

## Leave to Hope

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# Leave to Hope

by [Stormy Summers](#)

## Summary

Darcy gets a frantic call from Bing that gives him a reason to hope again. If he can save Lizzie from his Aunt first...

## Notes

Wrote this a long time ago before LBD ended, when we were waiting for those last episodes to hit. But just got my A03 account, so decided to throw it up.

## Benefits of Speed Dial

The entire household was in uproar. Bing had heard that phrase once, maybe in a book, or more possibly in a movie, but he had never experienced it until now. He had gone over to Jane's to go over the details of their cross country drive, and to help her finish packing, and had walked into absolute chaos.

Mrs. Bennet was shrieking hysterically in the kitchen, while Mr. Bennet, who had grown weary of trying to calm her down, had snapped and was shouting at her to shut up. Lydia was curled up, sitting on the ground in a corner of the hallway crying in wrenching sobs. Jane was in front of him, trying desperately to explain what was happening over the noise, and looked pretty close to having a breakdown of her own. And Catherine de Bourgh, of all people in the world, was in the den berating Lizzie in shrieking, high pitched tones, while her little dog yapped incessantly.

He had never seen Jane so upset. There were tears on her cheeks and panic in her eyes as she alternated between trying to fill him in on the events leading up to this over all the other noise, but without actually yelling, and listening to the horrible, horrible things Catherine de Bourgh was shouting at Lizzie, which would only make Jane cry harder.

As "Nasty, gold digging whore" thundered out of the den and "We all are ruined!" drifted out from the kitchen Bing realized he had to do something. He had to protect Jane, make her stop crying... and her family of course; he should help them as well.

For one utterly surreal second, he considered marching into the den, throwing Catherine de Bourgh over his shoulder and hauling her out of the house, little dog and all. It seemed like a very manly and take charge sort of thing to do.... but was probably a really bad idea. It occurred to him he knew someone who had better ideas, and who had much more experience with dealing with Catherine de Bourgh.

Bing hesitated briefly. Hadn't he told himself he was going to run his own life, and make plans for himself now? However, he reasoned, this was less of Darcy telling Bing to go against Bing's own desires as Bing having a major problem on his hands and no idea what to do about it. This, he realized, is a situation in life where advice from a friend can be welcomed, as long as you don't follow it blindly. Without a second thought he pulled out his phone and directed it to call Darcy.

"Hello" Darcy's emotionless, yet super polite 'phone voice' answered immediately, and Bing sighed in relief.

"Dude. I'm so glad you answered, you are not gonna believe what's going on."

"You've quite medical school and are moving to New York with Jane?" Darcy replied in crisp tones before "What is all that noise? Where are you?"

Bling blinked, then realized that Darcy must watch Lizzie's videos too. Did everyone know about them but him?

"Uhhh, yea, I am, but that's not what's going on. I'm at Jane's... and your Aunt Catherine is here"

Darcy stopped dead in the middle of the hallway. Gigi, who was hurrying behind him to keep up with his faster pace, collided with his back, then fell on her butt behind him. He didn't move to help her up, or even glance back at her.

"William?" she asked, slowly, worriedly as she picked herself up. "What's wrong?"

"What" Darcy spoke into the phone, not to her "Is she doing there?"

Gigi's eye's widened. He was using his deadly calm voice. It meant he was angry. It also meant that someone out there was going to really regret making him angry. Had something else happened with George? Was there another copy of the tape out there? She began to tug at his arm, like she was little again, to get his attention. She needed to know what was happening.

"Dude, she's screaming at Lizzie, saying some really awful stuff". At that moment, "Disgraced harlot!" came over the phone loud and clear in Aunt Catherine's very distinct tones. "and I think she told Mrs. Bennet about the sex tape. I guess she didn't know and now she's really upset". "How could he do such a thing to my poor Lydia?" rung out in the background in a high pitched, southern twang. "and I don't know what she said to Lydia, but she's really upset.... I think this tore open some wounds".

Bing paused to look at Lydia. She was softly chanting something that sounded suspiciously like "my fault, my fault".

Darcy stood stock still in the middle of the hallway, only distantly aware Gigi was trying to get his attention. He felt physically ill. Aunt Catherine was at Lizzie's house, probably doing everything in her power to destroy any tiny remaining chance he would ever have with Lizzie. His head spun and his stomach twisted like when he was on that horrible carnival ride Gigi had taken him on once. He was going to throw up.

Slowly he managed to grind out, in a voice that made a passing assistant hurry away in fear "put... her... on... the... phone. NOW."

Darcy could hear Aunt Catherine's voice getting louder on Bing's end of the phone, as the other noises crowding the house faded away. "Obstinate girl, I'm ashamed of you! You will give me a straight answer right now! Are you currently dating my nephew?"

He only barely heard Lizzie's answer, a very quiet, hesitant but still firm "No, I'm not".

There was a great sigh, and a pause, and Darcy realized that Bing was probably standing in the middle of the room waiting for someone to acknowledge him. Darcy shifted in impatience, vaguely aware that Gigi was waving her arms in front of him, trying to get some attention. "Give her the phone Bing!"

"Will you promise me that you will NEVER date my nephew?"

Darcy's throat closed up. God no. This couldn't be happening to him. He had been making progress! He'd gotten her to laugh! Hearing her say that he would NEVER had a chance, promising someone to have nothing to do with him, it would destroy him. He would never forgive Aunt Catherine for this, not as long as he lived.

"No I won't!"

'No I won't! No I won't! No I won't!' the words echoed in his head. He caught a breath. Was that what it feels like when your heart misses a beat?

Very slowly, he put his arm out, pressing his hand against the nearby wall, then shifted his weight onto it, leaning closer until his shoulder was leaning fully against the wall, bearing most of his weight. He literally could not hold himself up at the moment.

"If you don't swear to me that you will have no further contact with my nephew, then I will ruin you! I will call every contact I have in the whole of the business and tell them what a scheming, slutty brat you are, and about the disgrace that has shamed your family! You won't be able to get a job carting coffee at the local t.v. station! The degree you've been working so hard over will be useless!"

Darcy bent over double, as though he'd been punched in the stomach, which is exactly what he felt like. He felt his body began to shake as his anger arose to unparalleled heights. How dare she? How dare she threaten his Lizzie?

He felt his body slide until he was sitting on the floor with his back against the wall. Gigi was kneeling next to him, frantic. But he was too focused on the phone, and on the kaleidoscope of feelings spinning through him. He was furious. He was euphoric. He was anxious. He was full of dread. He was hopeful. He also wasn't breathing. He forced himself to take another breath.

"I will do no such thing. Now get out of my house or I'm calling the cops!"

Euphoria won the raging battle and flooded his body. She wouldn't do it. Threatened with the loss of her career, her reputation and the entire future she'd planned for herself and worked SO hard for, she wouldn't swear off of him. It was such an incredible sacrifice, it was such a massive gesture. There was no way that she... it meant that she had to... surely this could be interpreted as... she had to feel something. There was no way she would have done that if she didn't at least like him. If he didn't have SOME chance. He had a chance. And a sign that she might... that she felt at least something for him. He had to get to her right now. He had to make himself worthy of her. He wouldn't let Catherine whisper a word against her to anyone.

A mass of noise had started up again on the other end of the phone. Catherine was shrieking nearly intelligible words, Annie Kins was yapping up a storm, and Bing had joined Lizzie in insisting that Catherine vacate the premises immediately. But the main event was over, and it was time to act. He focused on Gigi.

"We're going to have to make new plans for Christmas. We will not be visiting Aunt Catherine"

The look of bafflement on Gigi's face was priceless. "What? Aunt Catherine? What are you talking about? What's happening? What's wrong?"

But he was already getting up. Bing appeared to have forgotten he was on the phone in the first place, as the sounds coming through were now muffled, as though he had shoved his phone in his pocket. So he hung up and called Mrs. Renolds, as he finally continued his track down the hall. Absently he wondered how many people had passed by while their CEO had an emotional breakdown in the hallway. Once Mrs. Renolds picked up he snapped out orders quickly, trying to restrain himself from sounding too rude in his impatience to get everything done.

"Mrs. Renolds? I need you to re-schedule ALL of my upcoming meetings, for the next few weeks or so. Get everything you can moved to phone or video conference, and put off anything that can't be accommodated as such. I'll be flying to Merryton immediately, so I expect a car to be waiting downstairs in five minutes and the jet to be ready when I get to the airport. Let Jacobs know he'll be in charge of basic operations while I'm gone. "

His mind raced as he mentally listed everything that needed to get done. He needed to grab his suitcase from his office – he always kept one fully packed for any emergency business trips. He needed to call Bing and let him know he'd be staying at Neitherfield for a while – he'd offer to close it up or get it ready to sell or prepare it for whatever plan Bing had for the place, although he doubted that Bing had any plan at all. He needed to call Aunt Catherine and tell her she was a horse-faced bitch that he'd be happy never to see again. He also needed to use whatever threats, real or imagined, that he possibly could to keep her from hurting Lizzie. He needed, he needed....

He needed to detach Gigi from his waist so that he could get everything else done. His baby sister had thrown her arms around his waist and was digging her heels into the carpeting.

"Alright, I'll tell you what's going on. But I need you to walk quickly"

As Darcy walked along the hallway, trying to relate this new development to Gigi, he felt the most incredible sense of hope blooming inside him. Maybe he really did have a chance. Maybe he could win Lizzie after all.

# Seductions of Sock Slides

## Chapter Notes

This time around it's all from Darcy's P.O.V, which I've found I enjoy writing. I tried to characterize him with longer words and more formal thoughts, so if you go through this thinking I need to put the thesaurus down, that's where I was going with that. Lizzie is strangely the hardest one for me to write for. Go figure.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Darcy sighed in relief when the plane finally touched down in Merryton. Honestly, he'd taken flights to Japan that didn't seem to last that long. He'd spent the entire ride to the airport talking Gigi out of coming along. He appreciated how much she wanted to help and how attached she had become to Lizzie, but he needed to face Lizzie on his own, without Gigi or Fitz there as a buffer.

It would be too easy, to let Gigi take charge and organize group events and develop coy (or really, not so coy) little match making schemes. He wanted, he needed, to face her on his own. To be able to ask her out in a clear context of a date, not a bait and switch on a group outing. He also needed to know that he was able to woo the woman that he loved without assistance from his baby sister.

He'd spent most of the plane ride on the phone with Aunt Catherine. He'd reasoned, wheedled, debated, argued, negotiated, threatened, convinced and screamed until he was utterly and completely sure that she wouldn't do any damage to Lizzie. He didn't think he could ever hear the sound of his aunt's voice again without wincing.

In the end, he had told her outright that if she even attempted to 'destroy' Lizzie, he would most certainly destroy her. He would go to war with her on the battleground of the business world. He would use every resource at his disposal to bring her and any enterprise related to her crashing to the ground. Despite the fact that she had lived in the business world far longer than he had, he knew he had a stronger position and a better reputation. Any real confrontation between them would see her suffering far more damage than him.

She had eventually backed down when she realized how serious his threats were and how unparalleled his anger was. Horse faced bitch was one of the nicer ways he referred to her in the length of their discussion. He had come up with some rather creative descriptors that he was rather proud of, actually.

Though she had still delivered quite a monologue about how she only had his best interests at heart and that she was only trying to help him. Apparently she thought that being 'Almost the closest relative that he had left' gave her leave to run his life. He had corrected that misinformed ideal very quickly.

She had also said some horrible things about Lizzie. He'd heard some of it through the phone earlier, and it had enraged him, but he'd gotten a far larger dose of it speaking to her directly. He still wasn't sure where she'd gotten her misinformation, or how badly it had been twisted around by her deliberate misunderstanding of the situation, but he'd have to get someone to look into her source. He was fairly certain that Aunt Catherine's understanding of the situation was completely her own, but he wouldn't take the chance that someone else out there was saying awful things about Lizzie. If they were, he would stop them.

He still hadn't managed to get ahold of Bing to inform him of his upcoming houseguest. Hopefully that meant that Bing was doing damage control at the Bennet house, and had managed to bring the hysteria down to a dull roar. He wasn't overly optimistic about that though.

Darcy was broken away from his retrieve when the hatch door popped open. It was time to face his fate.

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He had, for one cowardly moment, considered going to Neitherfield first. He could wait until Bing got home, and get a status update on what had happened after he'd lost contact. He could come up with some kind of excuse for going over to her house. He could test the waters before he dove in.

It all sounded perfectly reasonable in his head, but it left a sinking, twisting feeling in his gut. It felt like abandoning her. After everything Aunt Catherine had said, he needed to make sure she was o.k., and assure her that he wouldn't let any of those things happen to her. He couldn't leave her alone to believe that Aunt Catherine was out there wrecking her career and her life. He had to go straight to her.

So now he sat frozen in the back of a town car, in front of the Bennet house with his hand on the door handle. His desperate need to assure Lizzie that her career wasn't ruined warred violently with a nervous, twisting fear of being rejected again.

The driver was doing his best to pretend he hadn't just realized he was driving a crazy person around, but was ultimately failing at it, and kept sending Darcy worried looks.

The hope that had seemed so bright in San Francisco now seemed dull and distant. Maybe Lizzie just refused to agree to anything asked by someone being so rude to her. Perhaps it was all a matter of principals, and had nothing to do with her feelings towards him. What if his chances with her were the same as they always were? Which really amounted to almost no chance at all.

Darcy tried to swallow, but his throat was too dry. What did it really matter anyway? Even if she didn't want him, wasn't willing to give him a chance, he still loved her far too much to let her suffer. He still owed it to her to let her know that he'd gagged his wrenched old Aunt. He had to go in there. Get it resolved. He didn't know how much longer he could survive in this state of suspense, with a flickering hope taunting him with possibilities.



Slowly, he unlocked his muscles and pressed the door open. For the third time in his life, a massive wave of nervousness washed over him as he went to approach Lizzie with his feelings. Due to the fact that both previous episodes ended fairly badly (although the second time was really not his fault) this particular wave was probably the worst of them all.

He remembered how naïve he'd been the first time he confessed his love to Lizzie, last Halloween at Collins and Collins. He'd felt so anxious standing in the corner of that awful Halloween party. He'd been desperate to see Lizzie, and every moment she hadn't walked through the doors into the party was torture. His internal arguments against her family and situation, his rationalizations that they could never be together were growing weaker and more pathetic by the minute. He had spent the entire day looking forward to seeing her at this party, to being able to talk with her, maybe debate a book.

He'd fought hard with himself to stay in that corner, forcing himself to wait until she showed up, until she came to him, and satisfied his need to feel her presence around him. He'd lost the fight though, the battle and the war between his sense of propriety and his own feelings, standing in that corner of the party. The anxiety, the impatience, the loneliness and the desperation to see her steadily built up until he was completely overwhelmed and he just couldn't handle it anymore. It was too much. As grammatically incorrect as it was, he just couldn't not go to her. As he conceded to himself, a wave of relief swept over him. 'I love her, I will have her, and I will not fight against it anymore' he'd promised himself. What a fool he'd been.

Of course, in retrospect, approaching her just then, when he was swimming in his own emotions was a terrible idea. He'd felt so pleased and accomplished at overcoming his own objections he couldn't help but tell her about them, explain how much he'd done for her. If he'd taken the time to sleep on it, and plan out his confession of love, he probably would have spotted that saying those things was a bad call. He'd approached Lizzie at the 'worst possible time' in two respects, for just as she'd been in the worst possible mood for him to approach her (thoughts of killing him via strangulation had to count for that) he'd been in the worst possible state to talk to her. His already sorely lacking social skills were worsened considerably when he was emotional, as he stopped taking any time to run his words through his head as he usually did when more calm. Not that planning out an elegant and posed confession of love would have done him much good at that point, but at least he wouldn't have the shame of being an ass-hat to the woman he loved for the entire internet to see.

Of course, he was emotional now. He'd been put through the ringer today starting with Bing's call all the way through disowning his aunt. What if he accidentally said something else horrible to Lizzie? Hadn't she been through enough? He should go to Neitherfield and plan out what he'd say to her. Like he had before he'd asked her to the theater. He'd spent most of that morning planning out how to ask her on that date. Of course, the YouTube evidence made it clear that it hadn't been the smoothed move in the world, and he still wasn't sure if she would have accepted or not, but it was a pretty great improvement over the incident at Collins and Collins. He'd even remembered to check and see if she was in a good mood and not in any apparent way planning to do him bodily harm.

Just as he was about to turn to head back to the car, the front door opened and Mr. Bennet was standing in front of him. How had he gotten to the front porch? Had he rang the bell? He

didn't remember ringing the bell.

"Can I help you with something son, or do you just enjoy looking at our front door?" Mr. Bennet asked him, somehow managing to look both amused and distrustful. The house behind him was eerily silent. It was strange that this was the epicenter of the catastrophe of noise that Bing had called him from just a few hours ago.

He couldn't think of a thing to say. He could feel his chin pulling back into his neck, a habit that both Gigi and Fitz had been trying hard to break him of. He knew he was fidgeting in stiff, sudden robotic movements but couldn't make himself stop. His brain decided to do the most unhelpful thing it possibly could, and supplied the thought that if things went well he may one day be asking this man for his daughter's hand in marriage. And here he was acting like a malfunctioning Darcy-bot on his front porch. He could hear Fitz's voice in his head saying 'Epic fail dude, epic fail'.

He took a deep breath, and tried again. "I'm... looking for Lizzie. I... need to see her." No, that was wrong, he should ask. "That is to say... I had hoped to be able to speak with her... if that's alright?"

Mr. Bennet was now openly smirking at him. "I'm sorry, but Lizzie isn't here."

"She's... not here?" he replied rather stupidly. As anxious as he'd been about seeing her, suddenly he was massively disappointed that he'd missed her. He'd wanted so badly to see her face again.

The disappointment must have registered pretty clearly on his face, because Mr. Bennet's amusement faded (if only by a very little bit) and he took pity on Darcy. "Bing took all the girl's over to Neitherfield. Thought it would be a good idea to", Mr. Bennet glanced behind him into the house, "get them out of the house for a while. He even offered to let them stay the night in case they felt too... tired to make it back tonight."

Darcy read between the lines. Bing had managed to take charge, and had removed the girls from their hysterical mother. Finding out your youngest daughter had almost had a sex tape released had to be a hard bit of information to process, but from what Darcy had heard over the phone none of the Bennet sisters were in any kind of state to comfort or reassure their rather dramatic mother.

He felt a little silly for working himself up so much over a house that did not, in fact, contain Lizzie. However, it was a massive relief that he wouldn't have to talk with Lizzie in front of either of her Parents. Trying to ascertain her feelings for him would be hard enough without her scheming, matchmaking mother looking on or listening in, and he'd already made enough of a fool of himself in front of Mr. Bennet.

"Ah... thank you sir... I'll ... uh... inquire after Lizzie at Neitherfield" Darcy made a short bowing motion, and immediately felt ridiculous for doing so. He then turned and hurried off the porch and back to the car as quickly as he could with whatever was left of his dignity intact, leaving Mr. Bennet standing on the porch chuckling to himself.

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Ringling the doorbell didn't occur to Darcy, even for a second. He'd lived at Neitherfield for nearly four months, and had his own key. Letting himself in seemed as natural here as it did at his own house. As he came through the door his thoughts were already on what room in the house Bing would have the girls in, and how he should approach, how he could get Lizzie alone. When he glanced up into the house, he was somewhat surprised to see Bing was in the front hall, and even more surprised to see him sliding towards Darcy at great speed.

Later, Darcy would remember the moment in slow motion. Bing looking up and seeing Darcy in the doorway; surprise spreading over Bing's face; Bing leaning back just a little bit in shock; his feet continuing along much faster than his body, until...

The noise was probably the worst part. Like when someone tries to do a flip off the high dive and ends up belly flopping, the SMACK sound as they hit the water, the sound Bing's bottom made when it hit the marble floors caused everyone in proximity to wince.

There was a long moment of shocked silence as Darcy stared down, alarmed at Bing laying spread-eagle on the floor of the hall and Bing looked up at the ceiling, wondering why humans even needed a tailbone in the first damn place. The moment was broken rather rudely by an outburst of laughter. Darcy's head swiveled to the left, only to find Lydia standing in the doorway of the lounge, one hand clapped over her mouth, trying and failing to contain her glee. "Oh my god Bing! You need, like, waay more practice if you're ever gonna master sock slides!" Lydia dissolved into giggles again, as Jane rushed by her to kneel next to Bing and asses his injuries.

Poor friend that he was, Darcy did not join Jane in checking on Bing, as he was fully distracted when he noticed Lizzie standing just behind Lydia in the lounge. She looked so beautiful. She was wearing a dark purple sundress which looked incredible against her perfect porcelain skin. It brought out the red tones in her hair, which was down and slightly messy in a way that made Darcy think of beds and early mornings and so many fantasies of her that he'd lost count. She was wearing a pair of white socks that were cut low enough for him to see the delicate bone of her ankles. Lizzie's features were fixed into a look of complete surprise, her lips forming an adorable little o, though whether this was brought on by his arrival or Bing's graceless landing Darcy couldn't say.

He was staring at her. He knew he was staring at her and he should stop, that he should say something, but he couldn't. It had been over a month since he'd seen her at Pemberly, and he couldn't stop drinking in the sight of her. Lizzie looked straight back at him and... blushed? Was she blushing? Something giddy and anxious twisted deep inside of him.

The moment was broken when Bing heaved himself off of the floor and staggered over to Darcy. "Darcy! Dude! You were... you were on the phone!"

This was probably a great over-simplification of the situation, but Darcy realized this was not the moment to explain that he'd rushed down here because he'd heard Aunt Catherine verbally eviscerating Lizzie. Not with Jane, Bing and Lydia looking on. If there was one thing he'd learned from his disastrous confession at Collins and Collins, is that it's important to read the mood of the situation. If he'd paid any attention to Lizzie at all, even he would have been able to pick up the social cues that it was the worst possible moment for it, even without her saying "This is the worst possible moment for this". But he had been thinking

only of his own feelings, and his own fantasy of Lizzie falling into his arms and kissing her senseless. If he wanted this to work, he had to pay attention to this moment.

"Yes" he responded, and a moment later "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine" Bing replied sheepishly, trying do discreetly rub his aching tailbone. "I think the biggest injury was to my dignity."

"We're doing sock slides!" Lydia piped in, bouncing on the balls of her feet in excitement. "But Bing's epic failing in a major way!" She shook her head in mock sadness "He must have had a very sad childhood if he never learned to sock slide well." She brightened up again "So we're teaching him how to appreciate his house's potential for amazing sock-slide awesomeness!"

Darcy was relieved to see Lydia so cheerful and happy again, after seeing how broken she'd been the last time she appeared in Lizzie's videos and Bing's description of her breakdown earlier today. Clearly he'd underestimated Bing's ability to handle the situation, and take care of Jane's sisters as well as Jane herself. He felt truly grateful to his friend. Well, if this is what was helping...

He shook his head at Bing "And after Caroline goes on and on about how good you are at all sports, it seems we've discovered your athletic failing."

Bing laughed at him, surprised and amused with his teasing. "Hey, it's harder than it looks man. Like you could do any better!"

Darcy smirked and began to remove his suit jacket and roll up his sleeves. "I believe that is what they call 'a challenge', one I will not let go unanswered."

Bing gaped at him "You? You're going to do sock slides?"

Darcy raised one eyebrow at him, trying to look as play-haughty as he could.

Bing grinned at him. "Oh, it's on buddy, it's on."

He finally dared to glance back over at Lizzie, who looked rather incredulous at this turn of events. It reminded him of the look on her face when he returned to her video blog wearing his newsie hat and bowtie. Much like last time, it faded into a pleased expression that he could only describe as "well alright then". Darcy glanced down, momentarily overcome with how delighted and proud he felt for surprising her like that, with getting that expression on her face that he'd been so enraptured with the first time. He blinked several times, trying to clear his head, before he looked back up and began to move towards her, trying desperately trying to think of what to say.

He was, however, intercepted by an ecstatic Lydia. She grabbed his arm, and hauled him to the other end of the house, like a kid impatient for the grownups to play a promised game.

He was given an overview on the basics of 'sock sliding'. They were using the longest uninterrupted, smoothest surface in the house, the wide hallway with wooden floors that ran

through the house, front to back. Darcy noted that several vases and side tables had been removed from the hall. It could be said that once Darcy set his mind to something he threw himself into it completely. He did not like doing things halfway. So he now focused himself on mastering sock sliding (or at least mastering it enough to outdo Bing).

He was, he liked to think, a fast learner and quickly picked up on the factors that were judged in a successful sock slide: distance of slide, speed of slide, and displayed grace while sliding. He was, he could boast, far better at the skill than Bing was. He noted that a successful 'sock slide' required mostly good balance and proper placement of the feet, both skills he had acquired through extensive skiing. Though the foot placement was different from that required by skiing, once he'd gotten the placement down he was able to traverse nearly the full length of the hall.

Lydia accomplished the greatest speeds of all of them, but was somewhat more lacking in control or grace, and had a tendency to squeal rather loudly when sliding down the echo-inducing hallway. He would not have pegged sweet, demure Jane for it, but she threw herself into her slides, managing excellent distances, waving her arms in the air and giggling all the way. Bing was by far the worst of their party, for while he had picked up the trick of achieving a good speed, his balance was tenuous at best and he crashed into the walls more often than not.

He had to admit that his greatest pleasure in the experience was watching Lizzie slide down the hall, rather than doing it himself. She was extremely graceful, and he couldn't help but think that she would pick up skiing very quickly, with such good balance. This thought brought back another set of fantasies he'd had about her, dreams of her at his ski lodge, kissing her in front of a roaring fire, laughing with her in the snow, even playing board games with her and Gigi at night after a good ski. The ski lodge was one of his favorite escapes, one of the places he liked to be most in the world, and he had envisioned Lizzie there with him more times than he could count.

He was drawn away from a vision of Lizzie in his arms, in the hot tub at the lodge, with snow falling into her hair, by Lydia tugging at his arm. It strongly reminded him of the way Gigi had tugged at his arm earlier today. He realized that the others had all slid down the hallway, and that he was alone with Lydia. They would be making their way back in the established system, through the house, room by room, so no one was in danger of being plowed down by the next slider. Perhaps he would be able to manipulate the sequence of sliders in order to be left at the end of the hall with Lizzie...

"Hey, Darce..." Lydia's sock-sliding enthusiasm seemed to fade away into the more timid, unsure creature she had been in her sister's more recent videos. She was looking down and fidgeting with her hands as she spoke. "I wanted to... to thank you." She nodded resolutely, and looked back up at him. "For everything you've done, with George and..." she looked back down as she hesitated, unable to meet his eyes again "and with everything. I... I know you went to a lot of trouble" she glanced back down the hallway, the direction Lizzie had disappeared in "and I know you didn't do it for just me, but I wanted to let you know how much I..." she looked back up at him now, vulnerable but determined "I appreciate it. I'm really grateful. And... Thank you Darcy."

Before he could reply, Lydia had thrown her arms around him, squeezing him briefly but tightly. Darcy froze in uncertainty, chin tucking into his neck. This he hadn't expected. Before he could devise a plan to extract her, she jumped back, grasped his suspenders and looked him sternly in the eye. "Lizzie's favorite flowers ever are blue irises, her favorite restaurant is called Derby's and when she goes she likes to sit up on the rooftop terrace, she really likes this old theater over in Redford that's all old-fashioned and shows movies from, like, ancient times, but she never goes because it's kinda a drive. She loves to go to the zoo, and she loves picnics, so a picnic at the zoo would be perfect for her. If you ever hurt my sister the fact that you stopped that tape will not stop me from making you sorry. And trust me, I can make you sorry."

Lydia promptly let go of him, turned on her heel, took a few running steps, and slid all the way down the hall, leaving Darcy standing, still frozen next to the back door trying to process exactly what just happened.

Her favorite flowers were blue irises. Lydia was trying to help. And in her own special way, she seemed to be implying that he had some kind of chance. She thought that he would be able to hurt her sister, which he could only do if she had some kind of feelings for him.

That great, taunting, bubbling hope welled up in him again, and he felt re-energized.

Lizzie, Bing and Jane came around the corner, back into the hallway. They must have taken so long because they'd waited for one another and walked as a group. Lizzie was laughing at something Jane said, and glanced over at him. Still laughing, eyes sparking, she looked amazing. He was stuck with a strange desire to show off for her, do something to keep her laughing and her eyes sparking, to be the one that caused it. So he took off, sprinting a few steps, and managed a long, smooth, fast slide all the way down the hallway. As he slowed down, he managed to swivel around, so that he was sliding backwards at looking at her as he came to a stop. He could feel a smile playing at his lips, but he tried to suppress the goofy, pleased grin that wanted to emerge.

Lizzie raised her eyebrows, and gave him a nod, playfully impressed with his show.

Darcy moved to the side of the hall, out of the way without moving to start back around. He was hoping that Lizzie would slide next and they might have a moment alone together.

Apparently sensing his challenge, Lizzie set out down the hallway.

As she slid closer to him, Darcy was filled with a sudden impulse to step out and catch her in his arms as she slid by, then twirl her around and kiss those gorgeous laughing lips. Of course such impulses were far from uncommon around Lizzie, he'd been fighting them off since she and Jane had come to stay at Neitherfield while their house was being remodeled. He clenched his fists at his side to keep himself from reaching out to her.

Before Lizzie slid to a stop, she managed a full twirl, causing her skirt to flair out around her revealing even more of her amazing, creamy legs. Darcy took a sharp breath. Sock sliding should not be providing him with so many temptations.

Lizzie grinned at him, looking pleased to have outdone him. She padded into the lounge, and he glanced back down the hallway at Jane and Bing. They were making, as Lizzie would call it, 'googly eyes' at each other. They had a minute.

Darcy followed Lizzie into the lounge, calling out to her. "Lizzie" His voice always seemed to go deeper whenever he said her name; he just couldn't prevent his feelings for her from seeping into it, slipping out whenever he said it. He trained his eyes on the far wall, unable to look at her as he made the request. "I was hoping we could... talk... there was something... something I wanted to..." he trailed off, finally managing to look up at her. She was smiling at him. What had he been saying?

"We could take the long way around" she offered, gesturing at the French doors at the side of the room that lead out into the garden. He recalled that there was a path out there that leads around the house, eventually ending up at the back door next to the sock-sliding starting point. "I mean, it's such a nice day" she continued, looking nervous herself. Darcy tried to convince himself that was a good sign.

"Of course" Darcy agreed, already walking past her to open the door, in a hurry to get them both outside before someone else came sliding down the hallway and asked where they were going.

Darcy walked silently down the path next to Lizzie until he was fairly sure they couldn't be seen by anyone casually glancing out any of the windows. He placed a hand on her arm, gently pulling her to a stop next to him, but forced himself to pull it away once she had halted.

"Lizzie I..." Darcy struggled for the words. God he wished he'd practiced for this.

"I wanted you to know that Bing called me when he found Aunt Catherine in your house, and I heard you're... interaction with her".

Lizzie looked up at him, clearly horrified, causing Darcy to wonder what else she'd said to Aunt Catherine that he missed. "Oh god, Darcy, I'm sorry, I..."

Darcy quickly put a hand on her shoulder to stop her. "No Lizzie, I'm sorry, so sorry about the things she said to you. She had no right, no justification for saying any of those things to you. I'm... unbearably ashamed of how she treated you. I needed to let you know that I've... talked with her... about it. I promise you Lizzie, that she won't carry through with those threats; she won't do anything to hurt you. I swear to you that she won't whisper a word to anyone that will hurt your reputation. Please believe me that I had no idea that she was coming here, I would have stopped her if I had known."

Lizzie placed her hand on his arm, which he realized was still resting on her shoulder. "So you're not mad that I called her a conniving old hag?" she teased him, but he could still see traces of worry in her face.

Darcy instantly felt infinitely lighter. "That may be how I'll need to address the Christmas card to her from now on"

Lizzie beamed up at him, and for one glorious moment Darcy was flying. He'd gotten her to smile like that, all on his own, at him, on the same day that his Aunt had threatened to destroy her for associating with him. He was getting better at this.

But the smile faded away into a serious look and her hand slid off of his arm as Lizzie focused her eyes on one of his buttons, which was eye level for her.

"Darcy... I need to thank you. I mean, obviously for talking to your Aunt, but also for what you did for Lydia. I can't even imagine what it would have taken for you to get that tape taken down, and it means so much to all of us. To Lydia... and to me." She finally looked back up at him, her stunning eyes seemed a bit watery, gratitude shining brightly in them. Darcy took a sharp step back, letting his hand fall off her shoulder. This isn't how he wanted it, he didn't want her to feel indebted or obligated. This is why he didn't want her to know.

Lizzie immediately took a quick step towards him, filling in the space he'd created between them. She reached out and caught his hand as it was falling, capturing it in her own.

Darcy was frozen, completely overwhelmed. She was holding his hand. Lizzie was holding his hand. Her tiny, delicate fingers held his entire body trapped in this spot. There was no possible way for him to move away from her.

"Just... just thank you Darcy. Thank you for everything." She squeezed his hand and Darcy had to remind himself to breath.

Darcy looked down at their hands, intertwined, and felt a desperate longing in his chest. But it couldn't be like this.

He reached down between them with his other hand, and pulled her hand away from his. He couldn't quite break contact though, and kept a hold of her wrist. How could he say this?

Darcy closed his eyes, sure that he couldn't get this out while he was looking at her, at their hands together like this. His voice was rough and low. "Lizzie... please... I know you don't mean to trifle with me... you're too good a person... too honest for that... but Lizzie... I'm still in love with you." His voice broke on the word love, but he pressed on "So much more than I was when you turned me away in October, and I didn't even realize that you could be more in love than that. And when you refused Aunt Catherine's demand to have nothing to do with me, it gave me this... hope. Hope that I haven't been able to dismiss or deflate or... Lizzie, please, if I don't have a chance with you... if you couldn't ever feel something for me, let me know now, and I promise that I'll never bother you again. I did it for you Lizzie but... I don't want you to feel gratitude or obligation or" he stopped himself, trying to re-order his thoughts, to speak around the burning he felt in his throat "You don't owe me anything Lizzie. All I want is to know... to know if I have a chance."

There was more he wanted to say, to tell her that if she thought she could feel for him, if she gave him a chance he would do anything for her, he would prove to her that he was worthy to earn her love, he could change for her and become a better person. She made him want to be a better person. But his throat had closed up, and nothing else would come out.



When no reply came from her, he finally opened his eyes to look down at her. She was looking straight up, into his eyes, with one crystalline tear trailing down her cheek. It was like a punch to the gut. He had made her cry. He'd made Lizzie cry.

"Darcy" her voice was low and soft, and a touch raspy, but filled with confidence and determination. "...I love you."

Darcy rocked back on his heels as though she'd shoved him, the words felt like a blow to his entire body. He couldn't breathe, he couldn't swallow, he couldn't think. Absolute shock showed clearly on his face. She... she what? What had she said?

She looked away, and starting babbling, but it took him several long moments to focus on her words.

"After you saw all the video blogs, and everything with George, and your Aunt, and my behavior... I didn't think you could possibly feel anything for me anymore and..."

She loved him. Euphoria like he'd never experienced overtook him, sweeping away every other feeling. Lizzie Bennet loved him. Fitz's voice popped back up in his head 'Dude, this is the part where you kiss the girl!' Oh. Ok. He could do that.

Darcy took a half step closer to Lizzie, eliminating all but a sliver of space between them, and silencing her stream of nervous words. He gently cradled her face in his hands, and bent down to kiss her, but hesitated just before making contact with her lips. He'd been imagining this for so long, nearly a year of fantasies and dreams and burning thoughts tormenting him in the middle of the night. The thought that he could press forward and kiss her finally was almost surreal to him at this point. He was afraid that he did this then she'd take it all back – slap him on the face for forcing himself on her and storm off. Maybe his fantasies had finally gotten the better of him.

Then Lizzie pushed forward, sliding her lips against his, pressing her body against him, and he was lost. Nothing existed except her, her lithe frame against him, her amazing lips dancing across his.

It was not a chaste kiss, closed lips brushing against one another; her mouth met his open, gasping. Her tongue immediately slid over his, exploring and insisting. Her arms wrapped around his neck, pulling him closer, but it wasn't until her mouth dropped out from under his did he realize that she was standing on her tip-toes.

She looked down and away from him, and took a sudden step back filling him with the fear that he'd done something wrong, upset her in some way. But then she took another step back and was suddenly eye level. Glancing down he realized that she'd stepped onto a stone boarder that went around one of the flower beds. She reached out to him, and grabbed him by the suspenders, but somehow it was nothing like the way that her sister had done it. She yanked him forward, up against her body, and she fit up against him perfectly, no bending or reaching or straining. 'Clever girl' he thought to himself as he wrapped one arm tightly around her waist, pulling her even closer, while he cradled her head with his other hand, tangling it in her silky hair. Then her lips met his again, eager and willing and soft, ending all coherent thought.

## Chapter End Notes

Once upon a time I thought I was going to write more for this - but nope. It never happened, so this is defiantly the end of the story. And really about as much snogging as you get in the BBC version, so hope you enjoyed!

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