not been contained by four sides of closely crossed paper.

As it was, after he had shared the good news, it had been a good hour before Darcy had been allowed to leave his sister’s side. He knew too that he’d been banished from Elizabeth’s side for at least as long while Georgiana could express her delight directly to her new sister. So it was not a reticence or apprehension of Elizabeth or the marriage that kept Georgiana from wanting to accompany them.

Darcy waited on the steps of Netherfield for Ash to bring his curricle around.

“Are you to Longbourn again, Mr Darcy?” Miss Bingley joined him on the steps.

“I am, Miss Bingley.”

Miss Bingley smiled. She had not taken the engagement well and, clearly unable to speak well of the situation, had decided the better part of valour was silence. At least then she did not offend him and cut herself off from the riches of Pemberley forever. Ash would have told him he was being insufferable again, but Darcy thought his assessment was correct.

“Well, do give Mrs Bennet and her daughters my greetings. I expect you have a great many things
to discuss about the wedding. I do hope Miss Bennet is not allowing her mother to have the full run of proceedings. She is a very worthy woman, but I did think that Jane and Charles’ wedding was not quite in the style … certainly not the style of a Mr Darcy of Pemberley.”

“As long as it is Elizabeth waiting for me at the church, I find I do not much care for the details,” replied Darcy.

Miss Bingley smiled, even if it was a little strained. “Spoken like a true lover.” She watched as Ash drew up in front of them. “And you, my lord, you will desert us for Longbourn and wedding plans?”

“Yes, I find there is nothing I enjoy more,” replied Ash, and Darcy felt his eyes begin to roll. His cousin did so enjoy teasing.

“Oh you are so droll,” laughed Miss Bingley, entirely ignorant to Ash’s true meaning.

Darcy dutifully returned her wave as they set off. He looked at his cousin and wondered if he should remind his cousin of their conversation of some days ago, but Darcy decided against it.

He realised there would be no point when the farce at Longbourn’s door unrolled itself.

Elizabeth was attempting to make Miss Catherine wait for Miss Mary; Miss Catherine was having none of it. Mrs Bennet seemed equally insistent that Miss Mary depart the house with Miss Catherine all so that Darcy would not be surrounded by ‘silly girls’. Darcy held his tongue and did not suggest Mrs Bennet join her daughters. Then Mr Bennet inserted himself into the conversation, insisting that Miss Mary had been practicing a sonata just for Darcy to hear.

So it was that Miss Catherine, holding her bonnet to her head, was the sole beneficiary of Ash’s driving skills. Darcy watched them as they rounded the corner and thought he had discovered the reason Georgiana had refused to accompany them.

Elizabeth was watching them with a look that Darcy could not quite place.

“You wish that we could escape?” he said to her in a low tone.

She looked a little confused and then smiled. “There is not much chance of that, I just wish Mary had gone with them.”

Darcy felt some surprise that Elizabeth did not seem to notice that the presence of Mary Bennet would spoil the opportunity for Ash to propose. Surely she did not think, as Mrs Bingley did, that Ash was trifling with their sister? Or perhaps she had been too distracted by their engagement to notice how close to their own engagement, Ash and Miss Catherine were. That was perhaps Darcy’s fault, as he had monopolised their conversation whenever they were alone. He wanted to talk about their lives and dreams, not about his cousin’s!

"I think that my cousin may have something to discuss with your sister,” prompted Darcy.

"You have spoken to Lord Ashbourne ..." Elizabeth sounded surprised, which he understood, but he thought she also sounded concerned.

Elizabeth did not have a chance to finish her sentence as Mr Bennet at that moment swept them into the parlour to listen the promised sonata, which turned out not to be a sonata at all and Darcy rather thought Miss Mary was making it up as she went along.

“That was dreadful,” said Miss Lydia. “What a bore, I will go find Maria Lucas.” She then pouted her way out of the room and Darcy took a moment to reflect on the difference between Georgiana
and Miss Lydia.

Elizabeth must have been thinking along a similar line, for she leaned towards and asked, “Miss – Georgiana did not wish to visit today?”

“She has taken a walk with Freddie. I would not take it as a slight; I think she has an ulterior motive for her absence.”

She frowned at him, but could not ask anything more for Mrs Bennet claimed their attention with some trivial question about the wedding breakfast.

Lizzy took a deep breath to steady herself. She looked out the window to where she longed to be, instead of here where her mother was still discussing the wedding breakfast. She should be able to speak to Darcy, and soothe her fears, not hear about the proposed cake!

She had not seriously thought that Bingley would delegate her request to Darcy! She loved Darcy, but he was the last person who should be discussing Kitty with his cousin! Her worst fear was that he might have learned the wrong lesson from his interference in Jane and Bingley's relationship and actively pressure his cousin to make an offer he had not meant to make! Why had they spent every moment since their engagement talking about their love? They had their entire life to talk about love!

“Oh look, Charlotte and Lady Lucas…” Lizzy was distracted from her thoughts by seeing visitors walking up the drive.

Lady Lucas looked disconcerted when they appeared. “We met Lydia and she did not say …”

Of course Lydia would not have mentioned Darcy’s presence; she probably encouraged Lady Lucas and Charlotte to think they would be able to have a comfortable coze with Mrs Bennet.

Lizzy wasn’t too angry with her sister, for she where she found it difficult to get Jane alone, she found it impossible to find time with Charlotte.

“I am so sorry, Lizzy. I would not have …”

“Do not worry, Charlotte, I am just so happy to see you! You must go back to Hunsford soon; surely Lady Catherine cannot do without Mr Collins for much longer?”

Charlotte looked down, “Yes, although I think my husband delays our journey now that he knows such tidings must be given.”

Lizzy had forgotten that Lady Catherine would be one relation not overjoyed by her engagement. The fact Mr Collins and Charlotte were in residence here perhaps delayed the news, for Lizzy did not know if Darcy had written to his aunt.

Charlotte moved a little closer and spoke so no one else could hear them. “Has Mr Darcy informed his relations? His aunt and uncle?”

Her voice was not as low as Charlotte might have liked, or Mrs Bennet had been dividing her attention.

“Yes, Mr Darcy, have you informed your relations? Do we expect them for the wedding?”

“I have written letters, yes, although a great many of my relations are already here, enjoying
Bingley’s hospitality. Although for how much longer he shall bear that, I do not know; even the most amiable of hosts must lose patience with house guests.”

“But they shall stay for the wedding, shall they not?” said Lady Lucas. “Or shall they return?”

“Will Lady Catherine de Bourgh be attending the wedding?”

Lizzy closed her eyes briefly and wished she could distract the party from these questions but she did not know what would be dramatic enough.

“My aunt is unlikely to attend; my cousin is sickly and unable to travel and my aunt does not like to leave her.”

“That is a shame; I should very much like to meet Lady Catherine de Bourgh. We have heard so much about her amiability and condescension.”

A meeting between Lady Catherine and her mother would certainly be a dramatic moment one worthy of the stage, but not one Lizzy wanted to see enacted in front of her.

“My Uncle however, Lord Matlock, has indicated that he will attend, he and his wife. You may not have heard as much about them, madam, but they are eager to meet Elizabeth and her family.”

Darcy had not spoken to her of this, and Lizzy wondered if they were happy to meet her, or whether they felt the same as Lady Catherine. Darcy had not told her his aunt’s exact words in her original letter to Darcy but he had not had to, his face told her everything. The confirmation of an engagement was not likely to improve her thoughts.

“That is very gracious of them,” said Mrs Bennet, preening.

“Mr Bingley will have to put up with a few more houseguests, then,” said Lady Lucas.

“Oh but, Lady Lucas, that shall not be for some weeks,” said Lizzy.

“I am afraid my uncle can be just as vague as his sons, so I am unsure when he intends to arrive, although, I am sure my aunt will ensure that Bingley is given a proper amount of warning.”

That did not sound like the proper behaviour of an Earl of the realm, thought Lizzy.

“Well, he will find the neighbourhood a lively and charming one, “ said Mrs Bennet. “Although you must be a particular favourite to bring him early.”

Darcy nodded. “I am blessed with my uncle’s regard, but he has other reasons for wishing to see Hertfordshire, I am sure.”

The only reason Lizzy could think of were his sons, and perhaps the Earl’s fear that one of them was about to contract a misalliance. He might wish to come to prevent his heir making the mistake he could no longer prevent his nephew from making.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

This part corresponds with Chapter Twenty Six of the Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Eighteen (Chapter 26)

It was interminable. But there was no polite way to leave. Any attempt to turn the conversation failed. Lizzy found herself wishing that Mary had not scurried upstairs, or that Lydia had not gone off to Meryton. She needed someone, anyone, to break the conversation of Lady Lucas and Mrs Bennet.

She noticed that Darcy kept looking at the window, then the clock and then frowning.

"Mama, we should not keep our guests hostage," began Lizzy.

"Nonsense, Lizzy, they are very happy to be here. Mr Darcy, you are very happy to be here, are you not?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Darcy, shortly which did not make Lizzy believe him.

"But Bingley will be wondering where his guests have gone!" That was a very lame excuse as Lord Ashbourne had not returned and if Darcy left now he would have to walk to Netherfield.

"Mr Bingley has come in search of his guests," said Charlotte. "I spy Jane, and Mr Fitzwilliam is with him also."

Lizzy would have rather escaped, but a few more prisoners would certainly make the party merrier and she could shield Darcy from her mother a little more.

"This is a merry party," said Bingley as he entered the room. "We had not thought to see you here, Lady Lucas, and Mrs Collins. Indeed I had thought that you, Darcy, might be walking out with Miss Bennet."

Mr Fitzwilliam made his bows and then had some low words with his cousin, a short conversation which ended with Darcy shaking his head slightly.

"Lizzy, we thought we should come to rescue you. Although I remember you abandoning me to have a picnic."

"Jane, marriage has addled your mind. It was your decision to placate your husband and submit to Mama's thoughts. Something that I think proves your strength."

Jane smiled, "Surely she is less enthusiastic? This is her second daughter married, after all."

"You would think so Jane, but I have unfortunately chosen a man who eclipses your husband." Lizzy closed her eyes at what could have been taken as an insult by her sister. "I mean, Jane, in our mother's eyes."
"Then you must thank providence that Mr Darcy's estate is in Derbyshire, and I must hope for an invitation before too long."

Lizzy ducked her head hiding her grin. "You will always be welcome. Mr Darcy has suggested we invite Aunt and Uncle Gardiner for Christmas."

"There, see, he does not disapprove of our family."

"Not all of them, at any rate."

Lizzy thought that Jane might have said something to this remark, if Kitty had not burst into the room looking quite wild. Her bonnet was askew and her cheeks flushed.

She stopped and looked about before dashing out of the room. She did not even seem to heed their mother, who, while not one to normally notice outré behaviour, seemed disconcerted by her daughter's behaviour.

"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."

If only that had been her mother's only remark, but Lizzy could not be so lucky. Her mother and Lady Lucas began to discuss Kitty's strange entrance and departure, wondering if she had a megrim or some other disorder. They paid no attention to Darcy's or Bingley's presence and would not allow the conversation to be turned.

"Should I go to Kitty?" said Jane in a low voice.

"It will draw more attention, and Mary is upstairs. I wish to know where Lord Ashbourne is?" replied Lizzy.

It seemed as if Lizzy only had to speak his name and he appeared. He seemed the picture of sangfroid.

Mrs Bennet was luckily too in awe of him to ask him impertinent questions about Kitty, but Lady Lucas had no such compunction.

"I declare, your lordship, you must be a very alarming companion! I hope you have not been frightening our inexperienced country ladies."

"Ma'am?" The eyebrow said it all, and while Lizzy wished she could cultivate such an expression, she was heartily embarrassed it needed to be employed. Not that Lady Lucas did not deserve a set down, but it seemed indicative of Lord Ashbourne's opinion of them, and his lack of concern over the talk he was provoking with regards to Kitty.

Lady Lucas flushed a little. "With your driving, sir. I have seen you as you go past our door, my sons tell me you are quite the whip!"

"Indeed." Lord Ashbourne took the seat offered to him by Mrs Bennet, and seemed disinclined to say anything more. He did not look offended however. Lizzy thought he looked happy and wondered why on earth he should be so after Lady Lucas's pointed remark.

Bingley took it upon himself to begin to talk about the many pleasant paths and roads about the county. This pleased Mrs Bennet as it seemed a sign that he did not mean to quit Netherfield.

"All the young men seem unable to leave when they taste our delights," said Lady Lucas. "I declare I should never have thought it when your lordship and Mr Fitzwilliam arrived that you
would still be here! Indeed when you went away, Mr Bingley, we thought we should never see you and Mr Darcy again and yet here you are."

Charlotte looked uncomfortable that her mother should still be speaking. Lizzy felt for her.

"Where there is convivial company and a friend happy to put one up, you shall always find me, Lady Lucas," said Mr Fitzwilliam.

"The friend happy to offer you his home is probably the greater attraction!" said Darcy. He spoke softly but his words carried and he sounded disapproving.

Lizzy wondered if Mr Fitzwilliam was expensive; she knew him a rattle, but wondered if Darcy's words were less teasing and more serious concern.

"I did not think you in your dotage, cousin," replied Mr Fitzwilliam, "You sound like a grandfather, not a man who was young once."

"Oh, Darcy was never young," said Lord Ashbourne, looking at his cousin, and speaking in an odd tone. "He was always virtuous."

Lizzy could not quite make out this exchange, and neither it seemed could their mother who was discomforted by not being quite sure whose part she should take. She did not wish to offend her son-in-law but neither could she offend a Viscount.

Mrs Bennet was saved from having to interject, as Lizzy could tell she wanted to, by Kitty's re-entrance.

"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, wishing that mother did not add to the remarks Lord Ashbourne had already had to suffer.

"Indeed, Mrs Bennet, I may very well refuse to take your daughter out in a curricle anymore," replied his lordship.

"See, Kitty," said Mrs Bennet, pursing her lips together.

Lizzy was surprised. Was this the result of Bingley talking to him? But it was said in such a light way Lizzy was not sure it signalled his intention to cease to pay Kitty such particular attention.

"Are you well, Kitty?" said Jane, clearly wishing to turn the conversation.

"I am very well," said Kitty. "Although I may become annoyed if a certain someone continues to tease me." Her arch tone was paired with a saucy look at Lord Ashbourne.

"Kitty, Lord Ashbourne is very good to have been so kind to you," said Lizzy.

"Oh it was not a kindness, Miss Bennet," replied Lord Ashbourne, which surprised Lizzy, that he would be so blunt in front of company. Surely Kitty deserved some compassion.

Mr Fitzwilliam laughed and then muttered under his breath. He did not say anything more and Lizzy was indeed confused until Darcy added to the confusion by stepping forward, from where he had been standing near the window, no doubt embarrassed by the general conversation of the room, and he made a bow to Kitty.
“My congratulations, Miss Catherine.”

“Thank you, Mr Darcy.”

Lizzy could not conceive of what Darcy could be congratulating her sister for and she stood involuntarily and exclaimed, "Darcy?"

“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 Lord Ashbourne.

“An engagement? Kitty, is this true? Mr Bennet?” Lizzy was glad for her mother's bewilderment because it covered her own.

Her father 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!”

That indicated that it was not a surprise to her father. Suddenly his invention of a sonata for Mary made more sense.

There was no eruption from Mrs Bennet, who seemed incapable of saying a word and Lady Lucas seemed equally bereft of words, but Lizzy suspected that her difficulties came from a different source.

Charlotte, gave Lizzy a little smile and nod before she congratulated Kitty and Lord Ashbourne, which begun the general well wishing. Lizzy said something, but she hardly knew what. Bingley's joy was rapturous, so much so that Lizzy could not discern whether Jane shared her husband's feelings.

"You shall be wishing to be a little family party, shall you not?” said Lady Lucas standing precipitously.

That began the general exodus; Lizzy wanted to catch Jane before she left, but Bingley was so all encompassing in his happiness and his insistence they should all go back to Netherfield together to have a toast. Lizzy almost lost patience with him, and quite forgot about farewelling Darcy, or indeed asking him what his thoughts were on his cousin's engagement.

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"Rogers, we should open some of that champagne I bought in Devon," said Bingley as they arrived at Netherfield.

"You did not offer me champagne upon my engagement!” exclaimed Darcy, wondering why Bingley was so effervescent. He could only assume Mrs Bingley had truly worried about her sister.

"Why did you buy champagne in Devon?” said Ash, handing his hat to a footman.

The answer involved an improvised merchant and Bingley's kind nature enhanced by his wife's. Darcy could not imagine the champagne was of any quality.

"Why are you exposing your folly to Lord Ashbourne?” called Miss Bingley as they entered the drawing room.

"Folly!” said Bingley laughingly. "I will not have you say such a thing. And Caroline, it is in
honour of the best kind of news.”

Darcy doubted Miss Bingley would think it was the best kind of news. Indeed, Miss Bingley looked apprehensive.

"Lord Ashbourne is engaged!"

"Engaged? Congratulations, your lordship. Who is the lucky young lady? She should be congratulated twice over." Miss Bingley's tone was steady.

"Miss Bennet!" replied Bingley, clearly not intending to allow anyone but himself speak. Darcy saw that Mrs Bingley was giving him a small reproving look. "Kitty, to be more precise."

"Oh! Miss Catherine, well..." Miss Bingley stood with a smile that did not quite reach her eyes. "I suppose that was inevitable."

"Really, Miss Bingley?" Ash was finally allowed to speak.

"Indeed, you showed her such attention, it can hardly be a surprise."

Miss Bingley had clearly become adept at reacting to the engagements of the Bennet sisters. When one compared her reaction to Bingley and Mrs Bingley's engagement, to his and Elizabeth's, and now Ash's and Miss Catherine's, one did see that she had seen the sense in civility.

"We wish you every joy," said Mrs Hurst, though her glances at Miss Bingley underscored her words.

Ash inclined his head.

"We should see to dinner, Louisa," said Miss Bingley, rising, and there was no mention of that being Mrs Bingley's task.

"They took that better than expected," said Darcy in a low tone to his cousins.

Freddie snorted, "They will be exchanging sharp words now. But let us not think of such things and have some of Bingley's champagne."

It was decidedly subpar, but Darcy forbore to mention it to his host.

"I am so delighted, Darcy. Your words must have had the desired effect."

"Indeed they did not, Bingley; my cousin had determined to propose long before you spoke to me."

Bingley looked surprised. "And I never noticed!"

"As my cousin is not a beautiful blonde of the female persuasion who now carries your name, I am unsurprised."

"You will understand soon enough Darcy!"

"I hope for the sake of my tenants, I will not be as besotted as you to ignore everything under your nose."

"Your cousin is not as transparent as you might think!" retorted Bingley.

"I grant you that the workings of his mind remain a mystery to most, but his intentions were
entirely clear. It can only be the haze of love and your temperaments that blinded your wife and yourself."

Bingley shook his head but did not argue.

Lizzy knocked on her father's door. "Papa?"

"Surely you do not have another young man coming to speak to me!" Her father was sitting by the fire with a book.

Lizzy crossed the room to sit opposite him. "No, I am quite happy with one young man. But I did wish to talk to you about young men, well, a certain young man."

"Jealous of your sister, Lizzy? Do you wish to swap?"

Lizzy felt her heart sink with her father's flippant tone.

"I am very happy with Mr Darcy. Do you think Kitty will be very happy with Lord Ashbourne?"

Mr Bennet closed his book. "Of course she shall! Did you not hear your Mama once she had regained her wits? The jewels! The dresses! The pin money! The carriages! The rather alarming feather headdress your mother seems to think is necessary for Kitty to be presented to court in. How could any young lady not be very happy? She certainly had the same reaction to your engagement, and we have already established you will be very happy."

"Papa, do be serious. Do you think Lord Ashbourne will make her a good husband?"

"He has money and sense, though perhaps not as much as he should if he thinks taking one of my daughters is a good bargain!" laughed Mr Bennet. "She could do far worse! Her sister almost did."

"But his character, his compatibility with Kitty?"

"I dare say they will suit well enough," Mr Bennet was uninterested in the conversation and wished to return to his book. Lizzy could tell by the way he was stroking the spine. She would not oblige him however.

"Do you think he felt himself duty-bound to offer for Kitty?"

Her father looked at her sharply. "Do you suspect some impropriety?" Then he looked a little merry. "When a young man pays a great deal of attention to a pretty young lady, no doubt there is a point when he feels he cannot draw back. I suspect Lord Ashbourne found himself at that point many weeks ago. His friends certainly will have influenced him. All these engagements! How is a man to resist!"

He then waved Lizzy away, leaving her feeling no more composed than when she had entered the room.

She was no more composed in the morning; she had avoided speaking to Kitty until she had spoken to their father, but as he had not soothed her fears. His levity at the breakfast table made her heart sink. He had clearly questioned Mr Darcy closely before agreeing to the engagement, but it did not sound as if he had done so to Lord Ashbourne. Her father had seen a rich young man and his daughter was not averse, so why inquire further?
Lizzy suddenly felt the danger of her father having favourites amongst his children.

Jane and Miss Darcy visited them, and Lizzy was thankful that Miss Darcy took Kitty off to walk so she could talk with Jane.

"How did his lordship seem, Jane?"

"He seemed very happy. Caroline and Louisa took the news well, I thought. I was apprehensive that ..."

"What do we care for Miss Bingley and her sister!" said Lizzy, refusing to be sidetracked. "It does not sound at all as if Papa has questioned him."

"Why should he? You cannot suspect Lord Ashbourne of misrepresenting his situation! I do not think Kitty would care if he had!"

"That is why our father should not fail in his duty! He was more surprised at Darcy's proposing! When they have known each other such a comparatively short time and shown no interest in sharing their connection publically."

"Should they? I should have preferred to begin my acquaintance with Charles outside of the public eye. And is it really such a surprise? Really Lizzy, you speak very stridently."

"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."

"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."

Her father seemed, the night before, to assume that such a fate might befall Kitty.

"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 beginning to listen to herself and wonder what she was saying. Was it truly that she
worried about Kitty, or was she using Kitty's situation to avoid her own fear of an unequal marriage?

She loved Darcy and he loved her, but there was so much they did not know about each other. Charlotte was correct that so much of marriage was up to chance. The chance that something could upset Kitty's and her own seemed much higher to Lizzy, and she did not wish her sister to be surprised.

“I am grateful to hear what you think of me.” Kitty rounded a hedge, the colour high in her cheeks and Lizzy knew she had heard a great deal of their conversation and her heart sunk.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

This part corresponds with Chapter Twenty Seven of the Brighton Effect which is Kitty's POV

Part Nineteen (Chapter 27)

Lizzy would not have hurt her sister for the world, but that was what she had done. Her foolish pride had not been vanquished. If only she had spoken to her sister! A tiny voice remarked that Kitty could have just as easily confided in her. That was true, although Lizzy was the elder and had never invited confidences.

But it did not change the fact that Lizzy should not have spoken so intemperately to Jane. She should have examined her sister and Lord Ashbourne, and she should not have shied away from talking to Darcy about her concerns.

It did stem from an insecurity of her own position going forward as mistress of Pemberley, and her lack of trust in her own perception. It seemed incredible that she had been wrong about yet another thing, so she had tried to fit the evidence to match. It was just as possible that Lord Ashbourne had fallen in love with Kitty as Darcy had done so with her.

Although Lizzy did not berate herself over considering the equal possibility that such a marriage might not be beneficial to either party, just as she worried that her chance of happiness in marriage was just as precarious.

"Miss Bennet," Georgiana recalled her to her surroundings and Lizzy winced at Georgiana's formality.

Jane looked as if she would go after Kitty, but Lizzy shook her head. Kitty would require some time, and she always blotched when she cried and hated how she looked. She would not welcome Jane's attentions straight away; Lizzy knew that much about her little sister, even if she knew nothing else.

"Miss Bennet," Georgiana began again. "I cannot understand..." the girl faltered and looked much distressed, which made Lizzy's heart sink again. "... why you should say such a thing about my cousin and your sister. It is not true. Even before I came to Netherfield, I knew Ash was contemplating marriage. He wrote so warmly you see, and I charged him with it when I arrived. He did not deny it, and I was brought to believe that it was your sister who did not return his feelings."

Jane made a surprised sound, and Lizzy tried not to let a laugh escape her. She saw that that would be fatal to retaining any of Georgiana's respect. But it was too comical. No one who had seen Kitty could possibly doubt her affection. Whether it was the kind that could last ... well no one, not even Lizzy could judge that.

"I think he waited because he respects and loves your sister and would not wish her to make an error in judgement."
Georgiana sounded wiser than her years, even if her words were spoken so softly. Lizzy knew that Darcy worried about the effect of Ramsgate, but if this understanding had grown out of it, then she did not think Darcy should be worried.

"Georgiana.... I, " Lizzy paused. She did not know what to say. She should not explain herself to Georgiana before she attempted to explain herself to Kitty!

"Elizabeth?"

The voice she both did and didn't want to hear. Lizzy had walked over to skulk in the rose garden after she had failed so miserably to reassure her new sister.

"Darcy," she tried to infuse her voice with lightness.

"I spoke to Kitty."

Lizzy's heart sank. "Oh Fitzwilliam!"

Of all the thinks she expected Darcy to do, holding his arms out to her was the one she most hoped for and least expected. But she did not deny her good luck and cast herself into his arms.

"This is exactly what I judged my sister for!"

"I believe this is exactly what I judged your sister for," replied Darcy drily.

"No wonder we are marrying," replied Lizzy.

Darcy took her by the shoulders and pulled her away so he could look into her eyes, even though Lizzy didn't quite want to look at him.

"I think we need to talk."

"I do love you, Mr Fitzwilliam Darcy, even if I have a very odd way of showing it."

"By overestimating my powers?"

"Overestimate? Or misattribute?"

"Both. My cousin wants to marry your sister. He is in love with your sister. I in no way interfered with their relationship. Not to support it (not that I do not!) nor to hinder it. You do not need to worry about your sister. Except for the fact she has execrable taste in men."

Lizzy laughed. "Georgiana made it quite clear you had no involvement and that Lord Ashbourne acted entirely under his own aegis. I hope you are not serious about your cousin being a poor choice. I want my sister to be happy."

"She will be, just as happy as we are."

Lizzy bit her lip.

"You do not think we will be happy?"

"We are very poor communicators. That has been made abundantly clear. I cannot tell what you are thinking, and I confess part of me prefers that - the Mr Bingley's of this world are not for me - but ..."
Darcy took her by the arm and led her further into the rose garden.

"Elizabeth, I realise that our relationship has been punctuated by misunderstandings, but you make me alive. You make me realise my faults and, more than that, make me want to fix them."

Lizzy couldn't speak past the lump in her throat. Could she say the same thing? That he made her a better person?

"It is all right if you cannot say the same thing, Elizabeth."

"I think I have not been honest with you. I have so many worries and I am afraid I think too much of my own opinion to trust others. I trust you, I do, but my head has not caught up with my heart."

"I am willing to wait for that, Elizabeth Bennet, because we are going to grow together, and we are going to talk."

Lizzy couldn't help the smile spreading across her face.

"Do you wish me to reassure you about Lord Ashbourne?"

Lizzy shook her head. "I think I should hear my sister's account of her fiancé first. Do you not think?"

"I think that is a wise idea, Mrs Darcy."

"Not quite yet, but I like hearing it."

Kitty was nowhere to be seen; Lizzy had expected that after dinner she would be able to pull her sister aside. However, Kitty had taken her dinner with Mrs Bennet. Their mother's nerves were still strung tight from the fact she was going to be mother to a viscountess, and to Mrs Darcy of Pemberly as well as Mrs Bingley of Netherfield. However apart from brief moments of exploding with her happiness, Mrs Bennet had been rather subdued as if so much good news had overloaded her mind.

Lizzy knew that Kitty would go straight from their mother's rooms to her own and Mary would guard the door. Kitty must have told Mary what had happened because Lizzy had been on the end of Mary's disapproving looks and had had a series of choice passages quoted to her over dinner. Neither Mr Bennet nor Lydia had picked up on the subtext but that was not surprising.

Mary lingered over the pianoforte so Lizzy attacked and crossed her fingers that Georgiana would forgive Lizzy's misappropriation of some sheet music she'd left at Longbourn.

"Mary, I have here the newest sheet music from London. I will let you have it, if you will not interrupt my conversation with Kitty." She held the pages slightly out of Mary's reach. "I shall not give them to you until you promise. Georgiana heard the pieces played at a London concert and told me they were the most sublime pieces she had never heard."

Mary closed the pianoforte. "Well, it rather depends on what you are going to say to Kitty."

"I shall beg her pardon."

"Unreservedly?"

"Yes."
"I promise then, but I cannot understand how you came to such a conclusion about Kitty and Lord Ashbourne."

"You did not think them serious either, Mary."

Mary laughed.

"You said it would embarrass me to hear what they spoke of?"

"Because it would have made you blush and, depending on your tolerance of romance, perhaps quite ill. Also, if we may speak plainly, I think your own self importance has blinded you."

That made Lizzy flinch because it was the truth. "Not just my own self importance. My petty fears."

Mary sniffed. "Not petty."

Lizzy couldn't stop her laugh. "Now I feel much better!"

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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 was sitting at her dresser playing with her hair. She looked both absurdly youthful and grownup at the same time.

"Kitty, I am so sorry." Lizzy went to sit on Mary's bed and folded her hands in her lap.

"Is that all I am to expect?" replied Kitty, her tone was harder than Lizzy had heard from her.

"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. Please come and sit next to me, Kitty."

Lizzy was a little surprised that Kitty responded to her outstretched hand, but her stiffness when she did sit next to her said everything.

"I know you are aware of Darcy's first proposal to me, but I cannot think you know the details."

She found it difficult to describe her interactions with Darcy and what led to the proposal. Kitty's eyes widened and widened. Her very face showed Lizzy that nothing in her interactions with Lord Ashbourne had ever led her to believe he disapproved of her family or felt her to be less than him. She could not deny a spark of jealousy.

As Lizzy continued trying to untangle her thoughts and how she had lead herself to the conclusions, she found herself becoming embarrassed. Kitty was so kind and so insightful that Lizzy found herself feeling even worse. She even ended up confessing her worry about the London ton.

"But surely we shall face whatever London might say, and confess you don't mean London but
Mr Darcy's relations, together?" Kitty arched an eyebrow at her.

"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."

Now it was Lizzy's turn to widen her eyes. Why had she never heard of this? "But his second wife..."

"Yes, the daughter of a Duke, so they will be trusting that Mr Darcy and Ash make better second choices."

How could Kitty say such a thing! It was almost something she would say and it was that thought that made Lizzy burst into laughter. Lizzy never could say something so flippant about such a serious subject to Jane, or Mary, and it would be pointless to even consider Lydia. She'd always thought it would just be her father who would enter into her sense of the ridiculous. But she'd overlooked Kitty.

"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."

The air was chilly, so Lizzy shepherded Kitty under the covers.

"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."

She discovered that her new brother sounded very different from whom she expected. She had teased Jane about Bingley being so very blind, but it turned out she should have been teasing herself!

"And then he laid them out flat and I was so ashamed, and never tell Lydia, but she is very right about ...well ...his...attributes."

Lizzy certainly had to re-evaluate her opinion of Lord Ashbourne's physique and what he could do with it, but Kitty's love was not superficial and while Lizzy could never judge whether herself or any of her sisters would be happy in their marriages, at least Kitty was starting hers from a strong position, as she hoped she was.
Part Twenty (Chapter 28)

Kitty had not just spoken of her man, Lizzy had found herself opening up, and they ended up giggling about the latest fashions. They must have fallen asleep and Lizzy must have walked in her sleep because she woke up, in Kitty's bed, to Mary speaking shrilly.

"Does he bring the Earl and Countess?"

"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."

Lizzy didn't believe her sister, and Kitty and she shared a look.

"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 wondered if the Earl and Countess had spoken to Lady Catherine. It would certainly be an interesting picture of her that would emerge from the combination of Lady Catherine's, Georgiana's and Darcy's accounts of her. Perhaps even Miss De Bourgh and Colonel Fitzwilliam had added their own perspectives. Lizzy had no idea what that image would even look like. Would she recognise herself?

At breakfast Lizzy allowed Kitty to share the news with their mother.

"Are you sure you do not wish to tell Mama?"

"I am quite sure; it is your note, Kitty." Lizzy spread some butter on her bread.

"But you are the elder ..."

Lizzy ignored the doe eyes. "Oh, I couldn't possibly."

"Will you girls tell me what is happening before my nerves are torn to shreds?" Mrs Bennet put down her kippers with some force.

"Mama, Ash is bringing Lord and Lady Matlock this morning, to pay their respects."

"Lord and Lady Matlock ... today? But ... fish ... cake ... tea!" Mrs Bennet clutched her handkerchief and looked bewildered. She was also a strange puce colour.

"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!"

Lydia had a particular talent in bringing the conversation to a new level of ridiculousness. However, it did stop their mother's apoplexy.

"Next year?! Lydia, what nonsense. Lord Ashbourne does not need to have the banns read, he may get a special licence if he so chose. 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?"

Lizzy restrained from rolling her eyes; her mother meant well, and if Lizzy wasn't sure the reason that her mother wanted the special licence was so she could boast to the neighbours, she would have no objections to marrying Darcy earlier.

"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."

"Oh, yes, Mr Collins! I am sure he will know being a clergyman. And I am sure I have not had the chance to receive his compliments on my girls. To think one of you could have married him. I mean, if only he wasn't stealing Longbourn, but I think you girls will be much better off where you are."

"Why has he not gone away?" said Lydia, saying once again something Lizzy wouldn't say herself but would think and then judge her sister for it. She should work on that, with Darcy's support.

"They were to leave yesterday," said Mary, "But Mr Collins had a spasm."

Of course he had a spasm, thought Lizzy. She would have had a spasm too if she was Lady Catherine's parson.

"He does not want to tell Lady Catherine both of her nephews are engaged," said Lydia unfortunately reminding their mother that she was expecting Lord and Lady Matlock.

Lizzy made good her escape but could not decide upon what to wear. She did not know what she wanted to wear! She wished to make a good impression because these were the relatives of Darcy, not because of their rank. Normally she would not care, but Mrs Darcy of Pemberley had to care. She did not just reflect herself. But nor did she wish to become someone she was not!

"None of this has enough lace, nor is it the latest fashion."

Lydia stood in the doorway assessing the dresses laying all over the bed.

"Thank you, Lydia." Normally she would have fused the thanks with sarcasm, but it was possible that her sister was attempting to be nice.

"I do not think you should thank me for pointing out your shortcomings. Mrs Darcy of Pemberley cannot be so unfashionable. I am sure Lord and Lady Matlock are very fashionable, and if you dress your hair in that way ..." Lydia screwed up her nose and waved her hand over Lizzy's person.

"I take back my thanks."
"No, but Lizzy, I am here to make sure you make the right decisions."

Lydia then picked out a gown then bullied Lizzy into putting it on, and then attacked her hair. Lizzy closed her eyes but when extorted to open her eyes she could not believe the result.

"Lydia! Your hours spent pouring over magazines and through shop windows have been well spent."

Lydia didn't look surprised, she had more of a pitying look on her face for Lizzy's lack of intelligence.

"Thank you, Lydia."

"Well, you do need help, Lizzy, after all you are no longer marrying the richest man, and when Kitty introduces me to a Duke you will have to go after both Kitty and me!"

With that Lydia swept out of the room, leaving Lizzy to her thoughts until Kitty arrived.

"Oh, Lizzy, how pretty you look!"

"Come, Kitty, we must be united ..." Lizzy led her sister to the dresser so she could attempt to perform the same miracle as Lydia had just done, although it was hardly necessary to do so, as Kitty had spent hours perfecting the dressing of hair, as she had with trimming bonnets.

"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. It was true, Lizzy had every faith that if she could deal with Lady Catherine she could deal with anything else thrown her way. Kitty however had not had a courtship peppered with insults. Lizzy must hope that Lord Ashbourne knew how to protect his bride if she could not protect herself.

Perhaps Lizzy should not have worried as it was Kitty who dealth with their mother's fidgets better and just sat quietly.

"No, Lizzy, you cannot look as if you do things, what would their lordships and ladyship think?"

"Mama, we should not pretend ..."

"Pretend?! Pretend! My daughters are gentlewomen who do not have to work, they sit calmly and serenely. Oh, why was Jane married first, she would show you how to do it properly."

"We could read, Mama," said Lydia after about ten minutes of them sitting quietly (Mary was allowed to play the pianoforte as that was a talent rather than labour). Once again Lizzy told herself she should never think herself above her sisters since they were so often in charity with her.

"I do not wish them to think my daughters bluestockings!"

Lizzy took a deep breath ready to do battle again but her speech was cut off by Kitty pinching her and giving her a quelling look. Acceptance was the better part of valour so Lizzy subsided.

After what felt like an age, the parlour door opened.
"Lady Matlock, ma'am," said Hill bobbing nervously, as they all rose to greet their visitor.

Lord Ashbourne had made no mention of Darcy in his note so Lizzy did not know why her first instinct was to look for him. But it was only Lady Matlock; she was not even accompanied by her son.

She looked to Lizzy like the daughter of a duke. She was tall and commanded attention. Lizzy was a little reminded of Aunt Gardiner except for the confection perched on top of her head. It did not have the dead birds her sister-in-law was so fond of but it had a great deal of feathers. The feathers were the second thing one took in about her appearance (after the stately carriage) and Lizzy found it impossible to look away.

"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! How happy I am to meet you both. So very delighted." Lady Matlock did indeed seem delighted and instead of merely nodding her head (or perhaps she could not with the hat?) or curtseying like Lizzy was sure Miss Bingley and others of her ilk would do, the Countess of Matlock bore down upon them and crushed them in an embrace. Clearly she preferred her daughter-in-law because Kitty did not get poked in the eye with a feather.

"Are you not as happy as I am Mrs Bennet? I was quite sure they would never marry!" Lady Matlock released them and sat down clutching her reticule.

Nothing better could be said that was more likely to make Mrs Bennet more amenable. Not that she was likely to take an aversion to a countess whose son was marrying her daughter.

"Oh, yes ... I have five daughters, your ladyship."

"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.

"Mr Darcy is the best of men, Lady Matlock," said Lizzy, refusing to be flippant.

"And my son, Miss Catherine?"

"He certainly thinks he is the best of men," said Kitty who was clearly not afraid to be flippant.

"Kitty!" exclaimed Mrs Bennet, but Lady Matlock laughed.

Any further conversation was cut off by an older gentleman almost staggering into the room looking very aggrieved. "No, do not introduce me, I am sure you have better things to do! Harriet!"

He had the look of Colonel Fitzwilliam about him and he was certainly less handsome than two of his sons, who clearly took after their mothers. Lord Matlock was certainly not a nobleman who thought a great deal of his clothing and Lizzy wondered if Lord Ashbourne had set himself deliberately up in opposition in the fashion sphere.

"Edwin, the ladies will be thinking you very odd," Lady Matlock scolded.

"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!" Darcy entered the room unannounced and Lizzy was glad for it because she was trying to stifle her laughter. She did not know why she had worried. No, she did and she had been right to, she could not have known that Darcy's relations were not quite as stiff-rumped as himself.

Darcy looked ruffled and his breeches were quite stained and he looked just as lost for words as he had been when he had come across her and the Gardiners at Pemberley. At any moment Lizzy thought he would start to tug at his curls.

"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." Lord Ashbourne however did not look ruffled or stained, in fact he looked as if nothing strange had occurred. How could anyone tell what this man thought if he did not choose to let you see it? She hoped he would unbend to her soon so she could see the real man to whom both her sister and her fiancé looked up so much.

"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 had staggered into the room to be sure but Lizzy would not call it an infirmity.

Lizzy blushed for her mother who sincerely offered her sympathy to his lordship, and then began to talk of her own nerves. She was astonished, and chastened, to see that Lord Matlock seemed entirely happy to hear about nerves and palpitations. He was after all Lady Catherine's brother. He was most likely injured to any form of conversation that needed no partner.

"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 Lizzy found herself shepherded outside hoping that Lydia would not choose to entertain Darcy. She was not quite sure Darcy could deal with a request for an introduction to a Duke with equanimity or would quite know how to turn the conversation.

"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."

"You should not believe anything your son says about me." Lizzy was surprised by this until she realised Kitty meant Mr Fitzwilliam. How could she ever have thought Mr Fitzwilliam and Kitty had tender feelings for one another? They were far too much like brother and sister.

"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 solicitious 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 Lizz trying not to sound bitter or as if she were fishing for a compliment.

She got a compliment, or what sounded like one, anyway. "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 curriage 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."

Their tete-a-tete was interrupted by Lord Ashbourne. "I am afraid, Mama, you have monopolised Kitty long enough. You will have the rest of your life to do so."

Lizzy was left with Lady Matlock.

"You must not let Darcy hide you away at Pemberley," said Lady Matlock.

"I found Pemberley delightful and I am not marrying Darcy for the delights of London."

"I am very glad you are not, my dear, because Darcy does prefer the countryside, no matter what he says about confined society. So ridiculous for a man who quite dislikes a crowd of people, but men are often contradictory."

Lizzy covered her mouth.

"You may laugh at me; I do hope you will laugh at my nephew."

"I think you may count on that, my lady."

Lady Matlock made a 'hmmm' sound. "No, you must come to London. Your sister, I understand is not a delicate flower and is quite capable of defending herself, but she is marrying a very eligible parti and is very young. You, my nephew made it quite clear, are very determined. The two of you in London and it will be like the Gunn sisters."

Lizzy was touched at how protective the countess sounded towards Kitty. "I believe there were only two Gunn sisters, whereas there are five of us Bennets."

"Yes, and I expect you will all make very success marriages and the ton will ask 'Gunn who'?"

"Lydia, my youngest, does wish to marry a Duke," mused Lizzy.

"Well then. You will insist your husband does his family duty in London when the season comes around. He will not realise that hiding in the country would give such an ill impression. And if you have any concerns you needn't have. Lady Catherine does not speak for our family and anyone that should disapprove needn't be thought of."

Lizzy saw Darcy crossing the lawn towards them and smiled. "I have been very faulty in my judgements this year, ma'am and I should very much like to test them upon a wider variety of people in town. So those that disapprove shall merely amuse me, and between us we may protect my sister, if she needs it, but I have been learning not to discount her."
"No, the young lady who can wrap my son around her finger is probably best not discounted."
They watched as the happy couple walked arm in arm.

"Aunt, my uncle wishes for your presence."

"Yes, I am sure he most certainly has had enough of my mother's megrims, unless he is a saint," said Lizzy.

"He is most certainly not a saint," Lady Matlock sallied forth to rescue her husband.

Darcy offered her his arm. "Are you pleased I have relations I should not blush over?"

Lizzy smiled. "I think we shall be friends."

"You shall be more than friends, Lizzy, my family takes family very seriously."

"I am unsurprised. I cannot think of a subject you would not take seriously."

"Greek. I never took Greek very seriously."

Lizzy laughed and looked up at her husband-to-be. "Admirable response, Mr Darcy."

"I have been learning levity. My dearest Elizabeth, I have a very good tutor."

"I hope you will engage her for a very long time."

"The rest of my life I hope."

"Under very good terms?"

"Others would think them very poor terms, since I am such a slow-witted learner."

Lizzy threaded her hand through his. "Well, if the terms were sweetened by your offering to tutor her out of her faults then I cannot see why such a bargain could not be struck."

"I am very glad to hear you say that, Elizabeth."

Lizzy tipped her head up for a kiss and thought herself much contented.

THE END
The Epilogue Effect

Chapter Summary

The Epilogue Effect is the same between this and The Brighton Effect which is Kitty'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.

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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 will be very upset you have not been studying your Debrett's."

"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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