

DARCY

FITZWILLIAM. Very well. What would you say if I told you that he stayed tied to London all last winter—just to keep a friend away from temptation?

ELIZABETH. Temptation?

FITZWILLIAM. The temptation of king a disastrous marriage.

ELIZABETH. Oh!

FITZWILLIAM. This friend of s—chap named Dingley or Bingley or something like that—evidently conceived a consuming passion for a designing minx he met at some outlandish place in the country.

ELIZABETH. That happens so often, doesn't it? FITZWILLIAM. Yes, doesn't it! Of course, she cared nothing for him. (Looks at him.) Only wanted his name and his fortune. She was aided in her nefarious schemes by a particularly awful specimen of a mother.

ELIZABETH. Perhaps it was one of those mothers whose kind intentions are often fatal to those she most wishes to help.

FITZWILLIAM. Probably. But in addition to that, the girl had a pair of sisters who must have been veritable she-wolves. Poor Bingley was as good as caught. (Crosses to table R.C.)

ELIZABETH. (Rises, turning to him) But Darcy snatched him from the jaws of the she-wolves? (Crosses up to fireplace.)

FITZWILLIAM. Exactly. Oh—he only mentioned it to me because I happened to ask him why he'd stayed so unusually long in town. It was really a frightfully decent, unselfish thing for him to have done.

ELIZABETH. Indeed it was! And I see I have been underrating Mr. Darcy. I did not know he was made of such heroic stuff.

FITZWILLIAM. (Uneasily) Yes—rather! I say, Miss Bennet, are you laughing at me?

ELIZABETH. Oh, no, Colonel, not at you! (Crosses to chair L. of table R.C.)

FITZWILLIAM. I did want you to know the truth! DARCY. (Entering R.) Oh, Fitzwilliam, are you going out?

FITZWILLIAM. I was, but I'll wait.

DARCY. No, no— If you will take the same road as we discovered yesterday, I will join you a little later.

FITZWILLIAM. Good. Au revoir, Miss Bennet— (He bows; exits quickly R. ELIZABETH sits chair R. of L.C. table.)

DARCY. Miss Elizabeth—I wish to speak to you. ELIZABETH. I should have thought it evident that I wished to finish my letter.

DARCY. You're not very polite. You were such a stickler for politeness in Hertfordshire. (He smiles.) ELIZABETH. We are most of us sticklers for virtues in other people. (Continues writing.)

DARCY. (Moves to table) Miss Elizabeth—

ELIZABETH. (Looks up and stops writing) Sir? (He moves away C. She looks after him. He turns.) What is it, Mr. Darcy?

DARCY. (Paces up and down; suddenly crosses to R. of ELIZABETH) It's no use— In vain have I struggled; my feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you. (She rises.) I've fought with myself all these months— (ELIZABETH stares at him, too stunned to speak.) You may think I am speaking without due thought—that my feeling for you outweighs my common sense—that this love for you that consumes me is a thing that will pass. But it is not so, Miss Elizabeth. I have learned that in the bitterness of my self-abasement. (Pause) I love you.

ELIZABETH. Do you expect me to take you seriously? Have you so quickly forgotten the inferiority of my family?

DARCY. I have forgotten nothing about you—I love you.

DARCY cont.

ELIZABETH. Have you considered my unsuitability in the eyes of your exalted world, Mr. Darcy?

DARCY. I have considered it—and I love you.

ELIZABETH. (*Angrily*) You need not say it again, sir! What am I supposed to reply to this extraordinary harangue? One can scarcely call it an offer of marriage. You do not, I suppose, expect me to feel flattered?

DARCY. But do you expect me to be glad that your family is inferior to mine? Or blame me for being honest and sincere when making the most momentous decision of my life?

ELIZABETH. Decision—?

DARCY. Yes, my dearest. I have decided to ask you to marry me.

ELIZABETH. (*Facing him*) I suppose I should be overwhelmed at this honor.

DARCY. (*Drawing back*) But—

ELIZABETH. I ought to congratulate you on overcoming the battle between your unwilling affection and my unworthiness—but you see, I happen to be quite uninterested in your problems— (*Crosses down*

G.) DARCY. Elizabeth— (*He approaches her again, his hand out. She repels him with a proud gesture. He is about to speak.*)

ELIZABETH. (*Turns to him*) If you were not so lacking in perception, sir, you might have spared yourself my refusal—

DARCY. (*Dumbfounded. He crosses a step to her*) You refuse me?

ELIZABETH. (*Quietly*) You might have noticed the fact long ago. I have never hidden it. I neither aspire to nor could I ever return your affection. As for your scruples about marrying into my family— don't let that ever concern you again. (*Crosses to table L.C.*)

DARCY. Is that all the reply I am to be honored

with? I might perhaps deserve to be told why I have been rejected—and with so little civility.

ELIZABETH. I also might deserve to know why you consider my feelings so little while expressing your own.

DARCY. (*Takes step to her*) Please—if the manner of my revelation has offended you—

ELIZABETH. I am influenced by something deeper than your manners, Mr. Darcy. I am thinking more of your fine capacity for cruelty.

DARCY. Cruelty? And when have I demonstrated that capacity?

ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy, have you never willfully injured an innocent person?

DARCY. (*After a moment of thought*) Oh, you are referring again to my treatment of Mr. Wickham? That still preys on you. The fascination inferior men exert over superior women has often been a puzzle to me.

ELIZABETH. Inferior! Do you always apply that word only to other people?

DARCY. I feel justified in using it towards Mr. Wickham—unless indeed the word "cad" might be more descriptive. If the principal evidence against me is based on your faith in the word of a man like him—

ELIZABETH. This is unworthy of you, sir.

DARCY. I know you don't choose to believe me, but let me most earnestly warn you against him. He is an unprincipled, designing— (*WARNS CURTAIN.*)

ELIZABETH. (*Turns head*) I refuse to listen to you any further, but it is not only what you have done to Mr. Wickham, although that would be quite enough— (*FACES DARCY*) Even if I cared for you, and I never could—nothing would induce me to marry the man who has ruined my sister's life. (*Her voice breaks*) The sweetest soul ever born! How could you do it? How could you have hurt her—

DARCY cont.

having once known her? ! (DARCY is silent.) Can you deny that you came between Jane and Charles Bingley?

DARCY. I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your sister. (Quietly. ELIZABETH rises.) Towards him I have been wiser than towards myself.

ELIZABETH. You talk to me of love— They love each other, she and Charles— Jane is of those who only love once. It will kill her, I know it will. (Pause) You have trodden on a heart.

DARCY. (After a silence) You wish to think badly of me.

ELIZABETH. (Turns away from him) I have no choice.

DARCY. I have made the mistake of being honest with you.

ELIZABETH. (Turns to him) Honesty is a very overrated virtue. Tact and taste are more agreeable ones.

DARCY. My scruples with regard to your family— were natural.

ELIZABETH. And should have been kept to yourself. Let us end this distasteful subject— (Turns to DARCY) You could not have made your offer in any way that would have tempted me to accept it. Mr. Darcy, you are the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry!

DARCY. (He is humiliated, shocked and astounded) Forgive me for having taken up your time. (He bows; crosses to door L.) I wish you every happiness. (Her face is slightly panicked as he begins to go.)

end
CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE I

SCENE: The drawing room-living room at Longbourn. Same as Act I. A week later. After-noon.

L. of R.C. doors closed in this scene. R. open. Serving table R. of the door.

AT RISE: MRS. LAKE and ELIZABETH enter through conservatory. ELIZABETH sighs.

Mrs. LAKE. Don't you worry about Miss Jane, Miss.

ELIZABETH. I'm all right; I'm just tired, Mrs. Lake.

Mrs. LAKE. You can't believe how glad I was to see you last night, Miss Elizabeth. The responsibility was too much for me.

ELIZABETH. I came home as soon as I got Papa's message. Jane seems happier out there where she can see the flowers, doesn't she, Mrs. Lake? (ELIZABETH crosses slowly to front of table C.)

Mrs. LAKE. (At chair R. of table C.) Aye, the apothecary was right, Miss Bennet. (ELIZABETH crosses to sofa and sits.) And it's no trouble for Hill and me to carry her downstairs every morning. (Takes a step toward ELIZABETH) If I might take the liberty, Miss—couldn't we hint to the young gentleman—