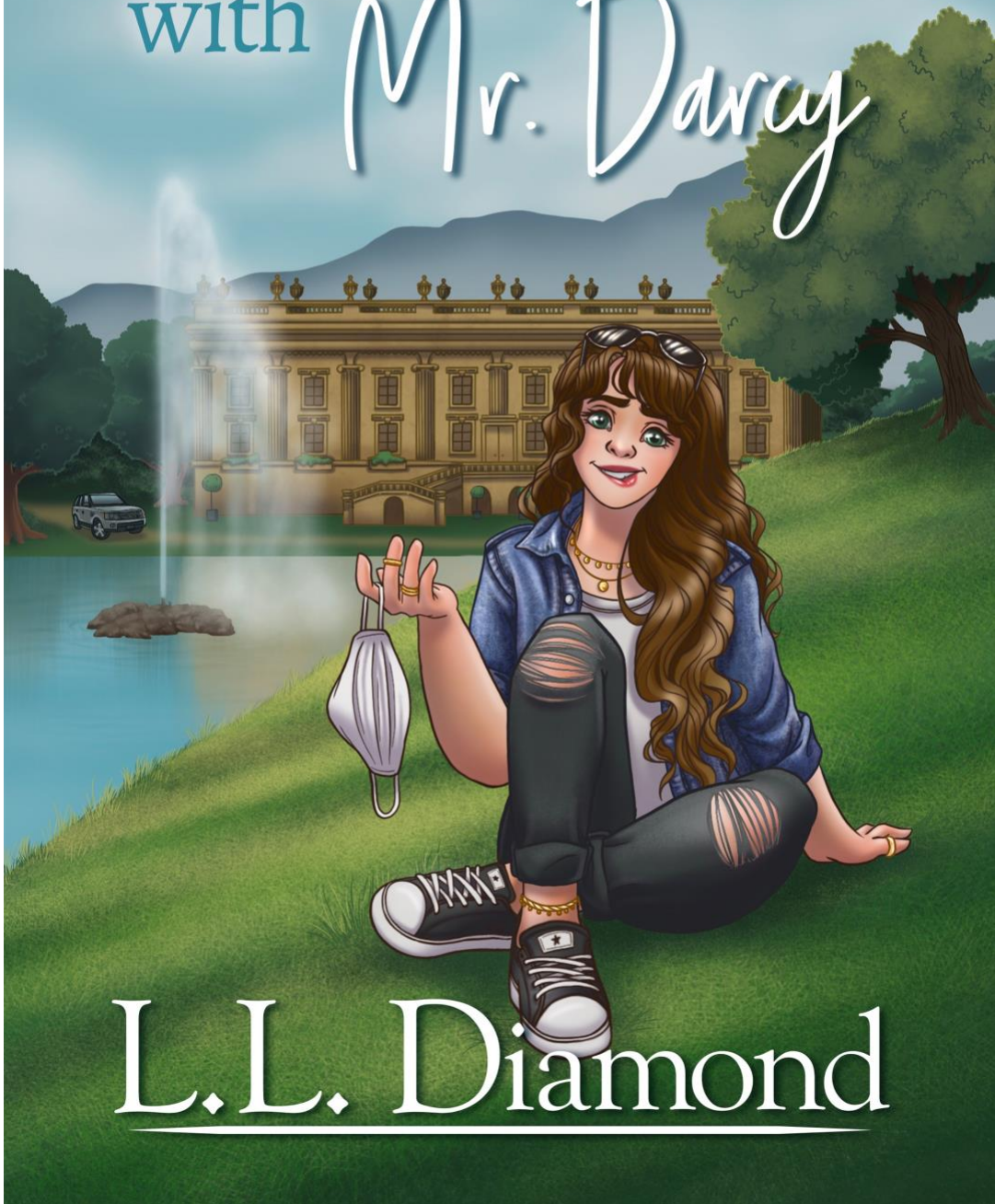


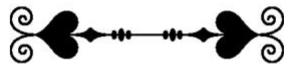
Confined with Mr. Darcy



L.L. Diamond

Confined with Mr. Darcy

Outtakes



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Confined with Mr. Darcy Outtakes

By L.L. Diamond

Published by L.L. Diamond

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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LLDiamond>

Instagram: @l.l.diamond

Twitter: @LLDiamond2

Blog: <http://lldiamondwrites.com/>

Austen Variations: <http://austenvariations.com/>

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It's Always Been Us

It's Always Been You and Me

Undoing

Confined with Mr. Darcy

For everyone who helped Jane Austen House Museum in their time of need.
Thank you!

The Meeting

William Darcy scanned the interior of the pub with a cringe and a distasteful swallow. If only this were a friendly pint at his favourite London watering hole, but it was far from it. He was stuck in a pub in Meryton of all places. As he'd driven into the village, he hadn't noticed another option along the High street, which was unfortunate. Bingley must not have had any other choice.

He certainly wouldn't have been there if it wasn't for Bingley. His best friend recently asked his girlfriend of five months to marry him—a bit quick, if you asked Darcy, but he'd done his part. He'd spoken to Bingley, attempted to make him see reason and how quickly he was making a lifelong commitment, but Bingley had ignored him and proposed anyway. Darcy couldn't exactly forbid it. Bingley was an adult and could make his own mistakes.

Once he spotted Bingley's ginger-blond hair on the opposite side of the room, he weaved his way through the crowd. Was The Bull and Rose always this busy on a Saturday night? He held himself stiff as a rod, trying not to brush against people as he squeezed through two women who stood back to back. Only Bingley would have his bleeding engagement party in a pub! Darcy sidled between two groups and held up a hand to his long-time friend and his CFO at Darcy Publishing.

"Darcy!" Bingley spread his arms wide, a pint of Guinness held in one of his hands. Darcy held out his own and Bingley gave him a slapping handshake.

"Congratulations, mate." As their hands released, Darcy stepped up to Jane, who smiled in her usual soft way. He leaned in and kissed her cheek. "Congratulations, Jane. I hope you know what you're getting into with this tosser."

She laughed as Bingley grabbed her around the waist and pulled her closer, grinning from ear to ear. Darcy had to respect Bingley's will on this account. Other than at work, Bingley was usually about as decisive as a droplet of water falling from the sky. He could land anywhere depending upon the wind and other factors; however, his friend had never questioned whether Jane was right for him. Despite Darcy's well-meant interference, Bingley followed through and proposed—obviously.

"How about a pint?" Bingley held up a hand. "Mr. Lucas, my friend here needs a pint?"

A balding and rather rotund man grinned and picked up a glass. "Can't leave a man in need, can I?"

"My mum is waving me over," said Jane. She kissed Bingley's cheek and disappeared between a couple of loud teenagers, who were batting their eyelashes and leaning forward just far enough to give peeks of their breasts to the boys they were talking to. He'd lock his little sister Ana in a convent until she was forty if he caught her doing the same.

"Lydia and Kitty," said Bingley.

"Pardon?"

"Those are Jane's youngest sisters, Lydia and Kitty. Mrs. Bennet allowed them to invite a couple of friends so they wouldn't be bored, and they invited a couple of boys they fancy. Jane and Elizabeth both disapproved, but Mrs. Bennet gave her permission before they objected, so what could they do?"

Elizabeth? "Who is Elizabeth?"

"Oh, sorry. Elizabeth is the Bennet's second daughter. She and Jane are very close." Bingley pointed around Lydia and Kitty to a young woman with long mahogany layers trailing down her

shoulders and back. Her vivid green eyes landed on him and his entire body did this odd sort of tremble. That was something that'd never happened before.

"She's pretty isn't she?" asked Bingley next to his ear. "I'm always amazed at how different the two of them are."

"She's okay, I suppose." He peered down into his pint. He couldn't look at her, at Elizabeth, and think straight.

"Okay?" said Bingley, his volume louder and tone higher. "Mr. Lucas said he'd turn on music for dancing a little later. You should ask her and get a closer look. I think you'll find she's more than 'okay.'" His voice deepened as he mimicked him. Lord, he hated when Bingley did that!

"I don't need to dance with her." Darcy spoke through gritted teeth.

"You've danced with Caroline to be polite. Would it kill you to dance with Elizabeth?"

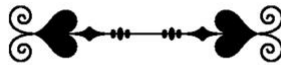
Why was this such a big deal to him? Darcy hated dancing and Bingley knew it. "Look! I'm not going to ask her to dance. I said she's okay and I meant it. She's not the prettiest woman I've ever seen."

Every muscle froze. The pub had gone deathly quiet right when his voice had risen. His eyes squeezed closed for a second and he cleared his throat. After a gulp of his beer, he chanced a glance at this Elizabeth. Her eyes bore through him for a second or two before she leaned over, whispered something to a friend, and turned back to stare at him while she laughed.

"Well done," said Bingley. "I don't think you've ever been that rude to Caroline even though my sister deserves it."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"No worries there, mate."



Elizabeth shoved down that simmering sensation in her gut. That uncomfortable fidgety sensation was slowly travelling through her before she managed to contain it. Tonight was Jane's night, and she wouldn't ruin it—no matter how much of a daft prick that man was.

"Do you know who he is?"

She turned back to her friend Charlotte and shook her head. "I've never seen him before, but since he seems pretty friendly with Charles, I'd say he's his boss. I think they've been friends since uni."

"Oh, Jane told me about him." Charlotte shifted back to peer around her. "William Darcy, right?"

"I think that sounds right. Charles talks about a Darcy a lot now that I hear the name."

Elizabeth turned and looked at him again. He stood so rigidly tall and proud, looking down his nose while he scanned the room. He glanced back in her direction, and when their eyes met, she whipped around to face Charlotte. She pressed a hand just above her bellybutton. What was that flipping and fluttering? She swallowed and breathed a little slower. Maybe she shouldn't have eaten that cauliflower pasta for dinner.

"You alright?" Jane looped her arm through Elizabeth's.

“What did mum want?”

After rolling her eyes, Jane sighed. “She wanted the scoop on Charles’s friend Darcy. She seems to think he’d be interested in Lydia.”

Charlotte bent backwards to glance around everyone at the man in question. “Except he’s looking at Lydia as though she has STI tattooed across her forehead.”

A burst of laughter escaped before Elizabeth could cover her mouth with her hand. “Is he really?” She didn’t want to turn around and have him think she was interested in him for anything other than a laugh.

“Charlotte!” gasped out Jane.

“What? He is!”

“I need to get back.” Her sister gave a tug to her arm. “Why don’t you come meet Darcy?”

“No, I think I’m going to get another glass of wine. I’m sure I’ll meet him some other time.” Her fingers grasped the glass tightly. Thank goodness, she’d already finished that first glass!

“You’ll have to meet him eventually, you know, but I’ll leave you alone.”

As soon as Jane was out of earshot, Charlotte picked up her glass. “Come on. Let’s grab that wine.” She tipped her head in the direction of Bingley. “Looks like a show has started.”

Elizabeth nearly guffawed at the sight of Charles’s sister’s talons sinking into the arm of Darcy’s expensive suit coat. “He looks terrified.”

“I know,” giggled Charlotte. “But that expression is different than the one he uses for Lydia. Do you think they’ve dated in the past?”

“If they have, then he regrets it now.” She slid her glass across the smooth finished oak of the bar as Mr. Lucas shifted over. “It was great of you to shut down the pub for Charles and Jane’s engagement party. I know Jane really appreciates it.”

“You know the two of you are family. I was chuffed to bits to do it.” He leaned across the bar. “That friend of Charles’s is staring at you like he’s going to set you on fire. Why don’t you go introduce yourself?”

How had Mr. Lucas missed her humiliation earlier? Oh well, he’d probably been busy chatting with someone while he pulled their pint. “I think I’ll pass, but thanks for pointing that out.” She had to admit that her best friend’s father pointing out potential date candidates didn’t exactly make her heart go pitter-patter.

The problem was that Darcy was staring. Every time she looked back, his eyes were on her. Jane and Charles had both indicated this Darcy was Charles’s best mate. What were the odds that he wouldn’t come to the wedding? Maybe she’d never have to lay eyes on him again after tonight.

The Gatecrash

Elizabeth relaxed into her chair with her glass of wine, letting the oaky notes of the merlot roll over her tongue. Today had been one of the longest in history, but the annual Rosings Book Festival always meant long days. Lectures from writing industry professionals and tables set out for the different publishers, all who prominently featured their more successful authors filled the weekend, was worth it. Somehow, she always returned to her small flat in London with some new inspiration to interact with her fans or a writing tip she wanted to incorporate into her own unique style.

Her eyes wandered the dining room, the dim lighting making the candles on the tables twinkle brightly in their glass lanterns, creating a romantic glow. When she looked out of the window, the view of the English Channel at night was lovely—particularly since the evening was clear of fog and the moon shone brightly, glimmering off the water.

“Thank you,” said a familiar voice close by. She knew that voice and kept her eyes trained on the view rather than turning to look behind her. Maybe, if she pretended he wasn’t there, he would walk right by.

“Good evening, Elizabeth” was said closer and she stiffened. If only her plan had worked as well as she’d hoped.

Slowly, she turned and looked up at the handsome face of William Darcy, who stood beside her table, softly smiling. “Good evening,” she said. “Are you alright?”

“Yes, thank you. Are you expecting anyone?” He pointed to the chair across from her. Usually, she dined with an author friend or two during these events, but it seemed they’d not travelled to Kent for the Rosings Book Fair this year. Perhaps the virus in China that was cropping up around Europe and other countries in Asia kept them away.

“No, I’m not.”

Before she could say more, he smiled. “Do you mind then? It doesn’t make any sense for me to take an entire table when we can share.”

“No, of course not.” Her stomach sank while she forced her expression to be as pleasant as possible. Why would William Darcy want to sit with her? After the comment he’d made at her sister Jane’s engagement party, she would think he’d go searching for someone—anyone but her. She could just hear Jane’s scolding if she’d told him no.

“Are you having a good time?” he asked while he situated himself.

“Yes, it’s been lovely.” She’d always enjoyed Rosings Book Fair—not that it was a book fair like what she’d had in school, but more a get together of authors and publishers for a weekend of talks and signing events. “Did you enjoy this morning’s panel?” He’d shown up and sat beside her for that as well. The only time she hadn’t seen him today was at the Gardiner Publishing table—after she’d signed several books for him. Why the owner of Darcy Publishing wanted a book by her was a mystery.

“I did. I’ve always found the speakers and panels at Rosings to be informative and helpful.”

“Darcy Publishing is so large. I would’ve expected you to have people specifically for marketing and social media.”

“We do, but these events are great for ensuring we’re not missing some new technique or idea.”

A waiter approached and Darcy pointed to her wine. “Would you like to share a bottle?”

“Oh,” she said, starting. “Um, it’s merlot. I suppose ... if you want.”

He ordered a bottle while she took a sip of hers. She'd only planned on the one glass, but if she was eating with Darcy, she might need another serving or two to make it through dinner. After he cleared his throat, he gave a quick shrug as if he were trying to loosen his shoulders. "Has Jane said anything about the wedding plans?"

Elizabeth pulled her eyebrows toward the centre. "No, nothing recently, but she knows I shut myself away before Rosings."

"You do?"

"Yes, I like to do this after I finish a book if I can help it. I despise trying to come back to what I've been writing after a break, even if it is only a few days."

The waiter returned and opened the wine, pouring a glass for Darcy before he disappeared. "Did you finish?"

"I did, but I'll need to pore over it several times before I send it to the editors at Gardiner." She ran her hands along the pristine table cloth. "But at least the entire idea is out. I don't need to get that muse back and try to remember what I'd wanted to write in the first place."

"Sounds nerve-wracking."

"You have no idea."

This long, painfully-awkward silence followed. Elizabeth sipped her wine, likely more quickly than she normally would if she'd been alone or with Jane. By the time, he walked her through the historic, yet posh hotel to her room, she was a little tipsy. She wished that slight inebriation had helped with the awkwardness of dinner, but it hadn't. At times, they sat quietly while he looked out of the window or watched her. As soon as they reached her door, she slipped the key card into the lock and hurried through, turning and hiding partially behind the door. "Thank you for dinner. Maybe I'll see you tomorrow." He smiled and she took a deep breath in, letting it slowly trickle out.

"Good night, Elizabeth," he said before turning and heading down the hall.

The Hunsford

Elizabeth sighed and sank back into her comfy chair while she enjoyed the view. Rosings had an amazing scenic vista of the water from her hotel room window. Yes, she'd hidden in her room rather than going to the dining room for dinner, but she'd been enduring Darcy's company the entire weekend. He'd shown up at every single talk as well as dinner *every* evening. He'd even happened upon her at breakfast this morning. She simply couldn't take it tonight.

It wasn't like she'd wanted to spend nearly every moment of the event with Darcy. She certainly hadn't even thought about him when she'd signed up, but the problem was she'd been too much of a chicken to tell him. Instead, she'd gritted her teeth, drank entirely too much wine, and bore it with as much grace as a pigeon hit by a car. Okay, maybe that was a bit dramatic. She only felt like a pigeon that'd been hit by a car.

A loud knock nearly made her fall out of her seat. She watched the door for a moment like it might explode. What if it was him? A part of her didn't want to answer it in case it was, but what if it was her uncle at the door? When she'd texted her uncle that she was going to miss that last event, she'd mentioned she had a headache. He might've come to check on her.

After blowing out a noisy breath, she approached the door and touched it gingerly when she opened it. Her stomach dropped to the floor when it was Darcy on the other side. She should've gone with her gut!

"The rep. at the Gardiner table said you have a headache. Are you okay? Do you need anything? I can get you some paracetamol. I think the shop in the lobby has some." He stepped through into the room while he spoke, and she glanced back and forth between the hallway and him. He couldn't have waited for an invitation?

"No, I already took some. Thank you." She hadn't really, but if she sent him out for paracetamol, he would come back. She just wanted him to go.

He scratched the back of his neck and looked around the room for a moment, his eyes settling on the room service cart before he looked back at her. "Hopefully eating helped."

"A little," she said, watching him stand there in the most awkward manner.

He cleared his throat and opened his mouth twice before he blurted, "You must know how much I like you by now. I mean, I tried not to—I really did, but I couldn't help it. Despite your horrible mother and your younger sisters, who behave like they've shagged half the county, you've fascinated me. From the first moment I saw you, I've fought with whether I should tell you how I feel. How much I enjoy being with you—talking with you. This weekend has been brilliant, but I really want us to spend more time together. I thought maybe we could get away. I have a flat in Paris. We could go next weekend? We could take the Eurostar on Friday evening and return late Sunday. Think about it. We could walk along the Seine, go to the Louvre and the Musée D'Orsay, eat croissants and crepes and drink champagne." When his long and rambling speech ended, he simply stood there, his eyebrows high on his forehead.

"You're mental," she said. "Absolutely mental."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You've liked me since the first moment you saw me? Really? Do you remember what you said that evening, because I do? I remember every bloody word!" His mouth opened and closed, but she really didn't give him time to answer. "I believe your exact words to Charles were, 'Look! I'm not going to ask her to dance. I said she's okay and I meant it. She's not the

prettiest woman I've ever seen.'" Elizabeth had dropped her pitch so her voice was almost as deep as she could make it. "And even if you'd apologized for saying that, there's still what your cousin told me about you."

"My cousin?" He frowned and stepped forward. "Which one?"

"The one who owns the biomedical company. What is his name: Robert ...Richard? If you don't remember, he was as pissed as a parrot by the end of the night. After he asked me to dance, he proceeded to tell me all about how you'd tried to break up Charles and my sister. What has my sister ever done to you?"

She paused for a moment, but again, left him no time to speak. "I can answer that because it's nothing. She's never so much as hurt a fly, but you wanted to break her heart. Very nice, Darcy. And now, you seem to think that you can waltz in here and sweep me off my feet by telling how much you like me—even though you don't want to, and how my mother is so horrible. Oh, and let's not forget my sisters, who've probably shagged half the county by the way. Let me tell you something. Regardless of what they do with boys their age, they're my sisters. They sometimes make me want to pull my hair out, but I still love them."

"I didn't think—"

"That much is obvious. You always stand there like a stuck-up prig, staring, and passing judgement on everyone."

He flinched as if he were pinched. "Is that really what you think?"

"What else was I supposed to believe? You said I wasn't pretty and then glared at me whenever we happened to be in the same room."

"But you invited me to dinner..."

"No, you'd always have some excuse or another to ask to sit with me." Her hands clenched so tightly at her sides that her fingernails dug painfully into her palms. "Believe it or not, I don't like to be rude, so I let you. I couldn't understand why, when we'd never had anything other than an awkward conversation, you wanted to eat together much less pay for my meal but you kept coming back. I've drunk more in the past few days than I usually do in a fortnight. You are the rudest man I have ever had the misfortune to meet—"

"I've heard enough," he said in an almost tired voice. "I understand that I was mistaken. Forgive me for taking up so much of your time." Without another word, he strode through the door, letting it slam shut behind him.

Elizabeth dropped onto the bed and put her hands over her face, but quickly pulled them away. They were damp. When had she started crying? "Okay, he's gone, Elizabeth. You can relax and let your hair down."

She looked out of the window before peering back at the door. His expression right before he'd walked out made her chest hurt, but why? Since when did she care whether she'd hurt Darcy's feelings?

"Oh bloody hell," she said, picking up the phone and dialling the number for room service. "Yes...this is room 311. Could you please send up a bottle of Prosecco?"

The Wedding

Elizabeth brushed the wispy bits of her hair from her face while she scanned the garden from an upstairs balcony. Thank the Lord she hadn't caught one glimpse of Darcy so far. Since their colossal disagreement... blow up at the Rosings book fair, he was the last man in the world she wanted to talk to. Eventually, she'd have to dance with him and that was going to be the most awkward and horrifying experience of her life. She was sure of it.

A young blonde flitted across the yard almost skipping towards the main house, entering into a door along the back terrace. She appeared too young to work at Pemberley, Darcy's ancestral estate, but perhaps she had some task for the day that escaped Elizabeth's imagination.

"It's lovely, isn't it?"

Elizabeth spun around to face Jane, who'd just come from the bathroom. "It's beautiful. It was nice of Darcy to let you use the grounds. Mum will be gushing for the next year."

Jane giggled and rolled her eyes, leaning against the door frame. "Mum is simply excited."

"Excitable is the word I think you're looking for."

Her sister clasped her hands in front of her and squeezed them together. "I can't believe I'm getting married today. It was so kind of William to make it happen. I'm just so worried that if we wait, we'll be stuck and then who knows when we'd marry."

"Well, no matter what happens, the deed will be done," said Elizabeth. She stepped inside and plopped down on the huge antique bed, the ornate canopy not even shaking. The thing must've been bolted into the ceiling. "I suppose only time will tell. Regardless, we should get you changed and ready to meet Charles at the front of the aisle."

Jane gave a small squeal and bounced on her toes while Elizabeth laughed. When she was done with her happy dance, she blew out a breath. "Would you get Lydia for me? She said she'd do my hair and makeup."

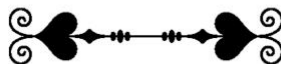
"Are you sure about that? You might come out looking like a drag queen who'd been dragged through a hedgerow backwards."

"Yes," said Jane, with a laugh. "I gave her a trial run a week ago and she did brilliantly. I promise I haven't lost my mind."

"I suppose I'll have to trust you."

Elizabeth hurried down the corridor to the guest room where her mother, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia were getting dressed for the wedding. At the sound of their loud arguing filtering through the door, Elizabeth cringed. She poked her head inside. "Lydia, Jane is ready for you."

"Sweet!" Her youngest sister sprang up from where she sat inelegantly in a wingback chair, her legs thrown carelessly over the arm, and rushed into the hall, chattering endlessly as they walked back to Jane's room. Elizabeth didn't hear one syllable. She was too busy staring at Darcy, who exited one room looking quite dashing in his suit, only to give her a cursory glance before stepping into one across the hall. Well, it seemed he wanted to see her as much as she wanted to see him. That was somewhat of a relief!



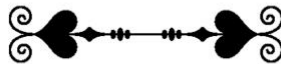
“And you may kiss the bride.”

Elizabeth’s grin probably reached from ear to ear when Charles swung Jane over his arm and laid a giant kiss to her lips. Even Darcy cracked a smile at the sight.

The wedding really had been stunning with the lake and the fountain in the background. The setting was like something out of a fairy tale, and now, Cinderella had her very own Prince Charming to sweep her back down the aisle.

Jane and Bingley started their procession as man and wife, and Elizabeth stiffened as she took a hesitant step toward the red runner that formed a path between the seats set out for family and close friends. She was going to have to touch Darcy whether she wanted to or not.

He didn’t even look at her as her hand slid into the crook of his elbow.



Darcy’s spine was rigid as he led Elizabeth down the aisle and into the ballroom, which was all set up for the reception. As soon as they were through the door, the light touch of her hand on his sleeve disappeared. He didn’t look behind him. He didn’t know what to say to her. He also couldn’t handle it if she’d simply walked off without a word.

He peered down at his feet, finding her stiletto clad feet still standing close by. He cleared his throat. “Excuse me.”

Without giving her a chance to respond, he bolted towards the bar. “Ollie, give me some of that Laphroaig 21 year would you?”

“Of course, Mr. Darcy.” He took a sip while he surveyed the room, trying with everything in him not to let his eyes rest on Elizabeth. She always drew him in. He couldn’t help it. One minute, all was normal and the next, she walked in and turned his world upside down.

He’d been in his study when he noticed her walking the gardens behind the family wing of the house. Even then, after she’d ripped his heart out and stomped all over it at Rosings, he was still attracted to her, drawn to her. How would he manage to extricate her from his heart?

From a safe distance, he kept an eye on how the afternoon progressed. Elizabeth’s mother loudly bragged about how fortunate the family was in Jane’s new husband, her sisters refilled their champagne glasses from the ornate silver fountain numerous times, leaving them giggling and stumbling around the reception—not that Charles noticed. He was too busy making moon-eyes at Jane.

“What are you doing?” hissed Ana’s voice from behind him. “You’ve been holding up the bar since you led Jane’s sister in here. Why aren’t you mingling?”

“Because there’s no point.”

“That’s not true. You can speak with Charles, you can also talk to his new father-in-law. I found him rather funny. He likes to tell Dad jokes.”

“Well, he is a dad,” said Darcy drily.

“Come on. You’re going to have to dance with the Maid of Honour soon enough.”

“Why would he need to do that?” An unpleasant shudder rattled his spine at Caroline’s kiss-ass, cloying tone. “I doubt Charlie is adhering to that outdated practice.” For the life of him, he couldn’t understand how Charles and Caroline came from the same parents. Maybe Caroline

was swapped at birth? Her fingernails dug through his suit coat and into his bicep. Did she sharpen those things into points because it sure stung like she did?

"You don't want to dance with dear old Eliza anyway. Come, you can dance with me instead."

He downed his fourth glass of Scotch and peered over his shoulder at Ana while he slammed the glass on the bar. She didn't say a word but had visibly bitten her lip. "I have no intention of dancing, Caroline."

"Oh, tosh. You always dance with me at these things."

He had to concentrate to walk to the dance floor without falling on his face. Caroline adjusted their arms and gave him a bit of a tug to start moving. Was she going to lead as well?

As he turned Caroline around, trying to ignore the stinging of her talons on his shoulder, he caught a glimpse of Elizabeth being led to the dance floor by Richard. He'd need to have a conversation with Richard when this nightmare was over. No way in hell did he want Richard dating Elizabeth. That would only make his nightmare complete!

The Interview

Leslie: Hi, Ana, thanks for talking to me today.

Ana: No worries. I never thought I'd be interviewed for anything. Should be fun—like being on Graham Norton.

Leslie: Not quite the same as Graham Norton, but I'll do my best. I definitely do not have a red chair, although I admit it would be fun to dump people over. I suppose let's start with the easiest question first. Tell me about your brother. What would you say are his best qualities?

Ana: Oh! Fitzwilliam is simply the best! Since Mum and Dad died, he's been there for me whenever I need him. He makes sure I go to the best schools and researched like mad to help me decide what sixth-form was best for studying music. He'll do anything for his friends and family. I've never known anyone as loyal.

Leslie: He sounds ideal. So, why don't you tell us about his worst qualities?

Ana: (giggles and rolls her eyes) Which ones? Fitzwilliam is brilliant when you know him, but he can be a bit of a bear when he's in a personal-type situation with someone new. He's so stand-offish and reserved at parties or anything social, really. I've always wanted him to find a girlfriend, but I can't imagine anyone getting through his Mr. Hyde personality. Well, until now.

Leslie: His Mr. Hyde personality?

Ana: He hates it when I call him that. He's usually so busy reading work-related material that hopefully, he won't read this.

Leslie: Then let's change the subject a bit. Tell me about Elizabeth Bennet.

Ana: Oh! She's brilliant—absolutely brilliant. She's certainly more outgoing than my brother, which is a good thing. He needs someone like her to drag him away from Darcy Publishing so he doesn't spend all of his time poring over books. He works entirely too much. Her cat is lovely as well. Lately, I've found him cuddling up and purring against my stomach in the middle of the night.

Leslie: Elizabeth lets him out now?

Ana: She has to leave the door cracked. Once he was accustomed to Pemberley, he started scratching and begging to go out during the night. From what Elizabeth has said, he's back with her by morning to give her kisses and cuddles.

Leslie: Tilney is a dear. Now, I know your brother spends most weekends in Derbyshire so he can spend time with you, so you see him often. When did you first realize that your brother had fallen in love?

Ana: You know, I'm not sure. I do know that he's been distracted for a while now. After the Rosings Book Festival, he moped around this house and drank entirely too much scotch. I noticed it on the weekends when I was home, but Mrs. Reynolds told me how he was the same during the week. She seriously considered hiding the Scotch in the cellar so he wouldn't find it. I still can't believe he spent the week working from Pemberley after Rosings. He never does that.

Leslie: Has he ever told you what happened?

Ana: No, but Elizabeth did. I can't say I'm the slightest bit surprised. He can be such a daft prick when he wants to be. It seems she was completely clueless that he liked her, and he had no idea how to flirt or show her how he felt about her. I'm sure he deserved it when she ripped him a new one. I probably would've done the same if a boy behaved the same way towards me. Fitzwilliam would've probably told me to forget about him.

Leslie: Did you do or say anything to get them together?

Ana: Well, you know part of it since you wrote it into the story. I certainly told off Fitzwilliam for being so dense. He had this brilliant idea to invite her to Pemberley, then he goes off and hides in his study. Bingley's suggestion to take her to Mr. Darcy's sculpture was well done, and Fitzwilliam seemed to gain some points from that, but he just had to go and offend her once he started making progress. I mean, Charles and Jane and I did the best we could to help them along, but the two of them are so bloody stubborn. Of course, my brother and his overblown sense of gentlemanlike behaviour didn't do him any favours.

Leslie: I believe I can agree with that. You're being very harsh, though. Don't you think Elizabeth deserves some of the blame for them taking so long to get together?

Ana: Oh, definitely! She was exceedingly stubborn. There were times I wanted to knock her on the head so she'd finally see Fitzwilliam's good side, but I knew forcing them wouldn't put them together. They had to find one another on their own.

Leslie: That's true. Thanks for talking to me, Ana. It's been fun to get some of your perspective on William and Elizabeth's romance during lockdown. Out of curiosity, what do you want to do first when you're allowed to do anything or go anywhere?

Ana: I'm not sure. There're so many places. I miss the cinema, school, and going to the café with my friends. Maybe a holiday somewhere warm. Fitzwilliam can take us to the villa in Santorini. That would be lovely.

Leslie: Sounds like paradise to me. Thanks, Ana.

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