

WICKHAM. Please excuse my temerity in accepting your sisters' kind invitation with an almost unbecoming alacrity.

ELIZABETH. It is a great kindness to seek us out. The regiment, I hope, is not unhappily quartered here?

WICKHAM. I cannot speak for the regiment but I may say I am personally improved by acquaintance with your family.

ELIZABETH. A courtesy very prettily put.

WICKHAM. And sincerely meant.

ELIZABETH. I could not help noticing, sir, a certain coolness of regard passing between yourself and Mr. Darcy.

WICKHAM. You have a keen eye Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH. And a curious one, sir.

WICKHAM. Might you tell me how far Netherfield is from Meryton?

ELIZABETH. Three miles perhaps.

WICKHAM. Indeed? How long has Mr. Darcy been staying there?

ELIZABETH. About a month. He is a man of very large property in Derbyshire, I understand.

WICKHAM. His estate there is a noble one. In fact I have been connected with his family from my infancy. Are you much acquainted with him?

ELIZABETH. I have spent four days in the same house with him, and I think him very disagreeable.

WICKHAM. I believe your opinion of him would in general astonish.

ELIZABETH. Really? He is not at all liked in Hertfordshire.

WICKHAM. May I express surprise? The world is perhaps blinded by his fortune and consequence and sees him only as he chooses to be seen.

ELIZABETH. I should take him even on my slight acquaintance to be an ill-tempered man.

WICKHAM. I fear I have considerable knowledge of him. The late Mr. Darcy, his father, was excessively attached to me. I cannot do justice to his kindness. His son and I were born in the same parish, sharing the same amusements. My father was his father's estate manager. The elder Mr. Darcy knew the church ought to be my profession and he promised me the family parish when it came available or, if not, a voluntary promise of providing for me. Both were countermanded by young Darcy after his father's death.

ELIZABETH. On what grounds?

WICKHAM. Had the late Mr. Darcy liked me less, his son might have borne with me better; but his father's uncommon attachment to me irritated him. He had not a temper to bear the sort of competition in which we stood. In short, his behaviour to me has been

scandalous. But I do not trust myself on the subject, I can hardly be fair to him now.

ELIZABETH. I had not thought Mr. Darcy as bad as this.

WICKHAM. I do feel that almost all his actions may be traced to his considerable pride.

ELIZABETH. But can such abominable pride as his have ever done him good?

*(A park bench is brought on.)*

WICKHAM. I must own him to be liberal and generous, display hospitality, assist his tenants and relieve the poor. Family pride and filial pride have done this. His father's preference for me has pricked that pride and made him my enemy.

ELIZABETH. I am astonished at his intimacy with Mr. Bingley. Do you know him?

WICKHAM. Not at all.

ELIZABETH. He is a sweet tempered, amiable, charming man. He cannot know what Mr. Darcy is.

WICKHAM. Mr. Darcy can please where he chooses. He does not want abilities.

ELIZABETH. My judgment would be that he deserves to be publicly disgraced.

WICKHAM. Sometime or other he will be—but it shall not be by me. Miss Bennet, allow me to say, that the troubling aspect of our subject has not made you a whit less delightful.

ELIZABETH. I must suppose that the relationship you have described will not allow your presence at the coming ball at Netherfield.

WICKHAM. I would fear a discomfort for all involved, but make no mistake Miss Bennet, I keenly feel the loss.

*(He bows and departs.)*

ELIZABETH. *(To the audience:)* Well, whatever he said was well said and whatever he did was done gracefully.