

WICKHAM #1

30 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE ACT I

Amelia! Oh, my dear Captain Denny! Did you ever in your lives have such an utterly delightful time?
CAPTAIN DENNY. Never, Miss Lydia! 'Pon my honor!

AMELIA. It has been charming.
LYDIA. Oh, I know my own mama and papa are giving the ball and I shouldn't run on about it so. But I can't help it. I really can't.
CAPTAIN DENNY. And why shouldn't you? Some shrub, Miss Lydia?

LYDIA. (*Glancing off r.c. to L.*) N—no— Papa says I mustn't. He says it's too strong. He thinks I'm a child.

AMELIA. Papas are all like that. Shall we return to the ballroom, Captain Denny?

CAPTAIN DENNY. By all means! (*He and AMELIA go out r.c. to L. Alone, LYDIA glances off r.c. to L., then goes to the punch bowl and snatches a quick one.*)
WICKHAM comes in from the conservatory; sees her; pauses on the steps. She puts the glass down hastily.)

LYDIA. Mr. Wickham!
WICKHAM. Your servant! (*He comes down*) But there's something most grievously wrong here.

LYDIA. Wrong?
WICKHAM. That you should be alone for an instant! It is a reflection on the intelligence of every gentleman present that one so young and so surprising fair should lack an escort.

LYDIA. Ah, Mr. Wickham! You officers talk as beautifully as you look.

WICKHAM. Our lives of grim duty make us doubly appreciative, Miss Lydia. (*He looks about*) After the rigors of camp life, it is sheer delight to find oneself in such elegant company in so fine a house.

LYDIA. You must see many houses that are finer.
WICKHAM. There are not many that bespeak so

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much of quiet gentility. A perfect setting for so exquisite an ornament as—

LYDIA. As what, Mr. Wickham?

WICKHAM. Need I say it, Miss Lydia?

LYDIA. Why—yes—I think you might—

WICKHAM. Your father is a wealthy man, Miss Bennet. But I should say that his greatest treasure is his youngest daughter.

Mrs. BENNET. (*Enters r.c. from L. with LADY LUCAS*) My dear Lydia—and my dear Mr. Wickham.

WICKHAM. Your servant, ma'am. (*LYDIA curtsies to LADY LUCAS.*)

Mrs. BENNET. Have you seen our conservatory, Mr. Wickham?

WICKHAM. Yes, ma'am—I have just been admiring—

Mrs. BENNET. (*Paying no attention*) Do take Mr. Wickham to see our conservatory. We have some—some tropical things of some kind—I can never remember those dreadful Latin names—but they're peculiarly fine specimens.

LYDIA. Do come, Mr. Wickham. (*MUSIC stops.*)
WICKHAM. With the utmost pleasure. (*They exit into conservatory.*)

Mrs. BENNET. Think of it! My youngest daughter, and virtually at the marriageable age! Isn't it incredible?

LADY LUCAS. With three daughters, you must find yourself in a permanent state of incredibility.

Mrs. BENNET. (*Beaming. MUSIC starts.*) I know! It makes life so entertaining, doesn't it? Will you have some shrub, Lady Lucas? Mr. Bennet promised me it would be most harmless. (*AGATHA and 2ND YOUNG MAN come in from conservatory with greetings.*) Ah, my dears, do go in and dance. The musicians become so discouraged if everyone stays in the conservatory. (*They go out r.c. to L. Comes down C.*)

end

begin

WICKHAM #2

up r.) Oh, very well—for your sake. But I'll only stand up with her once. (The Girls get out of view as they pass them on way to door.)

BINGLEY. You may change your mind. (DARCY and BINGLEY exit r.c. to L.)

ELIZABETH. (Enters with CHARLOTTE indignantly through French windows) Why do we tolerate that man? (CHARLOTTE L. of ELIZABETH. ELIZABETH crosses above c. table.)

CHARLOTTE. (Crosses to table c.) No doubt because he is of the very rich. Those who do not envy the tribe, adore it.

ELIZABETH. (Crosses to large fireplace) Well, I shall see that he does not come here again.

CHARLOTTE. You forget, dear, that he is the bosom friend of Bingley and may influence him against Jane.

(ELIZABETH is about to reply when they BOTH turn toward r.c. door as WICKHAM enters agitatedly.)

WICKHAM. (Enters r.c. from L.; comes down in front of sofa) Oh, Miss Elizabeth, I was looking for you to bid you goodnight. I am leaving at once. (Girls look at each other in surprise.) You'll excuse me, something very unpleasant—

ELIZABETH. (Rather stiffly) Unpleasant? Here? WICKHAM. I would rather not talk about it.

ELIZABETH. But, Mr. Wickham, I insist!

WICKHAM. Just now in the ballroom, Mr. Darcy—

ELIZABETH. Mr. Darcy? What has he done?

WICKHAM. Your mother wished to present me to Miss Bingley. Mr. Darcy was with her at the moment. They declined to be introduced and walked away.

ELIZABETH. This is beyond bearing— But why— I was not aware that you had even met before?

WICKHAM. We knew each other only too well—

CHARLOTTE. And yet he declined to meet you? There usually is some reason for a gentleman to refuse to meet a fellow guest.

ELIZABETH. A gentleman would have more consideration for his hostess.

WICKHAM. I am not qualified to form any opinion of Mr. Darcy. I have known him too long—and too well—to be a fair judge.

ELIZABETH. But, Mr. Wickham, why did he offer you such an affront?

WICKHAM. Please do not ask me, Miss Bennet. I do not wish to injure him in your eyes. If you will permit me I shall say goodnight. (Crosses to ELIZABETH and bows) He might come in. I would not subject you to a repetition of the disgraceful scene in the ballroom.

ELIZABETH. Indeed he would never dare.

CHARLOTTE. But may I ask why you are so anxious to avoid him, Mr. Wickham?

WICKHAM. (Turning to CHARLOTTE) I have no reason except a sense of very great injustice. I wish to spare him the embarrassment of meeting me.

ELIZABETH. (Sits on bench) Injustice! I am full of sympathy.

WICKHAM. (Sits on sofa) You are so kind, Miss Elizabeth— (MUSIC stops.)

ELIZABETH. Tell me, where did you know him?

WICKHAM. My father was manager of the Darcy estate in Derbyshire.

ELIZABETH. Oh!

WICKHAM. When the elder Darcy died he left instruction that his son should bestow upon me a sum of money.

CHARLOTTE. May one ask why, Mr. Wickham?

WICKHAM. I was his godson—he was very fond of me. I was also to receive the clerical living in his gift at Pemberly.

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ELIZABETH. But surely, Mr. Darcy obeyed his dead father's wishes?

WICKHAM. He refused me both the living and the money.

ELIZABETH. The wretch!

WICKHAM. I was forced to enter the army—a life I detest.

ELIZABETH. But what can have induced him to behave so cruelly?

WICKHAM. A determined dislike of me which I can attribute only to jealousy.

ELIZABETH. Indeed, I do not like Mr. Darcy. I could hardly have believed him dishonest.

CHARLOTTE. And I should have thought him too proud to be.

WICKHAM. Thank you for your sympathy, Miss Elizabeth. It has been very precious to me. You will forgive me for inflicting all this upon you, but your heart is so kind. Please let me go now. Convey my apologies and regrets to Mrs. Bennet—I will go this way. (Rises, kisses her hand, looks at r.c. door, then, pointing to conservatory, exits up l.)

ELIZABETH. (Stands staring after him, then turns. Crosses behind sofa to between table and the door r.c.) There's a sample of Darcy for you!

CHARLOTTE. (Crosses to l. of c. table; picks up book) I don't like emotional men—it seems to me that the reserve of Darcy is preferable. Surely, Lizzie, there must be two sides to this affair. (MUSIC starts.)

ELIZABETH. Yes, a right and a wrong. (Angrily.) Darcy. (Enters r.c. from l.; comes down to ELIZABETH) Oh, Miss Elizabeth, they are playing the last extra. May I have the honor? (Approaches ELIZABETH and offers arm.)

ELIZABETH. Thank you, sir. I am too tired to dance any more. (DARCY is surprised at the refusal. Takes

two steps down to table c.) Besides, I fear the honor would be more than I could bear.

DARCY. Have I had the misfortune to offend you?

ELIZABETH. It is rather Mr. Wickham whom you have offended, sir—one of my mother's guests.

DARCY. It is more than he merits, ma'am.

ELIZABETH. I beg your pardon. I found him very charming, and I am sure my mother did.

DARCY. He is blessed with the charm that makes new friendships. I doubt if he possesses the quality to retain them.

ELIZABETH. (Moving away indifferently, crosses to sofa. DARCY looks at her.) He certainly lacked the talent to retain yours. (ELIZABETH smiles at CHARLOTTE, who crosses, sits in chair r. of table, smiles at ELIZABETH and begins to read book. ELIZABETH sits on sofa. DARCY and ELIZABETH look at CHARLOTTE as she sits in chair. DARCY then gazes intently at ELIZABETH. She turns and sees, then speaks, after a pause) Did you enjoy the music, Mr. Darcy?

DARCY. Very much, thank you. (Crosses to bench in front of r. fireplace.)

ELIZABETH. (After another pause) It's your turn to make a remark now.

DARCY. Whatever you wish me to say, you may consider said.

ELIZABETH. Very well. I daresay there are times when perhaps it is better to limit conversation to yes or no.

DARCY. (Quietly) Are you consulting your own wishes—or do you imagine that you are gratifying mine? (MUSIC comes faintly off stage.)

ELIZABETH. (Looking over at him defiantly) Both—I recognize our similarity. We are each unsociable and taciturn—reluctant to speak unless we can say something that will astonish the whole room or be handed down to posterity. (She smiles at him during the last part of this speech.)

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