

COLLINS

I confess to scant knowledge of the game, sir, but should be glad to improve myself.

*SIR WILLIAM leads COLLINS to the card table followed by CHARLOTTE.*

*MRS. LUCAS goes to MRS. BENNET.*

*WICKHAM and ELIZABETH meet.*

WICKHAM

Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH

Mr. Wickham. I hope our modest gathering has not given you cause for despair?

WICKHAM

On the contrary, I have every cause for cheer.

ELIZABETH

How so?

WICKHAM

Pleasant society and good employment, I own, are necessary to me. I was not intended for a military life. Had it pleased the gentleman we were speaking of this afternoon, I might by now be in possession of a parish.

ELIZABETH

You contemplated a life in the church, Mr. Wickham?

WICKHAM

I had every expectation of being in that good living. The late Mr. Darcy was my godfather. He meant to amply provide for me, and thought he had done so.

ELIZABETH

Why was his bequest not honored?

WICKHAM

It is difficult still for me to comprehend the son's refusal to carry out his father's wishes. It is not an easy subject... Darcy and I were raised together at Pemberley. We were boyhood friends and, I dare say, thought of as

brothers. You see, Miss Bennet, my father had been an attorney, and one most highly esteemed by Darcy's father. My father gave up his entire practice and devoted himself exclusively to the affairs of the Darcy estate. When he died, Darcy's father looked after me as though I were his son. But later, when that good man passed on, I found myself without my bequest or legal redress.

ELIZABETH

How was that possible?

WICKHAM

There was such informality in the terms of the will that it gave me no hope from the law. And for reasons he has chosen to keep private, Darcy chose to look upon his father's wishes as a mere recommendation.

ELIZABETH

But what could have been his motive?

WICKHAM

Jealousy? Had the late Mr. Darcy liked me less, his son may have borne me better.

ELIZABETH

This is shocking. He deserves to be publicly disgraced!

WICKHAM

Perhaps someday he will be. But not by me. Out of respect for his kind father, I could never discredit the son.

ELIZABETH

I had not thought Mr. Darcy so bad as this. Such malicious spite! Can such abominable pride have ever done him good?

WICKHAM

He is very able to pretend otherwise. And indeed, some see him as generous and liberal - assisting his tenants and even relieving the poor. He will never appear to disgrace the good family name.

ELIZABETH

His intimacy with Mr. Bingley puzzles me. Do you know him?

WICKHAM

Not at all.