Lydia, still

by  

Summary

Rocks fall. Everyone dies.

Except Lydia.

Notes

Dear McTabby, the morning after we got our assignments, I woke up with this oddness in my head. I hope it is somewhere in the same universe as what you wanted.
Chapter 1

Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless.
— Jane Austen

Dear Kitty,

You'll never guess where I am today, not even in an hundred years! I am in Mrs ________’s house! You remember, Colonel ________’s wife who never invites us to her card parties or any thing because Wickham is only an ensign. I dare say she is jealous for he's the handsomest by far of the officers and her husband is nothing to him for all that he's a colonel. I can't imagine how she could have married him, he's such a stout old man and not nearly as merry as our dear Colonel Forster. Did I tell you he is nearly forty? Perhaps he was already very rich before they married and she hopes he will die soon and she will inherit. They have no children, you know. Oh! did you hear that Harriet is with child? She wrote me to say so and I wrote to say she ought to come and visit before her confinement, but I have not yet had her reply.

I have been having a jolly time here and spent above an hour in Mrs ________’s dressing room but all her gowns are so plain that there was hardly any thing worth looking at. Her jewels are locked up I expect or she has taken them away with her. There was one treasure that I did find, a dark blue pelisse all edged in white rabbit fur. I wish you could feel how soft and warm it is! I'm sure not even Lizzy has one finer. It is very unfair that Wickham and I have only one servant now and no money to buy pretty things while Lizzy and Jane have rich husbands and can buy what ever they like. I have written to Lizzy to see if she will ask for Mr Darcy's help in locating a better situation but he is so proud and disagreeable I expect he shan't. Though perhaps he might if he is mad in love with her as you say. Lord, I can't imagine!

Since I last wrote I have devised a great scheme to keep track of my borrowings. Two houses ago I found a charming little notebook on a lady's writing desk that had scarcely been used, only three sheets. Now when I leave a place, I write the address and a list of what I've borrowed in it, and when everyone comes back I will return them. Or at least as much as I can. Some things I don't write down, such as food of course. For what did they all expect going away so sudden and leaving it lying about as they did? At least the cold has kept most of it from spoiling, but truly it is just as well I am here to eat it up since otherwise it would only go to waste.

It continues very cold and I am more than glad of having gotten the trick of lighting the fire. I do not wish to ever repeat that first night on my own when it was so horrid dark and cold. I thought I should die from it! Papa always said that Lizzy was the only clever one of us but I am certain that I am just as clever as she and maybe even more too. I wager he will change his mind once he learns about all I've managed on my own.

In my last letter I told you how I found the room with all the maps and charts and things. They were not very amusing to look at being only a lot of lines and squiggles and the names of towns. I've decided that I will make my own map all about my adventures and it will be a vast deal more interesting. I began today with our house and drew the path I took here with interesting locations marked such as where I found the maps in the first place and where I tore my second best petticoat climbing a locked gate. (It was a good eight feet, I'm certain of it.) You know how tiresome I find mending and if only Molly was still here she could do it. How I will scold her for leaving when she returns!

Longbourn was always so dull and quiet but heavens it was nothing to this. Do you know, I do
not think there are even any dogs or cats left hereabouts. They must have taken them all with
them. I do find it strange that everyone should take their pets but leave so many of their clothes
and things. But perhaps they were worried that the French would kill them and eat them. They eat
frogs, you know. And snails. Imagine! I am sure I would scream if ever I saw a plate of them.
Nasty, slimy little things!

When everybody returns I think they will be amazed at my adventures and probably ask me to
write a book about them. Perhaps I'll even get a medal for bravery, for I've certainly been braver
than everyone who's run away.

I do not know when I will be able to put this letter in the post, or when it will even come. There
have been no riders through for weeks and it must be because of all this nonsense about the
French. You might hear about it in the papers before my letter ever arrives. How I shall laugh if
that's how it turns out! I am sure Papa will let you visit then and I will take you round to all the
places on my map. Give Mama and Papa and Mary my regards.

Your affectionate sister,
Lydia Wickham
Lieutenant Commander Data's log, Stardate 46425.1. After the recent incident with the sentient hologram Moriarty, Lieutenant Barclay and I are undertaking a thorough diagnostic of all holodeck systems. Commander La Forge has taken the precaution of quarantining the holodecks in the event that, in the Commander's words, Moriarty has left us a parting gift.

"Data to Lieutenant Barclay."

"Barclay here, sir."

"Lieutenant, are you running any programs at present?"

"No, no, Commander, I haven't activated anything yet."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Data out."

Data considered the information before him. "Computer, what program is running in Holodeck 1?"

*There is no program running in Holodeck 1.*

"Computer, is there a program running in any holodeck?"

*Negative.*

"What is the location of the active program?"

*Unknown.*

"Curious," Data said to himself. He had cultivated a habit of occasionally speaking his thoughts aloud after observing that Humans and several other humanoid species seemed to engage in this self-communication frequently — though for what purpose he could not discover. It had now been incorporated so fully into his subroutines that it was an entirely unconscious behaviour.

"Computer, transfer the active program to Holodeck 1."

*Program has been transferred.*

Data stepped through the holodeck doors and into a frozen winter scene. The cobbled street on which he stood was dusted in white, indicating a recent snowfall. Despite the number of houses surrounding him, there was no evidence of activity. He could detect no sound but the sharp whistle of the wind.

"Computer, what program is running in Holodeck 1?"

*Unknown.*

"Who activated this program?"

*Unknown.*

"When was it activated?"
"That is the same date as Moriarty’s attempt to take over the Enterprise." Data calculated the probability that the two events were related at 97.86%. He considered the scene before him. "Computer, are the holodeck safety protocols functioning?"

*Holodeck safety protocols are active.*

"Are there holograms present in this program?"

*There is one hologram present.*

"What is its location?"

*The hologram is located in grid G7.*

Data began to walk.
Chapter 3

Dear Kitty,

I am even more sure now that I shall be very famous when I publish my book than I was two days ago. I dare say you will not believe me when I tell you, but you must for it is all the truth. Today I met a gentleman from the Orient! He told me his name but I've forgotten it for you can't imagine what a fright I had when I saw him. I was outside, you know, and he came up to me bold as you please and said hello! When I got my breath back I asked if he was French for I thought I ought to be prepared to defend myself or run away, but he said that he wasn't. Then I looked at him properly and what do you think? His skin was a strange golden colour and even his eyes. And then I guessed that he was from the Orient and he said that he was. La!

He asked me so many questions, it was as though I had Papa or Lizzy quizzing me over some thing or other! But I didn't mind so much as it's been an age since I've had anyone to talk to saving you and he was very interested in what had happened. So I told him all about that Mr More-somebody who came and told the Colonel that the French were coming and we were to get away to safety, and how he said it was an order from the King, but that I said that if that was so, why did the General not have the order instead of him? And the gentleman from the Orient agreed with me that our soldiers would defeat any French regiment easily, for they are so much braver, and there was no reason at all to leave. Then he wanted to know where everyone had gone and if I was all alone and so I told him how they had started leaving in the nights and after only a week it was just Wickham and me, and Molly. And then in the end just me. I could not remember where they'd all gone as I did not listen to above half what that man said for I was sure it was nonsense. I think he wondered why my Wickham had gone too, and left me here, so of course I told him that it must be because he has gone to find them and make them return, for he didn't leave a note but he had talked of it often when everybody began to go. And I had told him he ought not go because of course they'd all be back in a day or two. I had no idea that it would really be so long! It must have been very far, and that is why Wickham has not yet returned with them all.

It has become very tiresome on my own, though my adventures do take up a good deal of every day. But I so long for a ball or assembly. Even a card party at Aunt Phillips' would do! When the regiment returns, I shall tell the Colonel he must give a ball to celebrate. I am sure Papa will let you visit then and we will have new gowns made and I will introduce you to all the officers. Perhaps we shall find you a husband!

But I was telling you about the gentleman from the Orient. What do you think, he has a cat. Her name is Spot and she is curled up by the fire right now with her tail twitching. After I had answered all the gentleman's questions, he said he thought he knew where it was likely they'd all gone. He has gone himself to tell them there is no danger. His horse is very fast, he said, and he thinks it will not be above two days before the whole town is returned. How strange it will be to see this empty place full again! I will be glad to see my Wickham, of course, and all our friends, but how I shall laugh at them for running away for nothing while here I have been all this time, as cozy and safe as any thing.

The gentleman asked me to look after Spot while he is gone as he did not like to take her on horseback. She is a very pleasant cat and does not hiss or scratch but purrs when I pet her. Do you remember that bad tempered mouser Papa had when we were little? It bit you when we tried to pet it and you cried and cried. When Wickham is home again I shall tell him we must get a cat of our own.

Lord, how my hand is cramped from all this writing! I am for bed, I think. I'll write you again
when everyone is home and tell you how shocked they are to see me and hear of my adventures.

Yours, &c.
Data found the captain's Ready Room almost as restful as his own quarters. There was very little extraneous sensory input and the captain himself was a quiet, contained man. As he waited for Picard to read the report he and Lieutenant Barclay had compiled, Data occupied himself by calculating the ambient temperature, the current warp speed, and the sum of every possible path of each fish in the captain's aquarium.

Finally, Picard spoke. "You've found no evidence to suggest that Moriarty had anything to do with this rogue program?"

"Only that he activated it, along with the other programs Lieutenant Barclay has listed."

"Yet this one continued to run even after he was contained. Fascinating. And this hologram, this... Lydia Wickham, also remained active. How does your analysis account for that?"

"I am only able to offer supposition, Captain," Data said.

Picard gestured for him to continue.

"When I learned that a single hologram was active within the program, I considered it possible that it, like Moriarty, had become self-aware. However, after speaking with Mrs Wickham, I determined that she was as unaware of her state as any other functional hologram. That being the case, and without any influencing external factors, my only explanation is that her continued existence was due to her own will."

"But you said that she was not self-aware."

"She was not. However, the possibility exists that her own belief in her reality became an active variable within the program. It would explain why other characters only disappeared at night, while she slept, and why the last to disappear were those closest to her."

Picard frowned slightly. "It seems highly improbable that a hologram could alter its own program, whether consciously or unconsciously."

"Agreed, Captain," Data said. "However, the holodeck matrix diodes operate using paraconsistent three-valued logic systems to allow for ambiguity and contradictions within their parameters. The capacity to integrate the unknown is at the heart of holodeck technology. And," he continued, "as Sherlock Holmes himself said: when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

"Indeed, Mr Data." The captain steepled his fingers and leaned back. "As early as the 21st century, Humans were building computational models of the meta-representational structures of consciousness itself, trying to find its neural correlates. Now here we are, three hundred years later, and life continues to surprise us with its ingenuity, even when it arises from our own technology."

"Perhaps especially then, sir."

Picard nodded thoughtfully. "One more question, Data."
"Captain?"

"Once you had established that the character was merely a hologram, you could have simply terminated the program then. Instead, you brought Spot to the holodeck and waited until the hologram had fallen asleep to do so. Why?"

Data considered the question. "I do not have a logical reason, Captain. But... she was little more than a child. I did not wish her to be alone. I would not wish to be alone under the same circumstances."

The captain smiled slightly. "I know that it is your continued desire to become more Human, Commander, and yet sometimes I think it is we who ought to be more like you."

"Sir?"

"I wonder if it would have occurred to anyone else to show such consideration for a hologram. Well done, Mr Data."

"Thank you, sir."

"And please extend my compliments to Spot," Picard added with another smile.

Data inclined his head to acknowledge the captain's humour. "I am sure she will be gratified to receive them."

Chapter End Notes

The information about logic systems was gleaned from Siri Hustvedt's novel The Blazing World; "computational models of the meta-representational structures of consciousness itself" is a direct quote. The Sherlock Holmes quote belongs to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, of course. And everything else is my own fault. I'm so sorry?

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