

## INVENTING MR. DARCY

*May, 1995*

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a young queer woman desiring to stay close to her family, is in need of a pretend boyfriend.

It is odd that my liberal leaning parents were acting this way. We were clearly no longer living in the 1990s. They had cast us all the way back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Don't get me wrong. I loved them dearly, but my heart also beat for someone new.

Papa handed the phone out to me.

"A Mr. Darcy for you..."

"A Mr. Darcy for you..."

He was still screening my calls. I felt my cheeks flush, seeing his eyebrows dance because a boy called me.

I reminded myself of the plan and, ever so politely, swallowed my bite of chicken and excused myself from the dinner table.

"Hello?"

A deep voice greeted her, "Hello, Alice. It's DJ."

"Yeah. Hi."

"Is it just us then?"

"Yes," I said, overly aware that the clinking of forks on plates had halted.

"But they are still in the room with you, I take it?"

"Yes." Then, to make it sound more like a normal conversation, I added, "Adele mentioned you'd be calling."

"Great. Okay. Listen, I know you are busy this weekend with 'Damn Yankees' rehearsal, but plans have been made for next Monday night, so I am going to pick you up around 5:30."

I pretended to be embarrassed about having this conversation in front of my parents, but spoke loud enough for them to hear. "Monday, May first?"

"Correct. I will tell your parents—Mr. and Mrs...?"

"Prestwich."

"Right. I'll tell them we're going on a mountain picnic near the Rim of the World to see the sunset, followed by some stargazing. That should give you and Sonia a good chunk of time. I know you are still in school, but hopefully your curfew isn't too early during the week."

"Wow. That sounds like a great date." I felt hopeful that my actual date with Sonia would be as romantic.

"We can work out all the details and talk about how fast we want this to progress when I pick you up. And try not to worry. It's all going to work out fine."

"It's a date then, I guess. I will...um...see you then."

I hung up the phone and swung around to find my parents smiling like Cheshire cats. So much teeth, it was disturbing.

Mr. and Mrs. Prestwich were clearly in need of a win. It had been a long month for them indeed. As liberal as they were, they were still old school when it came to who they thought their daughter should date. I admittedly didn't have the best track record with boys, but switching to Sonia was a nonstarter for them. I know that what they thought I needed was a gentleman, someone with manners, who would treat me with care and prove how great guys can be.

“Who was that?” Mama was trying to sound nonchalant.

“A guy named Darcy.” I did not want to appear too eager with the information.

“This Mr. Darcy—I love that name—He sounds promising!” Mama exclaimed.

Papa nudged, still not quite convinced, “How did you two meet?”

“I don’t actually know him, not yet anyway. Adele asked if she could give him my number.”

“Good. Adele. Good.”

Mama pressed on, “Sounds like you two are planning to go out together on Monday?”

“Yes.” I paused to watch them eye each other. “But...I forgot about being grounded. I’ll call him back after dinner and cancel. It probably isn’t a good idea to go out on a school night anyway.”

“Hold on,” Papa protested. “You know your mother and I adore your company, but we cannot keep you hold up in this house for the rest of your life. Besides, you will soon be a college student and will need to prioritize your time all on your own.”

“You are so good about getting your homework done, my dear.” Mama was pouring it on. “Why not go have a good time with this Mr. Darcy. After the stress of tech week, you deserve a break.”

“Thank you for the vote of confidence.” I put my game face on. “And, you’re right. I can handle this. Hopefully, Monday will be fun.”

I wondered if it could it really be as simple as that? Invent a boyfriend and POOF! everything is right again in the world again.

The rest of dinner whizzed by as speculations about Darcy, I’m sure, filled everyone’s thoughts.

I liked his confidence on the phone. He sounded tall and older—college aged. Not that it mattered, of course, since he only auditioning for the role of boyfriend, not the real thing. Still, I was curious.