Carrying Torches

by ladyphlogiston

Summary

Pride and Prejudice, set in the Roaring Twenties (1925ish) outside New York. Not a particularly strict retelling, but the characters stay themselves. Speakeasies, slang, and probably gangsters.

Notes

I've been posting this at fanfiction.net, but someone suggested I try ao3 so I'm posting it here as well. I do my best to keep the slang, clothes, names, etc appropriate for the time, but I'm no expert on the 1920s so no guarantees. (If you are, feel free to point out the most blatant errors - I like to keep my facts straight when I can.)

I pull all (or almost all) the slang from http://home.earthlink.net/~dlarkins/slang-pg.htm so you can go there to look it up.
"Lydia, you are not coming! You got perfectly ossified at the last one, you know you did!" Lizzie said, pacing up and down the room.

Lydia rolled her eyes and switched on the radio on the table. She tinkered with it until jazz filled the room.

"Lighten up, doll," she replied, flipping her bobbed hair, "You've no reason to stop me. I'll go if I darn well please."

"Language, Lydia," Jane said from the couch, where she was altering her dress.

"You can come with me, if you like," offered Mary, "I'm sure the meeting will be very interesting tonight."

"Who wants cocoa and bluenoses when they could be hoofing it all night?" demanded Kitty.

Lizzie sighed. Lydia would be going to Mr. Lucas' "tea party," and she'd no doubt have far too much tea. Again. Lydia might be the youngest but she was always ahead of her sisters - the first to get her hair bobbed, the first to start smoking, the first to use all the newest slang. Papa didn't care and Mama just wanted her favorite daughter to be happy. And with Kitty always supporting her, Lydia never felt the need to listen to her older sisters.

Mary and Kitty were still fighting, and Lydia had turned away from her sisters and was dancing the Charleston to the music from the radio. There seemed to be little point in arguing any further. Lizzie picked up her new cloche hat and fit it over her bobbed hair, examining the effect in the mirror.

"...and anyway, Mama wants her to go!" Kitty yelled at the end of a tirade.

Lizzie looked up. "Why?" she asked.

"Didn't you hear? There's a new swell in town. He's the Real McCoy - rich, handsome, you name it," Kitty replied.

"What's the moniker?" Lydia asked, pausing to look at her sister.

"Bingley, according to Mrs. Lucas. Mr. Lucas invited him," Kitty explained.

"Huh. Well, there you go, Lizzie. Mama wants me to meet Mr. Bingley," Lydia said. She lit up a cigarette and threw herself down on the couch.

"Butt me," asked Kitty, sitting down next to her and holding out her hand.

Mary tutted and left the room. Lydia handed her sister a cigarette and helped her light it.

Jane shook out her dress and held it against herself. The hem was a good two inches shorter than it had been. "Do you think that's all right?" she asked, looking anxiously at Lizzie.

"Looks swell to me," Lizzie smiled. "Maybe I should do mine, if we're getting dolled up for the new big shot."
"Ladies and gentleman, we are Curtis Carlyle and his Six Black Buddies! Now you all just syncopate a little..."

The jazz wasn't as hot as the big clubs in New York, but it was still enough to get people dancing. The floor was covered with couples when the door opened and three people the girls had never seen before walked in.

Lizzie happened to be dancing with Charlotte Lucas when they came in, so she stopped when she saw them. "Do you know which one is Bingley?" she asked.

"The blond one in the middle. The woman must be his sister. He told Papa he might bring her. I don't know who the third is."

"Just as well, really. He doesn't look like a fella worth knowing."

Mr. Lucas went over to welcome the newcomers. Mr. Bingley introduced his sister and friend. His sister smiled and simpered. His friend just scowled at the room.

Mr. Bingley turned away, and the music took over. Lizzie watched Mr. Bingley and his sister each collect a drink in a tea cup. Bingley's friend refused a drink and just stared around the room.

Charlotte slipped away through the dancers to speak to her father, and then came back to tell Lizzie that the woman was indeed Caroline Bingley, and the third man was Will Darcy, a friend of Bingley's who had especially asked to come tonight.

"Well, you'd think if he wanted to come he'd live a little. He hasn't even had a drink. Any dough?" Lizzie asked.

"Oh, loads. He's even richer than Bingley."

Lizzie danced a little longer, and then when the band rested, she went over to Jane to fill her in. While they were talking, Bingley came over and introduced himself, towing Darcy behind him.

"Well, baby, you want to dance?" Bingley asked Jane, holding out his hand.

Jane smiled her brightest smile and put her hand in his. Bingley started to lead her away, but turned back to Darcy.

"Oh, come on Darcy, don't be such a wet blanket. Dance with Lizzie," he said.

Darcy looked at Lizzie and turned his scowl on his friend. "You have got to be kidding, Bingley. You've got the only girl here who isn't a total pill."


He glanced at her, and then stepped away.

Jane let go of Bingley's hand to go back to her sister, but Lizzie waved her off. "Everything's jake, Jane. Go dance," said Lizzie, taking a step back.

Charlotte came up and grabbed her arm. "What's eating you? You look furious!"

"That Darcy of yours said I'm an absolute pill! Right to my face!"

"He didn't!"

"Well, close enough," Lizzie amended, "He said Jane was the only girl who wasn't a pill when
Bingley told him to dance with me.

"Well that's just baloney, and you know it," replied Charlotte. "Come have some giggle water with me."

"Sure thing," Lizzie walked with her towards the bar. Kitty was drinking what was clearly not her first cup, but Lydia wasn't in sight.

"Kitty, where's Lydia?" Lizzie asked as she sat down.

"Dunno. She went off with some sheik to neck, I think. He said he had a hot breezer outside."

Lizzie rolled her eyes, but she knew she couldn't stop Lydia from doing whatever she wanted. "Don't drink too much, Kitty," she warned.

"Oh, pipe down, Lizzie," Kitty whined.

Lizzie sighed and took a sip of her own hooch. It was pretty good. She sat down next to Charlotte and let the music wash over her.
Bingley was delighted. Jane was probably the prettiest girl he'd ever seen. No, make that definitely the prettiest girl he'd ever seen. She didn't wear heavy makeup and the latest, shortest fashions like his sister did, but there was real beauty in her face that her light powder and lipstick only accentuated. And Jane was a wonderful dancer. Bingley had fancied up the dance with every move he knew, and she had followed him through it like they'd been dancing together for years.

"Charles? Is everything all right?" Jane looked up at him, her brow furrowed. She shouldn't be worried, especially not on his account.

"Everything's wonderful," he reassured her. "I was just thinking."

She smiled at him. "Oh, I'm so glad. I was worried you were tired of dancing. I'm afraid I can be a real 'floorflusher' sometimes."

He smiled back at her. "No, I love to dance too. Maybe I could take you to a club I go to in New York sometime. The music there is really something. I think you'd love it."

"It sounds wonderful. Do you go to New York often?"

"Sometimes. We have a house there, but it's awfully noisy sometimes. That's why I wanted a house out here, too. It's a few hours' drive."

"Do you have your own car as well?"

"I do - a Studebaker Big Six. I'd love to drive you up in it."

"That sounds divine. Lydia and Lizzie have learned to drive, but I'm afraid I haven't yet."

"I'll have to teach you then! Perhaps I could come by tomorrow and we could take a short drive?"

Lydia stubbed out her cigarette and leaned back in the front seat of the parked car, enjoying the crisp autumn air on her face.

"This is just the cat's meee-ow, Denny," she said, stretching out the word into a kind of purr.

He grinned at her. "Ain't every day I find a doll like you to bring out here. You want another snort?" he offered, holding out the bottle of bootleg gin he'd pilfered from behind the bar on the way out.

"Sure thing." She took the bottle and drank, trying not to wince from the harsh taste. She usually drank highballs, which were sweeter and lighter. But highballs were old news. She took another drink and coughed a little.

"Hey baby, you okay?" he asked.

"Everything's copacetic," she replied, leaning towards him.

Denny drew her face towards him and kissed her. "Copacetic it is," he said, smiling. He kissed her again.
She pulled back from the kiss, her eyes sparkling. She took one more swig of gin, and put the bottle on the floor at her feet. Then she began peeling off her silk stockings.

Denny watched appreciatively. "Wow, baby, I knew you were a live wire," he laughed.

She rolled up the stockings and put them neatly in her purse. Stockings weren't cheap, and if she tore these Lizzie would scold.

"Live as anything," she said, and climbed into Denny's lap.

Darcy turned and looked back at the dance floor. He'd thought he'd seen him, but when he got closer he saw the man was a stranger after all. He had to be here. Somewhere.

Charles was dancing with Jane Bennet. She really was quite a doll, and an excellent dancer, though not as flashy as some.

Darcy glanced at a table near the bar, where Lizzie and Charlotte were lounging with their drinks and laughing together. She wasn't actually that unattractive. Was it worth it to go back and apologize? Probably not. He didn't care what she thought. He just wanted to be done with this business.

Caroline came up from behind him, hooked her arm through his, and started to pull him forward. "Come on, daddy, you have got to take me out there," she said.

He rolled his eyes, but let her pull him forward and drape herself over him. He began to dance, still scanning the room.

She watched him intently. "They've got some real strike-me-dead here," she said after a minute. Darcy just grunted.

"My brother is still dancing with that skirt he found," she tried a minute later. "He's such a sap."

"True."

She rolled her eyes. The song came to an end, and she threw her hands down and walked off, towards the bar. Darcy moved to the wall to keep watching the room.

Kitty was the first to see Lydia re-enter the room. She waved enthusiastically.

"Lyddie! He is such a sheik! Did you get some nookie? Your stockings are twisted, do you need me to help you straighten them? You have to tell me everything!" she squealed.

"Pipe down, Kitty," Lydia snapped. She it took her a minute to sit down, because the room seemed to be tilting oddly. She put her head in her hands.

"Looks like you need a hair of the dog. I always say there's nothing that picks you up like a little more knock-me-dead," Kitty giggled over her Witticism. She gestured wildly in the bartender's direction, and he nodded. A waiter brought over two more drinks.

Lydia took a cautious sip of hers. At least it was a cocktail, and not straight gin. She'd be fine soon.

She felt a hand on her shoulder. "Lydia, how much have you had?" demanded Lizzie's voice.
She rolled her head to the side and saw her sister looking down at her. "None of your beeswax, Lizzie!"

"It looks to me like you've had more than enough. Now lay off, or you're going to upchuck pretty soon."

"She's perfectly copacetic!" Kitty said indignantly. "She's having a great night, and you don't need to bother her with your manners piffle. Stop being such a killjoy!"

"Leave me alone, Kitty," Lydia snarled. "Who asked you?"

"This isn't about manners, it's about what's healthy," Lizzie patiently explained. "Lydia, you need to go home."

"You gonna give me the bum's rush?" Lydia demanded.

"I'm not going to force you anywhere. In another few minutes you'll fall asleep anyway. Now do I need to carry you?"

"Oh, beat it, Lizzie!" Lydia said, turning away from her sister to ostentatiously watch the band.

Lizzie sighed and walked back to Charlotte.

As the band started up, Darcy saw him, talking to the lead singer. Darcy pushed away from the wall and threaded his way through the crowd, towards the band.

His quarry finished his conversation and left through a set of doors on one side. Darcy followed him and found himself in the kitchen. Waiters and cooks stared at him as he followed the gray fedora through the steam.

He left the kitchen, but Darcy was right behind him, and grabbed his arm as he turned the corner onto the alley.

"Wickham, you rat. Where is she? Where's my sister?" Darcy demanded.

Chapter End Notes

In the book, Darcy was filthily rude at the assembly, which is apparently unusual for him, even before he met Lizzy. I've always assumed he was still emotionally reeling from Georgiana's near-elopement. So having Wickham present and more directly influencing things didn't seem like a stretch.
Wickham carefully resettled his hat on his head and smiled blandly up at Darcy. "I'm sorry, I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about."

"She's been gone a week. She was seen leaving with you. Somehow those two facts seem connected to me."

Wickham shrugged, hampered by Darcy's grip on his arm. "Sorry. Haven't seen her since we went dancing that night. Maybe she ran away. You're awfully good at disappointing people, after all."

Darcy let go of Wickham's arm and punched him in the stomach. "You're a rat, Wickham, and you know it. Where is she?"

Wickham straightened up and leaned back against the wall. He was still gasping for breath, but his grin was maddening.

Darcy punched him again, this time in the face, and blood started flowing from his nose. "Where's my sister, Wickham?" he roared.

Wickham wiped the blood from his lips and bent down to get his hat. He grinned at Darcy and started to sing softly:

"A bullfrog sittin' on a lily pad, lookin' up at the skies..."

Darcy slapped him. "My sister, Wickham. I will find her, and when I do..."

"'Scuse me, sir," came a deep voice from behind him.

Darcy grabbed at Wickham's jacket to keep him from running away and turned to see who was speaking. The saxophone player from the band had come out and was watching them impassively.

"Well?" Darcy asked.

"You keep out of this, Harvey Conroy!" Wickham spat.

"Oh, I'll keep out of it all right, Mista Wickham, jes' as soon as you pay what you owe me," responded Harvey. Turning back to Darcy, he asked, "What's your sister look like, if you don't mind my askin'?"

"She's eighteen. She's about this tall," Darcy responded, holding up his free hand, "with green eyes and fair skin and a nice slim figure. When she left she was wearing her pearls, a pink dress and a fur coat."

"I don't know about no fur coat or no pearls, sir, but I saw that Mista Wickham with a girl in a pink dress jes' the other day. And if that was your sister, I sugges' you go get her as soon as possible, sir. They was where no lady oughta be, if you take my meaning."

"That's hardly surprising. Can you show me where?"
Wickham snarled incoherently, but Harvey ignored him. "Yes, sir, I can."

Darcy turned back to Wickham. "I'll be off to get my sister, then. Thank you for your kind assistance," he sneered, and punched him one more time. Wickham sank to the ground, holding his face.

"My car is this way, Mr. Conroy," said Darcy, walking away.

"Darcy, wait!" called Wickham.

Darcy paused and looked back over his shoulder. "I can't be bothered with filth like you, Wickham."

"At least Jane is happy," Charlotte said, giving Lizzie a brief hug.

"I'm thrilled about that," Lizzie said, "just not about anything else. I get insulted, Lydia gets drunk...not the whoopee I was expecting." She fished a cigarette out of her handbag.

She glanced around. "Where'd that high hat Darcy go?" she asked. "He seemed to be glued to the wall earlier."

"Don't know. He was dancing with Caroline earlier, and then he vanished." Charlotte shrugged.

Lizzie smiled. "Good riddance," she said. "Hope he never comes back. I see Miss Caroline sulking at the table over there. Seemed awfully sure of him earlier."

"Oh, have a little sympathy, Lizzie. It's not like you have a man of your own, you know."

Over at her table, Lydia suddenly slumped forward. They watched Kitty shake Lydia's shoulder, apparently calling her name, and then look up at Lizzie when Lydia didn't respond.

Lizzie sighed and got up. "I told her she'd fall asleep soon. I just hope we can get her home before she upchucks. Tell Jane what happened, will you?"

"Of course. Good luck," Charlotte responded, smiling up at her.

Lizzie stood up and stubbed out her cigarette. She got Kitty to calm down, and the two of them started carrying Lydia out of the room. Lydia woke up enough to walk with their support, and they got out to the car without mishap.

Lizzie had just gotten Lydia and Kitty arranged in the back seats and was walking around to climb into the driver's seat when she saw a man stagger into the parking lot. He was sharply dressed in a gray suit and gray fedora, but she could see that his face was bloodied.

"Are you hurt?" she asked, walking over to him.

"What?" He looked up and saw her. "Oh, hello. It's nothing, just a bloody nose."

When he looked up she could see that he had the beginnings of a black eye. "You are hurt! Do you have somewhere to go? Do you need a ride?"

"No, I came here with friends but I think they've left already," he replied. "My name is Wickham, by the way. George Wickham."

"I'm Lizzie Bennet. Why don't you come to our house and let us clean you up? There's an empty seat in the car."
"I would truly appreciate that, Lizzie Bennet," he replied with a twisted smile. He climbed into the passenger seat.

Lizzie had to focus on driving for a few minutes, but once they were safely cruising down the road she glanced over at her new acquaintance. The black eye was only getting worse.

"What happened?" she asked.

Wickham sat back and looked pensively at the road. "I wish I knew, really. Darcy and I used to be such close friends."

"Darcy did this?" she asked.

"Oh yes. I think he came with the intention of finding me, just so he could bully me some more. We grew up together, you know."

"Really," Lizzie replied.

"Oh yes. His father and my father were good friends, even though my father worked for his father. His family was much richer, of course, but we were very close. We did everything together. Then at some point in high school...I don't know what happened, but Darcy started ignoring me."

"That's so sad."

"I hate to say it, but it gets worse. Darcy's father died when he was eighteen. He'd promised to pay for me to go to college, but Darcy wouldn't honor that promise. I couldn't go without the money, so here I am." He gingerly touched his eye.

"That's awful! Did you want to go?"

"Oh, I really wanted to go. I was going to study business, and open a theater with some friends of mine. But..." he trailed off.

"Has he been violent before?"

"No, this is new. He boxed in college, and I guess he decided he was out of practice and should take a swing at me. I didn't even say anything to him - I'm here to talk to the band about letting me help them."

"Are you a musician?"

I'm what you might call an agent. I know people, people who might want to hire a band like that one. If it weren't for Darcy, I'd know more people and I'd be the one hiring bands. As it is..." he sighed.

Then he looked over at her and smiled. "But it isn't all bad. I'm driving with a doll like you, and Darcy went off alone!"

Lizzie smiled back. "I'm glad you're able to enjoy things anyway."
Wickham starts singing a verse from "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More" by Wendell Hall, which was popular in the mid-twenties. The full verse is:

Oh, a bullfrog sittin' on a lily pad, lookin' up at the skies.
The lily pad broke and the frog fell in, got water all in his eyes.

It's a nonsense song, which seems appropriate for something he would sing to infuriate Darcy.
Lydia had started throwing up as soon as they got home. Lizzie left Kitty to comfort her sister and took care of George instead. Once she'd cleaned him up and made him a bed on the couch, she helped Kitty put Lydia to bed. Finally the house was silent, and Lizzie sat down to wait for Jane.

With the exception of George Wickham's appearance, Lizzie thought, it had been a pretty boring evening. Jane had danced the night away, Lizzie had been ignored, Lydia had gotten drunk and Kitty had admired Lydia. Just like always. Honestly, it might have been more interesting to go to a prayer meeting with Mary. At least this time Jane had found somebody with money. Jane hadn't had a real job since the hospital had finally closed down the extra wing the year before.

At least her job at the library was unlikely to change, she thought. And Kitty and Lydia were managing to keep their jobs at the clothing store downtown, so far at least. And when Mary finished her stenography course, she'd be able to get a job anywhere.

A car pulled up in front of the house. It was big and powerful and Lizzie didn't recognize it. A few minutes later, she saw Jane climb the steps onto the porch.

"Is that Mr. Bingley's car?" Lizzie asked, as she let Jane in.

Jane sighed happily. "He offered to bring me home when Charlotte told me you had left. He's such a swell guy, Lizzie."

"You know a lot of swell guys, Jane," Lizzie pointed out. It was true. Jane rarely had anything bad to say about anyone.

Jane laughed. "I know, but Charles is even better than most. He's sweet, and polite, and a wonderful dancer, and we just had the most wonderful time. He's offered to come over tomorrow and teach me to drive," she said.

"Well, he sounds lovely. I'm so glad you'll get to see him again."

"Me too. Oh, Lizzie, I'm so sorry about what his friend said. I couldn't believe anyone could be so rude!"

Lizzie thought of poor George, sleeping on the couch. "Mr. Darcy's rudeness is only the beginning, Jane. I'm sure I'd be much worse off if he had liked me."

She explained to Jane how she had met George, and what he had told her.

"...so you see, I don't much care what a bluenosed bully like that thinks of me," she finished.

Jane was staring at her, eyes wide. "But that's awful!" she exclaimed. "The poor young man! I'm surprised Charles can be friends with someone as petty and mean as that!"

Lizzie shrugged. "I suppose he can be pleasant enough when he wants to be. I'm just glad we know his true character now, so that none of us can be taken in."

"I am too. But I doubt we will ever see him again; Charles said he was just visiting for the evening. He'll be back in New York tomorrow."

"I'm glad to hear it. George will be glad too; this means he can get away safely. Poor man, I don't think he has much. I'll give him a little money when he leaves tomorrow, I think."
"That's kind of you, Lizzie, and I'm sure he'll be grateful. But for now you should go to bed," Jane replied, starting towards her own room.

"True. Good night, Jane."

"Good night."

Charles Bingley let himself into the house he and his sister had rented for the next few months. Caroline had gotten bored some time during the evening and left, so she was probably asleep in bed. She hadn't liked the music, or the people, or the drinks they served. Charles sighed. His sister was so fastidious, and never seemed to be happy. He'd found the music pleasant and the drinks tolerable and Jane...well, Jane was wonderful. But Caroline would probably be up early in the morning, full of reasons for him to take her back to New York immediately. If only Darcy was staying. Caroline would put up with anything if it meant staying near Darcy, though Lord knew it was obvious Darcy wasn't interested. But Darcy was doubtless already back in New York.

Darcy had left early too, he thought with a frown, presumably for whatever mysterious business had made him so determined to join them that night. Not that he minded Darcy's company, but he'd seemed oddly tense when he asked to go with them. What on earth was the point of coming down for a minor party in Meriton when he could have gone anywhere in New York? It had been a pleasant party, to be sure, but that was hardly a sufficient reason for such a long drive and such a short stay.

And Darcy hadn't even enjoyed the party! He'd been filthily rude to Jane's sister Lizzie, he hadn't ordered a drink, and he'd only danced because Caroline forced him to do so. Darcy wasn't a very sociable man, but he was usually polite. Why on earth had he come?

Charles shook his head, clearing his thoughts. It had been a splendid evening. Jane Bennet was wonderful: sweet, intelligent, beautiful, everything he could ask for. He would be able to see her tomorrow, too, and be alone with her in the car. That was something to look forward to.

He'd gotten to the top of the stairs when there was a knock on the door. He groaned and considered going to bed anyway. He was tired and cold, and his bed seemed very inviting.

The knock was repeated, this time louder. Charles sighed and slowly made his way back downstairs to the door. The clock in the hall caught his eye, and he realized it was past midnight. Who would be visiting at this hour?

He opened the door. Darcy was standing on his front steps, carrying someone. He looked cold, standing there in just his shirt and tie. He was pale and clearly exhausted. Charles realized that he was carrying his sister Georgiana, who was wrapped in her brother's coat. Her eyes were closed and her hair was dirty and disheveled.

"What's wrong with her?" Charles asked.

"They gave her cocaine," Darcy said, touching her forehead to see whether she had a fever. "It's...I don't know much about how it works."

He straightened and looked at his friend. "Charles, I need a favor."
"Of course, anything you need," responded Charles. He wished he could offer Darcy a drink - he certainly looked like he could use it - but he and Caroline had just moved in and he hadn't managed to find a reliable source yet.

"I think..." Darcy trailed off, looking bewildered. He sat down heavily. "Do you remember George Wickham?" he asked.

Charlie puzzled over the name for a minute. "I think so. Didn't you know him in college?"

"I did. We...well, it doesn't matter now. I...he owed money, I guess. Gambling, drugs, I don't know. Take your pick. Women, too. He...I was following him today," Darcy said. He put his head in his hands.

"Darcy, I can't help if you don't tell me what happened," Charlie pointed out.

"I know. I'm sorry. I'm still trying to sort it all out." Darcy swallowed. "Let me start at the other end. Georgiana went missing a week ago. She left the house to go shopping and never came back."

"That's why you've been so distracted lately, then. Why didn't you tell me what was wrong?"

"There wasn't anything you can do, and I didn't like to speak of it."

Charles rolled his eyes. Darcy had a bad habit of keeping his troubles to himself, refusing to acknowledge it when he needed friendship.

Darcy sighed. If he'd noticed Charles's reaction, he didn't let on. "It took a while, but I found out that she'd left with Wickham. Georgiana had no way of knowing how rotten George has gotten. That's why I came to the party tonight: Wickham is working as an agent now, and the band that played is one of his clients."

"So you found Wickham. I saw you leave early."

Darcy nodded. "Tried to beat it out of him. Repulsive mongrel." He rubbed his face. "One of the band came out and knew where Wickham had taken Georgiana. He offered to show me."

"And she was there?"

Darcy nodded again. "A tiny rathole of a place, in the basement of one of the buildings in town. Wickham's sort of place. Georgiana was there, but in no state to talk to me. I had to talk to the chorus girls to figure out what happened.

"Wickham owed money to the owner of the place, a man named Joe Mineo. Apparently he made a deal - the debt would be forgiven if he delivered an heiress. The plan was to get her addicted to cocaine and then drain her purse."

Charles gasped. "And is she..."

Darcy shook his head. "She's been there a week, and I gather they were loading it on pretty fast. I
talked to a doctor on the way here. There's no real treatment for cocainism. It doesn't do much physical damage, but the addiction affects the mind so deeply..." He covered his face again, and took a deep breath before lowering his hands. "We just need to wait. She needs time for the drug to clear, and then...we'll see what's left.

"I don't want to take her home like this. If this gets into the papers...you know how they tear people apart. Heiress Succumbs to Jazz-Age Drug, that sort of thing. It would be awful."

Charles nodded. "You want to keep her here?" he asked.

"Yes. If we can. A few weeks, maybe."

"Of course, stay as long as you like. There's plenty of room. But...doesn't she need a doctor?"

Darcy shook his head. "The doctor said there's not much to do. I'll need to find a nurse - someone trustworthy. Maybe pay her extra for her secrecy. But she can come here."

Charles sat up. "Jane Bennet."

Darcy looked up, puzzled. "Excuse me?"

"Jane could do it. She's a nurse, and she lost her job a while ago when the hospital closed the extra wing that opened during the war."

"That...might work. I'd ask her to sign something, promising not to tell...actually, if she pretended to be hired by you, that would be even better."

"Of course, Darcy, whatever you need. I'm sure she'd never expose Georgiana so cruelly, but do whatever you think best."

Darcy looked at his friend sardonically. "Your faith in her character is a beautiful thing, Charles. You've known her for all of five hours."

Charles shrugged. "Sometimes you just know what a person is like," he said. "In any case, you need to sleep. We'll speak to Jane in the morning."

Eight hours later, Darcy was finishing his tea at the heavy wood table in the dining room when the door opened and Charles and Jane walked in. He put down his cup. "Miss Bennet. Thank you so much for coming,"

She smiled gently. "It is rather early, but Charles said you needed a nurse, Mr. Darcy."

"I do indeed, for the next week or so. Are you available for that time?"

"I believe so. Charles also said you might have some...conditions?"

"I...Yes, I'm afraid I do. This is a matter of utmost secrecy, but I would pay well for your discretion. I will have to ask you to sign a document promising not to tell anyone, even your sisters, about your patient or even that I was the one who hired you. I'd like you to pretend that you are working for Charles."

"I...I'm not sure what to say, Mr. Darcy. You may be assured of my secrecy, of course, but I don't...I don't want to do anything illegal," she said, looking worried.

He smiled slightly. "I will not ask you to do anything that is illegal or immoral or against your own
conscience, Miss Bennet. Just to keep my private affairs private."

"If that is all, then I would be happy to oblige, Mr. Darcy."

"Excellent! It would be simplest if you could just live here, I think."

Jane nodded. "I can do that. I've done a little private nursing before, you see."

Darcy stood up and reached for the contract he'd typed up in Charles's study earlier that morning. It would have been safer to have a lawyer draft it, of course, but Darcy needed it to be done quickly and wasn't certain he could find a local lawyer to trust. He thought he'd covered the necessary points. "If you would sign this, Miss Bennet," he said, pushing it across the table towards her.

Jane took it and picked up the pen to sign, but stopped when she felt Charles's hand on her arm. "You'd better let me read it over first, Jane," he said kindly.

"Of course," she said, blushing faintly, and handed it over to him.

Charles read it over. "Is $10 a day all right, Jane?" he asked.

"That's very generous, sir!" Jane said, startled.

"I know. I appreciate your confidentiality, and I feel you should be compensated accordingly," replied Darcy.

"Th-thank you," she stammered, staring at him.

"Everything else looks right," Charles said, and handed it back to Jane.

Once it was signed, Darcy took Jane up to see his sister. She was still asleep, and in the clear light of morning they could see how her dress was torn and her hair was dirty and tangled. Her arms were covered in healing bruises, and a cut on her shoulder appeared infected. Jane stepped forward and silently examined her left arm, where several of the injection sites were also infected.

Jane looked up at Darcy. "I'll need some supplies, sir, as well as my things. There's not much I can do until she wakes up, so if you don't mind I'll go and get them."

Darcy nodded, and Jane left to get what she needed.

Chapter End Notes

Alfred Mineo was one of the controllers of one branch of the New York Mafia in the 20s. I'm guessing Joe is a cousin or something.

Cocainism is the older term for cocaine dependence. As far as I can tell from my research, cocaine actually has very few direct physical effects. Hiring a nurse for her is probably actually overkill, but I can't really blame Darcy.

According to the Washington State Nursing Association, in 1919 they got the wage of a private nurse increased to $5 a day. I don't know how much variation there was across the country, but I'm guessing $10 was pretty generous.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Again, http://home.earthlink.net/~dlarkins/slang-pg.htm for the slang dictionary

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Kitty, I think that lipstick might be too dark for you," Lizzie ventured gently, watching her sister apply her makeup. She didn't want a fight with Kitty, but Kitty would look much prettier if she could be convinced to change her makeup a little. And if Kitty was prettier, she might get more attention herself instead of always being in Lydia's shadow.

But Kitty barely glanced at her. "This is the lipstick Lydia uses," she said, carefully creating the cupid's bow shape that was popular for lipstick.

"Yes, dear, but your complexion is different from hers. You're fairer than she is. You know you always need less powder than she does," Lizzie replied, hoping the compliment about her fair skin would make Kitty more willing to listen to advice.

"So I need less munitions. So what? I think it's pretty this way," Kitty said, now pulling out a new mascara preparation she had decided to purchase in town the day before.

Lizzie put down her teacup and ate the last piece of toast from her breakfast. "It is pretty this way, but I think a lighter shade might be even prettier, Kitty. You always end up on your own after Lydia abandons you, and I think you'd have more fun if..."

"Lay off, Lizzie, just because you're older than me doesn't mean you know everything!" Kitty cut her off. "Lydia's hip to the jive, and you're just being grungy!" She gathered up her mascara and flounced down the hall, to use the mirror in the tiny bathroom.

"I don't know why you bother, Lizzie," said Mary, calmly pouring herself another cup of tea. "Makeup isn't a worthwhile pursuit anyway. She would do much better to read a book."

Lizzie smiled wryly. "My powers of persuasion do not extend that far, Mary. I shouldn't think anyone would be able to manage that."

"It is a pity she cannot be persuaded to take interest in serious affairs," replied Mary.

The door opened, and Jane rushed in. She greeted her sisters briefly and then darted upstairs. Lizzie got up and followed her up the stairs. "Jane? I something wrong?" she asked.

Jane looked up from packing clothes into a bag. "Nothing is wrong, Lizzie. I have a job!"

"A job? What sort of job?"

"Mr...Charles needs a private nurse. It's only for a week or two, but it pays well."

Lizzy was puzzled. Neither Mr. Bingley or his sister had looked ill, and surely if they had been in an accident they would have gone to the hospital. "Why does he need a nurse?" she asked.
"Because...oh dear, I'm afraid I'm not supposed to talk about it. I promised I wouldn't, even to you."

"Jane, what on earth..."

Jane saw how flustered her sister was and got up to give Lizzie a quick hug. "Everything's all right, Lizzie. It's just it's very private and they don't want to risk it getting into the papers, so I can't talk about it."

"Oh. Okay," Lizzie replied, not at all certain that it was okay. A thought occurred to her. "He's not asking you to have sex with him, is he?"

Jane blushed. "For heaven's sake, Lizzie, of course not! He wouldn't do that, and I wouldn't either. Don't be ridiculous."

Lizzie sighed. Her sister was rushing, but didn't seem agitated, so it probably was all right. "Well, do enjoy your mysterious new job. Do you have a secret alias as well?" she asked teasingly.

Jane laughed at her. "No, of course not Lizzie," she said, gathering up her cosmetics and putting them in a smaller bag. "Would you mind finding something for me to read?" she asked.

"Of course. I just bought the new collection of Jeeves stories, would you like that?"

"That would be perfect. So cheerful for a sickroom. And maybe the Father Brown book? I find him awfully soothing."

"Sure."

Lizzie had just seen her sister off when she heard Wickham groaning in the living room. She went in to find that he was stiffly attempting to sit up, so she rushed to help him.

"I'm glad you're finally awake," she said. "You must have been awfully tired. How do you feel?"

"Awful," he said, holding his side as if his ribs hurt him.

"Well, you have a beautiful black eye, but I'm glad to see you awake. Would you like some breakfast?"

"Abso-lute-ly, baby," he grinned back at her. He got up and slowly followed her to the dining room.

"At least you're well enough to flirt," she commented, as she poured him tea.

"A little of that noodle juice and I'll be well enough for nookie," he replied, with the same flirtatious grin. "Why don't you join me?"

She smiled and shook her head, but poured herself another cup of tea and sat with him.

"Do you know Charles Bingley at all?" she asked after a moment.

"Don't think I do. Who is he?"

"A friend of Darcy's. He just hired Jane to do some nursing work for him this morning. Something secret, I don't know why."

"Bingley. You know, maybe I have met the fella. Darcy must have introduced us. Don't know him, though. Are you worried about your sister?"
"A little. She thinks everything's jake, but then she always does. I don't want her to get hurt."

Wickham laughed bitterly. "Not much hope of that with Darcy around. If Bingley is the fella I remember, he seemed copacetic, but so did Darcy, at the time. You be careful of your sister, Lizzie. If she's a bit of a sap, she's lucky to have someone as sharp as you around."

Wickham reached over and grabbed the package of cigarettes lying on the windowsill next to Lizzie's purse. He lit two, and passed one to her. They smoked in silence for a minute.

"Are you well enough to travel?" Lizzie finally asked.

Wickham looked at her in surprise, and she found herself stumbling over her words. "Not that we aren't glad to let you stay, of course, but the house isn't very large, and..."

Wickham smiled at her. "No, of course baby, you don't need me hanging around. I'll get going back to the city." He stood up, still moving slowly.

Lizzie fished a couple of quarters out of her purse and pressed them into his hand. "For bus fare," she said, smiling at him.

He curled his fingers around hers. "Thanks, Lizzie. You're a real smarty," he replied, smiling down at her.

Chapter End Notes

The Wodehouse book mentioned is "Carry On, Jeeves." "The Innocence of Father Brown" was written in 1911 by G. K. Chesterton, and I do indeed find it very soothing - though actually I prefer Chesterton's "What's Wrong With the World" when I'm feeling agitated. He has a way of making the world make sense again.

Smoking is a terrible plan. You know that, I know that, Lizzie doesn't.
Chapter 7

Darcy scowled at his newspaper. He was attempting to read the reviews of his theater's latest show, but it was increasingly difficult to focus. Georgiana had woken up long enough to drink some milk, but she was asleep again. Jane had cleaned and bandaged her cuts, and given her a sponge bath, but there wasn't much else to be done until Georgiana woke up properly. He wanted to talk to his sister, to confirm that she was okay and alive and that all would be well, but he'd just have to wait.

Billy King swaggered across the stage as if he owned it in his debut role as...

"Hey, daddy, I noticed you were working hard over here."

Go chase yourself, Caroline, thought Darcy. It wasn't enough that his sister was sick upstairs, he also had to deal with Caroline draping herself over him like the boyfriend he certainly wasn't.

He gritted his teeth. He couldn't offend Caroline with Georgiana upstairs, still too ill to be moved. Caroline was a good dancer, and she turned all heads when she got dolled up, but he regretted having taken her dancing from time to time. She'd read more into it than he'd ever intended.

He shook the newspaper to straighten it. "Yes, Caroline, I am working."

She didn't take the hint. "You read those reviews every day, don't you? I think it's just wonderful how well you know your onions," she purred.

"I read what I have to," he replied. He glanced up at the clock. Just past one: too early to check on Georgiana again.

"How is dear Georgiana? I'm so sorry I must stay away from her room, I'd have liked to sit with her. We always have such lovely conversations - she absolutely slays me!," said Caroline.

Darcy had told Caroline that Georgiana had come down with measles, to keep her away from Georgiana's room. Quite aside from Caroline's tendency to gossip, Darcy had no wish to subject his sister to Caroline's insinuations.

"She's as well as can be expected," he replied tightly.

"Do tell her I hope she is better soon. It is so kind of you to hire a nurse for her! Such a brotherly thing to do."

"Well, as I am her brother, I suppose that's to be expected."

"Of course. It's also clever of you to hire that Jane. My brother is a sap, but even he can't ignore that she's not worth his time if she's just an employee. Though I do think you should be concerned about exposing Georgiana to her. You wouldn't want her to learn bad habits. I'll visit Georgiana as soon as I can, so she has something to listen to besides that woman's inane chatter."

Darcy closed the newspaper and stood up, grabbing his coat as he did so. "I'm going out," he announced, "I'll be back for dinner."

He didn't slam the door, even though he wanted to. He tucked the newspaper under his arm and started striding down the street, determined to put as much distance between himself and the house as possible.
After a minute, the walk and the cool air had refreshed him, and he slowed down. This really was a charming little town. His managers would be surprised that he hadn't returned to New York as planned, but the town was pleasant enough to make a spontaneous vacation believable.

He stopped and took a deep breath. Now where was he going to go? He wanted to finish his newspaper, and his secretary had sent him some paperwork to look over, but of course that was still in the house. Did this town have a library? At least he could get a little reading done.

The town's main street was a ten minute walk, and once he was there he had to ask a couple of people before he found someone to direct him to the library. It was a tiny brick building with a bright green door. The collection couldn't be large, but he was sure he'd find something to read.

He entered, and the librarian looked up from the card catalog to see who had entered. Her brown bob, blue eyes, and delicately pointed chin were familiar, but it took him a minute to recognize her. She'd been wearing makeup last night, of course, but she also looked calmer and more confident today.

"It's Lizzie, isn't it?" he asked, "I think we met last night?"

She straightened and brushed off her gray dress. "That's right. You're Will Darcy. I heard you were going back to New York today?" she asked.

"I...my plans changed. Charles...needs some help, so I'm staying to keep him company."

Keeping his friend company, an impulsive vacation, a case of the measles - the stories he was trying to keep straight were growing. Not to mention whatever story Jane might have told her family. Well, he only had to maintain it for a week or so. If he failed, the situation would rapidly begin resembling one of the comedic farces his theater produced every summer.

"I see," Lizzie replied crisply. "What can I do for you, Mr. Darcy?"

"I was mostly hoping for a quiet place to finish my newspaper," he said, waving it vaguely for her to see.

She briefly narrowed her eyes at him, but then turned and pointed to the adjoining room. "There's some comfortable chairs in there, if you like. And we do get a selection of papers, if you wish for others." She turned back to the card catalog and knelt down to resume filing cards. He found himself following the path of her slim fingers as she found the place for the next card, and noticing how her smooth hair skimmed along her jawline.

He realized he'd been staring at her. "Thank you," he said to her back.

He shook his head to clear it and headed towards the chairs.

Lizzie heard him go and sighed. It wasn't enough that Mr. Big Cheese Will Darcy had to come and ruin everyone's night last night, apparently he just had to come to her library and stare at her. At least the library would be closed in a few hours.
Chapter 8

Jane tried to focus on Bertie Wooster's antics, but it was hard to read while her patient was sleeping so uneasily. Georgiana was dreaming, probably reliving the past week in her sleep. She'd struggled against dream assailants, and pleaded for her brother or her parents or for George. Now she was crying and whispering "Violet. I'm sorry, Violet," over and over again.

Jane leaned forward and stroked the sleeping girl's face. "Shhh," she whispered, "It's okay. Everything's okay now. Just sleep."

Georgiana settled back down, and Jane pulled her chair a little closer to the bed before picking up her book again. She wished Mr. Darcy was in the house, since his voice seemed to comfort Georgiana more than Jane's did. But the nightmares wouldn't last forever, and Georgiana was healing.

Jane suddenly looked back up at Georgiana, puzzled. Who was Violet? Mr. Darcy had mentioned talking to chorus girls named Dolly, Sally, and Trixie, but no Violet. Maybe she was a school friend? Jane shrugged, making a mental note to ask Mr. Darcy about Violet next time he visited.

Darcy sat down and opened his newspaper, determined to concentrate. The reviews of his latest show were good, but it clearly wasn't the sensation they'd been looking for. Perhaps they should rework the second act - it was clearly the weakest.

His eye skimmed over the other articles. The paper gleefully reported the story of a wealthy young woman who had spent her entire fortune on cocaine before dying of pneumonia. Apparently her family claimed they'd had no idea she was using drugs. Sensationalist drivel. He'd been right to do everything possible to keep Georgiana out of the papers.

Footsteps made him look up. Elizabeth Bennet had crossed the room, her arms full of books to reshelve. She set them down and began searching for the right place for the first book. Her black mary janes seemed to emphasize her slim ankles as she stood on tiptoe to reach the top shelf.

A girl in her late teens approached Elizabeth. "Miss Bennet? Could you help me again?"

Elizabeth put down the book she had just picked up and smiled at the girl. "Of course, Molly. Are you still reading Sense and Sensibility?"

Molly shook her head. "No, we finished that. It was really sweet at the end. This is Shakespeare."

Her voice sounded so doleful that Darcy chuckled to himself.

Elizabeth glanced over at Darcy in annoyance, but immediately refocused on Molly. "I'm sure we'll manage to work it out," she said cheerfully, guiding Molly to a table and sitting down in one of the chairs, "Shakespeare isn't so bad once you get the knack of it. Which play is it?"

Molly sat and pulled out her book. "It's called Much Ado About Nothing. We had to read the first scene, and I don't think I understood any of it!"

Elizabeth laughed softly as she watched Molly find the place. "Well, the trick with Shakespeare - especially the comedies - is to assume that anything you don't understand is probably a sex joke."
Molly looked up, eyes wide. "Really?" she asked.

Elizabeth shrugged. "Really. Talking about nookie was as popular then as it is now. People don't really change that much." She turned a page of the book and began to explain the context of the play.

After Molly and Elizabeth had identified all the sex jokes (and discussed the actual events) in the first scene of *Much Ado*, Elizabeth got up to finish shelving books. Darcy found himself watching her do so, admiring the curve of her neck and the way she swiveled her hips slightly when she was thinking or looking for the right place on the shelf. When she went back to the front desk, he impulsively got up and followed her.

She looked up at him, eyebrows raised. "Do you need anything, Mr. Darcy?" she asked.

"No," he said. He stood for a minute, staring at her, and then recollected himself. "I'm just going out to get something to eat."

She nodded. He fidgeted slightly, but didn't actually move.

"So, all of Shakespeare reduced to sex jokes," he teased lightly.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "Not all of it, of course. Shakespeare is appealing because it reminds us that humans are always human. Arrogant, prideful, vain..."

The corner of his mouth quirked up. "And witty," he said, looking at her, "you must not forget witty."

"Yes," she said flatly, and turned back to her work.

Darcy smiled and went out to find a restaurant.

While he ate, Darcy wondered what was getting into him. He'd almost asked Elizabeth if she wanted to join him, which would have been insanity. Quite aside from Georgiana's state, getting involved with a small-town librarian was a ludicrous idea. He knew some of the wealthiest and most sophisticated women in New York, and he needed a wife who would know how to conduct herself around other wealthy men.

Of course, he couldn't imagine any of those women giggling over Shakespeare. Most of them hadn't read him since high school, and the few that had never deigned to notice the comedies.

He paid his bill and left the restaurant, and was about to head back to the library when he saw Caroline leaving a shop a few doors down, bracelets flashing and nose in the air. He ducked back into the restaurant entryway, but fortunately she was going the other direction. It occurred to him that if Caroline was out shopping, he could visit Georgiana while she was gone.

Elizabeth looked at the clock. Darcy really should have been back by now, assuming he was planning on returning after he ate. So apparently he wasn't coming back. Not that she cared, of course, she was just keeping an eye on who came and went in her library, as she always did.

A delivery of new books had arrived, including a bound collection of new Sherlock Holmes stories. Elizabeth remembered reading Doyle's stories with Jane, and how much they both enjoyed them. Perhaps Jane would enjoy these too, while she was working. Elizabeth checked the collection out in Jane's name, put a sign on the desk saying she'd be back in twenty minutes, and
headed out towards Mr. Bingley's house.

Chapter End Notes

I'm assuming that Sherlock Holmes (which was published in the UK) took a couple of years to reach the States. Or maybe the library just took a while to get it.

And Shakespeare really does have a lot of sex jokes.
"Her cuts are healing well, sir, and she's woken up long enough to eat a little a few times. I'd still like to get her in the bath, but it will wait. She's still having nightmares, though."

Darcy nodded. "I expect that's normal. She's been through a lot," he said, looking thoughtfully at his sister. He looked up at Jane. She looked a little pale, and she wouldn't be good for anything if she fainted. "Is there anything you need?" he asked shortly.

She shook her head. "I'm fine. Just a little hungry."

"Go ahead and eat something, then. I'll sit with my sister."

Jane nodded. "Thank you. I won't be long." She got up and headed towards the door. "Mr. Darcy?" she asked, looking back at him.

"Yes?"

"Your sister has mentioned someone named Violet a few times. I...is that someone you know?"

He frowned thoughtfully. "I don't believe so. I imagine she has school friends I haven't met, of course, but I don't think she's mentioned a Violet. Did she say anything else about her?"

Jane shook her head. "Not really. She just says I'm sorry, Violet.' She calls for help sometimes, asking for you or your parents or for George."

Darcy's face went blank at the mention of his parents. "Thank you for letting me know," he said, and turned away to watch his sister.

Lizzie was passing the drugstore, book in hand, when she head a familiar voice. "Hey, doll, didn't expect to see you here," said Wickham, pushing himself away from the wall to touch her arm.

Lizzie looked up at him. The bruises were still there, but they looked less puffy and were even beginning to fade a bit. "I thought you were heading back to New York," she said, startled.

He grinned at her. "Well, I was, but I thought what a shame it would be to leave a nice skirt like you behind. Besides, we aren't far from the city, so a few more contacts in this town might be useful."

"You do know that Darcy is still around, don't you? I had to put up with him all afternoon at the library."

"He didn't start anything, did he?" Wickham asked, stepping closer and taking her hand.

"No, he stared at me some, but I won't get screwy over that. I'm just worried about you."

"Oh, don't worry about me," Wickham replied, placing her hand on his arm as he turned to walk with her, "If Darcy wants to make some sockdollager of things, that's his problem. I won't mind him."

"That's very sensible of you. I do wish my sister wasn't working for his friend, though."
"Well, with his friend there I expect he'll stay on the level. What's Jane doing for his friend?"

"I don't know, she won't tell me. He's hired her for a week or two, to do some nursing work."

"Well, that's a bit odd. If you want me to stay around town, I will. I don't mind pretending to be a drugstore cowboy for a while if it means I can be on hand when I'm needed."

"I must admit, that might be comforting. But I don't want you to stay if it will cause trouble for you. I know what it is to be short on scratch," she said, smiling up at him.

"No bother at all, doll. I'll stay a bit. Might even crash a blow or two. You want to come? It's more fun to crash with a sheba along."

Darcy stroked his sister's hair as she slept. Jane had washed it and combed it, and it was good to see it shiny and clean again. He wished his parents were here, to help Georgiana heal and make the nightmares go away. Now it was his job, and he couldn't always protect her. His mother would have known what to do.

Of course, if his parents were still alive, George would no doubt still be hanging around the theater. Maybe if he'd had ready access to Georgiana he wouldn't have stolen her like this. He'd be bleeding her dry either way, of course, but maybe it would be better...he shook his head. There was no point in dwelling on it. He wanted George out of his life and out of his sister's life. Maybe that had made George angry, and maybe the anger made his behavior worse, but George was no good for anybody, and Darcy knew it. He'd just have to do a better job of keeping Georgiana safe. At least now she'd know he wasn't to be trusted. Let George find someone else to hang on. If Darcy never had to deal with George again, it would be too soon.

Georgiana stirred, and her eyes opened. She focused on her brother's face, but then her gaze wandered across the room.

"You're awake," Darcy said, smiling down at her.

Georgiana grunted her agreement.

"I'm glad. You've been asleep a long time. Are you feeling better?"

Georgiana sighed. "I suppose," she said, still gazing blankly at the ceiling.

"You're at the house Charlie has rented for a few weeks. Did I tell you he was going out of town? It's a little town called Meryton. Not much to recommend it, but I suppose it'll do. I'll take you home as soon as we can travel without the press suspecting anything. You'll feel better once you're back at home, I'm sure," Darcy said, taking her hand.

"Doesn't matter," Georgiana said.

"I suppose that's true, as long as you stay in bed. I checked with Caroline, and she assures me that she chose the linens herself. I've mostly been avoiding her, but at least she knows how to provide for her guests. I told her you have measles, by the way, so she won't be visiting."

Georgiana smiled briefly.

"But soon you'll feel better, and then we'll head back to the city and see a show or two and life will go back to normal," Darcy continued, "You'll practice your music and I'll find a new play to put on and we'll forget this ever happened."
Georgiana closed her eyes, apparently deciding to go back to sleep. "See, Violet, I told you so," she mumbled, and then she was silent.

Chapter End Notes

As always, http://home.earthlink.net/~dlarkins/slang-pg.htm for the slang dictionary
Jane was just starting the meal the cook had fixed for her when Charlie came in.

"Jane! I'm so glad to see you!" he said, stepping forward.

She smiled back. "I'm glad to see you too. It's been so odd, working in your house and not actually seeing you."

"How is Georgiana?" he asked.

"Getting better, I think. It's a little frustrating that there's not much to be done for her. I'm mostly just letting her sleep."

"I'm glad it isn't too much work, at least. And that you're eating something. May I join you?"

"Yes, please do."

Charlie stepped into the kitchen to speak with the cook, and came out a few minutes later with a plate of his own. They sat and ate, quietly smiling at each other.

A block away from Bingley's house, Wickham stopped suddenly. Lizzie turned to look at him, but nothing appeared to be wrong.

"Is everything okay?" she asked.

"Everything's fine, doll. I'm just...a little tired, I guess. Do you mind if I wait here until you get back?"

"Of course, you probably shouldn't be walking so much. I'm not in a hurry; why don't I wait with you? I'd like to introduce you to my sister."

"No, go on without me. I'll sit here a while," Wickham said, sitting down and pulling out a cigarette.

Lizzie waited a minute longer, but Wickham didn't look up at her, so she hurried on down the street.

Jane stepped out onto the porch to greet her sister. That way she'd be less likely to see anything she shouldn't. Lizzie hugged her fiercely before handing over the book.

"Thank you, Lizzie! I'm at loose ends most of the time, just waiting for...well, at any rate, I can certainly use some more reading material," Jane said, opening the cover to scan the list of titles. "This looks lovely. How has your day been?"

Lizzie rolled her eyes. "That Darcy has been lurking in the library all afternoon. He left for dinner a while ago, and hopefully he won't be back. He just reads the newspaper and stares at me and makes it quite clear he thinks I'm doing a terrible job."

"Lizzie, I've talked with him a bit, and I think he might have a lot on his mind. You probably
shouldn't assume the worst about him."

Lizzie laughed. "Yes dear, I know you must always find excuses for everyone. But truly I don't think he likes me. I can't think why he came at all."

"Well, I heard Charlie's sister talking to him this morning. Perhaps he wished to be alone."

"Avoiding his hosts all day is not exactly polite behavior either, Jane."

"No, but...well, I've known you to hide in the library when the house gets noisy, Lizzie."

Lizzie gave her sister a sharp look but would not respond.

They sat for a minute, enjoying the cool evening breeze, and Jane said, "I should probably go back in soon. Charlie and I were eating dinner when you arrived."

"Probably. Just the two of you?"

Jane nodded happily. "Caroline is out shopping, I think, and Mr. Darcy is...well, he's not eating with us. It's nice; Charlie's so nice to talk to."

"Jane...are you crushing on him?"

Jane blushed. "Maybe a little. He's just so nice, Lizzie. I like him."

"Well, I'm glad you like him, but you be careful. He's your boss, and that...changes things. You can't be certain he isn't just being polite."

"Lizzie, it isn't like that!"

"I'm sure it isn't. Just be careful, okay Jane?"

Wickham ground out his cigarette, stood up, and leaned against the fence of the house he had stopped in front of. He was a little tired, but he didn't want to go anywhere near Darcy right now. Lizzie ought to be good for some fun, if he could keep her ignorant for long enough, and so far Darcy was playing right into his hands.

The loss of Georgiana was a hardship, of course, but there were plenty of other heiresses, and he and Joe had a good system worked out. Lizzie didn't have the money to be good for anything but a bit of fun, but Caroline Bingley might be worth making a play for.

It was really rather a pity Lizzie hadn't accepted his invitation. She was charming and confident enough to be a real asset as a business partner, but it was obvious she'd never be willing to take that role.

The sound of giggling interrupted Wickham's musings. He looked up to see two girls walking nearby, laughing so hard they had to hold on to each other for support.

"Evening," he said, tipping his hat at them. They looked up and he realized they were Lizzie's younger sisters, who had been in the car last night. "Where might you nice young things be going to?" he asked.

The shorter one just gaped at him, but the taller one answered coyly, "We were just heading home. I'm Lydia, and this is Kitty. Aren't you the swell that Lizzie brought home last night?"

"I sure am, baby. Name's George Wickham. I'm surprised you weren't too zozzled to remember
me,” he added, with a teasing note in his voice.

"Takes more than a little hooch to get a bearcat like me bent," she responded. "I remember perfectly. Lizzie isn't the only one who noticed you."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. Meeting you is just the elephant's whistle. What's a tight doll like you doing in a town like this?" he asked, offering Lydia a cigarette and lighting another for himself.

"A girl can't help where she's born. But I'm going to go to New York as soon as I can and be a star," Lydia explained, accepting the cigarette and taking a long pull.

"We both are!" interjected Kitty, fishing a pack of cigarettes out of her purse. "We're working on a sister act!"

"Are you really? So you sing? Dance?"

Kitty nodded enthusiastically.

Lydia said, "Well, I sing, and we both dance. Kitty likes to harmonize, but...well, anyway, we'll see once we get to New York!"

Wickham smiled down at her. "You know, I might be able to help with that..."

Chapter End Notes

and that's it for the week! next week I'll be working on my other story, but the week after you can expect some more updates here. (I alternate to keep my head from exploding. It works sometimes.)
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Shorter than my usual chapters, but I wanted to add some more. I thought this might be abandoned, but recently I've been wanting to add some more, so we'll see. I do find that a lot of the padding that a slowly-developing relationship requires is really boring to write, so the rest might be more of a "highlights" type of story. We will see.

The Dewey Decimal System was pretty new in the 20s, but most libraries were using it by 1927.

Also the slang glossary I was using has vanished, which makes me sad. At some point I'll need a new one - if you know of a good one I'd really appreciate a link in the comments. Didn't need it for this chapter because the Darcys don't use much slang.

Darcy checked on his sister one more time before bed. To his surprise and delight, she was finally awake, though still very depressed.

Darcy held her hand and told her everything was going to be okay and that he didn't blame her for what had happened. She didn't seem very interested in what he was saying, but she didn't stop him either.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, and then Georgiana turned her head to look at her brother. "Did you get Violet out? I don't remember," she asked.

"I...no, I didn't get Violet out. Who is she?"

"She was in there with me. She wanted to leave," Georgiana said. After a minute, she added, "She didn't know George."

"I'm sorry sweetheart, I didn't know. What did she look like?"

"Dunno. She's tiny. Blond, I think. Her father is a doctor. She met Harry at boarding school I think."

Darcy waited for his sister to continue, then prompted her, "Harry brought her to that place?"

Georgiana nodded. She looked up. "You'll find her, won't you?"

"I don't know if I can. I'll try."

That had been a few days ago. Darcy rubbed his face and re-sorted the newspapers on the library table in front of him. He'd gone back to the den where he'd found Georgiana, but found the building empty. By bribing a few children he'd seen on the street, he's learned that the den belonged to a gangster named Joe Mineo. He'd been at the library every day since, studying newspapers to try and figure out how to track Violet down.

It was frustrating work, but being able to watch Elizabeth Bennet (and sometimes request her
assistance with locating something) had made the whole experience a lot less painful. He liked watching her. She was intelligent, and funny, and compassionate, and quite pretty. He particularly liked the way her sleek dark hair brushed against her face and neck as she moved around the library.

Georgiana was doing better as well. She was still depressed, but with Jane's encouragement she was starting to take an interest in things around her. She'd be ready to travel in a few more days, he thought, and then he'd finally be able to get away from Caroline.

Lizzie, on the other hand, was not pleased with the past few days. Lydia and Kitty had been out of the house more than usual, but when they were at home they were spending even more time fighting. They fought over everything: clothes, men, the sister act they had started rehearsing constantly. Jane wasn't there to help her put up with them, and Mary had taken to spending all her time at the Salvation Army, so Lizzie was left to her frustration.

And the library, previously a place of order and comfort if not delight, was not the shelter it once was. Darcy had started coming every day. None of the papers were good enough for him, so he'd started reading them all. He'd also started asking her to track down random books and articles, with a sardonic look that clearly indicated his opinion of her organizational skills. She wanted to throw the library's copy of Dewey's *Decimal Classification and Relative Index* at his head and demand to know what he found lacking, but of course one did not do such things in the library. She'd also glanced over at him to find him staring at her more than once. She'd started taking a few minutes throughout the day to smooth her clothes and hair, just so she could be certain he wouldn't find anything to criticize her for.
"Andy. I'm so glad you're in town," Darcy said, opening the door so his cousin could enter Bingley's house. "Do you need anything?" he asked.

"Something cold. Don't care what. It's a hot drive," Andrew Fitzwilliam replied, entering the house and looking around. "You said this is Bingley's place?"

"Yes, he's letting us stay as long as Georgiana needs to recover." Darcy gestured towards a chair in the parlor, then went to pour a glass of the lemonade sitting ready on the sideboard.

"It's nice. How is she?" Andy accepted the drink and sat down.

"Better. Still emotional, but getting stronger and more cheerful. She's probably able to travel home now - but we have to deal with this other issue first."

"Of course. You realize I can't call a raid on the place with just the information you sent me. Even the FBI needs warrants - and strictly speaking this isn't our jurisdiction anyway."

"No, a raid won't answer. They'd take Violet with them if they possibly could, and even if they left her behind she'd be exposed to all the publicity we'd prefer to avoid. I was hoping it could just be you and me. We walk in as customers, find Violet, and get her to leave with us. They can't forcibly keep her there."

"Will, you sap, it's not likely to be that easy! We don't know for sure she's there, and if she is we can't be sure you'll recognize her, and even if we do find her we can't be sure she'll come with us!"

"I know, but I told Georgiana I'd try, and it's the best I can think of. Georgiana can't remember Violet's last name, so I can't contact her family. I was lucky to learn where Mineo's latest den is at all."

"Fine. But we need a woman with us."

"What? Why?"

Because how does it look, two fine upstanding men taking a girl out of a place like that? We need a woman to come with us and help reassure the girl."
Darcy stood and looked out the window. "Very well. I'll ask Elizabeth Bennet to come with us. She's the librarian here; she's helped me with some of the research."

"Splendid. You'll be the brains, I'll be the muscle, and she'll be the compassion. I'll be the eel's whiskers."

Lizzie saw Darcy approaching her desk and sighed. The man just could not leave her alone. She stamped the last book on her pile with unnecessary force and turned to face him.

"Well, Mr. Darcy? Do you need my help finding an article?"

"I...no, thank you. I was wondering...I have a favor to ask of you."

"What sort of favor?" she asked, narrowing her eyes.

He took a deep breath. "I...have reason to believe that a friend...well, a connection of mine is in trouble. My cousin and I - he's an FBI agent, and he came to assist me with this - are going to try and help her tonight, and he suggested it would be better if we had a woman with us, to comfort the girl and remove any suspicion of impropriety. I hoped you might come. There is some danger, but I am sanguine that it will go smoothly and no one will be injured."

"What sort of trouble?"

Darcy looked around, but there was no one near the desk at the moment. "I believe her to be held in a cocaine den. It is not unknown for unscrupulous men to bring innocent victims to such places and...well, I would prefer to get her out."

Lizzie looked at him. He didn't appear to be lying, and she had heard rumors of a gin mill that also peddled cocaine and other drugs. And while she had no desire to spend time with Darcy, she didn't feel she could turn away from a young woman who needed her.

"Very well," she said eventually, "When do you want to go?"

"At around ten," he replied, "Andy says that's the best time for our purposes, and I trust his expertise. I thought we could pick you up at 9:30?"

The streets were dark, and the alley Andy had chosen to park in was even darker, but as they got out of the car they could hear voices and music filtering through the ground.

"Lizzie, would you prefer to stay in the car? I doubt there will be any trouble, but it would be safer," Andy offered.

Lizzie shook her head. "No thank you. You might need me to persuade the young lady to come with you."

As they approached the door, Lizzie patted her headband into place and smoothed the front of her dress. She's borrowed a dress from Lydia, hoping to look the part of a regular customer. It was considerably shorter than what she was used to wearing, and she felt slightly awkward in it.

Behind her, Darcy was having trouble keeping his mind on the mission. Lizzie's legs seemed to stretch on for miles, and her bare shoulders looked silky-smooth in the moonlight. He cleared his throat and mentally reviewed everything Georgiana had told him about Violet, but Lizzie's hips...
were shifting under her dress and her bare back swayed as she walked and...

He snapped out of it as Fitzwilliam knocked on the door. The door opened slightly and they exchanged sign and countersign with the doorman.

When they got in, Lizzie looked around curiously. She'd been at private parties before, but never a real speakeasy. The bare walls and unfinished ceiling contrasted oddly with the fine linens and gleaming candlesticks on the tables that dotted the room. A small band was playing and a few couples were dancing on the tiny dance floor, but the room was mostly empty and things were quiet.

From what Darcy had pieced together from newspaper reports and a few careful interviews with locals, the main room was used for gin and cocktails and dancing, and harder drugs would be in a back room or sub-basement. Fitzwilliam had found blueprints of the building filed at the City Hall which showed a hallway behind the main basement the led to two smaller rooms, and they hoped to find Violet there. If necessary, Fitzwilliam thought he could ask for harder drugs without raising suspicion, but that would be riskier.

Fitzwilliam gestured towards a table and beckoned a waiter over. They would have a drink first, to avoid attracting attention.

While they were waiting for their drinks to come, the band began to play "Oh, Lady Be Good!" Seeing the dancing couples, Darcy turned to Lizzie and asked her to dance.

Lizzie stiffened, but she realized it would look better if they appeared to be enjoying the music. So she pursed her lips and nodded, then stood up. She saw, belatedly, that Darcy had intended to give her his hand to help her rise. She met his eyes briefly and was surprised to see him smile at her. She placed her hand in his and allowed him to lead her to the floor. He pulled her close, and she forced herself to relax and focus on the dance. If nothing else, she would be able to look for the door to the hallway as they moved around the dance floor.

Lizzie was surprised to discover that Darcy was an excellent dancer. The dance was a foxtrot, and he maneuvered them around the floor easily and without drifting to the side, as some men did. He led her into a turn and she found she could navigate it easily and gracefully, and it made her feel more elegant than she had since the beginning of the night.

For Darcy, the dance was intoxicating. He had long been regretting that he had been unable to dance with Lizzie at the party where they first met, and he felt that this dance was restoring the lost opportunity. Once Violet was safely out, he looked forward to the next time he could dance with Lizzie again, to feel her bare skin under his fingers and her hair brushing his jaw.

He was trying to remember whether Bingley had a record player when the song ended. He smiled down at Lizzie and was surprised to see her looking tense.

"I expect we'll move on soon," he reassured her, "We won't have to wait much longer."

She glanced up at him. "Of course. We should rejoin your cousin," she replied.

Their drinks had arrived, and they sat sipping slowly.

"I think I saw a door to the left of the stage," Lizzie whispered.

Fitzwilliam nodded. "The man speaking to the bartender appears to be the manager here. I saw him come through that door a few minutes ago."
"So should we go look?" Darcy asked.

Fitzwilliam shook his head. "Not yet, Will. We need to finish our drinks first."

They sat in silence, sipping their drinks and trying to make it look like they were drinking more than they actually consumed. After a while, Fitzwilliam stood and stretched.

"Come on, fella, let's ankle a bit!" he cried, pretending to be drunker than he was.

"Sure. I'm looking for a real blow!" responded Lizzie, this time allowing Darcy to help her up.

They strolled slowly around the room, making their way towards the door in the back. The cigarette smoke was thicker now, and the patrons who weren't dancing were mostly quite drunk. They got to the door and slipped through without anyone seeming to notice them.

The hallway beyond was quite dark, with only one candle for illumination. The first room they looked in was empty, and appeared to be used as a green room for the band.

The second room was brightly lit. A man sat at a table in the middle of the room, laying out folded slips of paper on a mirror. Three couches lines the walls, with a handful of people sitting on them, either sleeping or staring vacantly into space, blissfully floating under the effects of the drug.

"Five clams a pop, fellas," the man said, without looking up.

Darcy looked around. On the couch across from him was a girl about his sister's age, with a tangled blond bob. She was sleeping, and he could see bruises on her wrist as well as marks on her arm where the drug had been injected.

He walked over to her and shook her shoulder. "Violet, wake up," he called.

At first she didn't respond, but after a moment she opened her eyes and flinched away from his touch, clearly afraid. She stared at him and seemed to realize he wasn't her captor.

"Come on, Violet, we came to get you out," Darcy said, tugging gently on her hand to get her moving. "Do you remember Georgiana? I'm her brother."

"Hey, fella, you here for a blow or not?" the man demanded.

"Not," Lizzie replied, moving forward to reach for Violet. "Come on, sweetie, we came to take you home," she said.

Violet didn't move, and for a moment Darcy was afraid they wouldn't be able to get her out. If she didn't come willingly, he had no real right to take her away. But then she sighed and let Lizzie pull her up off the couch, towards the door.

When Violet got up, the man became agitated. "You can't take her! Joe'll be mad as anything if she's gone!" he sputtered.

Fitzwilliam moved forward and grabbed the man, prepared to pin him down if necessary. "She's leaving of her own free will. Are you saying you're holding her prisoner?"

The man muttered to himself but didn't make any move to stop them.

Lizzie supported Violet down the hallway to the door to the main room. They were just about to go through when the door to the green room opened and the manager came out. His eyes bugged out when he saw them, and Lizzie pushed Violet rapidly through the door, but they weren't quite
"Stop them!!" yelled the manager, and two large men at a table near the door stood up and reached for their guns.

Fitzwilliam pulled out his gun, and the two men froze, watching him warily. Lizzie hurried Violet towards the exit as fast as she could, but in her haste she tripped over the leg of a chair. Her legs got tangled as she fell and she felt a sharp pain in her ankle.

Darcy saw her fall and try to get up again, but it was clear she was unable to walk. He ran over and helped her up, and just as he realized that he wouldn't be able to get both girls out by himself, Fitzwilliam came running up and took over supporting Violet.

Darcy glanced behind them and saw one of the men on the floor, unconscious, and the other in the process of picking up his gun.

Fitzwilliam and Violet were most of the way to the exit. The band had finally noticed something was wrong and stopped playing, and the customers were starting to shout and run for the exit.

Darcy lifted Lizzie into his arms and started running blindly, looking for somewhere to hide from the gunshots he was sure would come as soon as the customers were cleared out. He dashed behind the bar and they crouched together next to the rows of bottles while he looked for a way out.

"How badly are you hurt?" he asked.

"It feels like a sprain. I can walk if I need to, but I can't run," she replied.

He nodded. He wished they had time to put ice on it or wrap it, but there was no time.

Lizzie shifted. "Is that a door?" she asked.

The wall to their right had a half-size hatch in it, probably left over from an old coal chute. Darcy pushed on it and discovered that it could be opened, although it was stiff with age.

As quietly as possible, he eased it open. Lizzie scooted forward, using her good leg and her hands to support herself, and managed to get through. Darcy crawled after her just as the first shots sounded.

The street was as dark as it had been before, and Darcy wasn't certain how to get back to the car. He picked Lizzie up and ran off in a random direction, hearing shouts behind him.

After a few random turns they sound themselves in a dark alley, and the shouts faded. He set Lizzie on her feet, with her back against the wall so she could lean against it. He was breathing hard, and he could just see her eyes glittering up at him and her pale skin gleaming in the moonlight. The adrenaline of the previous half hour had left him flushed and lightheaded, and in his excitement it seemed the most natural thing in the world grab those smooth shoulders and pin Lizzie against the wall and kiss her sweet lips with all the passion he had.
Chapter 13

It is a truth far too rarely acknowledged that many of life's experiences are highly subjective. Our interpretation of sensations and events is strongly influenced by the context and emotions that surround them. Thus it was that while Darcy was reeling in the heady bliss of a passionate kiss, Lizzie was reeling in disgust with the feeling of a strange tongue thrust into her mouth.

Lizzie was caught off-guard, and in her surprise allowed him to continue for a few seconds. Then she shifted her weight more firmly onto her good foot, braced her hands against the wall behind her, and kneed Darcy in the groin as hard as she could.

Darcy yelped and fell backwards, gasping and disoriented. Lizzie had intended to start yelling or running - or both - but the sight of Darcy curled up on the ground was so unexpected that she just stood there, staring at him.

Darcy managed to find words first. "What was that for?" he gasped out.

"You kissed me!" said Lizzie, straightening herself. She felt better standing, even with a hurt ankle.

"I...Of course I kissed you, sweetheart. I'm sorry I surprised you, but after that dance earlier..." Darcy tried to explain.

"The dance? We were trying to blend in! A dance doesn't give you carte blanche to kiss girls!"

"Of course it doesn't. I don't just kiss anyone," snapped Darcy, finally getting to his feet.

"So why did you kiss me?" Lizzie demanded.

Darcy stared at her. "Because I love you. Didn't you know that?" he finally replied.

Lizzie collapsed back against the wall behind her. This was the last response she would have ever expected. "You love me," she repeated, disbelieving.

"Absolutely and completely. You...you're beautiful. I can't stop watching you. You've been the only nice thing about the past few weeks. The research I've been doing...it was awful, and combined with my worries for...well, it was awful, but I'd look up and see you shelving books, or hear you teasing one of the schoolchildren, and it just - I felt so happy, knowing you were there, and the dingy library and tiny town and criminal element seemed worth it."

He stopped to catch his breath. He'd kept his feelings quiet for so long that finally being able to open his heart to her was a relief, and he felt like he might never stop talking.

"I can't stop thinking about you, Lizzie. I go to a restaurant for dinner and wonder if you like it there and what you'd order. I see a couple walking down the street holding hands and my own hand aches with the need to be with you. I think about you as I'm falling asleep and all my dreams are of you. I hear music and wish I could hold you and dance with you, and this evening I finally got to dance with you and...I thought you felt it too."

He stopped. Lizzie was still staring at him. "Say something," he begged.

"I can't believe this," said Lizzie. "You insulted me the first time we met, and now you say you love me."
Darcy closed his eyes. "I'd forgotten about that. I'm sorry. I...I was in a terrible mood that night. You're easily one of the most beautiful women I've ever known."

Lizzie started to breathe a little faster. The shock was wearing off and her anger and disgust were getting stronger. "And you took that terrible mood out on Wickham, didn't you? I saw what you did to him! How many other people have gotten hurt the same way, because you were angry and they were there? I'm just glad you did refuse to dance with me, or who knows what would have happened?"

"Wickham..." Darcy started to say, but Lizzie cut him off.

"Not to mention your friendship with that creep Charles Bingley!! You're very close with him, aren't you? I couldn't possibly love anyone who thinks his behavior is acceptable!"

Now Darcy looked up, confused. "Charles isn't a creep!" he protested.

"No? Really? What kind of man hires a personal nurse for twice her normal salary and makes her sign a document promising not to tell anyone what goes on in his house? And then spends all his time flirting with her? I keep telling Jane he's only playing with her, but do you know how hard it is for her to guard her heart from his manipulation? How hard it is for her to work in his house? What is his game anyway? As his best friend, I'm sure you're neck-deep in it, whatever it is," she spat at him.

Darcy swallowed. "Of course. I...forget I ever said anything, Miss Bennet," he ground out.

"Oh, I will, Darcy. I hope I can forget you, because otherwise you will be one of my worst memories ever. I have no idea what made you think you were in love with me, but I'm pretty certain I could never possibly love you," said Lizzie, turning away and beginning to limp down the alley, supporting herself against the wall when she couldn't stand on her ankle.

The alley was silent, expect for their heavy breathing and the Lizzie's halting footsteps.

Lizzie was almost to the corner when Darcy started walking after her. "Lizzie, wait. Let me help you. You can't walk home on a sprained ankle."

"I can if I want to," she retorted.

He chuckled. "I might have known you'd say that. Come on. Let me get you home and then you can go back to forgetting me."

She stopped and turned to lean against the wall so she could look up at him. "Why? What do you care?"

He sighed and rubbed his face. "I don't know. I shouldn't. My life is in pieces and nothing makes sense and I guess I'm just running on automatic now."

She closed her eyes and slowly shook her head. "Whatever. Okay," she said at last. She looked around. "Can you check what the street sign says at the corner? I don't know where we are."

Darcy nodded and walked to the corner. They were at the intersection of Tammer and Elm, which didn't tell him anything, but he could see lights a few blocks away.

He went back and reported his findings, adding, "I figure we should head towards the lights. That might be a main street - maybe we'll even find a taxi."

Lizzie shrugged, but accepted the support of his arm, and they slowly moved off.
After a block or two, Darcy took a deep breath. "I know you don't like me, but I should tell you that Charles isn't playing with or attempting to manipulate your sister. As far as I can tell, he really loves her."

Lizzie didn't answer, so he continued, "And Charles isn't a creep. I hadn't realized it would look that way...I was just trying to be careful. Your sister is actually working for me. Not Charles. I asked her to pretend it was Charles so that the newshounds wouldn't start asking questions."

"You...what? That makes no sense, Darcy," said Lizzie, shocked.

"It..." Darcy trailed off, and then too a deep breath. The only solution was to tell Lizzie the whole truth. "I came to Meryton to find my sister, Georgiana. She disappeared a couple weeks before I came, and I was able to track her here. She was in the same situation as Violet. I needed a nurse to help her while she came off the drug, and I needed it to be discreet. I'm sure you've seen some of the scandals they publish these days. Quite aside from my own preference for privacy, Georgiana is very shy, and being publicly exposed like that would be devastating for her."

"I see," said Lizzie. They walked on in silence. "You said you thought Violet had been kidnapped and taken to the den..."

"Yes, that's what she told Georgiana. I don't actually know her at all, only what Georgiana told me. I don't even know her last name, or I'd have brought her parents and not asked you for help."

"Of course. What I meant was, is that what happened to your sister?"

Darcy sighed. He hadn't mentioned Wickham yet because he was afraid Lizzie would refuse to believe him. But, he figured, he had nothing to lose. She already thought he was a bully and a creep and who knows what else.

"Yes, it is. It...I don't know what Wickham told you. He grew up with us, and we were really good friends as children. I stopped being his friend in college - the things he was getting into were things I couldn't support. Georgiana knew that I'd stopped talking to him, but she didn't know why.

"I haven't sorted all the details out, but apparently he owed a lot of money to Joe Mineo, who owns the club we just left. The deal he worked out was that he'd turn over Georgiana. He went to our house, offered to take her shopping or out for a meal or something, and she never came back. Once she was addicted, they could make her pay whatever they wanted. It still could work, too - coca..."cocainism is never truly cured. She'll always have to be careful, and when she's better I'm going to talk to her about changing the way her trust fund is set up, so that she can't drain it even if she does relapse."

Darcy choked on the last words. He stopped and bowed his head, and a few tears slipped down his face. Lizzie stared at him, not knowing what to say.

After a few minutes, Darcy regained his composure. "That's why I came to Meryton," he continued. "I'd learned that Wickham was managing the band that was playing that night, and I came to make him tell me where Georgiana was. That's why I was in a foul mood. When I caught up with him and demanded to know where my sister was, he just laughed at me. So I punched him. I don't know what would have happened if one of the musicians hadn't remembered seeing him with Georgiana. He took me to her."
"I'm sorry. I guess I misjudged you," muttered Lizzie after a minute.

He nodded. "Understandable. Wickham has fooled plenty of people. And I guess I didn't think about how my plan would affect Charles and your sister," he said.

"How is your sister doing?" Lizzie asked timidly.

"Better. She's physically much recovered, but still very depressed. I hoped...well, it doesn't matter now. She's well enough to travel, at any rate. We'll be leaving tomorrow. Violet can recuperate at our home in the city, or at her home once she's awake enough to tell us who her parents are."

Lizzie wasn't sure how to respond to that, so she was thankful to be saved from having to do so by the arrival of a taxi, dropping off a late-night customer a block ahead. Darcy immediately left Lizzie and ran forward to get the driver's attention, then came back to help her to the car.

They rode home in silence. Darcy felt drained, having bared his heart on so many topics in such a short time. Lizzie mostly felt confused. Her emotions were swirling around, and she wasn't sure whether she felt happy or sad or angry or pitying or shocked or apologetic most.

They arrived at Bingley's house. Darcy went inside and came out again a few minutes later. "I woke Jane up, and she's gathering supplies to take care of your ankle. She says it would be easier for her to work inside, and then the taxi can take both of you home," he said, handing the cabby some money.

Lizzie nodded tiredly and allowed him to help her out of the car and into the house. She felt guilty for waking Jane up so late, but she was so grateful to be left to the ministrations of her gentle spirit that she didn't really care. Jane soothed the pain in her ankle, but her quiet presence also helped quiet Lizzie's heart, and the emotions which had seemed so tangled a few minutes before seemed much more manageable now.

Once Jane had wrapped her sister's ankle, she collected her luggage (which had been packed in anticipation of her departure in the morning) and they went home. Sleep had never felt so good.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Once the girls had left, Darcy went back upstairs and knocked on the only bedroom door that showed light underneath it. On being invited in, he opened the door to find Richard pacing and smoking.

"Darcy, you made it. Thank God," said Richard, starting forward, "I was getting worried."

"I apologize for worrying you. We got lost on the way out, I'm afraid."

"Trust you to get balled up when you ought to scram," Richard teased with a wry smile.

Darcy shrugged. "They were shooting at us, what do you expect? We ran, and they missed us, and we found a taxi and came back. You got home okay?"

Richard nodded. "I waited for a while. By the time I was pretty sure we wouldn't get pinched, Violet was starting to wake up a bit, and I wanted to get her back to the house before she got properly sick. She's sleeping in Georgiana's room now."

"Did she tell you her last name?"

"Fraid not. She wasn't clear-headed enough. I figure if I leave in the next hour or so I can get her to your house before sunrise. We probably won't be seen."

"That makes sense. I'll leave with Georgiana in the morning, and meet you there." Darcy sighed and walked over to the bureau. "Mind if I have a ciggy?"

"Sure."

Richard watched his cousin light the cigarette and collapse into a chair. He looked exhausted. Admittedly it had been a long night, but there seemed to be an underlying depression that Richard couldn't account for.

"Are you all right, Will?" he finally asked.

Darcy took a deep breath and leaned forward to stub out his cigarette. "I think so. I thought...oh, never mind."

"You thought what?"

"It's none of your business, Richard. Never mind. I'll get over it."

Richard raised his eyebrows at that, but it was clear that Darcy was unwilling to talk about it. He picked up his cigarettes and wallet from the bureau and put them in his pockets.

"I have to be off, Darcy. I'll see you tomorrow."

Darcy nodded, but didn't get up.

"You should go to sleep, Darcy."

"Just go, Richard. I'll sleep eventually," Darcy replied.
Richard rolled his eyes, but closed the door and went to drive Violet to New York. Hopefully she'd be able to identify her parents soon.

Jane and Lizzie both slept late. Lizzie ate breakfast in silence and left for work, leaving Jane to wash the dishes and listen to her sisters quarrel.

After bickering over a pair of shoes, who had smoother hair, and which lipstick color they should wear, Lydia turned on the radio so they could practice dancing. For a few minutes Jane could hear nothing but music and footsteps, but soon Lydia began criticizing Kitty's dance moves as well, and it was clear that there would be at least as much fighting as dancing.

Finally the radio was turned off and Lydia began singing instead. Jane could hear footsteps, so they were still dancing, and Jane assumed that this must be the "sister act" Lizzie had mentioned lately. Perhaps if she went and watched them they'd fight less.

Once the dishes were dried, Jane went to the living room. Lydia and Kitty were fighting again.

"No, you can't sing, Kitty! My voice is the cat's meow - Wickham said so! I can carry it all by myself if you would just get the dance right!"

"But I want to sing, Lyddie!" Kitty started, but Jane interrupted her.

"Are you dancing together? Can I watch?" she asked.

Both girls stopped and looked at her.

"Sure you can watch. We're going to be stars! At least, we will if Kitty here stops being such a heeler," said Lydia.

Kitty looked like she wanted to protest, but Lydia struck a pose and started singing, "Yes sir, that's my baby, no sir, don't mean maybe, Yes sir, that's my baby now...." and the Kitty hastily moved into place. The girls continued with the dance.

They managed to get all the way through without anything more than a few scowls from Lydia, and Jane applauded enthusiastically at the end. "Hooray!! That's such a...hip number you have!"

Kitty beamed at the praise, but Lydia still seemed disgruntled. "I wish Wickham would do it with me," she sulked, "He's a real Oliver Twist!"

"Kitty is also an excellent dancer, Lydia," Jane said gently. In truth, she hadn't seen much difference between their dancing. The choreography featured lots of shimmying and kicking, and both girls were decent dancers. Admittedly Lydia had a more fashionable figure, which helped the dance look more polished.

Lydia ignored Jane and went back over to turn on the radio, informing Kitty that she needed to practice more. Jane sighed and left them to it.

Lizzie dropped another box of books onto her desk. She'd dealt with the usual work very efficiently this morning, and had resorted to going through the boxes of donated books in the back in order to keep her mind occupied. The more she worked, the less she had to think about the
night before.

At least, that was the theory. It wasn't working very well. Her mind kept going back to the night before, leaping from image to image in a whirlwind of emotion. Shots ringing around their ears. Darcy telling her he loved her. Darcy kissing her. Her ankle hurting, hurt in the confusion of their flight. The speakeasy with its dark back rooms. Their dance. Their fight. She was mortified at having misjudged Wickham so badly - she'd even been grateful when he offered to stay in town to "protect" her! She still felt resentful about the situation with Jane and Charles Bingley, but she admitted she could understand why he made the decisions he did.

The beat of a bass drum came from the street outside, and she could dimly hear voices singing. The Salvation Army came down the street sometimes, playing music to attract attention. Lizzie decided to go outside for a bit, hoping that the sunshine and the singing would lighten her mood, or at least distract her.

She hobbled outside and saw a group of six people in their uniforms singing at the street corner. She was surprised to see that Mary was with them, though not in uniform. Her sister had been going to their meetings almost every night, but she hadn't realized she was with them during the day as well.

Mary turned, and Lizzie waved to attract her attention. After a minute, Mary came over and gave her a hug.

"I'm sorry to see that your ankle is hurt," said Mary.

"I had something of an adventure last night, but I shouldn't talk about it. It'll heal. I didn't know you were campaigning with the Salvation Army."

Mary blushed bright pink, and stammered, "It's-it's a very worthy cause, you know. I...I like doing the Lord's work."

Lizzie regarded her sister, puzzled. Mary had always been interested in religious things, but why was she blushing? "I...can see that. I'm glad you're able to use your singing."

Mary nodded. "And I play piano for them too. Brother William says I'm a true blessing," she said, turning even redder.

Lizzie raised her eyebrows. "I'm glad to hear it. Which one is Brother William?"

Mary pointed out a young man about Lizzie's age, with black hair and a determined expression.

"He looks very nice," said Lizzie kindly, "Would you like to invite him over for dinner sometime?"

Mary nodded once, looking almost scared. She looked like she was about to say something else when the singing stopped. Mary looked back at the group.

"I have to go back - they'll be moving on now. But thank you, Lizzie!" she said, before running back to walk next to Brother William.

Lizzie smiled and turned to hobble back inside. At least pondering Mary's emotional state would be a welcome relief from pondering her own.

Chapter End Notes
It feels really weird to write protagonists who smoke. But they definitely would.

I did a little research into the Salvation Army, but to be honest most of what I know comes from the movie version of Guys and Dolls. It's a pity I can't include Frank Sinatra.
Chapter 16

Lizzie took a nickel home, since she couldn't easily walk. She could hear Kitty and Lydia quarreling over clothing upstairs. Jane was sitting on the couch in the parlor, sitting rigidly and staring straight ahead. A lit cigarette was in her hand, but she seemed to have forgotten that it was there.

"Hey Jane. What's got you so grummy?" Lizzie asked, sitting next to her sister on the couch.

Jane started and looked at her sister. "Oh, Lizzie. I didn't hear you come in," she said.

Lizzie smiled. "That's okay. What's wrong?"

"I..." Jane looked at her hands and noticed the cigarette. She stubbed it out and clenched her hands in her lap. "Charles offered to come teach me to drive this evening," she finally said.

"And...oh! I owe you an apology, Jane. I shouldn't have told you to keep your distance from him. I'm sorry it's upsetting you," said Lizzie.

Jane shook her head. "No, you were right to warn me. If he isn't interested in something lasting, then I do need to stay away."

"But I was wrong, Jane. I'm sorry I thought he was a creep. I...I had a long talk with Darcy last night. He told me about his sister and everything. He even sort of apologized for putting you in such an awkward position. He says that Charles does really love you."

Jane looked astonished. "He...Why did he make me promise not to tell anyone if he was just going to tell you himself?"

"I don't think he was. We kind of had a fight. It's a long story."

"Well, I suppose I'm glad. And I am glad that you think Charles is on the up and up after all," said Jane, finally starting to smile.

"So you'll let him teach you how to drive?" asked Lizzie.

"I will!" Jane took a deep breath and let it out. "Oh, I'm so happy, Lizzie! You have no idea how nice it is to have that decided!"

Lizzie couldn't help but laugh at her sister's radiant smile. "I'm happy for you, Jane. It's nice to see you relaxed again."

Lizzie was about to tell her sister about some of the other things she'd learned lately, but just then the doorbell rang.

Jane jumped up to answer the door. Her smile got even brighter when she found Charles outside.

"Hello!" she exclaimed.

He grinned back at her. "Hello! I brought the breezer out for our driving lesson. Are you ready?"

Jane nodded eagerly. "Of course! Just a minute while I get ready," she said, turning and racing up
the stairs.

Lizzie stood up and smiled at Charles. "I'm sure she'll be back in a minute. Why don't you come in?"

"Thank you," said Charles, and crossed into the parlor.

"How is your sister?" asked Lizzie politely.

"Caroline is well, thank you. She is a little saddened that Darcy left this morning, I think."

"Darcy's gone?"

"Yes, they - he left this morning."

"Oh." Lizzie wasn't quite sure how she felt about this news. "Well, I'm glad his sister is feeling well enough to travel," she said.

Charles looked troubled at that, but just then Jane came back into the room, a scarf tied over her smooth hair. "I'm all ready now," she announced.

Charles turned towards her and smiled involuntarily. "You look lovely," he said.

For a moment they just smiled at each other, but then they recollected themselves and turned to leave. Lizzie walked them to the door and waved goodbye as the car pulled away.

Darcy tenderly escorted his sister to her room, and asked his housekeeper, Mrs. Caffrey, to make sure Georgiana had help getting changed if she needed it. He headed down to the game room on the first floor, where he found Richard shooting pool.

"Will! Glad to see you. How did your drive go?"

"Well enough. Georgiana was awfully quiet, but at least she was awake the whole time. Is Violet here?"

"Yes, Mrs. Caffrey put her in a guest room and called Dr. Neal in to see her. He says she'll be listless and depressed and possibly headachey but she should be fine."

Darcy nodded. "I believe that's usual. You haven't learned her last name, then?"

"I did, actually. She woke up long enough to talk to Dr. Neal for a few minutes. Apparently her last name is Beaumont and her parents live in West Egg."

"Oh really? I believe the Beaumonts are only a few houses down from Pemberley. Fascinating. I can't say I remember Violet, but as she went to boarding school that's not very surprising."

"I hoped you would know them. If you don't mind, I'll let you handle the rest."

Darcy nodded. "Thank for your help, Richard. I imagine you need to get some sleep."

"I do. I napped some, but it's not enough to make up for being awake all night, and I do have work tomorrow. Perhaps I'll see if there's any stakeout duty I could volunteer for, while my sleep schedule is already a mess," Richard said with a grin as he headed towards the door.

"You do that, Richard," Darcy said.
He stared at the balls still spread out on the pool table, then slowly picked up the cue and began to line up a shot. Caring for Violet would be fairly simple. His problems concerning Elizabeth Bennet, however, had just begun.

He’d probably manage to see her again if he wanted to. Charles loved to dance and flirt but rarely pursued any girl for more than an evening. That he was taking a longer interest in Jane meant he’d probably maintain the relationship for some time, if not permanently. The question was whether he wanted to.

Lizzie hated him. Some of the dislike had been fixable: he wasn't a creep or a bully. But he'd insulted her the first time they met, and obviously their subsequent interactions hadn't changed her perception of him.

Falling in love with Lizzie had been magical and intoxicating. Knowing that he would see her every day and thinking that she admired him just as much as he admired her had been a heady experience. He'd thought they were learning about each other, allowing each other to see into their souls. He'd thought a special intimacy and connection was forming between them.

But it wasn't and it hadn't. Her feelings had been nothing like his. What he had thought was flirtatious conversation was actually sarcastic mockery. Which meant that he didn't know her. His insights into her heart and mind were only a mirage he'd created for himself.

So the question was, should he pursue her, knowing that his understanding of her was so faulty? Or should he dismiss her as a mistake and move on. Either way he would have to be more careful in the future. Clearly he needed to pay more attention to how his actions looked to others. And he also needed to make sure he was actually paying attention to people. If he could so badly misread Lizzie, who else had he misunderstood?

But as he thought about it, he realized that he did know Lizzie, even if he had misread her. She had been sarcastic to him, but she had been warm and friendly and witty with other people at the library, with the students who came to her for help and the elderly people who came in to read the papers and gossip. He'd seen enough to know she was kind and intelligent and quick-witted and loyal, even if she had never directed any of those things at him.

He'd seen all that, even though his own blindness had kept him from truly understanding her. How much more would he have seen if he'd been looking properly?

And with that, he decided that he had to find out.

Chapter End Notes

Apparently I'm swiping names for extras from White Collar today. And West Egg is swiped from The Great Gatsby, of course.

A "nickel" was a private car used as a bus. The fare was usually five cents, hence the name. It's mentioned in the glossary I've been using, under "jitney."

Said glossary is at http://home.earthlink.net/~dlarkins/slang-pg.htm
writing Brother William is both irritating and weirdly easy
also I just realized that I used Pemberly for the summer home on West Egg when I'd intended to name Darcy's theater Pemberly. I could switch it, but I think I'll just name it the Fitzwilliam Theater instead. I guess he partnered with his uncle to start it. Or something.

Dinner with Brother William was more than a bit awkward. He had arrived exactly on time, still in his Salvation Army uniform. His handshakes all lasted slightly longer than they should, and he never seemed to stop smiling, but at least he was polite.

Lydia and Kitty, on the other hand, were not polite. They barely acknowledged his introduction, and spent a considerable amount of time squabbling in front of the mirror as they applied lipstick. Lizzie had not given them permission to skip the dinner, but they had every intention of sneaking out as soon as they could.

Mary had blushed bright red as soon as Brother William arrived, and seemed to be incapable of speech, so Jane and Lizzie made polite conversation with him in her stead. They learned that he was from the west part of the state, and had come out to help plant the new Salvation Army chapter. He had two sisters and a brother, all of them still living at home. He did not indulge in any of the modern amusements.

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Jane went to the kitchen, and came back and reported that dinner was not quite ready yet. Finally, with the air of one making a great concession, Brother William picked up a book of crossword puzzles that was sitting on the windowsill and commented that a small amount of frivolity would do no harm.

Lizzie was quick to take him up on this offer, and promptly steered Mary into the seat next to him and found a pencil for them to use. One of the first clues was a musical term, which allowed Mary to get over her embarrassment enough to talk a little.

Finally, dinner was ready. Lizzie corralled Lydia and Kitty into the dining room and everyone was seated. Once they were served, Jane asked Brother William about his plans for the coming weekend.

"General Taylor wishes to hold a special prayer meeting this weekend, doesn't he?" asked Mary.

"I believe he does, dear Sister Mary, but I shall not be attending. I am bound for the city this weekend," Brother William replied.

"The city? Are you taking in a show?" Lydia asked, pleased that the conversation was not as dull as she feared it would be.

"I am not, dear Lydia, but instead attending a revival meeting organized by Preacher Catherine de Bourgh. It is to be a great demonstration of God's work among the godless of the great city," replied Brother William.
"So he's stuck on some face stretcher, no surprise there," Lydia muttered. Lizzie looked at Lydia, aghast.

Mary scrambled for a way to distract her guest from her sister's words. "Is that the same Preacher de Bourgh who wrote the sermon you quoted on Wednesday? I read the whole sermon afterwards and was strongly impressed by her words."

"It is indeed. She is a great worker of God, speaking His words to those too dull to hear Him. I will be honored to attend her meeting, and even perhaps to assist in some small way. I have been in correspondence with Preacher de Bourgh, offering whatever assistance I might provide."

"How very wonderful! I wish I might attend also!" Mary said.

Lydia snorted and Kitty giggled, but Lizzie and Jane exchanged glances. Mary so rarely expressed a wish for anything that they were inclined to help her attend the meeting, if it could be arranged.

"Perhaps we could manage something," Lizzie finally suggested. "Brother William, where are attendees staying? Is there a hotel where we could stay?"

"Indeed there is! Preacher Catherine de Bourgh has arranged for the Rosings Hotel, which is separated by only one street from where the pavilion is to be located, to provide rooms and meals for those who need them at a reduced cost. Nothing is to stand in the way of Preacher de Bourgh's great work for the Lord! Ladies might walk from the hotel to the meeting with perfect propriety, and Preacher de Bourgh has notified the local constabulary to be vigilant against drunks and other undesirables during the meeting. I would be delighted to escort you to the city myself, if you are willing to travel on Friday afternoon so as to be present for the Opening on Friday night. We might take the 1:47 train in, and then a taxicab to Rosings Hotel, allowing us to arrive no later than 5:30."

"I think we could do that. The library closes early on Fridays, so Mary and I could travel with you," Lizzie said, thinking that she could always slip off to shop or see a show when the meetings got boring. But it would be unwise to say so; Brother William would be offended, and Lydia and Kitty would want to come.

"Truly, Lizzie? How I should love to go! Thank you so much!" Mary exclaimed, her face suddenly beaming with delight.

"You are very welcome, Mary. I'm sure we will have a lovely weekend," said Lizzie. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Lydia smirk, so she added, "Kitty, Lydia, why don't you go to your appointment now?" before Lydia could say anything else.

Lydia jumped at the chance for freedom. She immediately stood and said, "Sorry, Brother William, but I'm afraid we gotta go," and was through the door before he had time to respond. Kitty followed her, whining that she hadn't finished her dessert.

"Well!" Brother William began, but Mary cut him off by clearing his plate and asking if he would like tea or coffee. Jane suggested that they move back to the parlor, and the rest of the evening was pleasant enough.
The ride to the city was as dull as Lizzie feared. Brother William pontificated the entire way. Mary alternated between silent agreement and prim conversation. Lizzie looked out the window, attempting to lose herself in her thoughts. She considered reading a book, but she was quite certain that Brother William would deeply disapprove of the murder mystery she'd brought.

They arrived safely enough, but they had barely set foot in their room at Rosings Hotel when Brother William announced they must hasten to introduce themselves to Preacher de Bourgh. Mary glanced in the mirror to check that her tight braids were still smooth and then dragged Lizzie willy-nilly out of the hotel.

The pavilion was full of people rushing about with chairs and tables and ribbons, most of them glancing nervously over their shoulders as they worked. Brother William ushered them into a back section where a large, upright woman with iron-gray hair was issuing a constant stream of orders. She looked over as they entered, and Brother William seemed uncertain whether he should shake hands or bow.

"Brother William Collins, I believe. Who are your companions?" Preacher de Bourgh asked, eyeing Lizzie's rumpled sweater and bobbed hair with distaste.

"Indeed, ma'am. This is Mary Bennett, who has been assisting the Lord's work in Meryton, and her sister Elizabeth," Brother William responded.

"Well, girl? How old are you?" Preacher de Bourgh demanded of Mary.

Mary was holding herself up very straight and breathing rapidly. "Yes, ma'am. I'm twenty, and my sister is twenty-two. I'm so very honored to meet you, ma'am, and to be at your revival," she said.

"Hmm. Well, I suppose you look tidy enough. We are engaged in the Lord's work and our appearance must reflect that at all times. Your shoes are dusty, so be sure to have them cleaned at the earliest opportunity, and I do not altogether like the color of that skirt. Have you got a handkerchief?"

Mary gulped and produced her handkerchief, which Preacher de Bourgh minutely examined.

"An acceptable cotton, but the folds are not crisp. In the future you will use a small amount of starch to ensure a precise line," she eventually declared.

Mary nodded silently and put the handkerchief away.

Preacher de Bourgh turned her eyes to Lizzie. "You are not fit for the Lord's work while you pursue such frivolity," she began.

Lizzie interrupted her. "Indeed I am not. I just wanted to bring my sister over, and now I'll go back and unpack our things. Good evening, Preacher de Bourgh," she said, and turned smartly around and walked out, leaving Mary and Brother William to their own devices.

Darcy shook hands with his accountant as they left Darcy's office at the Fitzwilliam Theater. He was finally caught up on the business that had accumulated while he was caring for Georgiana, and now the theater looked forward to a busy and profitable weekend.
The theater itself was abuzz with activity. Chorus girls and musicians filled the halls, the stage was covered in scenery pieces and stage crew members, and the lobby was being cleaned and polished in preparation for the evening performance. Darcy saw the accountant safely into a taxicab and stood for a moment, enjoying the evening breeze. The pavilion across the road was easily as crowded and busy as the inside of the theater.

Now that his sister was beginning to recover and the theater was running smoothly again, Darcy began to consider whether he could manage to see Lizzie again sometime soon. It might look odd if he returned to Meryton so soon, but perhaps he could convince Charles to visit, and invite Jane and her sister to accompany him? Certainly Caroline would support the visit, if not the presence of the Bennet sisters.

He saw a young woman leave the pavilion and walk towards the Rosings Hotel. His feet were moving towards her even before he realized that he recognized the way she moved - the was Lizzie, indignant over the stupidity of the world. The fact that he had often been the locus of that stupidity did not change the fact that he recognized her and was drawn to her.

They reached the front door of the hotel almost at the same time. Lizzie hadn’t been paying attention to her surroundings, but now she looked up to see who had opened the door for her.

"Good evening, Miss Bennet."
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lizzie blinked at the man in front of her. It was definitely Will Darcy. Unless, of course, she was hallucinating from the cumulative effects of travel, hunger, and superciliousness, which at the moment seemed quite likely.

"Mr. Darcy?" she asked.

He smiled. "It is you. I...what are you doing here? Not that I'm not pleased to see you, of course," he stammered. Other travelers were coming to use the door, so he touched her elbow to guide them both into the lobby of the hotel.

Lizzie blinked at him. "I'm sorry, I don't seem to be a bit blotto at the moment, or something. I'm here with my sister, who is attending the meeting across the street. We just got in."

"You must be exhausted. I won't keep you. What are your plans? Will you be in town long?"

"I'll feel better once I have a chance to freshen up. I can't stick the meeting, not for anything, so I suppose I'll unpack my things and then find something to eat, and maybe a show or something later."

Darcy wasn't sure whether she'd meant to give him an opportunity, but he wasn't about to pass it up, either. "Would you like to join me? I was going to find a restaurant or coffee shop for a quick meal, and then watch the evening show at my theater."

Lizzie hesitated. She still hadn't made up her mind about Will Darcy, and as it had never occurred to her that she might see him again, she hadn't even considered whether she wanted to. Then her stomach growled, and the that decided her. "That would be lovely, thank you. I hope you won't mind if I go up to my room for a bit? I won't be long."

He smiled down at her. "Of course. Take your time."

As they took their seats in the coffeeshop, which was decorated to look like a Spanish village, Lizzie asked after Violet.

"She's fine, as far as I know," Darcy replied, "Once she sobered up she was able to tell us who she was, and we were able to take her to her parents immediately. I'm actually slightly acquainted with them. I believe she's expected to recover well, but of course I don't know any of the specifics of the matter."

"I'm glad she is with her family. And your sister? How is she?"

Darcy sighed. "Not as well as I hoped. She is well, physically, and regaining her strength, but her spirits are very low. I am not even certain she is glad to be home. I worry for her."

Lizzie nodded. "I hope she will recover. I don't know very much about cocainism, but I gather drunks who become sober are very given to low spirits also. I believe it gets easier with time."

"That is what the doctor says, though of course I cannot help but worry. Who have you been discussing drunks with? That's not a common topic of conversation."
Lizzie smiled wryly. "Most recently, with Brother William Collins, a young man attached to the Salvation Army in Meryton. He is the one who invited my sister and me to the meeting, and on the ride up I was priveledged to hear a great many of his opinions on the problem."

"A knowledgable young man, then?" Darcy cocked one eyebrow.

Lizzie smiled primly. "A pious one, rather."

They shared a commisterating grin. Lizzie continued, "I assure you that neither he nor my sister Mary would be guilty of any frivolous behavior, but I suspect that they will both discover a calling towards matrimony at some point. I don't like him myself, but I believe it would make Mary happy."

After their meal, they walked back to the theater. Preacher de Bourgh was in full swing, and her sermon could be clearly heard from the street. "Repent, you sinners!" she bellowed, "Smash the bottles and stills you are hiding in your closets, and fit them with shelves instead, so that your house may be useful and pleasing to all!"

"I do hope her meeting doesn't disturb your theater at all," Lizzie said as they crossed the street.

"I doubt her voice will carry, but if they sing loudly enough then the audience may be able to hear it faintly during the quiet parts of the play. Thankfully, we are showing a comedy tonight, and there will be no moments of tension or high emotion to be disturbed by stray noises."

Chapter End Notes

I've no idea how often stills were hidden in closets, but Catherine de Bourgh's feeling on the topic is quite well-documented
Chapter 20

Somehow, Lizzie found that she could not stop smiling as she got ready for bed that night. Darcy had been pleasant and entertaining during dinner. The show had been hilariously funny, and their conversations during the intermission and over coffee afterwards had been refreshingly natural. Darcy had relaxed as he told her about the little dramas in casting and rehearsal, and she had found herself relaxing too, and enjoying his company.

Darcy had asked if he could take her to lunch the next day, and she had agreed. She wouldn't be in town for long, after all, and it would be sensible to investigate this new side of Darcy as efficiently as possible.

Mary had not returned by the time Lizzie turned out the light. Apparently Brother William's injunctions on the subject of early bedtimes did not apply to those doing the Lord's work for Catherine de Bourgh.

Mary got in at two in the morning, but was awake and dressed and insisting that Lizzie get up by seven.

"You know very well that I am not here for my own enjoyment, but to serve where I am needed, and it would be most remiss of me to indulge in the sin of laziness," Mary replied to Lizzie's mumbled complaints about the time.

Lizzie shook her head to clear it, and dressed as quickly as possible. Seeing Mary's anxiety, she did no more than brush her hair before declaring herself ready for breakfast. She could always come back afterwards and apply her makeup, after all.

Mary led the way downstairs to the room set aside for breakfast for those working at Catherine de Bourgh's revival. They loaded their plates with hotcakes and fruit and turned to find that Brother William had selected a table and was pulling out their seats for them.

"Miss Mary, are you well?" Brother William asked as they sat down.

"I confess I am a little tired, but fully prepared to do the Lord's work today," Mary replied firmly.

"You must be nearly jingle-brained. You didn't get in before two," said Lizzie.

"Is this true?" Brother William demanded, peering closely at Mary.

Mary nodded. "I helped clean up the tent and set it up for today, and the refreshing room for the ladies needed new ribbons, and then someone asked me to type up some notes for a report, and I didn't like to say no. I know how important it is."

"Nonetheless, I hope you will take better care of yourself. Our Lord does promise to give His beloved sleep," Brother William replied gently.

Mary blinked in confusion, and then nodded and smiled at Brother William.

Lizzie watched in avid fascination. She had never imagined that either of them was capable of this kind of tenderness.

A woman bumped into Mary's chair as she passed their table, and the moment was broken. Lizzie
finished her breakfast, bid her sister farewell, and headed back upstairs to finish getting ready for the day.

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Lizzie passed a pleasant morning, and met Darcy for lunch. If she had been fascinated by Brother William's care for her sister at breakfast, she was far more astonished at Darcy's focused attention at lunch.

If he hadn't been so worried about his sister, Lizzie realized, she might have enjoyed Darcy's company from the start. She was certainly enjoying it now. He'd been attentive, slyly flirtatious, interested and interesting.

Of course, if he hadn't been concerned about his sister, she would probably never have met him. So it was probably all for the best. She certainly didn't allow his previous behavior to stop her from looping her arm through his and leaning into him as they walked slowly back towards the hotel.

"I'm busy this afternoon, and this evening I'm eating with some business associates and their wives," Darcy said as they entered the lobby.

"Oh, of course. Thank you so much for lunch," Lizzie replied, smiling at him.

Darcy shifted his weight. "Perhaps...perhaps you could join us?"

"I..." Lizzie began, but broke off as she caught a glimpse of something behind him. "Jane? What are you doing here?"

Jane came forward to hug Lizzie. "It's Lydia! She didn't come home last night! Kitty says she and Lydia had planned to come to the city with Wickham..."

"They were supposed to take me with them!" Kitty broke in.

"Why don't you go up to your room to discuss this," Darcy murmured in Lizzie's ear. "I'll arrange for them to send up sandwiches."

Lizzie turned and put her hand on his arm. "Could you come too? If you're not too busy? I'm sorry to impose, but you know the city far better than I do."

Darcy put his hand over Lizzie's. "Of course. Take your sisters upstairs. I'll be up shortly."

Lizzie thanked him and gave him her room number, then turned to shepherd her sisters upstairs.

Once upstairs, Lizzie sent Jane to wash her face and tidy her hair. Lizzie sat down to question Kitty herself.

Kitty was sulky and reluctant to answer. She and Lydia had planned to head to the city and become stars. Wickham had promised to get them auditions with all the top producers. Lydia and Wickham had been spending time together without Kitty. Kitty had no idea where Lydia planned to live or what producers Wickham planned to visit.

Jane came out of the bathroom at the same time that Darcy entered. Leaving Kitty by the window, Lizzie came to sit at the table with them.
"She doesn't know where Lydia might be. Honestly, she mostly just seems upset that they didn't bring her with them," Lizzie said.

"I've always supported Lydia's dream, but she's so young! I thought I should come find her. Kitty didn't seem to know where Lydia planned to live. And I don't think Lydia has much money, either," Jane said.

"Lydia didn't make plans at all, if you ask me," Lizzie muttered.

Darcy frowned. "I can make inquiries among the producers and casting agencies, of course. But...are you certain she went with Wickham?"

Lizzie shrugged. "Kitty seems to think so, and says they've been spending time together. You don't think...?"

Darcy shook his head. "Unlike Violet and my sister, Lydia doesn't have much money. I doubt she's in that sort of place."

"But you don't think Wickham was telling the truth."

"It would be highly out of character," Darcy said.

"But then, where is she?" Lizzie asked.

Darcy drummed his fingers on the table, thinking hard. "There are...worse fates...than what my sister experienced, but I don't think Wickham has that sort of connection, and I believe he would shrink from doing something quite so illegal."

"I don't understand why she would have gone without planning ahead," said Jane, rubbing her eyes.

"Jane, have you slept?" Lizzie asked.

"A little. I was waiting up for Lydia, but I dozed some in the parlor. And then there was the train ride."

Darcy stood up and turned to Lizzie. "I believe I should place calls to a few of my acquaintances and see if I can figure out what Wickham is up to. I can do so more easily from my office. Perhaps your sister should stay here and rest?"

Lizzie nodded. "Perhaps I could come with you? If you have questions about Lydia, I could answer them? If I won't be in the way, of course."

Darcy smiled. "No, I'd like to have you. It may be a bit boring, though."

"I had no other plans. I can bring a book."
An hour later, Lizzie was curled up in a comfortable chair in Darcy's office, smoking a cigarette and giggling over a script called Daisy at the Burn House. True to his word, Darcy had called several people about Wickham and was waiting for them to call back with more information. In the meantime, he had moved on to other work and other meetings. One secretary has slid her eyes over Lizzie and sniffed, but for the most part they had ignored her presence.

The phone rang, and Darcy answered it. Lizzie stopped reading to listen to his side of the conversation, but Darcy said very little.

"—that's probably it. Thanks for letting me know," Darcy finished. He hung up the phone, then stood and reached for his jacket. "We may have found it," he said.

Lizzie got up and put on her own coat. "You know where they are?"

"Not definitely, but Wickham has been working with Abe Minsky. If he took Lydia to him, we need to get her immediately," he replied, leading the way downstairs to the street.

"Who is Abe Minsky?" Lizzie asked once they were in Darcy's car and driving through the streets.

"Abe Minsky and his brothers run Minskys Burlesque. It's less theater and more comedy sketches, novelty acts, and dancing girls."

"That doesn't sound so bad."

"Most burlesque halls keep within the levels of taste and legality. Minsky's does not. They get raided on a regular basis, and the managers press the girls to reveal more of themselves than is seemly. Lydia is younger than most, and probably uneducated about the law, and she'll be quite vulnerable to their tactics," Darcy explained.

"What can we do? Will she be all right?"

Darcy reached over to hold Lizzie's hand, squeezing it comfortingly. "We'll go get her now. She's underage, so they'll let us take her. I don't know whether she performed last night, but I haven't heard anything about a raid last night. We'll get her, and hopefully she'll learn her lesson and not be so foolish again."

Lizzie snorted. "Well, I hope so, but I won't depend on that. Thank you for helping us. I don't think we'd have been able to find her without you."

"We haven't found her yet, but I hope we will. And of course I would help you."

Lizzie glanced over at Darcy's face. He looked entirely calm and focused on driving, but she could hear the sincerity in his voice. It was terribly reassuring.

They pulled up outside a theater with a sign in front that said "Burlesque As You Like It – Not a Family Show" in dazzling letters. The front doors were locked, but Darcy hammered on them until they were opened by a disheveled doorman, who demanded to know what they wanted.
"William Darcy, here to see Minsky," Darcy snapped, and pulled Lizzie past the doorman and into the lobby without waiting for a reply.

"Mister Abe ain't here," stammered the doorman.

Darcy swung around to look at him. "Well, who is here?"

"Mister Billy is in the office," said the doorman.

"He'll do. Where's the office?" Darcy demanded.

The doorman had just pointed to the left when music started playing in the theater, accompanied by the sound of dancing feet and an indistinct voice shouting instructions. Lizzie instinctively turned and pushed open the doors to see what was going on.

The stage, with the famous runway that extended out into the audience, was filled with dancing girls. They all wore matching pink and gold outfits consisting of a brief top, which covered only their breasts, and a translucent skirt, which covered their hips but clearly displayed their legs. A man in black clothes was moving between them, alternating between calling out the next dance steps and providing individual criticism of the dancers.

Lizzie drew closer. They all wore the same makeup, making it harder to spot her sister. She was halfway down the aisle when she recognized Lydia near the end of the line of girls, so she moved to that part of the theater and waited for the music to stop.

Finally the choreographer called for the music to stop. He turned to give further instructions to the girls, but before he could start, Lizzie stepped forward and shouted, "Lydia Madeline Bennet, get down here!"

Most of the girls erupted into whispers and tittering laughter, but Lizzie and Lydia just glared at each other. Lydia was the first to drop her eyes, and she reluctantly made her way down to the floor.

"What's your beef, Lizzie?" she demanded.

"My beef? My beef is that you left, without any proper plans and without telling us where you were going! You are underage, Lydia! You're still in school! You are far too young to be performing, much less in a place like this!"

"But I want to dance! Wickham knows the Big Cheese here, and they pay me here! I could get fifty clams a week if I make it!" Lydia whined.

"If you don't get nailed, of course. You don't know what you're doing, Lydia," Lizzie retorted.

"Oh, break it up! This isn't a can house or a chip joint! I'm not some chippy! Some sister you are!" Lydia said indignantly.

"You're a swell kitten, Lydia, but this place gets raided all the time, and..."

"You're such a bluenose! I hate you! I find this swanky place where I can make dough easy as duck soup, and they let me wear all these glad rags, and you just stand there and jaw about how I shouldn't!" Lydia exploded.

Lizzie sighed and grabbed Lydia's shoulder, steering her to the side door where she assumed the dressing rooms were. "Bluenose or not, you are still underage and you're still not allowed to leave home. Now go get changed."
"I hate you," Lydia retorted, but her shoulders slumped and she went backstage.

"I'll be waiting in the lobby," Lizzie called after her.

Lizzie turned, taking in the fascinated stares of the other girls and the disgruntled expression of the choreographer. "Sorry," she said, and turned to head back to the lobby. Behind her, the choreographer continued the rehearsal.

Darcy was waiting for her in the lobby. "You found her?" he asked.

Lizzie nodded, suddenly weary. "She's changing into her own clothes. She doesn't want to come home."

Darcy moved closer and put a tentative arm around her shoulders. Lizzie slumped against him, so he pulled her closer, against his chest.

"Billy Minsky says they didn't know she was underage. He says they'll be more careful about taking Wickham's recommendations in the future," he said, his voice rumbling beneath her.

"I suppose that's the best we can hope for," Lizzie muttered.

"We could probably get him arrested for kidnapping, actually, but I doubt you want your sister exposed like that. I think I may hire a private dick, and see if I can find evidence that could be used against him."

"I'm sure he's done something," Lizzie said, lifting her head and stepping away.

Lydia came out, lugging a small bandbox. Lizzie recognized the dress she wore, but the hat was new.

"Is that a new hat?" Lizzie asked, as lightly as she could.

Lydia's sulky frown deepened. "I suppose I can't spend my dough when I have it?" she demanded.

Lizzie rolled her eyes. "It's a very nice hat. We should go now."

Lydia harrumphed and followed her out the door.

Chapter End Notes

Minsky's Burlesque was a real show and did get raided more than average. I have no reason to think they pressured their dancers inappropriately, though.

And, as previously noted, Lizzie does not know that cigarettes are bad for her. Don't be stupid, folks.
Chapter 22

Lizzie leaned back in her gilt chair at their table at the speakeasy, sighing with relief at finally being able to relax. Some of their dinner companions from the restaurant would join them soon, and Darcy had excused himself and would be back shortly, but for the moment she was alone.

Dinner with Darcy and his business associates had been pleasant, but her pleasure at being with Darcy had been tempered by the feeling that she might, at any moment, be called upon to explain who she was and why Darcy had brought her. None of the others had actually asked, of course, but that hadn't stopped her from worrying.

And then, of course, there was Darcy himself. She was strongly aware of her growing attraction to him. He seemed the embodiment of an ideal: handsome, intelligent, conversable, charming.

She'd been immensely relieved that Darcy had not withdrawn from her after they'd dealt with Lydia. Lizzie and Darcy had decided on the way back to the hotel that the simplest solution would be to send Jane, Kitty, and Lydia home on the earliest train possible, and not tell Mary or Brother William anything about it. Mary would doubtless hear about it when she got home, but there was no reason to spoil her weekend.

Lydia had been sulky but obedient, so Lizzie had taken her into the hotel to wake Jane and Kitty while Darcy left to arrange for the train tickets. Lydia had immediately started fighting with Kitty. Despite their squabbling, Jane had agreed that returning immediately was the best solution, and between them Lizzie and Jane packed the younger girls' things and bundled them, still squabbling, into the waiting car.

Darcy had been waiting at the train station. In addition to acquiring the tickets, he had a hamper of sandwiches, a book for Jane to read, and sheet music of several popular songs. He explained that he hoped Lydia might like to practice with the latest hits. Lydia was too absorbed in her own woes to thank him, but Jane and Lizzie both appreciated his thoughtfulness.

Lizzie had been concerned that Darcy might have thought better of his dinner invitation and might find an excuse to withdraw it, or simply go to dinner but ignore her all night. He had not, however, and their conversation and flirting had been as delightful as before Lydia arrived in the city.

Which brought Lizzie back to her current dilemma. Darcy certainly seemed to be interested in her, and she was beginning to think he was rather perfect, but neither of them had said anything about continuing the connection. She was due to go home in the morning, so something had to be established tonight. She just didn't know how to make her interest clear.

Lizzie looked up, and saw Darcy coming towards her. She smiled involuntarily. Just then, the band started to play. It took her a moment to place the tune: Lady Be Good, which they'd danced to (rather disastrously) once before.

"There's no cover to maintain now," he pointed out.

"No, I guess not," Lizzie replied, fighting an urge to giggle.
"Would you like to dance?" Darcy asked.

"I'd love to dance with you," Lizzie said, putting her hand in his.

She let him lead her onto the dance floor and pull her close, and reflected that perhaps she wouldn't have to say anything after all.

The end.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the end, folks. Hope you enjoyed it.

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