"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single werewolf in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a mate."

A Sterek (and Scisaac) based parody of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice". Written in the voice of Jane Austen, not the voice of Teen Wolf, and following the original text very closely. Basically names and pronouns are changed, and there is the normal strategic product placement associated with Teen Wolf, but otherwise this is Austen. It is remarkable how little the characters have to change to fit with the Austen novel - although Lydia Martin and Melissa McCall get a bit of a rough deal in the translation. Scott, Isaac, Stiles and Derek match the character types very well, however - personality traits have not changed that much over the centuries. January 2013 marks the 200 year anniversary of the publication of Pride and Prejudice.
It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single werewolf in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a mate.

However little known the feelings or views of such a werewolf may be on their first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that they are considered the rightful property of some one or other of their offspring.

"My dear Sheriff Stilinski," said his lady to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?"

Sheriff Stilinski replied that he had not.

"But it is," returned she; "for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it."

Sheriff Stilinski made no answer.

"Do you not want to know who has taken it?" cried Mrs McCall-Stilinski impatiently.

"You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it."

This was invitation enough.

"Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young beta of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a Toyota 4X4 to see the place, and was so much delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week."

"What is his name?"

"Isaac Lahey."

"Is he married or single?"

"Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single beta of large fortune; four or five hundred thousand a year. What a fine thing for our children!"

"How so? How can it affect them?"

"My dear Sheriff Stilinski," replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them."

"Is that his design in settling here?"

"Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes."

"I see no occasion for that. You and the children may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as your legs are pretty good for a woman of your age, Isaac Lahey may like you the best of the party."

"My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything
extraordinary now. But you must indeed go and see Mr. Lahey when he comes into the neighbourhood."

"It is more than I engage for, I assure you."

"But consider your children. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir Chris Silver is determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know, he visits no new wolf packs. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not."

"You are over-scrupulous, surely. I dare say Isaac Lahey will be very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by text to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the children; though I must throw in a good word for my little Stiles."

"I desire you will do no such thing. Stiles is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure he is not half so handsome as Scott, nor half so good-humoured as Jackson. But you are always giving him the preference."

"They have none of them much to recommend them," replied he; "they are all silly and ignorant like other teenagers; but Stiles has something more of witty comebacks than the rest."

"Sheriff Stilinski, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves."

"You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these last twenty years at least."

"Ah, you do not know what I suffer."

"But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four hundred thousand a year come into the neighbourhood."

"It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them."

"Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all."

Sheriff Stilinski was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, only medical information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her children married; its solace was visiting and news.
"Oh!" said Jackson stoutly, "I am not afraid; for though I am the youngest, my abs are the best defined."

Sheriff Stilinski was among the earliest of those who waited on Isaac Lahey. He had always intended to visit him, though to the last always assuring his wife that he should not go; and till the evening after the visit was paid she had no knowledge of it. It was then disclosed in the following manner. Observing his second son wearing a new "stud muffin" T-shirt he suddenly addressed him with:

"I hope Isaac Lahey will like it, Stiles."

"We are not in a way to know what Mr. Lahey likes," said Mrs McCall-Stilinski resentfully, "since we are not to visit."

"But you forget, mamma," said Stiles, "that we shall meet him at the Jungle Club, and that Mrs. Long promised to introduce him."

"I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two children of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her."

"No more have I," said Sheriff Stilinski; "and I am glad to find that you do not depend on her serving you."

Mrs. McCall-Stilinksi deigned not to make any reply, but, unable to contain herself, began scolding one of her daughters.

"Don't keep coughing so, Kanima, for Heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You paralyse them to pieces."

"Kanima has no discretion in her coughs," said her father; "she times them ill."

"I do not cough for my own amusement," replied Kanima fretfully.

"When is your next club outing to be, Stiles?"

"To-morrow fortnight."

"Aye, so it is," cried Melissa, "and Mrs. Long does not come back till the day before; so it will be impossible for her to introduce him, for she will not know him herself."

"Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of your friend, and introduce Mr. Lahey to her."

"Impossible, Sheriff Stilinski, impossible, when I am not acquainted with him myself; how can you
be so teasing?"

"I honour your circumspection. A fortnight's acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what a beta really is by the end of a fortnight. But if we do not venture somebody else will; and after all, Mrs. Long and her children must stand their chance; and, therefore, as she will think it an act of kindness, if you decline the office, I will take it on myself."

The teenagers stared at their father. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski said only, "Nonsense, nonsense!"

"What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?" cried he. "Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you there. What say you, Lydia? For you are a young lady of deep reflection, I know, and read great books and make complicated equations on blackboards."

Lydia wished to say something sensible, but knew not how.

"While Lydia is adjusting her ideas," he continued, "let us return to Isaac Lahey."

"I am sick of Isaac Lahey," cried his wife.

"I am sorry to hear that; but why did not you tell me that before? If I had known as much this morning I certainly would not have called on him. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now."

The astonishment of his family was just what he wished; that of his wife perhaps surpassing the rest; though, when the first tumult of joy was over, she began to declare that it was what she had expected all the while.

"How good it was in you, my dear Sheriff Stilinski! But I knew I should persuade you at last. I was sure you loved your children too well to neglect such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! and it is such a good joke, too, that you should have gone this morning and never said a word about it till now."

"Now, Kanima, you may cough as much as you choose," said Sheriff Stilinski; and, as he spoke, he left the room, fatigued with the raptures of his wife.

"What an excellent father you have, children!" said she, when the door was shut. "I do not know how you will ever make him amends for his kindness; or me, either, for that matter. At our time of life it is not so pleasant, I can tell you, to be making new acquaintances every day; but for your sakes, we would do anything. Jackson, my love, though you are the youngest, I dare say Isaac Lahey will dance with you at the next rave."

"Oh!" said Jackson stoutly, "I am not afraid; for though I am the youngest, my abs are the best defined."

The rest of the evening was spent in conjecturing how soon Isaac would return Sheriff Stilinski’s visit, and determining when they should ask him to dinner.
Turning round he looked for a moment at Stiles, till catching his eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said: "He is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me; I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young boys who are slighted by other men."

Not all that Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, however, with the assistance of her five teenagers, could ask on the subject, was sufficient to draw from her husband any satisfactory description of Mr. Lahey. They attacked him in various ways--with barefaced questions, ingenious suppositions, and distant surmises; but he eluded the skill of them all, and they were at last obliged to accept the second-hand intelligence of their neighbour, Sir Chris Silver. His report was highly favourable. He had been delighted with him. He was quite young, with blond curly hair, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable, and, to crown the whole, he meant to be at the next rave with a large pack. Nothing could be more delightful! To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love; and very lively hopes of Isaac Lahey’s heart were entertained.

"If I can but see one of my children happily settled at Netherfield," said Mrs. McCall-Stilinski to her husband, "and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for."

In a few days Mr. Lahey returned Sheriff Stilinski’s visit, and sat about ten minutes with him in his library. He had entertained hopes of being admitted to a sight of the teenagers, of whose physical perfection he had heard much; but he saw only the father. The teenagers were somewhat more fortunate, for they had the advantage of ascertaining from an upper window that he wore a blue scarf, and drove a black Toyota SUV.

An invitation to dinner was soon afterwards dispatched; and already had Mrs. McCall-Stilinski planned the courses that were to do credit to her housekeeping, when an answer arrived which deferred it all. Mr. Lahey was obliged to be in town the following day, and, consequently, unable to accept the honour of their invitation, etc. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was quite disconcerted. She could not imagine what business he could have in town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear that he might be always flying about from one place to another, and never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be. Sir Chris Silver quieted her fears a little by starting the idea of his being gone to London only to get a large pack for the rave; and a report soon followed that Mr. Lahey was to bring twelve alphas and seven betas with him to the Jungle Club.

The teenagers grieved over such a number of alphas, but were comforted the day before the rave by hearing, that instead of twelve he brought only five with him from London. And when the party entered the Jungle Club it consisted of only five altogether - Mr. Lahey, his sister Erica, his brother Boyd and sister-in-law, and another young werewolf.

Isaac Lahey was good-looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners. His siblings were fine werewolves, with an air of decided fashion; but his friend
Mr. Derek soon drew the attention of the club by his fine, tall person, handsome features, manly stubble, and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having a million a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Lahey, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud; to be above his pack, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, Sourwolf-like countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend.

Isaac Lahey had soon made himself acquainted with all the principal people in the room; he was lively and unreserved, danced every track, was angry that the club closed so early, and talked of giving a rave himself at Netherfield. Such amiable qualities must speak for themselves. What a contrast between him and his friend! Mr. Derek danced only once with Mrs. Boyd and once with Erica, declined being introduced to any other person, and spent the rest of the evening in lurking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party and glowering at the rest. His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable Sourwolf in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again.

Amongst the most violent against him was Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, whose dislike of his general behaviour was sharpened into particular resentment by his having slighted one of her teenagers.

Stiles had been obliged, by the scarcity of partners, to sit down for two tracks; and during part of that time, Mr. Derek had been standing near enough for Stiles to hear a conversation between Mr. Derek and Mr. Lahey, who came from the dance floor for a few minutes, to press his friend to join it.

"Come, Derek," said he, "I must have you dance. I hate to see you lurking about by yourself in this creepy manner. You had much better dance."

"I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an nightclub as this it would be insupportable. Your sister is engaged, and there is not another person in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with."

"I would not be so fastidious as you are," cried Isaac Lahey, "for a kingdom! Upon my honour, I never met with so many pleasant people in my life as I have this evening; and there are several of them you see uncommonly attractive." 

"You are dancing with the only handsome boy in the room," said Mr. Derek, looking at Scott.

"Oh! He is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But there is one of his brothers sitting down just behind you, who is very pretty, and I dare say very agreeable. Do let me ask my partner to introduce you."

"Which do you mean?" and turning round he looked for a moment at Stiles, till catching his eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said: "He is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me; I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young boys who are slighted by other men. You had better return to your partner and enjoy his puppy-dog smiles, for you are wasting your time with me."

Isaac followed his advice. Mr. Derek walked off; and Stiles remained with no very cordial feelings toward him. He told the story, however, with great spirit among his friends; for he had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous.

The evening altogether passed off pleasantly to the whole family. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski had seen her eldest teenager much admired by the Netherfield party. Isaac Lahey had danced with him twice, and he had been distinguished by his siblings. Scott was as much gratified by this as his mother could be,
though in a quieter way. Stiles felt Scott's pleasure. Lydia had heard herself mentioned to Erica as the most accomplished girl in the neighbourhood; and Kanima and Jackson had been fortunate enough never to be without partners, which was all that they had yet learnt to care for at a rave. They returned, therefore, in good spirits to Longbourn, the village where they lived, and of which they were the principal inhabitants. They found Sheriff Stilinski still up. With a Samsung notepad he was regardless of time; and on the present occasion he had a good deal of curiosity as to the event of an evening which had raised such splendid expectations. He had rather hoped that his wife's views on the stranger would be disappointed; but he soon found out that he had a different story to hear.

"Oh! my dear Sheriff Stilinski," as she entered the room, "we have had a most delightful evening, a most excellent rave. I wish you had been there. Scott was so admired, nothing could be like it. Everybody said how well he looked; and Isaac Lahey thought him quite handsome, and danced with him twice! Only think of that, my dear; he actually danced with him twice! and he was the only creature in the room that he asked a second time.

First of all, he asked Miss Allison Silver. I was so vexed to see him stand up with her! But, however, he did not admire her at all; indeed, nobody can, you know; and he seemed quite struck with Scott as he was going up to the bar. So he inquired who he was, and bought him a Coke, and asked him for the two next. Then the two third he danced with Miss King, and the two fourth with Maria Silver, and the two fifth with Scott again, and the two sixth with Stiles, and the 1990s anthem-

"If he had had any compassion for me," cried her husband impatiently, "he would not have danced half so much! For God's sake, say no more of his partners. Oh that he had sprained his ankle in the first dance!"

"Oh! my dear, I am quite delighted with him. He is so excessively handsome! And his pack are charming werewolves. I never in my life saw anything more elegant than their outfits. I dare say the lace upon Erica's top -"

Here she was interrupted again. Sheriff Stilinski protested against any description of finery. She was therefore obliged to seek another branch of the subject, and related, with much bitterness of spirit and some exaggeration, the shocking rudeness of Mr. Derek.

"But I can assure you," she added, "that Stiles does not lose much by not suiting his fancy; for he is a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there was no enduring him! He lurked here, and he lurked there, fancying himself so very great! Not handsome enough to dance with! I wish you had been there, my dear, to have given him one of your set-downs. I quite detest the man."
Volume 1 Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Scott was therefore established as a sweet beta, and their brother felt authorized by such commendation to think of him as he chose.

Volume 1
Chapter 4

When Scott and Stiles were alone, the former, who had been cautious in his praise of Isaac Lahey before, expressed to his brother just how very much he admired him.

"He is just what a young man ought to be," said he, "sensible, good-humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy smiles! - so many curls, with such perfect good breeding!"

"He is also handsome," replied Stiles, "which a young man ought likewise to be, if he possibly can. His character is thereby complete."

"I was very much flattered by his asking me to dance a second time. I did not expect such a compliment."

"Did not you? I did for you. But that is one great difference between us. Compliments always take you by surprise, and me never. What could be more natural than his asking you again? He could not help seeing that you were about five times as attractive as every other wolf in the club. No thanks to his gallantry for that. Well, he certainly is very agreeable, and I give you leave to like him. You have liked many a stupider person."

"Dear Stiles!"

"Oh! you are a great deal too apt, you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in anybody. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in your life."

"I would not wish to be hasty in censuring anyone; but I always speak what I think."

"I know you do; and it is that which makes the wonder. With your good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough - one meets with it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design - to take the good of everybody's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad - belongs to you alone. And so you like this man's siblings too, do you? Their manners are not equal to his."

"Certainly not - at first. But they are very pleasing werewolves when you converse with them. Erica is to live with her brother, and keep his house; and I am much mistaken if we shall not find a very charming neighbour in her."

Stiles listened in silence, but was not convinced; their behaviour at the assembly had not been calculated to please in general; and with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper
than his brother, and with a judgement too unassailed by any attention to himself, he was very little disposed to approve them. They were in fact very fine wolves; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of making themselves agreeable when they chose it, but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of two million pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with werewolves of alpha rank, and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others. They were of a respectable pack in the north of England; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by the grave-digging trade.

Isaac Lahey inherited property to the amount of nearly a ten million pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do it. Isaac Lahey intended it likewise, and sometimes made choice of his county; but as he was now provided with a good house and the liberty of a manor, it was doubtful to many of those who best knew the easiness of his temper, whether he might not spend the remainder of his days at Netherfield, and leave the next generation to purchase. His siblings were anxious for his having an estate of his own; but, though he was now only established as a tenant, Erica was by no means unwilling to preside at his table--nor was Boyd, who had married a woman of more fashion than fortune, less disposed to consider Isaac’s house as his home when it suited him. Isaac Lahey had not been of age two years, when he was tempted by an accidental recommendation to look at Netherfield House. He did look at it, and into it for half-an-hour - was pleased with the situation and the principal rooms, satisfied with what the owner said in its praise, and took it immediately.

Between him and Derek there was a very steady friendship, in spite of great opposition of character. Isaac was endeared to Derek by the easiness, openness, and ductility of his own temper, though no disposition could offer a greater contrast to his own, and though with his own he never appeared dissatisfied. On the strength of Derek's regard, Isaac had the firmest reliance, and of his judgement and alpha power the highest opinion.

In understanding, Derek was the superior. Isaac was by no means deficient, but Derek was clever. He was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his leather jacket, though well-made, gave an air of menace. In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Isaac was sure of being liked wherever he appeared, Derek was continually glowering.

The manner in which they spoke of the Beacon Hills assembly was sufficiently characteristic. Isaac had never met with more pleasant people or more attractive teenagers in his life; everybody had been most kind and attentive to him; there had been no formality, no stiffness; he had soon felt acquainted with all the dance floor; and, as to Scott, he could not conceive a puppy-dog more beautiful. Derek, on the contrary, had seen a collection of people in whom there was little beauty and no fashion, for none of whom he had felt the smallest interest, and from none received either attention or pleasure. Scott he acknowledged to be attractive, but his jaw was uneven.

Boyd and Erica allowed it to be so - but still they admired Scott and liked him, and pronounced him to be a sweet beta, and one whom they would not object to know more of. Scott was therefore established as a sweet beta, and their brother felt authorized by such commendation to think of him as he chose.
Within a short walk of Longbourn lived a family with whom the McCall-Stilinksis were particularly intimate. Sir Chris Silver had been formerly in the arms trade in Beacon Hills, where he had made a tolerable fortune, and risen to the honour of knighthood for his services to law enforcement.

The distinction had perhaps been felt too strongly. It had given him a disgust to his business, and to his residence in a small market town; and, in quitting them both, he had removed with his family to a house about a mile from Beacon Hills, denominated from that period Silver Lodge, where he could think with pleasure of his own importance, and, unshackled by business, occupy himself solely in being civil to all the world. For, though elated by his rank, it did not render him supercilious; on the contrary, he was all attention to everybody. By nature inoffensive, friendly, and obliging, his presentation at St.James's had made him courteous.

He had several children. The eldest of them, a sensible, intelligent young woman, about seventeen, was Stile's intimate friend.

That Miss Silver and the McCall-Stilinksis should meet to talk over a rave was absolutely necessary; and the morning after the assembly brought the former to Longbourn to hear and to communicate.

"You began the evening well, Allison," said Mrs. McCall-Stilinksi with civil self-command to Miss Silver. "You were Mr. Lehay's first choice."

"Yes; but he seemed to like his second better."

"Oh! you mean Scott, I suppose, because he danced with him twice. To be sure that did seem as if he admired him - indeed I rather believe he did - I heard something about it - but I hardly know what - something about Mr. Robinson."

"Perhaps you mean what I overheard between him and Mr. Robinson; did not I mention it to you? Mr. Robinson's asking him how he liked our Beacon Hills raves, and whether he did not think there were a great many attractive people in the room, and which he thought the most attractive? and his answering immediately to the last question: 'Oh! Scott McCall, beyond a doubt; there cannot be two opinions on that point.'"

"Upon my word! Well, that is very decided indeed - that does seem as if - but, however, it may all come to nothing, you know."

"My overhearings were more to the purpose than yours, Stiles," said Allison. "Mr. Derek is not so well worth listening to as his friend, is he? - poor Stiles! - to be only just tolerable."
"I beg you would not put it into Stiles' head to be vexed by his ill-treatment, for he is such a disagreeable man, that it would be quite a misfortune to be liked by him. Mrs. Long told me last night that he sat glowering alongside to her for half-an-hour without once opening his lips."

"Erica told me," said Scott, "that he never speaks much, unless among his intimate acquaintances. With them he is remarkably agreeable."

"I do not believe a word of it, my dear. If he had been so very agreeable, he would have talked to Mrs. Long. But I can guess how it was; everybody says that he is eaten up with pride, and I dare say he had heard somehow that Mrs. Long does not keep a car, and had come to the rave on public transport."

"I do not mind his not talking to Mrs. Long," said Allison, "but I wish he had danced with Stiles."

"Another time, Stiles," said his mother, "I would not dance with him, if I were you."

"I believe, ma'am, I may safely promise you never to dance with him."

"His pride," said Allison, "does not offend me so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine an alpha, with pack, fortune, Camaro, everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud."

"That is very true," replied Stiles, "and I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine."
"Well," said Allison, "I wish Scott success with all my heart; and if he were married to Isaac to-morrow, I should think he had as good a chance of happiness as if he were to be studying Isaac’s character for a twelvemonth."

The family of Longbourn soon waited on the family of Netherfield. The visit was soon returned in due form. Scott’s pleasing manners grew on the goodwill of Boyd and Erica; and though the mother was found to be intolerable, and the younger siblings not worth speaking to a wish of being better acquainted with them was expressed towards the two eldest. By Scott, this attention was received with the greatest pleasure, but Stiles still saw superciliousness in their treatment of everybody, hardly excepting even his brother, and could not like them; though their kindness to Scott, such as it was, had a value as arising in all probability from the influence of their brother’s admiration.

It was generally evident whenever they met, that Isaac did admire Scott and to Stiles it was equally evident that Scott was yielding to the preference which he had begun to entertain for Isaac from the first, and was in a way to be very much in love; but Stiles considered with pleasure that it was not likely to be discovered by the world in general, since Scott united, with great strength of feeling, a composure of temper and a uniformly vacant goofy sort of expression which would guard him from the suspicions of the impertinent. Stiles mentioned this to his friend Miss Silver.

"It may perhaps be pleasant," replied Allison, "to be able to impose on the public in such a case; but it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a person conceals his affection with the same skill from the object of it, he may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark. There is so much of gratitude or vanity in almost every attachment, that it is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all begin freely - a slight preference is natural enough; but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten a person had better show more affection than they feel. Lahey likes your brother undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like him, if Scott does not help him on."

"But Scott does help him on, as much as his nature will allow. If I can perceive his regard for Isaac, Isaac must be a simpleton, indeed, not to discover it too."

"Remember, Stiles, that Isaac does not know Scott's disposition as you do."

"But if a person is partial to a man, and does not endeavour to conceal it, he must find it out."

"Perhaps he must, if he sees enough of that person. But, though Isaac and Scott meet tolerably often, it is never for many hours together; and, as they always see each other in large mixed parties, it is impossible that every moment should be employed in conversing together. Scott should therefore make the most of every half-hour in which he can command Isaac’s attention. When Scott is secure
of him, there will be more leisure for falling in love as much as he chooses."

"Your plan is a good one," replied Stiles, "where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married, and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it. But these are not Scott's feelings; he is not acting by design. As yet, he cannot even be certain of the degree of his own regard nor of its reasonableness. He has known him only a fortnight. He danced four tracks with him at the Jungle Club; he saw Isaac one morning at his own house, and has since dined with him in company four times and been bowling with him once. This is not quite enough to make him understand Isaac's character."

"Not as you represent it. Had he merely dined with him, he might only have discovered whether Isaac had a good appetite; but you must remember that four evenings have also been spent together - and four evenings may do a great deal."

"Yes; these four evenings have enabled them to ascertain that they both like lacrosse better than basketball; but with respect to any other leading characteristic, I do not imagine that much has been unfolded."

"Well," said Allison, "I wish Scott success with all my heart; and if he were married to Isaac tomorrow, I should think he had as good a chance of happiness as if he were to be studying Isaac's character for a twelvemonth. Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other or ever so similar beforehand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life."

"You make me laugh, Allison; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself."

Occupied in observing Mr. Lahey's attentions to his brother, Stiles was far from suspecting that he was himself becoming an object of some interest in the eyes of his friend. Mr. Derek had at first scarcely allowed Stiles to be handsome; he had looked at Stiles without admiration at the rave; and when they next met, he looked at Stiles only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that Stiles hardly had a good feature in his face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of his dark eyes set against clear skin with its scattering of moles. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect muscle tone in his form, he was forced to acknowledge Stiles' figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that Stiles' manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness and witty use of sarcasm. Of this Stiles was perfectly unaware; to him Derek was only the man who glowered constantly, and who had not thought him handsome enough to dance with.

Derek began to wish to know more of Stiles, and as a step towards conversing with Stiles himself, attended to his conversation with others. His doing so drew Stiles' notice. It was at Sir Chris Silver's, where a large party were assembled.

"What does Mr. Derek mean," said Stiles to Alison, "by listening to my conversation with Colonel Finstock"?

"That is a question which Mr. Derek only can answer."

"But if he does it any more I shall certainly let him know that I see what he is about. He has a very glowering eye and brooding eyebrows, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of him."
On seeing Allison look at him, Stiles quickly exclaimed “I am not afraid of him. Well, OK, maybe a bit. That’s not the point”.

On Derek’s approaching them soon afterwards, though without seeming to have any intention of speaking, Miss Silver defied her friend to mention such a subject to him; which immediately provoking Stiles to do it, he turned to Derek and said:

"Did you not think, Mr. Derek, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now, when I was teasing Colonel Finstock to give us a rave at Beacon Hills?"

"With great energy; but it is always a subject which makes a teenager energetic."

"You are severe on us."

"It will be his turn soon to be teased," said Miss Silver. "I am going to turn on the karaoke machine, Stiles, and you know what follows."

"You are a very strange creature by way of a friend! - always wanting me to sing before anybody and everybody! If my vanity had taken a musical turn, you would have been invaluable; but as it is, I would really rather not stand up before those who must be in the habit of hearing the very best performers." On Miss Silver's persevering, however, Stiles added, "Very well, if it must be so, it must." And gravely glancing at Mr. Derek, "There is a fine old saying, which everybody here is of course familiar with: 'Keep your breath to cool your rabbit burger; and I shall keep mine to swell my song."

His performance was pleasing, though by no means capital. After a song or two, and before he could reply to the entreaties of several that he would sing again, he was eagerly succeeded at karaoke by his sister Lydia, who having, in consequence of being the only intellectual one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display.

Lydia had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than she had reached. Stiles, easy and unaffected, had been listened to with much more pleasure, though not singing half so well; and Lydia, at the end of a long Beatles medley, was glad to purchase praise and gratitude by singing One Direction tunes, at the request of her younger siblings, who, with some of the Silvers, and two or three officers, joined eagerly in dancing at one end of the room.

Mr. Derek stood near them in silent indignation at such a mode of passing the evening, to the exclusion of all conversation, and was too much engrossed by his thoughts to perceive that Sir Chris Silver was his neighbour, till Sir Chris thus began:

"What a charming amusement for young people this is, Mr. Derek! There is nothing like dancing after all. I consider it as one of the first refinements of polished society."

"Certainly, sir; and it has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world. Every omega can dance."

Sir Chris only smiled. "Your friend dances delightfully," he continued after a pause, on seeing Isaac join the group; "and I doubt not that you are an adept in the science yourself, Mr. Derek."

"You saw me dance at Beacon Hills, I believe, sir."

"Yes, indeed, and received no inconsiderable pleasure from the sight. Do you often dance at St. James's?"
"Never, sir."

"Do you not think it would be a proper compliment to the place?"

"It is a compliment which I never pay to any place if I can avoid it."

"You have a house in town, I conclude?"

Mr. Derek bowed.

"I had once had some thought of fixing in town myself—for I am fond of superior society."

He paused in hopes of an answer; but his companion was not disposed to make any; and Stiles at that instant moving towards them, he was struck with the action of doing a very gallant thing, and called out to him:

"My dear Mr Stiles, why are you not dancing? Mr. Derek, you must allow me to present this young gentleman to you as a very desirable partner. You cannot refuse to dance, I am sure when such perfection is before you."

And, taking Stiles’ hand, he would have given it to Mr. Derek who, though extremely surprised, was not unwilling to receive it, when Stiles instantly drew back, and said with some discomposure to Sir Chris

"Indeed, sir, I have not the least intention of dancing. I entreat you not to suppose that I moved this way in order to beg for a partner."

Mr. Derek, with grave propriety, requested to be allowed the honour of his hand, but in vain. Stiles was determined; nor did Sir Chris at all shake Stiles’s purpose by his attempt at persuasion.

"You excel so much in the dance, Stiles, that it is cruel to deny me the happiness of seeing you; and though this gentleman dislikes the amusement in general, he can have no objection, I am sure, to oblige us for one half-hour."

"Mr. Derek is all politeness," said Stiles, smiling.

"He is, indeed; but, considering the inducement, my dear Stiles, we cannot wonder at his complaisance—for who would object to such a partner?"

Stiles looked archly, and turned away. Stiles’s resistance had not injured him with the gentleman, and Derek was thinking of Stiles with some complacency, when thus accosted by Erica:

"I can guess the subject of your reverie."

"I should imagine not."

"You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in this manner in such society; and indeed I am quite of your opinion. I was never more annoyed! The insipidity, and yet the noise—the humanness, and yet the self-importance of all those people! What would I give to hear your strictures on them!"

"Your conjecture is totally wrong, I assure you. My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the clear skinned face of a handsome teen can bestow."

Erica immediately fixed her eyes on his face, and desired he would tell her what teen had the credit
of inspiring such reflections.

Mr. Derek replied with great intrepidity:

"Mr Stiles Stilinski."

"Mr Stiles Stilinski!" repeated Erika. "I am all astonishment. How long has he been such a favourite? -and pray, when am I to wish you joy?"

"That is exactly the question which I expected you to ask. A lady's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony, in a moment. I knew you would be wishing me joy."

"Nay, if you are serious about it, I shall consider the matter is absolutely settled. You will be having a charming mother-in-law, indeed; and, of course, she will always be at Pemberley with you."

He listened to her with perfect indifference while she chose to entertain herself in this manner; and as his composure convinced her that all was safe, her wit flowed long.
Scott had slept ill, and though up, was very feverish, and not well enough to leave his room. Stiles was glad to be taken to him immediately; and Scott, who had only been withheld by the fear of giving alarm or inconvenience from expressing in his note how much he longed for such a visit, was delighted at his entrance.

Sheriff Stilinski's property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two hundred thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his children, was entailed on a distant relation; and their mother's fortune, though ample for her situation in life, could but ill supply the deficiency of his. Her father had been an attorney in Beacon Hills, and had left her four hundred thousand pounds.

She had a sister married to a Mr. Phillips, who had been a clerk to their father and succeeded him in the business, and a brother settled in London in the veterinarian line of trade.

The village of Longbourn was only one mile from Beacon Hills; a most convenient distance for the young people, who were usually tempted thither three or four times a week, to pay their duty to their aunt and to a branch of Macy's just over the way. The two youngest of the family, Kanima and Jackson, were particularly frequent in these attentions; their minds were more vacant than their siblings', and when nothing better offered, a walk to Beacon Hills was necessary to amuse their morning hours and furnish conversation for the evening; and however bare of news the country in general might be, they always contrived to learn some from their aunt. At present, indeed, they were well supplied both with news and happiness by the recent arrival of a militia regiment in the neighbourhood; it was to remain the whole winter, and Beacon Hills was the headquarters.

Their visits to Mrs. Phillips were now productive of the most interesting intelligence. Every day added something to their knowledge of the officers' names and connections. Their lodgings were not long a secret, and at length they began to know the officers themselves. Mr. Phillips visited them all, and this opened to his nephews and nieces a store of felicity unknown before. They could talk of nothing but officers; and Mr. Lahey's large fortune, the mention of which gave animation to their mother, was worthless in their eyes when opposed to the regimentals of an ensign.

After listening one morning to their effusions on this subject, Sheriff Stilinski coolly observed:

"From all that I can collect by your manner of talking, you must be two of the silliest teenagers in the country. I have suspected it some time, but I am now convinced."

Kanima was disconcerted, and made no answer; but Jackson, with perfect indifference, continued to express his admiration of Captain Greenberg, and his hope of seeing him in the course of the day, as Captain Greenberg was going the next morning to London.
"I am astonished, my dear," said Mrs. McColl-Stilinski, "that you should be so ready to think your own children silly. If I wished to think slightingly of anybody's children, it should not be of my own, however."

"If my children are silly, I must hope to be always sensible of it."

"Yes - but as it happens, they are all of them very clever."

"This is the only point, I flatter myself, on which we do not agree. I had hoped that our sentiments coincided in every particular, but I must so far differ from you as to think our two youngest children uncommonly foolish."

"My dear Sheriff Stilinski, you must not expect such teenagers to have the sense of their father and mother. When they get to our age, I dare say they will not think about officers any more than we do. I remember the time when I liked a red coat myself very well--and, indeed, so I do still at my heart; and if a smart young colonel, with five or six hundred thousand a year, should want one of my teens I shall not say nay to him; and I thought Colonel Finstock looked very becoming the other night at Sir Chris's in his regimentals."

"Mamma," cried Lydia, "my aunt says that Colonel Finstock and Captain Greenberg do not go so often to Miss Watson's as they did when they first came; she sees them now very often standing in Clarke's library."

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was prevented replying by the entrance of the footman with a note for Scott; it came from Netherfield, and the servant waited for an answer. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski's eyes sparkled with pleasure, and she was eagerly calling out, while her son read,

"Well, Scott, who is it from? What is it about? What does he say? Well, Scott, make haste and tell us; make haste, my love."

"It is from Erica," said Scott, and then read it aloud.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,--

"If you are not so compassionate as to dine to-day with Boyd and me, we shall be in danger of hating each other for the rest of our lives, for a whole day's tete-a-tete between two betas can never end without a quarrel. Come as soon as you can on receipt of this. My brother and Mr. Derek are to dine with the officers.--Yours ever,

Erica"

"With the officers!" cried Jackson. "I wonder my aunt did not tell us of that."

"Dining out," said Mrs. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, "that is very unlucky."

"Can I have the car?" said Scott.

"No, my dear, you had better go on your bike, because it seems likely to rain; and then you must stay all night."

"That would be a good scheme," said Stiles, "if you were sure that they would not offer to send Scott home."

"Oh! but the gentlemen will have Mr. Lahey's Toyota to go to Beacon Hills, and Boyd has his in for a service."
"I had much rather go in the car."

"But, my dear, your father cannot spare the car, I am sure. It is wanted in the farm, Sheriff Stilinski, is it not?"

"It is wanted in the farm much oftener than I can get it."

"But if you have got it to-day," said Stiles, "my mother's purpose will be answered."

Stiles did at last extort from his father an acknowledgment that the car was engaged. Scott was therefore obliged to go on his bike, and his mother attended him to the door with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day. Her hopes were answered; Scott had not been gone long before it rained hard. His siblings were uneasy for him, but his mother was delighted. The rain continued the whole evening without intermission; Scott certainly could not come back.

"This was a lucky idea of mine, indeed!" said Mrs. McCall-Stilinski more than once, as if the credit of making it rain were all her own. Till the next morning, however, she was not aware of all the felicity of her contrivance. Breakfast was scarcely over when the Prodigy's "Run with the wolves" ringtone announces a text for Stiles from Scott:

"MY DEAREST STILES,--

"I find myself very unwell this morning, which, I suppose, is to be imputed to my getting wet through yesterday. My kind friends will not hear of my returning till I am better. They insist also on my seeing Mr. Jones--therefore do not be alarmed if you should hear of his having been to me - and, excepting a sore throat and headache, there is not much the matter with me.--Yours, etc."

"Well, my dear," said Sheriff Stilinski, when Stiles had read the text aloud, "if your son should have a dangerous fit of illness - if he should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Isaac Lahey, and under your orders."

"Oh! I am not afraid of him dying. Werewolves do not die of little trifling colds. He will be taken good care of. As long as he stays there, it is all very well. I would go and see him if I could have the car."

Stiles, feeling really anxious, was determined to go to Scott, though the Jeep was not to be had; and as he was no biker, walking was his only alternative. He declared his resolution.

"How can you be so silly," cried his mother, "as to think of such a thing, in all this dirt! You will not be fit to be seen when you get there."

"I shall be very fit to see Scott - which is all I want."

"Is this a hint to me, Stiles," said his father, "to send for the car?"

"No, indeed, I do not wish to avoid the walk. The distance is nothing when one has a motive; only three miles. I shall be back by dinner."

"I admire the activity of your benevolence," observed Lydia, "but every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason; and, in my opinion, exertion should always be in proportion to what is required."

"We will go as far as Beacon Hills with you," said Kanima and Jackson. Stiles accepted their company, and the three young people set off together.

"If we make haste," said Jackson, as they walked along, "perhaps we may see something of Captain
In Beacon Hills they parted; the two youngest repaired to the lodgings of one of the officers' wives, and Stiles continued his walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding himself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty jeans, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise.

He was shown into the breakfast-parlour, where all but Scott were assembled, and where his appearance created a great deal of surprise. That he should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by himself, was almost incredible to Boyd and Erica; and Stiles was convinced that they held him in contempt for it. He was received, however, very politely by them; and in their brother's manners there was something better than politeness; there was good humour and kindness. Mr. Derek said very little, and Mrs. Boyd nothing at all. The former was divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to his complexion, and doubt as to the occasion's justifying him coming so far alone. The latter was thinking only of her breakfast.

His inquiries after his brother were not very favourably answered. Scott had slept ill, and though up, was very feverish, and not well enough to leave his room. Stiles was glad to be taken to him immediately; and Scott, who had only been withheld by the fear of giving alarm or inconvenience from expressing in his note how much he longed for such a visit, was delighted at his entrance. Scott was not equal, however, to much conversation, and when Erica left them together, could attempt little besides expressions of gratitude for the extraordinary kindness he was treated with. Stiles silently attended him.

When breakfast was over they were joined by Boyd and Erica; and Stiles began to like them himself, when he saw how much affection and solicitude they showed for Scott. The vet came, and having examined his patient, said, as might be supposed, that Scott had caught a violent cold, and that they must endeavour to get the better of it; advised him to return to bed, and promised him some shots. The advice was followed readily, for the feverish symptoms increased, and Scott’s head ached acutely. Stiles did not quit his room for a moment; nor were Erica and Boyd often absent; the alpha being out, they had, in fact, nothing to do elsewhere.

When the clock struck three, Stiles felt that he must go, and very unwillingly said so. Erica offered him the Toyota, and he only wanted a little pressing to accept it, when Scott testified such concern in parting with Stiles, that Erica was obliged to convert the offer of the SUV to an invitation to remain at Netherfield for the present.

Stiles most thankfully consented, and a servant was dispatched to Longbourn to acquaint the family with his stay and bring back a supply of jeans and humorously sloganed T Shirts.
Chapter Summary

Stiles was so much caught with what passed, and had not taken much Adderall that day, and thus had very little attention for his book; and soon laying the Samsung wholly aside, he drew near the card-table, and stationed himself between Mr. Lahey and his brother, to observe the game.

At five o'clock the two betas retired to dress, and at half-past six Stiles was summoned to dinner. To the civil inquiries which then poured in, and amongst which Stiles had the pleasure of distinguishing the much superior solicitude of Isaac Lahey’s, he could not make a very favourable answer. Scott was by no means better. The Laheys, on hearing this, repeated three or four times how much they were grieved, how shocking it was to have a bad cold, and how excessively they disliked being ill themselves; and then thought no more of the matter: and their indifference towards Scott when not immediately before them restored Stiles to the enjoyment of all his former dislike.

Isaac, indeed, was the only one of the party whom Stiles could regard with any complacency. His anxiety for Scott was evident, and his attentions to Stiles most pleasing, and they prevented him feeling himself so much an intruder as he believed he was considered by the others. He had very little notice from any but him. Erica was engrossed by Mr. Derek, her brother scarcely less so; and as for Mrs. Boyd, by whom Stiles sat, she was an indolent woman, who lived only to eat, drink, and play at cards; who, when she found Stiles to prefer a curly fries to a potato dauphinoise, had nothing to say to him.

When dinner was over, Scott returned directly to Stiles, and Erica began abusing him as soon as he was out of the room. His manners were pronounced to be very bad indeed, a mixture of pride and hyperactivity; he had no conversation, no hairstyle, no beauty. Boyd thought the same, and added:

"He has nothing, in short, to recommend him, but being an excellent walker. I shall never forget his appearance this morning. He really looked almost wild."

"He did, indeed, Boyd. I could hardly keep my countenance. Very nonsensical to come at all! Why must he be scampering about the country, because his brother had a cold? His hair, so short, so juvenile!"

"Yes, and his sneakers; I hope you saw his sneakers, two inches deep in mud, I am absolutely certain; and the jeans which had been allowed to sag down to hide them not doing their office."

"Your picture may be very exact, Boyd," said Isaac; "but this was all lost upon me. I thought Stiles looked remarkably well when he came into the room this morning. His dirty sneakers quite escaped my notice."

"You observed it, Mr. Derek, I am sure," said Erica; "and I am inclined to think that you would not
wish to see your brother make such an exhibition."

"Certainly not."

"To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above his ankles in dirt, and
alone, quite alone! What could he mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort of
conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum."

"It shows a bromantic affection for his brother that is very pleasing," said Isaac.

"I am afraid, Mr. Derek," observed Erica in a half whisper, "that this adventure has rather affected
your admiration of his fine eyes."

"Not at all," he replied; "they were brightened by the exercise." A short pause followed this speech,
and Boyd began again:

"I have an excessive regard for Scott, he is really a very sweet beta, and I wish with all my heart he
were well settled. But with such a father and mother, and such low connections, I am afraid there is
no chance of it."

"I think I have heard you say that their uncle is an attorney in Beacon Hills."

"Yes; and they have another, who lives somewhere near Cheapside."

"That is capital," added her brother, and they both laughed heartily.

"If they had uncles enough to fill all Cheapside," cried Isaac, "it would not make them one jot less
agreeable."

"But it must very materially lessen their chance of marrying people of any consideration in the
world," replied Derek.

To this speech Isaac made no answer; but his siblings gave it their hearty assent, and indulged their
mirth for some time at the expense of their dear friend's vulgar relations.

With a renewal of tenderness, however, they returned to Scott's room on leaving the dining-parlour,
and sat with him till summoned to coffee. He was still very poorly, and Scott would not quit him at
all, till late in the evening, when he had the comfort of seeing him turn around three or four times and
lie down to sleep, and when it seemed to him rather right than pleasant that he should go downstairs
himself.

On entering the drawing-room he found the whole party at poker, and was immediately invited to
join them; but suspecting them to be playing high he declined it, and making his brother the excuse,
said he would amuse himself for the short time he could stay below, with an e-book. Boyd looked at
him with astonishment.

"Do you prefer reading to cards?" said he; "that is rather singular."

"Stiles Stilinski," said Erika, "despises cards. He is a great reader, and has no pleasure in anything
else."

"I deserve neither such praise nor such censure," cried Stiles; "I am not a great reader, and I have
pleasure in many things."

"In nursing your brother I am sure you have pleasure," said Isaac; "and I hope it will be soon
increased by seeing him quite well."

Stiles thanked him from his heart, and then walked towards the table where a Samsung tablet was lying. Isaac immediately offered to download Stiles other books - all that his hard drive afforded.

"And I wish my collection were larger for your benefit and my own credit; but I am an idle fellow, and though I have not many, I have more than I ever looked into."

Stiles assured him that he could suit himself perfectly with those already downloaded to the Samsung.

"I am astonished," said Erika, "that my father should have left so small a collection of e-books. What a delightful library you have at Pemberley, Mr. Derek!"

"It ought to be good," he replied, "it has been the work of many generations."

"And then you have added so much to it yourself, you are always buying e-books."

"I cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such days as these."

"Neglect! I am sure you neglect nothing that can add to the beauties of that noble place. Isaac, when you build your house, I wish it may be half as delightful as Pemberley."

"I wish it may."

"But I would really advise you to make your purchase in that neighbourhood, and take Pemberley for a kind of model. There is not a finer county in England than Derbyshire."

"With all my heart; I will buy Pemberley itself if Derek will sell it."

"I am talking of possibilities, Isaac."

"Upon my word, Erica, I should think it more possible to get Pemberley by purchase than by imitation."

Stiles was so much caught with what passed, and had not taken much Adderall that day, and thus had very little attention for his book; and soon laying the Samsung wholly aside, he drew near the card-table, and stationed himself between Mr. Lahey and his brother, to observe the game.

"Is Danny much grown since the spring?" said Erica; "will he be as tall as I am?"

"I think he will. He is now about Stiles’s height, or rather taller."

"How I long to see him again! I never met with anybody who delighted me so much. Such a countenance, such muscle tone, such manners! And so extremely accomplished for his age! His performance on the lacrosse pitch is exquisite."

"It is amazing to me," said Isaac, "how young people can have patience to be so very accomplished as they all are."

"All young people accomplished! My dear Isaac, what do you mean?"

"Yes, all of them, I think. They all play Playstation, hack into computers, and take candid photographs. I scarcely know anyone who cannot do all this, and I am sure I never heard a young person spoken of for the first time, without being informed that he was very accomplished."
"Your list of the common extent of accomplishments," said Derek, "has too much truth. The word is applied to many a teenager who deserves it no otherwise than by hacking an email account or building a Facebook page. But I am very far from agreeing with you in your estimation of teenagers in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half-a-dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished."

"Nor I, I am sure," said Erica.

"Then," observed Stiles, "you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished teenager."

"Yes, I do comprehend a great deal in it."

"Oh! certainly," cried his faithful assistant, "no one can be really esteemed accomplished who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A teenager must have a thorough knowledge of bestiary, web searching, basic first aid, magical rites, and the archaic languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, they must possess a certain something in their air and manner of walking, the tone of their voice, their address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved."

"All this they must possess," added Derek, "and to all this they must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of their mind by extensive reading."

"I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished teenagers. I rather wonder now at your knowing any."

"Are you so severe upon your own generation as to doubt the possibility of all this?"

"I never saw such a teenager. I never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe united."

Boyd and Erica both cried out against the injustice of his implied doubt, and were both protesting that they knew many teenagers who answered this description, when Mrs. Boyd called them to order, with bitter complaints of their inattention to what was going forward.

As all conversation was thereby at an end, Stiles soon afterwards left the room.

"Stiles Stilinski," said Erica, when the door was closed on him, "is one of those young humans who seek to recommend themselves to the older generations by undervaluing their own; and with many, I dare say, it succeeds. But, in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art."

"Undoubtedly," replied Derek, to whom this remark was chiefly addressed, "there is a meanness in all the arts which teenagers sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears affinity to cunning is despicable."

Erica was not so entirely satisfied with this reply as to continue the subject.

Stiles joined them again only to say that his brother was worse, and that he could not leave him. Isaac urged Mr. Jones being sent for immediately; while his siblings, convinced that no country vet could be of any service, recommended an express to town for one of the most eminent zoological experts. This Stiles would not hear of; but he was not so unwilling to comply with their brother's proposal; and it was settled that Mr. Jones should be sent for early in the morning, if Scott were not decidedly better. Isaac was quite uncomfortable; his siblings declared that they were miserable. They solaced their wretchedness, however, by karaoke duets after supper, while he could find no better relief to his feelings than by giving his housekeeper directions that every attention might be paid to the sick beta and his brother.
"Indeed, Mamma, you are mistaken," said Stiles, blushing to the roots of his buzz cut for his mother. "You quite mistook Mr. Derek. He only meant that there was not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in the town, which you must acknowledge to be true."

Stiles passed the chief of the night in his brother’s bed, and in the morning had the pleasure of being able to send a tolerable answer to the inquiries which he very early received from Isaac by a housemaid, and some time afterwards from the two servants who waited on Isaac's siblings. In spite of this amendment, however, he requested to have a note sent to Longbourn, desiring his mother to visit Scott, and form her own judgement of Scott’s situation. The note was immediately dispatched, and its contents as quickly complied with. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, accompanied by her two youngest children, reached Netherfield soon after the family breakfast.

Had she found Scott in any apparent danger, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski would have been very miserable; but being satisfied on seeing her son that his illness was not wolfsbane related, she had no wish of his recovering immediately, as Scott’s restoration to health would probably remove him from Netherfield. She would not listen, therefore, to her son's proposal of being carried home; neither did the vet, who arrived about the same time, think it at all advisable.

After sitting a little while with Scott, on Erica's appearance and invitation, the mother and three other children all attended Erica into the breakfast parlour. Isaac met them with hopes that Mrs. McCall-Stilinski had not found Scott worse than she expected.

"Indeed I have, sir," was her answer. "He is a great deal too ill to be moved. Mr. Jones says we must not think of moving him. We must trespass a little longer on your kindness."

"Removed!" cried Isaac. "It must not be thought of. My sister, I am sure, will not hear of his removal."

"You may depend upon it, Madam," said Erica, with cold civility, "that Scott will receive every possible attention while he remains with us."

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was profuse in her acknowledgments.

"I am sure," she added, "if it was not for such good friends I do not know what would become of him, for he is very ill indeed, and suffers a vast deal, though with the greatest patience in the world, which is always the way with him, for he has, without exception, the sweetest temper I have ever met with. I often tell my other children they are nothing to him. You have a sweet room here, Mr. Lahey, and a charming prospect over the gravel walk. I do not know a place in the country that is
equal to Netherfield. You will not think of quitting it in a hurry, I hope, though you have but a short lease."

"Whatever I do is done in a hurry," replied he; "and therefore if I should resolve to quit Netherfield, I should probably be off in five minutes. At present, however, I consider myself as quite fixed here."

"That is exactly what I should have supposed of you," said Stiles.

"You begin to comprehend me, do you?" cried he, turning towards him.

"Oh! Yes - I understand you perfectly."

"I wish I might take this for a compliment; but to be so easily seen through I am afraid is pitiful."

"That is as it happens. It does not follow that a deep, intricate character is more or less estimable than such a one as yours."

"Stiles," cried his mother, "remember where you are, and do not run on in the wild and random manner that you are suffered to do at home."

"I did not know before," continued Isaac immediately, "that you were a studier of character. It must be an amusing study."

"Yes, but intricate characters are the most amusing. They have at least that advantage."

"The country," said Derek, "can in general supply but a few subjects for such a study. In a country neighbourhood you move in a very confined and unvarying society."

"But people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them for ever."

"Yes, indeed," cried Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, offended by Derek’s manner of mentioning a country neighbourhood. "I assure you there is quite as much of that going on in the country as in town."

Everybody was surprised, and Derek, after looking at her for a moment, turned silently away. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, who fancied she had gained a complete victory over him, continued her triumph.

"I cannot see that London has any great advantage over the country, for my part, except the shops and public places. The country is a vast deal pleasanter, is it not, Mr. Lahey?"

"When I am in the country," he replied, "I never wish to leave it; and when I am in town it is pretty much the same. They have each their advantages, and I can be equally happy in either."

"Aye - that is because you have the right disposition. But that gentleman," looking at Derek, "seemed to think the country was nothing at all."

"Indeed, Mamma, you are mistaken," said Stiles, blushing to the roots of his buzz cut for his mother. "You quite mistook Mr. Derek. He only meant that there was not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in the town, which you must acknowledge to be true."

"Certainly, my dear, nobody said there were; but as to not meeting with many people in this neighbourhood, I believe there are few neighbourhoods larger. I know we dine with four-and-twenty families."

Nothing but concern for Stiles could enable Isaac to keep his countenance. His sister was less delicate, and directed her eyes towards Mr. Derek with a very expressive smile. Stiles, for the sake of saying something that might turn his mother's thoughts, now asked her if Allison Silver had been at
"Yes, she called yesterday with her father. What an agreeable man Sir Chris is, Mr. Lahey, is not he? So much the man of fashion! So genteel and easy! He has always something to say to everybody. That is my idea of good breeding; and those alphas who fancy themselves very important, and never open their mouths, quite mistake the matter."

"Did Allison dine with you?"

"No, she would go home. I fancy she was wanted about the recipe book for her grandfather’s chicken casserole. For my part, Mr. Lahey, I always keep servants that can do their own work; my children are brought up very differently. But everybody is to judge for themselves, and the Silvers are a very good sort of teenagers, I assure you. It is a pity they are not handsome! Not that I think Alison so very plain - but then she is our particular friend."

"She seems a very pleasant young woman."

"Oh! dear, yes; but you must own she is very plain. Sir Chris himself has often said so, and envied me Scott’s looks and pecs. I do not like to boast of my own child, but to be sure, Scott - one does not often see anybody better looking. It is what everybody says. I do not trust my own partiality. When he was only fifteen, there was a man at my brother Deaton’s in town so much in love with him that my sister-in-law was sure he would make him an offer before we came away. But, however, he did not. Perhaps he thought him too young. However, he wrote some verses on Scott, and very pretty they were."

"And so ended his affection," said Stiles impatiently. "There has been many a one, I fancy, overcome in the same way. I wonder who first discovered the efficacy of poetry in driving away love!"

"I have been used to consider poetry as the food of love," said Derek.

"Of a fine, stout, healthy love it may. Everything nourishes what is strong already. But if it be only a slight, thin sort of inclination, I am convinced that one good sonnet will starve it entirely away."

Derek only smiled; and the general pause which ensued made Stiles tremble lest his mother should be exposing herself again. He longed to speak, but could think of nothing to say; and after a short silence Mrs. McCall-Stilinski began repeating her thanks to Isaac for his kindness to Scott, with an apology for troubling him also with Stiles. Isaac was unaffectedly civil in his answer, and forced his sister to be civil also, and say what the occasion required. Erica performed her part indeed without much graciousness, but Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was satisfied, and soon afterwards ordered her carriage. Upon this signal, the youngest of her children put himself forward. The two younger teenagers had been whispering to each other during the whole visit, and the result of it was, that the youngest should tax Isaac with having promised on his first coming into the country to give a rave at Netherfield.

Jackson was a ripped, well-grown boy of sixteen, with a fine cheekbones and perfect abs; a favourite with his mother, whose affection had brought him into public at an early age. He had high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attention of the officers, to whom his uncle’s good dinners, and his own attractive appearance recommended him, had increased into assurance. He was very equal, therefore, to address Isaac on the subject of the rave, and abruptly reminded him of his promise; adding, that it would be the most shameful thing in the world if he did not keep it. His answer to this sudden attack was delightful to their mother's ear:

"I am perfectly ready, I assure you, to keep my engagement; and when your brother is recovered,
you shall, if you please, name the very day of the dance. But you would not wish to be dancing when he is ill."

Jackson declared himself satisfied. "Oh! yes - it would be much better to wait till Scott was well, and by that time most likely Captain Carter would be at Beacon Hills again. And when you have given your dance," he added, "I shall insist on their giving one also. I shall tell Colonel Finstock it will be quite a shame if he does not."

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski and her two youngest teens then departed, and Stiles returned instantly to Scott, leaving his own and his relations' behaviour to the remarks of the two younger Laheys and Mr. Derek; the latter of whom, however, could not be prevailed on to join in their censure of Scott, in spite of all Erica's witticisms on fine eyes.
"By all means," cried Isaac; "let us hear all the particulars, not forgetting their comparative height and size; for that will have more weight in the argument. Stiles, than you may be aware of. I assure you, that if Derek were not such a great tall alpha, with such an imposing physique, in comparison with myself, I should not pay him half so much deference. I declare I do not know a more awful object than Derek, on particular occasions, and in particular places; at Beacon Hills police station especially, and on the night of a full moon, when he is defending something important to him."

The day passed much as the day before had done. Boyd and Erica had spent some hours of the morning with the invalid, who continued, though slowly, to mend; and in the evening Stiles joined their party in the drawing-room. The poker table, however, did not appear. Derek was emailing, and Erica, seated near him, was watching the progress of his mail and repeatedly calling off his attention by messages to his brother. Boyd and Isaac were on the PlayStation, and Mrs. Boyd was observing their game.

Stiles took up his Samsung tablet, and was sufficiently amused in attending to what passed between Derek and his companion. The perpetual commendations of the lady, either on his typing, or on the style of his font, or on the length of his email, with the perfect unconcern with which her praises were received, formed a curious dialogue, and was exactly in union with her opinion of each.

"How delighted Danny will be to receive such a mail!"

He made no answer.

"You type uncommonly fast."

"You are mistaken. I type rather slowly."

"How many mails you must have occasion to write in the course of a year! E-mails of business, too! How odious I should think them!"

"It is fortunate, then, that they fall to my lot instead of yours."

"Pray tell your brother that I long to see him."

"I have already told him so once, by your desire."

"How can you contrive to type so evenly?"

He was silent.
"Tell your brother I am delighted to hear of his improvement at lacrosse; and pray let him know that I am quite in raptures with his beautiful little design for a web app, and I think it infinitely superior to the Apple product."

"Will you give me leave to defer your raptures till I write again? At present I have not time to do them justice."

"Oh! it is of no consequence. I shall see him in January. But do you always write such charming long emails to him, Derek?"

"They are generally long; but whether always charming it is not for me to determine."

"It is a rule with me, that a person who can write a long e-mail with ease, cannot write ill."

"That will not do for a compliment to Derek, Erica," cried her brother, "because he does not write with ease. He studies too much for words of four syllables. Do not you, Derek?"

"My style of writing is very different from yours."

"Oh!" cried Erica, "Isaac writes in the most careless way imaginable. He leaves out half his words, and never spell checks the rest."

"My ideas flow so rapidly that I have not time to express them - by which means my emails and texts sometimes convey no ideas at all to my correspondents."

"Your humility, Isaac," said Stiles, "must disarm reproof."

"Nothing is more deceitful," said Derek, "than the appearance of humility. It is often only carelessness of opinion, and sometimes an indirect boast."

"And which of the two do you call my little recent piece of modesty?"

"The indirect boast; for you are really proud of your defects in writing, because you consider them as proceeding from a rapidity of thought and carelessness of execution, which, if not estimable, you think at least highly interesting. The power of doing anything with quickness is always prized much by the possessor, and often without any attention to the imperfection of the performance. When you told Mrs. McCall-Stilinski this morning that if you ever resolved upon quitting Netherfield you should be gone in five minutes, you meant it to be a sort of panegyric, of compliment to yourself - and yet what is there so very laudable in a precipitance which must leave very necessary business undone, and can be of no real advantage to yourself or anyone else?"

"Nay," cried Isaac, "this is too much, to remember at night all the foolish things that were said in the morning. And yet, upon my honour, I believe what I said of myself to be true, and I believe it at this moment. At least, therefore, I did not assume the character of needless precipitance merely to show off before the others. "I dare say you believed it; but I am by no means convinced that you would be gone with such celerity. Your conduct would be quite as dependent on chance as that of any beta I know; and if, as you getting into your Toyota SUV, a friend were to say, 'Isaac, you had better stay and play in the next lacrosse game,' you would probably do it, you would probably not go - and at another word, might stay a month."

"You have only proved by this," cried Stiles, "that Isaac did not do justice to his own disposition. You have shown him off now much more than he did himself."

"I am exceedingly gratified," said Isaac, "by your converting what my friend says into a compliment on the sweetness of my temper. But I am afraid you are giving it a turn which that gentleman did by
no means intend; for he would certainly think better of me, if under such a circumstance I were to give a flat denial, and drive off as fast as I could."

"Would Mr. Derek then consider the rashness of your original intentions as atoned for by your obstinacy in adhering to it?"

"Upon my word, I cannot exactly explain the matter; Derek must speak for himself."

"You expect me to account for opinions which you choose to call mine, but which I have never acknowledged. Allowing the case, however, to stand according to your representation, you must remember, Stiles, that the friend who is supposed to desire his return to the house, and the delay of his plan, has merely desired it, asked it without offering one argument in favour of its propriety."

"To yield readily — easily - to the persuasion of a friend is no merit with you."

"To yield without conviction is no compliment to the understanding of either."

"You appear to me, Mr. Derek, to allow nothing for the influence of friendship and affection. A regard for the requester would often make one readily yield to a request, without waiting for arguments to reason one into it. I am not particularly speaking of such a case as you have supposed about Isaac. We may as well wait, perhaps, till the circumstance occurs before we discuss the discretion of his behaviour thereupon. But in general and ordinary cases between friend and friend, where one of them is desired by the other to change a resolution of no very great moment, should you think ill of that person for complying with the desire, without waiting to be argued into it?"

"Will it not be advisable, before we proceed on this subject, to arrange with rather more precision the degree of importance which is to appertain to this request, as well as the degree of intimacy subsisting between the parties?"

"By all means," cried Isaac; "let us hear all the particulars, not forgetting their comparative height and size; for that will have more weight in the argument, Stiles, than you may be aware of. I assure you, that if Derek were not such a great tall alpha, with such an imposing physique, in comparison with myself, I should not pay him half so much deference. I declare I do not know a more awful object than Derek, on particular occasions, and in particular places; at Beacon Hills police station especially, and on the night of a full moon, when he is defending something important to him."

Derek smiled; but Stiles thought he could perceive that he was rather offended, and therefore checked his laugh. Erica warmly resented the indignity Derek had received, in an expostulation with her brother for talking such nonsense.

"I see your design, Isaac," said his friend. "You dislike an argument, and want to silence this."

"Perhaps I do. Arguments are too much like disputes. If you and Stiles will defer yours till I am out of the room, I shall be very thankful; and then you may say whatever you like of me."

"What you ask," said Stiles, "is no sacrifice on my side; and Mr. Derek had much better finish his e-mail."

Derek took his advice, and did finish his e-mail.

When that business was over, Derek applied to Erica and Stiles for an indulgence of some music. Erica moved with some alacrity to the karaoke machine; and, after a polite request that Stiles would lead the way which the other as politely and more earnestly negatived, she took up the microphone.

Boyd sang with his sister, and while they were thus employed, Stiles could not help observing, as he
turned over some lyric sheets that lay on the ampliphier, how frequently Derek’s eyes were fixed on
him. He hardly knew how to suppose that he could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and
yet that Derek should look at him because he disliked him, was still more strange. He could only
imagine, however, at last that he drew his notice because there was something more wrong and
reprehensible, according to his ideas of right, than in any other person present: his hair, perhaps, or
his hyperactivity. The supposition did not pain him. He liked Derek too little to care for his
approbation.

After singing some rock songs, Erica varied the charm by a lively pop tune from One Direction; and
soon afterwards Derek, drawing near Stiles, said to him:

"Do not you feel a great inclination, Stiles, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a routine?"

Stiles smiled, but made no answer. Derek repeated the question, with some surprise at his silence.

"Oh!" said Stiles, "I heard you before, but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply.
You wanted me, I know, to say ‘Yes,’ that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I
always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated
contempt. I have, therefore, made up my mind to tell you, that I do not want to dance a routine at all -
and now despise me if you dare."

"Indeed I do not dare."

Stiles, having rather expected to affront him, was amazed at his gallantry; but there was a mixture of
sweetness and archness in Stiles’s manner which made it difficult for him to affront anybody; and
Derek had never been so bewitched by any person as he was by Stiles. He really believed, that were
it not for the inferiority and humanity of Stiles’s connections, he should be in some danger.

Erica saw, or suspected enough to be jealous; and her great anxiety for the recovery of her dear
friend Scott received some assistance from her desire of getting rid of Stiles.

She often tried to provoke Derek into disliking her guest, by talking of their supposed marriage, and
planning his happiness in such an alliance.

"I hope," said she, as they were walking together in the shrubbery the next day, "you will give your
mother-in-law a few hints, when this desirable event takes place, as to the advantage of holding her
tongue; and if you can compass it, do cure the younger siblings of running after officers. And, if I
may mention so delicate a subject, endeavour to check that little something, bordering on conceit and
impertinence, which your toy boy possesses."

"Have you anything else to propose for my domestic felicity?"

"Oh! yes. Do let the portraits of your uncle and aunt Phillips be placed in the gallery at Pemberley.
Put them next to your great-uncle the judge. They are in the same profession, you know, only in
different lines. As for your Stiles's picture, you must not have it taken, for what photographer could
do justice to those beautiful eyes?"

"It would not be easy, indeed, to catch their expression, but their colour and shape, and the
eyelashes, so remarkably fine, might be copied."

At that moment they were met from another walk by Boyd and Stiles himself.

"I did not know that you intended to walk," said Erica, in some confusion, lest they had been
overheard.
"You used us abominably ill," answered Boyd, "running away without telling us that you were coming out."

Then taking the disengaged arm of Derek, she left Stiles to walk by himself. The path just admitted three. Derek felt their rudeness and immediately said:

"This walk is not wide enough for our party. We had better go into the avenue."

But Stiles, who had not the least inclination to remain with them, laughingly answered:

"No, no; stay where you are. You are charmingly grouped, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth. Good-bye."

He then ran gaily off, rejoicing as he rambled about, in the hope of being at home again in a day or two. Scott was already so much recovered as to intend leaving his room for a couple of hours that evening.
"That is a failing indeed!" cried Stiles. "Implacable resentment is a shade in a character. But you have chosen your fault well. I really cannot laugh at it. You are safe from me."

"There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil - a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome."

"And your defect is to hate everybody."

"And yours," he replied with a woolfish smile, "is willfully to misunderstand them."

When the teenagers removed after dinner, Stiles ran up to his brother, and seeing him well guarded from cold, attended him into the drawing-room, where he was welcomed by his two friends with many professions of pleasure; and Stiles had never seen them so agreeable as they were during the hour which passed before Darcy and Isaac appeared. Their powers of conversation were considerable. They could describe an entertainment with accuracy, relate an anecdote with humour, and laugh at their acquaintance with spirit.

But when Derek and Isaac entered, Scott was no longer the first object; Erica’s eyes were instantly turned toward Derek, and she had something to say to him before he had advanced many steps. He addressed himself to Scott, with a polite congratulation; Mrs. Boyd also made him a slight bow, and said she was "very glad;" but diffuseness and warmth remained for Isaac's salutation. He was full of joy and attention. The first half-hour was spent in piling up the fire, lest Scott should suffer from the change of room; and Scott removed at his desire to the other side of the fireplace, that he might be further from the door. Isaac then sat down by Scott, and put his hand on Scott's to absorb any of the pain that lingered, and talked scarcely to anyone else. Stiles, surfing the web in the opposite corner, saw it all with great delight.

When tea was over, Boyd reminded his sister of the card-table - but in vain. She had obtained private intelligence that Mr. Derek did not wish for cards; and Boyd soon found even his open petition rejected. She assured him that no one intended to play, and the silence of the whole party on the subject seemed to justify her. Boyd had therefore nothing to do, but to stretch himself on one of the sofas and go to sleep. Derek took up a book ("The Hunger Games"); Erica did the same. Erica's attention was quite as much engaged in watching Mr. Darcy's progress through his book, as in reading her own; and she was perpetually either making some inquiry, or looking at his page. She could not win him, however, to any conversation; he merely answered her question, and read on. At length, quite exhausted by the attempt to be amused with her own book, which she had only chosen because it was "Catching Fire", the second volume of the "Hunger Games" trilogy, she gave a great yawn and said, "How pleasant it is to spend an evening in this way! I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of anything than of a book! When I have a
house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library."

No one made any reply. She then yawned again, threw aside her book, and cast her eyes round the room in quest for some amusement; when hearing her brother mentioning a rave to Scott, she turned suddenly towards him and said:

"By the bye, Isaac, are you really serious in meditating a dance at Netherfield? I would advise you, before you determine on it, to consult the wishes of the present party; I am much mistaken if there are not some among us to whom a rave would be rather a punishment than a pleasure."

"If you mean Derek," cried her brother, "he may go to bed, if he chooses, before it begins - but as for the rave, it is quite a settled thing; and as soon as Nicholls obtained enough glow sticks, I shall send round my cards."

"I should like raves infinitely better," she replied, "if they were carried on in a different manner; but there is something insufferably tedious in the usual process of such a meeting. It would surely be much more rational if conversation instead of dancing were made the order of the day."

"Much more rational, my dear Erica, I dare say, but it would not be near so much like a rave."

Erica made no answer, and soon afterwards she got up and walked about the room. Her figure was elegant, and she walked well; but Derek, at whom it was all aimed, was still inflexibly studious. In the desperation of her feelings, she resolved on one effort more, and, turning to Stiles, said:

"Stiles, let me persuade you to follow my example, and take a turn about the room. I assure you it is very refreshing after sitting so restlessly in one attitude."

Stiles was surprised, but agreed to it immediately. Erica succeeded no less in the real object of her civility; Derek looked up. He was as much awake to the novelty of attention in that quarter as Stiles himself could be, and unconsciously closed his book. He was directly invited to join their party, but he declined it, observing that he could imagine but two motives for their choosing to walk up and down the room together, with either of which motives his joining them would interfere.

"What could he mean? Erica was dying to know what could be his meaning?" and asked Stiles whether he could at all understand him?

"Not at all," was his answer; "but depend upon it, he means to be severe on us, and our surest way of disappointing him will be to ask nothing about it."

Erica, however, was incapable of disappointing Derek in anything, and persevered therefore in requiring an explanation of his two motives.

"I have not the smallest objection to explaining them," said he, as soon as she allowed him to speak. "You either choose this method of passing the evening because you are in each other's confidence, and have secret affairs to discuss, or because you are conscious that your figures appear to the greatest advantage in walking; if the first, I would be completely in your way, and if the second, I can admire you much better as I sit by the fire."

"Oh! shocking!" cried Erica. "I never heard anything so abominable. How shall we punish him for such a speech?"

"Nothing so easy, if you have but the inclination," said Stiles. "We can all plague and punish one another. Tease him - laugh at him. Intimate pack member as you are, you must know how it is to be done."
"But upon my honour, I do not. I do assure you that my intimacy has not yet taught me that. Tease a brooding manner and designer stubble! No, no; I feel he may defy us there. And as to laughter, we will not expose ourselves, if you please, by attempting to laugh without a subject. Derek may hug himself."

"Mr. Derek is not to be laughed at!" cried Stiles. "That is an uncommon advantage, and uncommon I hope it will continue, for it would be a great loss to me to have many such acquaintances. I dearly love a laugh."

"Erica," said Derek, "has given me more credit than can be. The wisest and the best of alphas - nay, the wisest and best of their actions - may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke."

"Certainly," replied Stiles - "there are such people, but I hope I am not one of them. I hope I never ridicule what is wise and good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can. But these, I suppose, are precisely what you are without."

"Perhaps that is not possible for anyone. But it has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule."

"Such as vanity and pride."

"Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride - where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation."

Stiles turned away to hide a smile.

"Your examination of Derek is over, I presume," said Erica; "and pray what is the result?"

"I am perfectly convinced by it that Mr. Derek has no defect. He owns it himself without disguise."

"No," said Derek, "I have made no such pretension. I have faults enough, but they are not, I hope, of understanding. My temper I dare not vouch for. It is, I believe, too little yielding - certainly too little for the convenience of the world. I cannot forget the follies and vices of others so soon as I ought, nor their offenses against myself. My feelings are not puffed about with every attempt to move them. My temper would perhaps be called resentful. My good opinion once lost, is lost forever."

"That is a failing indeed!" cried Stiles. "Implacable resentment is a shade in a character. But you have chosen your fault well. I really cannot laugh at it. You are safe from me."

"There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil - a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome."

"And your defect is to hate everybody."

"And yours," he replied with a woolfish smile, "is willfully to misunderstand them."

"Do let us have a little music," cried Erica, tired of a conversation in which she had no share. The iPod was plugged in; and Derek, after a few moments' recollection, was not sorry for it. He began to feel the danger of paying Stiles too much attention.
To Mr. Derek it was welcome intelligence - Stiles had been at Netherfield long enough. He attracted him more than he liked - and Erica was uncivil to Stiles, and more teasing than usual to himself. He wisely resolved to be particularly careful that no sign of admiration should now escape him.

In consequence of an agreement between the brothers, Stiles emailed the next morning to their mother, to beg that the car might be sent for them in the course of the day. But Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, who had calculated on her sons remaining at Netherfield till the following Tuesday, which would exactly finish Scott’s week, could not bring herself to receive them with pleasure before. Her answer, therefore, was not propitious, at least not to Stiles’s wishes, for he was impatient to get home. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski sent them word that they could not possibly have the car before Tuesday; and in her postscript it was added, that if Mr. Lahey and his sister pressed them to stay longer, she could spare them very well. Against staying longer, however, Stiles was positively resolved - nor did he much expect it would be asked; and fearful, on the contrary, as being considered as intruding themselves needlessly long, he urged Scott to borrow Isaac's car immediately, and at length it was settled that their original design of leaving Netherfield that morning should be mentioned, and the request made.

The communication excited many professions of concern; and enough was said of wishing them to stay at least till the following day to work on Scott; and till the morrow their going was deferred. Erica was then sorry that she had proposed the delay, for her jealousy and dislike of one brother much exceeded her affection for the other.

The master of the house heard with real sorrow that they were to go so soon, and repeatedly tried to persuade Scott that it would not be safe for him - that he was not enough recovered; but Scott was firm where he felt himself to be right.

To Mr. Derek it was welcome intelligence - Stiles had been at Netherfield long enough. Stiles attracted him more than he liked - and Erica was uncivil to Stiles, and more teasing than usual to himself. He wisely resolved to be particularly careful that no sign of admiration should now escape him, nothing that could elevate Stiles with the hope of influencing his felicity; sensible that if such an idea had been suggested, his behaviour during the last day must have material weight in confirming or crushing it. Steady to his purpose, he scarcely spoke ten words to Stiles through the whole of Saturday, and though they were at one time left by themselves for half-an-hour, he adhered most conscientiously to his PSP, and would not even look at Stiles.

On Sunday, after morning service, the separation, so agreeable to almost all, took place. Erica’s civility to Stiles increased at last very rapidly, as well as her affection for Scott; and when they parted, after assuring the latter of the pleasure it would always give her to see him either at Longbourn or Netherfield, and embracing him most tenderly, she even shook hands with the former. Stiles took leave of the whole party in the liveliest of spirits.
They were not welcomed home very cordially by their mother. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski wondered at their coming, and thought them very wrong to give so much trouble, and was sure Scott would have caught cold again. But their father, though very laconic in his expressions of pleasure, was really glad to see them; he had felt their importance in the family circle. The evening conversation, when they were all assembled, had lost much of its animation, and almost all its sense by the absence of Scott and Stiles.

They found Lydia, as usual, deep in the study of thorough-bass and human nature; and had some equations to admire, and some new observations of threadbare morality to listen to. Kanima and Jackson had information for them of a different sort. Much had been done and much had been said in the regiment since the preceding Wednesday; several of the officers had dined lately with their uncle, a private had been flogged, and it had actually been hinted that Colonel Finstock was going to be married.
"About a month ago I received this email; and about a fortnight ago I answered it, for I thought it a case of some delicacy, and requiring early attention. It is from my cousin, Adrian Harris, who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases."

"I hope, my dear," said Sheriff Stilinski to his wife, as they were at breakfast the next morning, "that you have ordered a good dinner to-day, because I have reason to expect an addition to our family party."

"Who do you mean, my dear? I know of nobody that is coming, I am sure, unless Allison Silver should happen to call in--and I hope my dinners are good enough for her. I do not believe she often sees such at home."

"The person of whom I speak is a gentleman, and a stranger."

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski’s eyes sparkled. "A gentleman and a stranger! It is Mr. Lahey, I am sure! Well, I am sure I shall be extremely glad to see Mr. Lahey. But - good Lord! how unlucky! There is not a bit of fish to be got to-day. Jackson, my love, ring the bell - I must speak to Hill this moment."

"It is not Isaac Lahey," said her husband; "it is a person whom I never saw in the whole course of my life."

This roused a general astonishment; and he had the pleasure of being eagerly questioned by his wife and his five teenagers at once.

After amusing himself some time with their curiosity, he thus explained:

"About a month ago I received this email;" the Sheriff brandished his Samsung tablet "and about a fortnight ago I answered it, for I thought it a case of some delicacy, and requiring early attention. It is from my cousin, Adrian Harris, who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases."

"Oh! my dear," cried his wife, "I cannot bear to hear that mentioned. Pray do not talk of that odious man. I do think it is the hardest thing in the world, that your estate should be entailed away from your own children; and I am sure, if I had been you, I should have tried long ago to do something or other about it."

Scott and Stiles tried to explain to her the nature of an entail. They had often attempted to do it before, but it was a subject on which Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was beyond the reach of reason, and she continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five teenagers, in favour of a man whom nobody cared anything about.
"It certainly is a most iniquitous affair," said Sheriff Stilinski, "and nothing can clear Mr. Harris from the guilt of inheriting Longbourn. But if you will listen to his email, you may perhaps be a little softened by his manner of expressing himself."

"No, that I am sure I shall not; and I think it is very impertinent of him to email you at all, and very hypocritical. I hate such false friends. Why could he not keep on quarreling with you, as his father did before him?"

"Why, indeed; he does seem to have had some filial scruples on that head, as you will hear."

"Hunsford, near Westerham, Kent, 15th October.

"Dear Sir,

"The disagreement subsisting between yourself and my late honoured father always gave me much uneasiness, and since I have had the misfortune to lose him, I have frequently wished to heal the breach; but for some time I was kept back by my own doubts, fearing lest it might seem disrespectful to his memory for me to be on good terms with anyone with whom it had always pleased him to be at variance. - 'There, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski.' - My mind, however, is now made up on the subject, for having received ordination at Easter, I have been so fortunate as to be distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honourable Lady Victoria d’Argent, heir of Sir Gerard d’Argent, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to the valuable rectory of this parish, where it shall be my earnest endeavour to demean myself with grateful respect towards her ladyship, and be ever ready to perform those rites and ceremonies which are instituted by the Church of England. As a clergyman, moreover, I feel it my duty to promote and establish the blessing of peace in all families within the reach of my influence; and on these grounds I flatter myself that my present overtures are highly commendable, and that the circumstance of my being next in the entail of Longbourn estate will be kindly overlooked on your side, and not lead you to reject the offered olive-branch. I cannot be otherwise than concerned at being the means of injuring your amiable teenagers, and beg leave to apologise for it, as well as to assure you of my readiness to make them every possible amends--but of this hereafter. If you should have no objection to receive me into your house, I propose myself the satisfaction of waiting on you and your family, Monday, November 18th, by four o’clock, and shall probably trespass on your hospitality till the Saturday se’ennight following, which I can do without any inconvenience, as Lady Victoria is far from objecting to my occasional absence on a Sunday, provided that some other clergyman is engaged to do the duty of the day.

I remain, dear sir, with respectful compliments to your lady and teenagers, your well-wisher and friend,

"ADRIAN HARRIS"

"At four o’clock, therefore, we may expect this peace-making gentleman," said Sheriff Stilinski, as he turned off his Samsung tablet. "He seems to be a most conscientious and polite young man, upon my word, and I doubt not will prove a valuable acquaintance, especially if Lady Victoria should be so indulgent as to let him come to us again."

"There is some sense in what he says about the children, however, and if he is disposed to make them any amends, I shall not be the person to discourage him."

"Though it is difficult," said Scott, "to guess in what way he can mean to make us the atonement he thinks our due, the wish is certainly to his credit."

Stiles was chiefly struck by his extraordinary deference for Lady Victoria, and his kind intention of christening, marrying, and burying his parishioners whenever it were required.
"He must be an oddity, I think," said he. "I cannot make him out. - There is something very pompous in his style. - And what can he mean by apologising for being next in the entail? We cannot suppose he would help it if he could. Could he be a sensible man, sir?"

"No, my dear, I think not. I have great hopes of finding him quite the reverse. There is a mixture of servility and self-importance in his email, which promises well. I am impatient to see him."

"In point of composition," said Lydia, "the email does not seem defective. The idea of the olive-branch perhaps is not wholly new, yet I think it is well expressed."

To Kanima and Jackson, neither the email nor its writer were in any degree interesting. It was next to impossible that their cousin should come in a scarlet coat, and it was now some weeks since they had received pleasure from the society of a man in any other colour. As for their mother, Adrian Harris’s email had done away much of her ill-will, and she was preparing to see him with a degree of composure which astonished her husband and children.

Mr. Harris was punctual to his time, and was received with great politeness by the whole family. Sheriff Stilinski indeed said little; but the others were ready enough to talk, and Adrian Harris seemed neither in need of encouragement, nor inclined to be silent himself. He was a slight, skinny young man of five-and-twenty. His air was grave and stately, and his manners were very formal. He had not been long seated before he complimented Mrs. McCall-Stilinski on having so fine a family of teenagers; said he had heard much of their attractiveness, but that in this instance fame had fallen short of the truth; and added, that he did not doubt her seeing them all in due time disposed of in marriage. This gallantry was not much to the taste of some of his hearers; but Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, who quarreled with no compliments, answered most readily.

"You are very kind, I am sure; and I wish with all my heart it may prove so, for else they will be destitute enough. Things are settled so oddly."

"You allude, perhaps, to the entail of this estate."

"Ah! sir, I do indeed. It is a grievous affair to my poor children, you must confess. Not that I mean to find fault with you, for such things I know are all chance in this world. There is no knowing how estates will go when once they come to be entailed."

"I am very sensible, madam, of the hardship to my fair cousins, and could say much on the subject, but that I am cautious of appearing forward and precipitate. But I can assure the young people that I come prepared to admire them. At present I will not say more; but, perhaps, when we are better acquainted -"

He was interrupted by a summons to dinner; and the teens smiled on each other. They were not the only objects of Mr. Harris’s admiration. The hall, the dining-room, and all its furniture, were examined and praised; and his commendation of everything would have touched Mrs. McCall-Stilinski’s heart, but for the mortifying supposition of his viewing it all as his own future property. The dinner too in its turn was highly admired; and he begged to know to which of his fair cousins the excellency of its cooking was owing, suggesting - with a knowing and perhaps somewhat amorous glance - that Scott might have prepared the roast rabbit in his little werewolf oven. But he was set right there by Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, who assured him with some asperity that they were very well able to keep a good cook, and that her children had nothing to do in the kitchen beyond raiding the fridge for milk every now and again. He begged pardon for having displeased her. In a softened tone she declared herself not at all offended; but he continued to apologise for about a quarter of an hour.
Sheriff Stilinski's expectations were fully answered. His cousin was as absurd as he had hoped, and he listened to him with the keenest enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute composure of countenance, and, except in an occasional glance at Stiles, requiring no partner in his pleasure.

During dinner, Sheriff Stilinski scarcely spoke at all; but when the servants were withdrawn, he thought it time to have some conversation with his guest, and therefore started a subject in which he expected him to shine, by observing that he seemed very fortunate in his patroness. Lady Victoria D'Argent's attention to his wishes, and consideration for his comfort, appeared very remarkable. Sheriff Stilinski could not have chosen better. Adrian Harris was eloquent in her praise. The subject elevated him to more than usual solemnity of manner, and with a most important aspect he protested that "he had never in his life witnessed such behaviour in a person of rank - such affability and condescension, as he had himself experienced from Lady Victoria. She had been graciously pleased to approve of both of the discourses which he had already had the honour of preaching before her. She had also asked him twice to dine at Rosings, and had sent for him only the Saturday before, to make up her poker table in the evening. Lady Victoria was reckoned proud by many people he knew, but he had never seen anything but affability in her. She had always spoken to him as she would to any other gentleman; she made not the smallest objection to his joining in the society of the neighbourhood nor to his leaving the parish occasionally for a week or two, to visit his relations. She had even condescended to advise him to marry as soon as he could, provided he chose with discretion; and had once paid him a visit in his humble parsonage, where she had perfectly approved all the alterations he had been making, and had even vouchsafed to suggest some herself - some shelves in the closet up stairs."

"That is all very proper and civil, I am sure," said Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, "and I dare say she is a very agreeable woman. It is a pity that great ladies in general are not more like her. Does she live near you, sir?"

"The garden in which stands my humble abode is separated only by a lane from Rosings Park, her ladyship's residence."

"I think you said she was a widow, sir? Has she any family?"

"She has only one daughter, the heiress of Rosings, and of very extensive property."

"Ah!" said Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, shaking her head, "then she is better off than many young people. And what sort of young lady is she? Is she handsome?"

"She is a most charming young lady indeed. Lady Victoria herself says that, in point of true beauty, Kate D'Argent is far superior to the handsomest of her sex, because there is that in her features which
marks the young lady of distinguished birth - a veritable Diana. She is unfortunately of a sick mind, which has prevented her from making that progress in many accomplishments which she could not have otherwise failed of, as I am informed by the lady who superintended her education, and who still resides with them. But she is perfectly amiable, and often condescends to drive by my humble abode in her little sports car."

"Has she been presented? I do not remember her name among the ladies at court."

"Her indifferent state of health unhappily prevents her being in town; and by that means, as I told Lady Victoria one day, has deprived the British court of its brightest ornament. Her ladyship seemed pleased with the idea; and you may imagine that I am happy on every occasion to offer those little delicate compliments which are always acceptable to ladies. I have more than once observed to Lady Victoria, that her charming daughter seemed born to be a duchess, and that the most elevated rank, instead of giving her consequence, would be adorned by her. These are the kind of little things which please her ladyship, and it is a sort of attention which I conceive myself peculiarly bound to pay."

"You judge very properly," said Sheriff Stilinski, "and it is happy for you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy. May I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are the result of previous study?"

"They arise chiefly from what is passing at the time, and though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible."

Sheriff Stilinski's expectations were fully answered. His cousin was as absurd as he had hoped, and he listened to him with the keenest enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute composure of countenance, and, except in an occasional glance at Stiles, requiring no partner in his pleasure.

By tea-time, however, the dose had been enough, and Sheriff Stilinski was glad to take his guest into the drawing-room again, and, when tea was over, glad to invite him to read aloud to the teenagers. Adrian Harris readily assented, and a book was produced; but, on beholding it he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read comic books. Kanima stared at him, and Jackson exclaimed. Other books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose a Chemistry text book. Jackson gaped as he opened the volume, and before Adrian Harris had, with very monotonous solemnity, read three pages, Jackson interrupted him with:

"Do you know, mamma, that my uncle Phillips talks of turning away Richard; and if he does, Colonel Finstock will hire him. My aunt told me so herself on Saturday. I shall walk to Beacon Hills to-morrow to hear more about it, and to ask when Mr. Greenberg comes back from town."

Jackson was bid by his two eldest siblings to hold his tongue; but Mr. Harris, much offended, laid aside his book, and said:

"I have often observed how little teenagers are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes me, I confess; for, certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction. But I will no longer importune my young cousin."

Then turning to Sheriff Stilinski, he offered himself as his antagonist at backgammon. Sheriff Stilinski accepted the challenge, observing that he acted very wisely in leaving the teens to their own trifling amusements. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski and her children apologised most civilly for Jackson's interruption, and promised that it should not occur again, if he would resume his book; but Mr. Harris, after assuring them that he bore his young cousin no ill-will, and should never resent his behaviour as any affront, seated himself at another table with Sheriff Stilinski, and prepared for
backgammon.
Greenberg addressed them directly, and entreated permission to introduce his friend, Matt Daehler, who had returned with him the day before from town, and he was happy to say had accepted a commission in their corps. This was exactly as it should be; for the young man wanted only regimentals to make him completely charming.

Adrian Harris was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society; the greatest part of his life having been spent under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly father; and though he belonged to one of the universities, he had merely kept the necessary terms, without forming at it any useful acquaintance. The subjection in which his father had brought him up had given him originally great humility of manner; but it was now a good deal counteracted by the self-conceit of a weak head, living in retirement, and the consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity. A fortunate chance had recommended him to Lady Victoria D’Argent when the living of Hunsford was vacant; and the respect which he felt for her high rank, and his veneration for her as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his right as a rector, made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility.

Having now a good house and a very sufficient income, and having been sober for several years, he intended to marry; and in seeking a reconciliation with the Longbourn family he had a mate in view, as he meant to choose one of the children, if he found them as handsome and amiable as they were represented by common report. This was his plan of amends - of atonement - for inheriting their father's estate; and he thought it an excellent one, full of eligibility and suitableness, and excessively generous and disinterested on his own part.

His plan did not vary on seeing them. Scott’s lovely face and firm pecs confirmed his views, and established all his strictest notions of what was due to seniority; and for the first evening Scott was his settled choice. The next morning, however, made an alteration; for in a quarter of an hour's tete-a-tete with Mrs. McCall-Stilinski before breakfast, a conversation beginning with his parsonage-house, and leading naturally to the avowal of his hopes, that a mate might be found for it at Longbourn, produced from her, amid very complaisant smiles and general encouragement, a caution against the very Scott he had fixed on. "As to her younger teenagers, she could not take upon her to say - she could not positively answer - but she did not know of any prepossession; her eldest son, she must just mention, she felt it incumbent on her to hint, was likely to be very soon engaged."

Mr. Harris had only to change from Scott to Stiles - and it was soon done - done while Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was stirring the fire. Stiles, equally next to Scott in birth and beauty, succeeded him of course.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski treasured up the hint, and trusted that she might soon have two children married; and the man whom she could not bear to speak of the day before was now high in her good
Jackson's intention of walking to Beacon Hills was not forgotten; every sibling except Lydia agreed to go with him; and Mr. Harris was to attend them, at the request of Sheriff Stilinski, who was most anxious to get rid of him, and have his library to himself; for thither Mr. Harris had followed him after breakfast; and there he would continue, nominally engaged with one of the largest files in the archive of our own collection, but really talking to Sheriff Stilinski, with little cessation, of his house and garden at Hunsford. Such doings discomposed Sheriff Stilinski exceedingly. In his library he had been always sure of leisure and tranquillity; and though prepared, as he told Stiles, to meet with folly and conceit in every other room of the house, he was used to be free from them there; his civility, therefore, was most prompt in inviting Adrian Harris to join his children in their walk; and Mr. Harris, being in fact much better fitted for a walker than a reader, was extremely pleased to close his large file, and go.

In pompous nothings on his side, and civil assents on that of his cousins, their time passed till they entered Beacon Hills. The attention of the younger ones was then no longer to be gained by him. Their eyes were immediately wandering up in the street in quest of the officers, and nothing less than a very smart T shirt indeed, or a really new lacrosse kit in Macy’s window, could recall them.

But the attention of every teen was soon caught by a young man, whom they had never seen before, of most gentlemanlike appearance, walking with another officer on the other side of the way. The officer was the very Greenberg, whose return from town Jackson had come to inquire, and he bowed as they passed. All were struck with the stranger's air, all wondered who he could be; and Kanima and Jackson, determined if possible to find out, led the way across the street, under pretense of wanting something in an opposite shop, and fortunately had just gained the pavement when the two gentlemen, turning back, had reached the same spot. Greenberg addressed them directly, and entreated permission to introduce his friend, Matt Daehler, who had returned with him the day before from town, and he was happy to say had accepted a commission in their corps. This was exactly as it should be; for the young man wanted only regimentals to make him completely charming.

His appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very impressive digital camera around his neck. The introduction was followed up on his side by a happy readiness of conversation - a readiness at the same time perfectly correct and unassuming; and the whole party were still standing and talking together very agreeably, when the sound of motorbikes drew their notice, and Derek and Isaac were seen riding down the street. On distinguishing the group, the two gentlemen came directly towards them, and began the usual civilities. Isaac was the principal spokesman, and Scott the principal object. He was then, he said, on his way to Longbourn on purpose to inquire after him. Mr. Derek corroborated it with a bow, and was beginning to determine not to fix his eyes on Stiles or slam him up against a wall, when they were suddenly arrested by the sight of the stranger, and Stiles happening to see the countenance of both as they looked at each other, was all astonishment at the effect of the meeting.

Both changed colour, one looked white, the other red. Matt Daehler, after a few moments, touched his baseball cap - a salutation which Mr. Derek just deigned to return. What could be the meaning of it? It was impossible to imagine; it was impossible not to long to know.

In another minute, Isaac Lahey, but without seeming to have noticed what passed, took leave and rode on with his friend.

Greenberg and Matt walked with the young ladies to the door of Mr. Phillip's house, and then made their bows, in spite of Jackson’s pressing entreaties that they should come in, and even in spite of Mrs. Phillips’s throwing up the parlour window and loudly seconding the invitation.
Mrs. Phillips was always glad to see her nephews and nieces; and the two eldest, from their recent absence, were particularly welcome, and she was eagerly expressing her surprise at their sudden return home, which, as their own carriage had not fetched them, she should have known nothing about, if she had not happened to see Mr. Jones's shop-boy in the street, who had told her that they were not to send any more draughts to Netherfield because Scott and Stiles were come away, when her civility was claimed towards Mr. Harris by Scott's introduction of him. She received him with her very best politeness, which he returned with as much more, apologising for his intrusion, without any previous acquaintance with her, which he could not help flattering himself, however, might be justified by his relationship to the young persons who introduced him to her notice. Mrs. Phillips was quite awed by such an excess of good breeding; but her contemplation of one stranger was soon put to an end by exclamations and inquiries about the other; of whom, however, she could only tell her nephews and nieces what they already knew, that Greenberg had brought him from London, and that he was to have a lieutenant's commission in the shire. She had been watching him the last hour, she said, as he walked up and down the street, and had Matt appeared, Kanima and Jackson would certainly have continued the occupation, but unluckily no one passed windows now except a few of the officers, who, in comparison with the stranger, were become "stupid, disagreeable fellows." Some of them were to dine with the Phillipses the next day, and their aunt promised to make her husband call on Matt, and give him an invitation also, if the family from Longbourn would come in the evening. This was agreed to, and Mrs. Phillips protested that they would have a nice noisy multiplayer game on the Playstation, and a little bit of hot supper afterwards. The prospect of such delights was very cheering, and they parted in mutual good spirits. Mr. Harris repeated his apologies in quitting the room, and was assured with unwearying civility that they were perfectly needless.

As they walked home, Stiles related to Scott what he had seen pass between the two gentlemen; but though Scott would have defended either or both, had they appeared to be in the wrong, he could no more explain such behaviour than his brother.

Matt on his return highly gratified Mrs. McCall-Stilinski by admiring Mrs. Phillips's manners and politeness. He protested that, except Lady Victoria and her daughter, he had never seen a more elegant woman; for she had not only received him with the utmost civility, but even pointedly included him in her invitation for the next evening, although utterly unknown to her before. Something, he supposed, might be attributed to his connection with them, but yet he had never met with so much attention in the whole course of his life.
"I had not thought Mr. Derek so bad as this - though I have never liked him. I had not thought so very ill of him. I had supposed him to be despising his fellow-creatures in general, but did not suspect him of descending to such malicious revenge, such injustice, such inhumanity as this."

As no objection was made to the young people's engagement with their aunt, and all Adrian Harris’s scruples of leaving Sheriff and Mrs. Stilinski for a single evening during his visit were most steadily resisted, the SUV conveyed him and his five cousins at a suitable hour to Beacon Hills; and the teenagers had the pleasure of hearing, as they entered the drawing-room, that Matt had accepted their uncle's invitation, and was then in the house.

When this information was given, and they had all taken their seats, Mr. Harris was at leisure to look around him and admire, and he was so much struck with the size and furniture of the apartment, that he declared he might almost have supposed himself in the small summer breakfast parlour at Rosings; a comparison that did not at first convey much gratification; but when Mrs. Phillips understood from him what Rosings was, and who was its proprietor--when she had listened to the description of only one of Lady Victoria’s drawing-rooms, and found that the chimney-piece alone had cost eighty thousand pounds, she felt all the force of the compliment, and would hardly have resented a comparison with the housekeeper’s room.

In describing to her all the grandeur of Lady Victoria and her mansion, with occasional digressions in praise of his own humble abode, and the improvements it was receiving, he was happily employed until the gentlemen joined them; and he found in Mrs. Phillips a very attentive listener, whose opinion of his consequence increased with what she heard, and who was resolving to retail it all among her neighbours as soon as she could. To the teenagers, who could not listen to their cousin, and who had nothing to do but to wish for an iPod, and examine their appearances in the mirror over the mantelpiece, the interval of waiting appeared very long. It was over at last, however. The gentlemen did approach, and when Matt walked into the room, Stiles felt that he had neither been seeing him before, nor thinking of him since, with the smallest degree of unreasonable admiration.

The officers of the shire were in general a very creditable, gentlemanlike set, and the best of them were of the present party; but Matt was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk, as they were superior to the broad-faced, stuffy uncle Phillips, breathing port wine, who followed them into the room.

Matt was the happy man towards whom almost every young person's eye was turned, and Stiles was the happy person by whom he finally seated himself; and the agreeable manner in which he immediately fell into conversation, though it was only on its being a full moon that night, made him feel that the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker.
With such rivals for the notice of the fair as Matt and the officers, Adrian Harris seemed to sink into insignificance; to the younger generarion he certainly was nothing; but he had still at intervals a kind listener in Mrs. Phillips, and was by her watchfulness, most abundantly supplied with coffee and curly fries. When the card-tables were placed, he had the opportunity of obliging her in turn, by sitting down to whist.

"I know little of the game at present," said he, "but I shall be glad to improve myself, for in my situation in life - " Mrs. Phillips was very glad for his compliance, but could not wait for his reason.

Matt did not play at whist, and with ready delight was he received at the multiplayer Playstation game between Stiles and Jackson. At first there seemed danger of Jackson's engrossing him entirely, for he was a most determined talker; but being likewise extremely fond of “Need for Speed”, he soon grew too much interested in the game to have attention for anyone in particular.

Allowing for the common demands of the game, Matt was therefore at leisure to talk to Stiles, and he was very willing to hear him, though what Stiles chiefly wished to hear he could not hope to be told - the history of Matt’s acquaintance with Mr. Derek. Stiles dared not even mention that gentleman. His curiosity, however, was unexpectedly relieved. Matt began the subject himself. He inquired how far Netherfield was from Beacon Hills; and, after receiving his answer, asked in a hesitating manner how long Mr. Derek had been staying there.

"About a month," said Stiles; and then, unwilling to let the subject drop, added, "He is a man of very large property in Derbyshire, I understand."

"Yes," replied Matt; "his estate there is a noble one. A clear million per annum. You could not have met with a person more capable of giving you certain information on that head than myself, for I have been connected with his family in a particular manner from my infancy."

Stiles could not but look surprised.

"You may well be surprised, Stiles, at such an assertion, after seeing, as you probably might, the very cold manner of our meeting yesterday. Are you much acquainted with Mr. Derek?"

"As much as I ever wish to be," cried Stiles very warmly. "I have spent four days in the same house with him, and I think him very disagreeable."

"I have no right to give my opinion," said Matt, "as to his being agreeable or otherwise. I am not qualified to form one. I have known him too long and too well to be a fair judge. It is impossible for me to be impartial. But I believe your opinion of him would in general astonish - and perhaps you would not express it quite so strongly anywhere else. Here you are in your own family."

"Upon my word, I say no more here than I might say in any house in the neighbourhood, except Netherfield. He is not at all liked in Hertfordshire. Everybody is disgusted with his pride and general Sourwolf nature. You will not find him more favourably spoken of by anyone."

"I cannot pretend to be sorry," said Matt, after a short interruption, "that he or that any man should not be estimated beyond their deserts; but with him I believe it does not often happen. The world is blinded by his fortune and consequence, or frightened by his glower, his high and imposing manners, and his habit of throwing people against walls and steering wheels."

"I should take him, even on my slight acquaintance, to be an ill-tempered wolf." Matt only shook his head.

"I wonder," said he, at the next opportunity of speaking, "whether Derek is likely to be in this
country much longer."

"I do not at all know; but I heard nothing of his going away when I was at Netherfield. I hope your plans in favour of the shire will not be affected by his being in the neighbourhood."

"Oh! No it is not for me to be driven away by Mr. Derek. If he wishes to avoid seeing me, he must go. We are not on friendly terms, and it always gives me pain to meet him, but I have no reason for avoiding him but what I might proclaim before all the world, a sense of very great ill-usage, and most painful regrets at his being what he is. His father, Stiles, the late Mr. Derek, was one of the best wolves that ever breathed, and the truest friend I ever had; and I can never be in company with this Mr. Derek without being grieved to the soul by a thousand tender recollections. His behaviour to myself has been scandalous; but I verily believe I could forgive him anything and everything, rather than his disappointing the hopes and disgracing the memory of his father."

Stiles found the interest of the subject increase, and listened with all his heart; but the delicacy of it prevented further inquiry.

Matt began to speak on more general topics, Beacon Hills, the neighbourhood, the society, appearing highly pleased with all that he had yet seen, and speaking of the latter with gentle but very intelligible gallantry.

"It was the prospect of constant society, and good society," he added, "which was my chief inducement to enter the shire. I knew it to be a most respectable, agreeable corps, and my friend Greenberg tempted me further by his account of their present quarters, and the very great attentions and excellent acquaintances Beacon Hills had procured them. Society, I own, is necessary to me. I have been a disappointed man, and my spirits will not bear solitude. I must have employment and society. A military life is not what I was intended for, but circumstances have now made it eligible. Photo journalism ought to have been my profession – I was brought up for photo journalism, and I should at this time have been in possession of a most valuable post on Perez Hilton’s website, had it pleased the gentleman we were speaking of just now."

"Indeed!"

"Yes - the late Mr. Derek bequeathed me the next presentation of the best photographic job in his corporate empire. He was my godfather, and excessively attached to me. I cannot do justice to his kindness. He meant to provide for me amply, and thought he had done it; but when the position fell vacant, it was given elsewhere."

"Good heavens!" cried Stiles; "but how could that be? How could his will be disregarded? Why did you not seek legal redress?"

"There was just such an informality in the terms of the bequest as to give me no hope from law. A man of honour could not have doubted the intention, but Mr. Derek chose to doubt it - or to treat it as a merely conditional recommendation, and to assert that I had forfeited all claim to it by extravagance, imprudence - in short anything or nothing. Certain it is, that the position became vacant two years ago, exactly as I was good enough to hold it, and that it was given to another man; and no less certain is it, that I cannot accuse myself of having really done anything to deserve to lose it. I have a warm, unguarded temper, and I may have spoken my opinion of him, and to him, too freely. I can recall nothing worse. But the fact is, that we are very different sort of men, and that he hates me."

"This is quite shocking! He deserves to be publicly disgraced."

"Some time or other he will be - but it shall not be by me. Till I can forget his father, I can never defy
Stiles honoured Matt for such feelings, and thought him handsomer than ever as he expressed them.

"But what," said he, after a pause, "can have been his motive? What can have induced him to behave so cruelly?"

"A thorough, determined dislike of me - a dislike which I cannot but attribute in some measure to jealousy. Had the late Mr. Derek liked me less, his son might have borne with me better; but his father's uncommon attachment to me irritated him, I believe, very early in life. He had not a temper to bear the sort of competition in which we stood - the sort of preference which was often given me."

"I had not thought Mr. Derek so bad as this - though I have never liked him. I had not thought so very ill of him. I had supposed him to be despising his fellow-creatures in general, but did not suspect him of descending to such malicious revenge, such injustice, such inhumanity as this."

After a few minutes' reflection, however, he continued, "I do remember his boasting one day, at Netherfield, of the implacability of his resentments, of his having an unforgiving temper. His disposition must be dreadful."

"I will not trust myself on the subject," replied Matt; "I can hardly be just to him."

Stiles was again deep in thought, and after a time exclaimed, "To treat in such a manner the godson, the friend, the favourite of his father!" He could have added, "A young man, too, like you, whose very countenance may vouch for your being amiable" - but he contented himself with, "and one, too, who had probably been his companion from childhood, connected together, as I think you said, in the closest manner!"

"We were born in the same parish, within the same park; the greatest part of our youth was passed together; inmates of the same house, sharing the same amusements, objects of the same parental care. My father began life in the profession which your uncle, Mr. Phillips, appears to do so much credit to - but he gave up everything to be of use to the late Mr. Derek and devoted all his time to the care of the Pemberley property. He was most highly esteemed by Mr. Derek, a most intimate, confidential friend. Mr. Derek often acknowledged himself to be under the greatest obligations to my father's active superintendence, and when, immediately before my father's death, Mr. Derek gave him a voluntary promise of providing for me, I am convinced that he felt it to be as much a debt of gratitude to him, as of his affection to myself."

"How strange!" cried Stiles. "How abominable! I wonder that the very pride of this Mr. Derek has not made him just to you! If from no better motive, that he should not have been too proud to be dishonest - for dishonesty I must call it."

"It is wonderful," replied Matt, "for almost all his actions may be traced to pride; and pride had often been his best friend. It has connected him nearer with virtue than with any other feeling. But we are none of us consistent, and in his behaviour to me there were stronger impulses even than pride."

"Can such abominable pride as his have ever done him good?"

"Yes. It has often led him to be liberal and generous, to give his money freely, to display hospitality, to assist his tenants, and relieve the poor. Family pride, and filial pride - for he is very proud of what his father was - have done this. Not to appear to disgrace his family, to degenerate from the popular qualities, or lose the influence of the Pemberley House, is a powerful motive. He has also brotherly pride, which, with some brotherly affection, makes him a very kind and careful guardian of his young brother Danny, and you will hear him generally cried up as the most attentive and best of
"What sort of boy is Danny?"

Matt shook his head. "I wish I could call him amiable. It gives me pain to speak ill of a Derek. But he is too much like his brother - very, very proud. As a child, he was affectionate and pleasing, and extremely fond of me; and I have devoted hours and hours to flirting in the library with him. But he is nothing to me now. He is a handsome boy, about sixteen, and, I understand, highly accomplished particularly on the lacrosse field. Since his father's death, his home has been London, where a lady lives with him, and superintends his education."

After many pauses and many trials of other subjects, Stiles could not help reverting once more to the first, and saying:

"I am astonished at his intimacy with Isaac Lahey! How can Isaac, who seems good humour itself, and is, I really believe, a truly amiable puppy of a beta, be in friendship with such a man? How can they suit each other? Do you know Isaac?"

"Not at all."

"He is a sweet-tempered, amiable, charming man. He cannot know what Mr. Derek is."

"Probably not; but Mr. Derek can please where he chooses. He does not want abilities. He can be a conversable companion if he thinks it worth his while. Among those who are at all his equals in consequence, he is a very different man from what he is to the less prosperous. His pride never deserts him; but with the rich he is liberal-minded, just, sincere, rational, honourable, and perhaps agreeable, allowing something for fortune and figure."

The whist party soon afterwards breaking up, the players gathered round the Playstation and Matt took his station between his cousin Stiles and Mrs. Phillips. The usual inquiries as to his success was made by the latter. It had not been very great; he had lost every point; but when Mrs. Phillips began to express her concern thereupon, he assured her with much earnest gravity that it was not of the least importance, that he considered the money as a mere trifle, and begged that she would not make herself uneasy.

"I know very well, madam," said he, "that when persons sit down to a card-table, they must take their chances of these things, and happily I am not in such circumstances as to make twenty five pounds any object. There are undoubtedly many who could not say the same, but thanks to Lady Victoria D’Argent, I am removed far beyond the necessity of regarding little matters."

Matt’s attention was caught; and after observing Mr. Harris for a few moments, he asked Stiles in a low voice whether his relation was very intimately acquainted with the family of D’Argent.

"Lady Victoria D’Argent," she replied, "has very lately given him a living. I hardly know how Adrian was first introduced to her notice, but he certainly has not known her long."

"You know of course that Lady Victoria D’Argent and Derek’s mother were sisters; consequently that she is aunt to the present Mr. Derek."

"No, indeed, I did not. I knew nothing at all of Lady Victoria’s connections. I never heard of her existence till the day before yesterday."

"Her daughter, Kate, will have a very large fortune, and it is believed that she and her cousin will unite the two estates."
This information made Stiles smile, as she thought of poor Erica. Vain indeed must be all her attentions, vain and useless her affection for his brother Danny, and her praise of Derek himself, if he were already self-destined for another.

"Adrian Harris," said she, "speaks highly both of Lady Victoria and her daughter; but from some particulars that he has related of her ladyship, I suspect his gratitude misleads him, and that in spite of her being his patroness, she is an arrogant, conceited woman."

"I believe her to be both in a great degree," replied Matt; "I have not seen her for many years, but I very well remember that I never liked her, and that her manners were dictatorial and insolent, and her stare simply terrifying. She has the reputation of being remarkably sensible and clever; but I rather believe she derives part of her abilities from her rank and fortune, part from her authoritative manner, and the rest from the pride for her nephew, who chooses that everyone connected with him should have an understanding of the first class."

Stiles allowed that he had given a very rational account of it, and they continued talking together, with mutual satisfaction till supper put an end to the Playstation game, and gave the rest of the teenagers their share of Mr. Daehler’s attentions. There could be no conversation in the noise of Mrs. Phillips's supper party, but his manners recommended him to everybody. Whatever he said, was said well; and whatever he did, done gracefully. Stiles went away with his head full of him. He could think of nothing but of Matt, and of what he had told him, all the way home; but there was not time for him even to mention Matt’s name as they went, for neither Jackson nor Mr. Harris were once silent. Jackson talked incessantly of the Playstation, of the levels he had lost and the levels he had won; and Mr. Harris in describing the civility of Mr. and Mrs. Phillips, protesting that he did not in the least regard his losses at whist, enumerating all the dishes at supper, and repeatedly fearing that he crowded his cousins, had more to say than he could well manage before the SUV stopped at Longbourn House.
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Chapter Summary

It now first struck Stiles, that he was selected from among his siblings as worthy of being Adrian’s mate at Hunsford Parsonage, and of assisting to form a poker table at Rosings, in the absence of more eligible visitors.

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Chapter 17

Stiles related to Scott the next day what had passed between Matt and himself. Scott listened with astonishment and concern; he knew not how to believe that Mr. Derek could be so unworthy of Isaac’s regard; and yet, it was not in his nature to question the veracity of a young man of such amiable appearance as Matt. The possibility of his having endured such unkindness, was enough to interest all Scott’s tender feelings and produced a goofy, puppydog expression on his face; and nothing remained therefore to be done, but to think well of them both, to defend the conduct of each, and throw into the account of accident or mistake whatever could not be otherwise explained.

"They have both," said Scott, "been deceived, I dare say, in some way or other, of which we can form no idea. Interested people, hunters maybe or witches, have perhaps misrepresented each to the other. It is, in short, impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which may have alienated them, without actual blame on either side."

"Very true, indeed; and now, my dear Scott, what have you got to say on behalf of the hunters who have probably been concerned in the business? Do clear them too, or we shall be obliged to think ill of somebody."

"Laugh as much as you choose, but you will not laugh me out of my opinion. My dearest Stiles, do but consider in what a disgraceful light it places Mr. Derek, to be treating his father's favourite in such a manner, one whom his father had promised to provide for. It is impossible. No man of common humanity, no man who had any value for his character, could be capable of it. Can his most intimate friends be so excessively deceived in him? Oh! no."

"I can much more easily believe Isaac’s being imposed on, than that Matt should invent such a history of himself as he gave me last night; names, facts, everything mentioned without ceremony. If it be not so, let Mr. Derek contradict it. Besides, there was truth in Matt's looks."

"It is difficult indeed - it is distressing. One does not know what to think."

"I beg your pardon; one knows exactly what to think."

But Scott could think with certainty on only one point—that Isaac, if he had been imposed on, would have much to suffer when the affair became public.

The two young men were summoned from the shrubbery, where this conversation passed, by the arrival of the very persons of whom they had been speaking; Mr. Lahey and his siblings came to give
their personal invitation for the long-expected rave at Netherfield, which was fixed for the following Tuesday. Erica and Boyd were delighted to see their dear friend again, called it an age since they had met, and repeatedly asked what Scott had been doing with himself since their separation. To the rest of the family they paid little attention; avoiding Mrs. McCall-Stilinski as much as possible, saying not much to Stiles, and nothing at all to the others. They were soon gone again, rising from their seats with an activity which took their brother by surprise, and hurrying off as if eager to escape from Mrs. McCall-Stilinski’s civilities.

The prospect of the Netherfield party was extremely agreeable to every teenager of the family. Mrs. McCall-Stilinkski chose to consider it as given in compliment to her eldest son, and was particularly flattered by receiving the invitation from Isaac Lahey himself, instead of a general email. Scott pictured to himself a happy evening in the society of his two friends, and the attentions of their brother; and Stiles thought with pleasure of dancing a great deal with Matt Daehler, and of seeing a confirmation of everything in Mr. Derek’s look and behaviour. The happiness anticipated by Kanima and Jackson depended less on any single event, or any particular person, for though they each, like Stiles, meant to dance half the evening with Matt, he was by no means the only partner who could satisfy them, and a rave was, at any rate, a rave. And even Lydia could assure her family that she had no disinclination for it.

"While I can have my mornings to myself," said she, "it is enough – I think it is no sacrifice to join occasionally in evening engagements. Society has claims on us all; and I profess myself one of those who consider intervals of recreation and amusement as desirable for everybody."

Stiles’s spirits were so high on this occasion, that though he did not often speak unnecessarily to Mr. Harris, he could not help asking Adrian whether he intended to accept Isaac Lahey’s invitation, and if he did, whether he would think it proper to join in the evening’s amusement; and he was rather surprised to find that he entertained no scruple whatever on that head, and was very far from dreading a rebuke either from the Archbishop, or Lady Victoria D’Argent, by venturing to dance.

"I am by no means of the opinion, I assure you," said he, "that a rave of this kind, given by a young beta of character, to respectable people nd werewolves, can have any evil tendency; and I am so far from objecting to dancing myself, that I shall hope to be honoured with the hands of all my fair cousins in the course of the evening; and I take this opportunity of soliciting yours, Stiles, for the two first tracks especially, a preference which I trust my cousin Scott will attribute to the right cause, and not to any disrespect for him."

Stiles felt himself completely taken in. He had fully proposed being engaged by Matt for those very dances; and to have Adrian Harris instead! his liveliness had never been worse timed. There was no help for it, however. Matt’s happiness and his own were perforce delayed a little longer, and Mr. Harris’s proposal accepted with as good a grace as he could. He was not the better pleased with Adrian’s gallantry from the idea it suggested of something more. It now first struck Stiles, that he was selected from among his siblings as worthy of being Adrian’s mate at Hunsford Parsonage, and of assisting to form a poker table at Rosings, in the absence of more eligible visitors. The idea soon reached to conviction, as he observed Adrian Harris’s increasing civilities toward himself, and heard his frequent attempt at a compliment on Stiles's sarcasm and witty comebacks; and though more astonished than gratified by this effect of his charms, it was not long before his mother gave Stiles to understand that the probability of their marriage was extremely agreeable to her. Stiles, however, did not choose to take the hint, being well aware that a serious dispute must be the consequence of any reply. Mr. Harris might never make the offer, and till he did, it was useless to quarrel about him.

If there had not been a Netherfield rave to prepare for and talk of, the younger Stilinskis would have been in a very pitiable state at this time, for from the day of the invitation, to the day of the rave, there was such a succession of rain as prevented their walking to Beacon Hills once. No aunt, no officers,
no news could be sought after - the very glow-sticks for Netherfield were got by proxy. Even Stiles might have found some trial of his patience in weather which totally suspended the improvement of his acquaintance with Matt Daehler; and nothing less than a dance on Tuesday, could have made such a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday endurable to Kanima and Jackson.
Volume 1 Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

When the dancing recommenced, however, and Derek approached to claim his hand, Allison could not help cautioning Stiles in a whisper, not to be a simpleton, and allow his fancy for Matt to make him appear unpleasant in the eyes of a man ten times his consequence. Stiles made no answer, and took his place in the line, amazed at the dignity to which he was arrived in being allowed to stand opposite to Mr. Derek, and reading in his neighbours’ looks, their equal amazement in beholding it.

Till Stiles entered the drawing-room at Netherfield, and looked in vain for Matt Daehler among the cluster of red coats there assembled, a doubt of Matt being present had never occurred to him. The certainty of meeting Matt had not been checked by any of those recollections that might not unreasonably have alarmed him. He had dressed with more than usual care, selecting his new dark red hoodie from Macy’s over an especially wittily sloganned T-shirt, and prepared in the highest spirits for the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of Matt’s heart, trusting that it was not more than might be won in the course of the evening. But in an instant arose the dreadful suspicion of his being purposely omitted for Mr. Derek’s pleasure in the Laheys’ invitation to the officers; and though this was not exactly the case, the absolute fact of his absence was pronounced by his friend Greenberg, to whom Jackson eagerly applied, and who told them that Matt had been obliged to go to town on business the day before, and was not yet returned; adding, with a significant smile, "I do not imagine his business would have called him away just now, if he had not wanted to avoid a certain gentleman here."

This part of Greenberg’s intelligence, though unheard by Jackson, was caught by Stiles, and, as it assured him that Darcy was not less answerable for Matt’s absence than if his first surmise had been just, every feeling of displeasure against the former was so sharpened by immediate disappointment, that he could hardly reply with tolerable civility to the polite inquiries which he directly afterwards approached to make. Attendance, forbearance, patience with Derek, was injury to Matt. Stiles was resolved against any sort of conversation with Derek, and turned away with a degree of ill-humour which he could not wholly surmount even in speaking to Isaac Lahey, whose blind partiality provoked him.

But Stiles was not formed for ill-humour; and though every prospect of his own was destroyed for the evening, it could not dwell long on his spirits; and having told all his griefs to Allison Silver, whom he had not seen for a week, he was soon able to make a voluntary transition to the oddities of his cousin, and to point Matt out to Allison’s particular notice. The first two dance routines, however, brought a return of distress; they were dances of mortification. Adrian Harris, awkward and solemn, apologising instead of attending, and often moving wrong without being aware of it, gave Stiles all the shame and misery which a disagreeable partner for a couple of tracks can give. The moment of his release from Matt was ecstasy.
Stiles danced next with an officer, and had the refreshment of talking of Matt, and of hearing that he was universally liked. When those dances were over, he returned to Allison Silver, and was in conversation with her, when he found herself suddenly addressed by Mr. Derek who took him so much by surprise in his slamming Stiles against a wall and making an application for his hand, that, without knowing what he did, Stiles accepted him. Mr. Derek walked away again immediately, and Stiles was left to fret over his own want of presence of mind; Allison tried to console him:

"I dare say you will find him very agreeable."

"Heaven forbid! That would be the greatest misfortune of all! To find an alpha agreeable whom one is determined to hate! Do not wish me such an evil."

When the dancing recommenced, however, and Derek approached to claim his hand, Allison could not help cautioning Stiles in a whisper, not to be a simpleton, and allow his fancy for Matt to make him appear unpleasant in the eyes of a man ten times his consequence. Stiles made no answer, and took his place in the line, amazed at the dignity to which he was arrived in being allowed to stand opposite to Mr. Derek, and reading in his neighbours’ looks, their equal amazement in beholding it. They stood for some time without speaking a word; and Stiles began to imagine that their silence was to last through the two routines, and at first was resolved not to break it; till his naturally inability to keep silent for more than two minutes intervened, and suddenly fancying that it would be the greater punishment to his partner to oblige him to talk, he made some slight random and slightly off topic observation on the dance. Derek replied, and was again silent. After a pause of some minutes, Stiles addressed him a second time with: - "It is your turn to say something now, Mr. Derek. I talked about the dance, and you ought to make some sort of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples."

He smiled, and assured Stiles that whatever he wished him to say should be said.

"Very well. That reply will do for the present. Perhaps by and by I may observe that private raves are much pleasanter than public ones. But now we may be silent."

"Do you talk by rule, then, while you are dancing?"

"Sometimes. One must speak a little, you know. It would look odd to be entirely silent for half an hour together; and yet for the advantage of some, conversation ought to be so arranged, as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible."

"Are you consulting your own feelings in the present case, or do you imagine that you are gratifying mine?"

"Both," replied Stiles archly; "for I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds. We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to posterity with all the eclat of a viral YouTube posting."

"This is no very striking resemblance of your own character, I am sure," said he. "How near it may be to mine, I cannot pretend to say. You think it a faithful portrait undoubtedly."

"I must not decide on my own performance."

He made no answer, and they were again silent till they had completed the Gangnam style routine, when he asked Stiles if he and his siblings did not very often walk to Beacon Hills. Stiles answered in the affirmative, and, unable to resist the temptation, added, "When you met us there the other day, we had just been forming a new acquaintance."
The effect was immediate. A deeper shade of hauteur overspread his features, ice seemed to form on the very tips of his stubble, but he said not a word, and Stiles, though blaming himself for his own weakness, could not go on. At length Derek spoke, and in a constrained manner said, "Matt Daehler is blessed with such happy manners and a predilection for videotaping as may ensure his making 'friends' - whether he may be equally capable of retaining them, is less certain."

"He has been so unlucky as to lose your friendship," replied Stiles with emphasis, "and in a manner which he is likely to suffer from all his life."

Derek made no answer, and seemed desirous of changing the subject. At that moment, Sir Chris Argent appeared close to them, meaning to pass through the dancefloor to the other side of the room; but on perceiving Mr. Derek, he stopped with a bow of superior courtesy to compliment him on his moves and his partner.

"I have been most highly gratified indeed, my dear sir. Such very superior dancing is not often seen. It is evident that you belong to the first circles. Allow me to say, however, that your fair partner does not disgrace you, and that I must hope to have this pleasure often repeated, especially when a certain desirable event, my dear Stiles (glancing at his brother and Isaac) shall take place. What congratulations will then flow in! I appeal to Mr. Derek: - but let me not interrupt you, sir. You will not thank me for detaining you from the bewitching converse of that young man, whose bright eyes and flailing arm gestures are also upbraiding me."

The latter part of this address was scarcely heard by Derek; but Sir Chris's allusion to his friend seemed to strike him forcibly, and his eyes were directed with a very serious expression towards Isaac and Scott, who were dancing together. Recovering himself, however, shortly, he turned to his partner, and said, "Sir Chris's interruption has made me forget what we were talking of."

"I do not think we were speaking at all. Sir Chris could not have interrupted two people in the room who had less to say for themselves. We have tried two or three subjects already without success, and what we are to talk of next I cannot imagine."

"What think you of online gaming communities that battle mythical creatures?" said he, smiling.

"Online gaming? oh! no. I am sure we never play the same, or not with the same feelings."

"I am sorry you think so; but if that be the case, there can at least be no want of subject. We may compare our different opinions."

"No -I cannot talk of gaming in a rave; my head is always full of something else."

"The present always occupies you in such scenes - does it?" said he, with a look of doubt.

"Yes, always, I have ADHD" he replied, without knowing what he said, for his Adderall dose had been quite low that day and his thoughts had wandered far from the subject, as soon afterwards appeared by his suddenly exclaiming, "I remember hearing you once say, Mr. Derek, that you hardly ever forgave, that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very cautious, I suppose, as to its being created."

"I am," said he, with a firm voice.

"And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice?"

"I hope not."

"It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to be secure of judging
"May I ask to what these questions tend?"

"Merely to the illustration of your character," said Stiles, endeavouring to shake off his gravity. "I am trying to make it out."

"And what is your success?"

Stiles shook his head. "I do not get on at all. I hear such different accounts of you as puzzle me exceedingly."

"I can readily believe," answered he gravely, "that reports may vary greatly with respect to me; and I could wish, Stiles, that you were not to sketch my character at the present moment, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either."

"But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity."

"I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours," he coldly replied.

Stiles said no more, and they went down the other dance routine and parted in silence; and on each side dissatisfied, though not to an equal degree, for in Derek's breast there was a tolerable powerful feeling towards Stiles, which soon procured his pardon, and directed all his anger against another.

They had not long separated, when Erica came towards Stiles, and with an expression of civil disdain accosted him:

"So, Stiles, I hear you are quite delighted with Matt Daehler! Your brother has been talking to me about him, and asking me a thousand questions; and I find that the young man quite forgot to tell you, among his other communication, that he was the son of old Daehler, the late Mr. Derek's steward. Let me recommend you, however, as a friend, not to give implicit confidence to all his assertions; for as to Mr. Derek's using him ill, it is perfectly false; for, on the contrary, he has always been remarkably kind to him, though Matt Daehler has treated Mr. Derek in a most infamous manner. I do not know the particulars, but I know very well that Mr. Derek is not in the least to blame, that he cannot bear to hear Matt Daehler mentioned, and that though my brother thought that he could not well avoid including him in his invitation to the officers, he was excessively glad to find that he had taken himself out of the way. His coming into the country at all is a most insolent thing, indeed, and I wonder how he could presume to do it. I pity you, Stiles, for this discovery of your favourite's guilt; but really, considering his descent, one could not expect much better."

"His guilt and his descent appear by your account to be the same," said Stiles angrily; "for I have heard you accuse him of nothing worse than of being the son of Mr. Derek's steward, and of that, I can assure you, he informed me himself."

"I beg your pardon," replied Erica, turning away with a sneer and a flip of her hair. "Excuse my interference - it was kindly meant."

"Insolent girl!" said Stiles to himself. "You are much mistaken if you expect to influence me by such a paltry attack as this. I see nothing in it but your own wilful ignorance and the malice of Mr. Derek." He then sought his eldest brother, who has undertaken to make inquiries on the same subject of Isaac. Scott met Stiles with a smile of such sweet complacency, a goofy looking distracted glow of such happy expression, as sufficiently marked how well he was satisfied with the occurrences of the evening. Stiles instantly read Scott's feelings, and at that moment solicitude for Matt, resentment against his enemies, and everything else, gave way before the hope of Scott's being in the fairest way
"I want to know," said Stiles, with a countenance no less smiling than his brother’s, "what you have learnt about Matt. But perhaps you have been too pleasantly engaged to think of any third person; in which case you may be sure of my pardon."

"No," replied Scott, "I have not forgotten him; but I have nothing satisfactory to tell you. Isaac Lahey does not know the whole of his history, and is quite ignorant of the circumstances which have principally offended Mr. Derek; but he will vouch for the good conduct, the probity, and honour of his friend, and is perfectly convinced that Matt has deserved much less attention from Mr. Derek than he has received; and I am sorry to say by his account as well as Erica’s, Matt is by no means a respectable young man. I am afraid he has been very imprudent, and has deserved to lose Mr. Derek's regard."

"Isaac does not know Matt himself?"

"No; he never saw him till the other morning at Beacon Hills."

"This account then is what he has received from Mr. Derek. I am satisfied. But what does he say of the photography job?"

"He does not exactly recollect the circumstances, though he has heard them from Mr. Derek more than once, but he believes that it was left to him conditionally only."

"I have not a doubt of Isaac’s sincerity," said Stiles warmly; "but you must excuse my not being convinced by assurances only. Isaac’s defense of his friend was a very able one, I dare say; but since he is unacquainted with several parts of the story, and has learnt the rest from that friend himself, I shall venture to still think of both gentlemen as I did before."

Stiles then changed the discourse to one more gratifying to each, and on which there could be no difference of sentiment. Stiles listened with delight to the happy, though modest hopes which Scott entertained of Isaac’s regard, and said all in his power to heighten his confidence in it. On their being joined by Isaac himself, Stiles withdrew to Allison; to whose inquiry after the pleasantness of his last partner he had scarcely replied, before Adrian Harris came up to them, and told Stiles with great exultation that he had just been so fortunate as to make a most important discovery.

"I have found out," said Adrian, "by a singular accident, that there is now in the room a near relation of my patroness. I happened to overhear the gentleman himself mentioning to the young lady who does the honours of the house the names of his cousin Miss Kate D’Argent, and of her mother Lady Victoria. How wonderfully these sort of things occur! Who would have thought of my meeting with, perhaps, a nephew of Lady Victoria D’Argent in this rave! I am most thankful that the discovery is made in time for me to pay my respects to him, which I am now going to do, and trust he will excuse my not having done it before. My total ignorance of the connection must plead my apology."

"You are not going to introduce yourself to Mr. Derek!"

"Indeed I am. I shall entreat his pardon for not having done it earlier. I believe him to be Lady Victoria’s nephew. It will be in my power to assure him that her ladyship was quite well yesterday se’nnight."

Stiles tried hard to dissuade Adrian Harris from such a scheme, assuring him that Mr. Derek would consider his addressing him without introduction as an impertinent freedom, rather than a compliment to his aunt; that it was not in the least necessary there should be any notice on either side; and that if it were, it must belong to Mr. Derek, the superior in consequence and an alpha to boot, to begin the
"My dear Stiles, I have the highest opinion in the world in your excellent judgement in all matters within the scope of your understanding; but permit me to say, that there must be a wide difference between the established forms of ceremony amongst the laity, and those which regulate the clergy; for, give me leave to observe that I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom - provided that a proper humility of behaviour is at the same time maintained. You must therefore allow me to follow the dictates of my conscience on this occasion, which leads me to perform what I look on as a point of duty. Pardon me for neglecting to profit by your advice, which on every other subject shall be my constant guide, though in the case before us I consider myself more fitted by education and habitual study to decide on what is right than a young man like yourself." And with a low bow he left Stiles to attack Mr. Derek, whose reception of his advances Stiles eagerly watched, and whose astonishment at being so addressed was very evident. Stiles’s cousin prefaced his speech with a solemn bow and though he could not hear a word of it, he felt as if hearing it all, and saw in the motion of his lips the words "apology," "Hunsford," and "Lady Victoria D’Argent." It vexed him to see Mr. Harris expose himself to such a man. Mr. Derek was eyeing him with unrestrained wonder and flashing red eyes, and when at last Mr. Harris allowed him time to speak, replied with an air of distant civility. Adrian Harris, however, was not discouraged from speaking again, and Mr. Derek’s contempt seemed abundantly increasing with the length of his second speech, and at the end of it he only made him a slight bow, and moved another way. Adrian Harris then returned to Stiles.

"I have no reason, I assure you," said he, "to be dissatisfied with my reception. Mr. Derek seemed much pleased with the attention. He answered me with the utmost civility, and even paid me the compliment of saying that he was so well convinced of Lady Victoria’s discernment as to be certain she could never bestow a favour unworthily. It was really a very handsome thought. Upon the whole, I am much pleased with him."

As Stiles had no longer any interest of his own to pursue, he turned his attention almost entirely to living vicariously through his brother and Isaac; and the train of agreeable reflections which his observations gave birth to, made him perhaps almost as happy as Scott. Stiles saw Scott in idea settled in that very house, in all the felicity which a marriage of true affection could bestow; and Stiles felt capable, under such circumstances, of endeavouring even to like Isaac’s two siblings. Stiles’s mother's thoughts he plainly saw were bent the same way, and he determined not to venture near her, lest he might hear too much. When they sat down to supper, therefore, Stiles considered it a most unlucky perverseness which placed them within one of each other; and deeply was he vexed to find that his mother was talking to that one person (Sir Chris Silver) freely, openly, and of nothing else but her expectation that Scott would soon be married to Isaac. It was an animating subject, and Mrs. McCall-Stilinski seemed incapable of fatigue while enumerating the advantages of the match. His being such a charming young man, and so rich, and living but three miles from them, were the first points of self-gratulation; and then it was such a comfort to think how fond Erica and Boyd were of Scott, and to be certain that they must desire the connection as much as she could do. It was, moreover, such a promising thing for her younger teenagers, as Scott’s marrying so greatly must throw them in the way of other rich men and women; and lastly, it was so pleasant at her time of life to be able to consign her single children to the care of their brother, that she might not be obliged to go into company more than she liked. It was necessary to make this circumstance a matter of pleasure, because on such occasions it is the etiquette; but no one was less likely than Mrs. McCall-Stilinski to find comfort in staying home at any period of her life. She concluded with many good wishes that Sir Chris might soon be equally fortunate, though evidently and triumphantly believing there was no chance of it.

In vain did Stiles endeavour to check the rapidity of his mother's words, or persuade her to describe
her felicity in a less audible whisper; for, to his inexpressible vexation, Stiles could perceive that the chief of it was overheard by Mr. Derek, who sat opposite to them. His mother only scolded him for being nonsensical.

"What is Mr. Derek to me, pray, that I should be afraid of him? I am sure we owe him no such particular civility as to be obliged to say nothing he may not like to hear."

"For heaven's sake, madam, speak lower. What advantage can it be for you to offend Mr. Derek? You will never recommend yourself to his friend by so doing!"

Nothing that Stiles could say, however, had any influence. His mother would talk of her views in the same intelligible tone. Stiles blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation. He could not help frequently glancing his eye at Mr. Derek, though every glance convinced him of what he dreaded; for though he was not always looking at Stile's mother, Stiles was convinced that Derek's attention was invariably fixed by her. The expression of Derek's face changed gradually from indignant and red-eyed contempt to a composed and steady if somewhat glowering gravity.

At length, however, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski had no more to say; and Sir Chris, who had been long yawning at the repetition of delights which he saw no likelihood of sharing, was left to the comforts of cold ham and chicken. Stiles now began to revive. But not long was the interval of tranquility; for, when supper was over, singing was talked of, and he had the mortification of seeing Lydia, after very little entreaty, preparing to oblige the company. By many significant looks and silent entreaties, did Stiles endeavour to prevent such a proof of complaisance, but in vain; Lydia would not understand them; such an opportunity of exhibiting was delightful to her, and she began her song. Stiles's eyes were fixed on her with most painful sensations, and he watched her progress through the several verses with an impatience which was very ill rewarded at their close; for Lydia, on receiving, amongst the thanks of the table, the hint of a hope that she might be prevailed on to favour them again, after the pause of half a minute began another.

Lydia's powers were by no means fitted for such a display; her voice was weak, and her manner affected. Stiles was in agonies. He looked at Scott, to see how he bore it; but Scott was very composedly talking to Isaac. He looked at Erica and Boyd, and saw them making signs of derision at each other, and at Derek, who continued, however, imperturbably grave. Stiles looked at his father to entreat his interference, lest Lydia should be singing all night. Sheriff Stilinski took the hint, and when Lydia had finished her second song, said aloud, "That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young people have time to exhibit."

Lydia, though pretending not to hear, was somewhat disconcerted; and Stiles, sorry for her, and sorry for his father's speech, was afraid his anxiety had done no good. Others of the party were now applied to.

"If I," said Adrian Harris, "were so fortunate as to be able to sing, I should have great pleasure, I am sure, in obliging the company with an air; for I consider music as a very innocent diversion, and perfectly compatible with the profession of a clergyman. I do not mean, however, to assert that we can be justified in devoting too much of our time to music, for there are certainly other things to be attended to. The rector of a parish has much to do. In the first place, he must make such an agreement for tithes as may be beneficial to himself and not offensive to his patron. He must write his own sermons; and the time that remains will not be too much for his parish duties, and the care and improvement of his dwelling, which he cannot be excused from making as comfortable as possible. And I do not think it of light importance that he should have attentive and conciliatory manners towards everybody, especially towards those to whom he owes his preferment. I cannot acquit him of that duty; nor could I think well of the man who should omit an occasion of testifying his respect towards anybody connected with the family." And with a bow to Mr. Derek, he concluded his
speech, which had been spoken so loud as to be heard by half the room. Many stared – many smiled; but no one looked more amused than Sherrif Stilinski himself, while his wife seriously commended Adrian for having spoken so sensibly, and observed in a half-whisper to Sir Chris, that he was a remarkably clever, good kind of young man.

To Stiles it appeared that, had his family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more spirit or finer success; and happy did he think it for Isaac and Scott that some of the exhibition had escaped their notice, and that their feelings were not of a sort to be much distressed by the folly which they must have witnessed. That Erica, Boyd and Mr. Derek, however, should have such an opportunity of ridiculing his relations, was bad enough, and he could not determine whether the silent contempt of the alpha, or the insolent smiles of the betas, were more intolerable.

The rest of the evening brought Stiles little amusement. He was teased by Adrian Harris, who continued most perseveringly by his side, and though he could not prevail on Stiles to dance with him again, put it out of Stiles’s power to dance with others. In vain did Stiles entreat him to stand up with somebody else, and offer to introduce him to any young person in the room. Adrian assured him, that as to dancing, he was perfectly indifferent to it; that his chief object was by delicate attentions to recommend himself to Stiles and that he should therefore make a point of remaining close to him the whole evening. There was no arguing upon such a project. Stiles owed his greatest relief to his friend Miss Silver, who often joined them, and good-naturedly engaged Mr. Harris’s conversation to herself.

Stiles was at least free from the offense of Mr. Derek’s further notice; though often standing within a very short distance of him, quite disengaged, he never came near enough to speak. Stiles felt it to be the probable consequence of her allusions to Matt, and rejoiced in it.

The Longbourn party were the last of all the company to depart, and, by a manoeuvre of Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, had to wait for their SUV a quarter of an hour after everybody else was gone, which gave them time to see how heartily they were wished away by some of the family. Boyd and Erica scarcely opened their mouths, except to complain of fatigue, and were evidently impatient to have the house to themselves. They repulsed every attempt of Mrs. McCall-Stilinski’s at conversation, and by so doing threw a languor over the whole party, which was very little relieved by the long speeches of Mr. Harris, who was complimenting Isaac and his siblings on the elegance of their entertainment, and the hospitality and politeness which had marked their behaviour to their guests. Derek said nothing at all. Sheriff Stilinski, in equal silence, was enjoying the scene. Isaac and Scott were standing together, a little detached from the rest, and talked only to each other. Stiles preserved as steady a silence as either Boyd or Erica; and even Jackson was too much fatigued to utter more than the occasional exclamation of "Lord, how tired I am!" accompanied by a violent yawn.

When at length they arose to take leave, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was most pressingly civil in her hope of seeing the whole family soon at Longbourn, and addressed herself especially to Isaac, to assure him how happy he would make them by eating a family dinner with them at any time, without the ceremony of a formal invitation. Isaac was all grateful pleasure, and he readily engaged for taking the earliest opportunity of waiting on her, after his return from London, whither he was obliged to go the next day for a short time.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was perfectly satisfied, and quitted the house under the delightful persuasion that, allowing for the necessary preparations of settlements, new cars, and wedding clothes, she should undoubtedly see her son settled at Netherfield in the course of three or four months. Of having another son married to Mr. Harris, she thought with equal certainty, and with considerable, though not equal, pleasure. Stiles was the least dear to her of all her children; and though the man
and the match were quite good enough for him, the worth of each was eclipsed by Isaac and Netherfield.
And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection.

The next day opened a new scene at Longbourn. Mr. Harris made his declaration in form. Having resolved to do it without loss of time, as his leave of absence extended only to the following Saturday, and having no feelings of diffidence to make it distressing to himself even at the moment, he set about it in a very orderly manner, with all the observances, which he supposed a regular part of the business. On finding Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, Stiles, and one of the girls together, soon after breakfast, he addressed the mother in these words:

"May I hope, madam, for your interest with your fair son Stiles, when I solicit for the honour of a private audience with him in the course of this morning?"

Before Stiles had time for anything but a flail of surprise, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski answered instantly, "Oh dear! – yes - certainly. I am sure Stiles will be very happy - I am sure he can have no objection. Come, Kanima, I want you up stairs." And, gathering her work together, she was hastening away, when Stiles called out:

"Dear madam, do not go. I beg you will not go. Mr. Harris must excuse me. He can have nothing to say to me that anybody need not hear. I am going away myself."

"No, no, nonsense, Stiles. I desire you to stay where you are." And upon Stiles's seeming really, with vexed and embarrassed looks, about to escape, she added: "Stiles, I insist upon your staying and hearing Adrian Harris."

Stiles would not oppose such an injunction - and a moment's consideration making him also sensible that it would be wisest to get it over as soon and as quietly as possible, he sat down again and tried to conceal, by incessant employment on his PSP, the feelings which were divided between distress and diversion. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski and Kanima walked off, and as soon as they were gone, Adrian Harris began.

"Believe me, my dear Stile, that your modesty, so far from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your other perfections. You would have been less amiable in my eyes had there not been this little unwillingness; but allow me to assure you, that I have your respected mother's permission for this address. You can hardly doubt the purport of my discourse, however your natural delicacy may lead you to dissemble; my attentions and detentions (of your time) have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my future life. But before I am run away with by my feelings on this subject, perhaps it would be advisable for me to state my reasons for marrying--and, moreover, for coming into Hertfordshire with the design of selecting a mate, as I certainly did."
The idea of Adrian Harris, with all his solemn composure, being run away with by his feelings, made Stiles so near laughing, that he could not use the short pause Adrian allowed in any attempt to stop him further, and he continued:

"My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances, who has his four year chip from AA (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly--which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too!) on this subject; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Hunsford--between our pools at quadrille, while Mrs. Jenkinson was arranging Kate D’Argent’s footstool, that she said, 'Mr. Harris, you must marry. A clergyman like you must marry. Choose properly, choose a human for my sake; and for your own, let them be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a person as soon as you can, bring them to Hunsford, and I will visit them.' Allow me, by the way, to observe, my crop-haired cousin, that I do not reckon the notice and kindness of Lady Victoria D’Argent as among the least of the advantages in my power to offer. You will find her manners beyond anything I can describe; and your wit and sarcasm, I think, must be acceptable to her, especially when tempered with the silence, Adderall and respect which her rank will inevitably excite. Thus much for my general intention in favour of matrimony; it remains to be told why my views were directed towards Longbourn instead of my own neighbourhood, where I can assure you there are many amiable young men. But the fact is, that being, as I am, to inherit this estate after the death of your honoured father (who, however, may live many years longer), I could not satisfy myself without resolving to choose a mate from among his teenagers, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place - which, however, as I have already said, may not be for several years. This has been my motive, my fair cousin, and I flatter myself it will not sink me in your esteem. And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection. To fortune I am perfectly indifferent, and shall make no demand of that nature on your father, since I am well aware that it could not be complied with; and that one hundred thousand pounds in the three per cents, which will not be yours till after your mother's decease, is all that you may ever be entitled to. On that head, therefore, I shall be uniformly silent; and you may assure yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when we are married."

It was absolutely necessary to interrupt him now.

"You are too hasty, sir," Stiles cried. "You forget that I have made no answer. Let me do it without further loss of time. Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me. I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than to decline them."

"I am not now to learn," replied Adrian Harris, with a formal wave of the hand, "that it is usual with young people to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second, or even a third time. I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said, and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long."

"Upon my word, sir," cried Stiles, "your hope is a rather extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of those young persons (if such young persons there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last man in the world who could make you so. Nay, were your friend Lady Victoria to know me, I am persuaded she would find me in every respect ill qualified for the situation."
"Were it certain that Lady Victoria would think so," said Adrian Harris very gravely - "but I cannot imagine that her ladyship would at all disapprove of you. And you may be certain when I have the honour of seeing her again, I shall speak in the very highest terms of your modesty, economy, clear skin, bright eyes, abilities on Google, and other amiable qualification."

"Indeed, Mr. Harris, all praise of me will be unnecessary. You must give me leave to judge for myself, and pay me the compliment of believing what I say. I wish you very happy and very rich, and by refusing your hand, do all in my power to prevent your being otherwise. In making me the offer, you must have satisfied the delicacy of your feelings with regard to my family, and may take possession of Longbourn estate whenever it falls, without any self-reproach. This matter may e considered, therefore, as finally settled." And rising as he thus spoke, he would have quitted the room, had Adrian Harris not thus addressed him:

"When I do myself the honour of speaking to you next on the subject, I shall hope to receive a more favourable answer than you have now given me; though I am far from accusing you of cruelty at present, because I know it to be the established custom of your generation to reject a man on the first application, and perhaps you have even now said as much to encourage my suit as would be consistent with the true delicacy of the your character."

"Really, Mr. Harris," cried Stiles with some warmth, "you puzzle me exceedingly. If what I have hitherto said can appear to you in the form of encouragement, I know not how to express my refusal in such a way as to convince you of its being one. If necessary I hall unfriend you on Facebook"

"You must give me leave to flatter myself, my dear cousin, that your refusal of my addresses is merely words of course. My reasons for believing it are briefly these: It does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy your acceptance, or that the establishment or knowledge of how to create a fire bomb I can offer would be any other than highly desirable. My situation in life, my connections with the family of D’Argent, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour; and you should take it into further consideration, that in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. As I must therefore conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me, I shall choose to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of virginal teenagers."

"I do assure you, sir, that I have no pretensions whatever to that kind of elegance which consists in tormenting a respectable man. I would rather be paid the compliment of being believed sincere. I thank you again and again for the honour you have done me in your proposals, but to accept them is absolutely impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it. Can I speak plainer? Do not consider me now as an virginal teenager, intending to plague you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from his heart."

"You are uniformly charming!" cried he, with an air of awkward gallantry; "and I am persuaded that when sanctioned by the express authority of both your excellent parents, my proposals will not fail of being acceptable."

To such perseverance in wilful self-deception Stiles would make no reply, and immediately and in silence withdrew; determined, if Adrian Harris persisted in considering his repeated refusals as flattering encouragement, to apply to his father, whose negative might be uttered in such a manner as to be decisive, and whose behaviour at least could not be mistaken for the affectation and coquetry of an virginal teenager.
Volume 1 Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

"An unhappy alternative is before you, Stiles. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Adrian Harris, and I will never see you again if you do."

Mr. Harris was not left long to the silent contemplation of his successful love; for Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, having dawdled about in the vestibule to watch for the end of the conference, no sooner saw Stiles open the door and with quick step pass her towards the staircase, than she entered the breakfast-room, and congratulated both him and herself in warm terms on the happy prospect or their nearer connection. Adrian Harris received and returned these felicitations with equal pleasure, and then proceeded to relate the particulars of their interview, with the result of which he trusted he had every reason to be satisfied, since the refusal which his cousin had steadfastly given him would naturally flow from his bashful modesty, his uncertainty as to whether he was truly attractive to gay guys, and the genuine delicacy of his character.

This information, however, startled Mrs. McCall-Stilinski; she would have been glad to be equally satisfied that her son had meant to encourage him by protesting against his proposals, but she dared not believe it, and could not help saying so.

"But, depend upon it, Mr. Harris," she added, "that Stiles shall be brought to reason. I will speak to him about it directly. He is a very headstrong, foolish boy, and does not know his own interest but I will make him know it."

"Pardon me for interrupting you, madam," cried Adrian Harris; "but if he is really headstrong and foolish, I know not whether he would altogether be a very desirable mate to a man in my situation, who naturally looks for happiness in the marriage state. If therefore he actually persists in rejecting my suit, perhaps it were better not to force him into accepting me, because if liable to such defects of temper, he could not contribute much to my felicity."

"Sir, you quite misunderstand me," said Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, alarmed. "Stiles is only headstrong in such matters as these. In everything else he is as good-natured a boy as ever lived. I will go directly to Sheriff Stilinski, and we shall very soon settle it with Stiles, I am sure."

She would not give him time to reply, but hurrying instantly to her husband, called out as she entered the library, "Oh! Sheriff Stilinski, you are wanted immediately; we are all in an uproar. You must come and make Stiles marry Adrian Harris, for Stiles vows he will not have him, and if you do not make haste Adrian Harris will change his mind and not have Stiles."

Sheriff Stilinski raised his eyes from his Samsung tablet as she entered, and fixed them on her face with a calm unconcern which was not in the least altered by her communication.
"I have not the pleasure of understanding you," said he, when she had finished her speech. "Of what are you talking?"

"Of Adrian Harris and Stiles. Stiles declares he will not have Mr. Harris, and Mr. Harris begins to say that he will not have Stiles."

"And what am I to do on the occasion? It seems an hopeless business."

"Speak to Stiles about it yourself. Tell him that you insist upon him marrying Adrian Harris."

"Let Stiles be called down. He shall hear my opinion."

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski rang the bell, and Stiles was summoned to the library.

"Come here, son," cried his father as he appeared. "I have sent for you on an affair of importance. I understand that Mr. Harris has made you an offer of marriage. Is it true?" Stiles replied that it was.

"Very well - and this offer of marriage you have refused?"

"I have, sir."

"Very well. We now come to the point. Your mother insists upon your accepting it. Is it not so, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski?"

"Yes, or I will never see Stiles again."

"An unhappy alternative is before you, Stiles. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Adrian Harris, and I will never see you again if you do."

Stiles could not but smile at such a conclusion of such a beginning, but Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, who had persuaded herself that her husband regarded the affair as she wished, was excessively disappointed.

"What do you mean, Sheriff Stilinski, in talking this way? You promised me to insist upon Stiles marrying him."

"My dear," replied her husband, "I have two small favours to request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room. I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as may be."

Not yet, however, in spite of her disappointment in her husband, did Mrs. McCall-Stilinski give up the point. She talked to Stiles again and again; coaxed and threatened him by turns. She endeavoured to secure Scott in her interest; but Scott, with all possible mulish placidity, declined interfering; and Stiles with real earnestness, and sometimes with playful hyperactivity, replied to her attacks. Though Stiles’s manner varied, however, his determination never did.

Adrian Harris, meanwhile, was meditating in solitude on what had passed. He thought too well of himself to comprehend on what motives his cousin could refuse him; and though his pride was hurt, he suffered in no other way. His regard for Stiles was quite imaginary; and the possibility of his deserving his mother's reproach prevented Adrian feeling any regret.

While the family were in this confusion, Allison Silver came to spend the day with them. She was met in the vestibule by Jackson, who, flying to her, cried in a half whisper, "I am glad you are come, for there is such fun here! What do you think has happened this morning? Mr. Harris has made an offer to Stiles, and Stiles will not have him."
Allison hardly had time to answer, before they were joined by Kanima, who came to tell the same news; and no sooner had they entered the breakfast-room, where Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was alone, than she likewise began on the subject, calling on Miss Silver for her compassion, and entreating her to persuade her friend Stiles to comply with the wishes of all his family. "Pray do, my dear Miss Silver," she added in a melancholy tone, "for nobody is on my side, nobody takes part with me. I am cruelly used, nobody feels for my poor nerves."

Allison's reply was spared by the entrance of Scott and Stiles, who entered with their arms draped over one another's shoulders.

"Aye, there he comes," continued Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, "looking as unconcerned as may be, and caring no more for us than if we were at York, provided he can have his own way. But I tell you, Stiles - if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all - and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead. I shall not be able to keep you - and so I warn you. I have done with you from this very day. I told you in the library, you know, that I should never speak to you again, and you will find me as good as my word. I have no pleasure in talking to undutiful children. Not that I have much pleasure, indeed, in talking to anybody. People who suffer as I do from nervous complaints can have no great inclination for talking. Nobody can tell what I suffer! But it is always so. Those who do not complain are never pitied."

Her children listened in silence to this effusion, sensible that any attempt to reason with her or soothe her would only increase the irritation. She talked on, therefore, without interruption from any of them, till they were joined by Adrian Harris, who entered the room with an air more stately than usual, and on perceiving whom, she said to the teenagers, "Now, I do insist upon it, that you, all of you, hold your tongues, and let me and Mr. Harris have a little conversation together."

Stiles passed quietly out of the room, Scott and Kanima followed, but Jackson stood his ground, determined to hear all he could; and Allison, detained first by the civility of Adrian Harris, whose inquiries after herself and all her family were very minute, and then by a little curiosity, satisfied herself with walking to the window and pretending not to hear. In a doleful voice Mrs. McCall-Stilinski began the projected conversation: "Oh! Mr. Harris!"

"My dear madam," replied he, "let us be for ever silent on this point. Far be it from me," he presently continued, in a voice that marked his displeasure, "to resent the behaviour of your son. Resignation to inevitable evils is the duty of us all; the peculiar duty of a young man who has been so fortunate as I have been in early preferment; and I trust I am resigned. Perhaps not the less so from feeling a doubt of my positive happiness had my fair cousin honoured me with his hand; for I have often observed that resignation is never so perfect as when the blessing denied begins to lose somewhat of its value in our estimation. You will not, I hope, consider me as showing any disrespect to your family, my dear madam, by thus withdrawing my pretensions to your son's favour, without having paid yourself and Sheriff Stilinski the compliment of requesting you to interpose your authority in my behalf. My conduct may, I fear, be objectionable in having accepted my dismission from your son's lips instead of your own. But we are all liable to error. I have certainly meant well through the whole affair. My object has been to secure an amiable companion for myself, with due consideration for the advantage of all your family, and if my manner has been at all reprehensible, I here beg leave to apologise."
Chapter Summary

"Erica sees that her brother is in love with you, and wants him to marry Danny. She follows him to town in hope of keeping him there, and tries to persuade you that he does not care about you."

Scott shook his head.

"Indeed, Scott, you ought to believe me. No one who has ever seen you together can doubt his affection."

The discussion of Adrian Harris's offer was now nearly at an end, and Stiles had only to suffer from the uncomfortable feelings necessarily attending it, and occasionally from some peevish allusions of his mother. As for the gentleman himself, his feelings were chiefly expressed, not by embarrassment or dejection, or by trying to avoid Stiles, but by stiffness of manner and resentful silence. He scarcely ever spoke to Stiles, nor detained him, and the assiduous attentions which he had been so sensible of himself were transferred for the rest of the day to Allison Silver, whose civility in listening to Adrian Harris was a seasonable relief to them all, and especially to her friend.

The morrow produced no abatement of Mrs. McCall-Stilinski’s ill-humour or ill health. Adrian Harris also in the same state of angry pride. Stiles had hoped that his resentment might shorten his visit, but his plan did not appear in the least affected by it. He was always to have gone on Saturday, and to Saturday he meant to stay.

After breakfast, the teens walked to Bacon Hills to inquire if Matt were returned, and to lament over his absence from the Netherfield ball. Matt joined them on their entering the town, and attended them to their aunt's where his regret and vexation, and the concern of everybody, was well talked over. To Stiles, however, he voluntarily acknowledged that the necessity of his absence had been self-imposed.

"I found," said he, "as the time drew near that I had better not meet Mr. Derek; that to be in the same room, the same party with him for so many hours together, might be more than I could bear, and that scenes might arise unpleasant to more than myself."

Stiles highly approved his forbearance, and they had leisure for a full discussion of it, and for all the commendation which they civilly bestowed on each other, as Matt and another officer walked back with them to Longbourn, and during the walk he particularly attended to Stiles. His accompanying them was a double advantage; Stiles felt all the compliment it offered to himself, and it was most acceptable as an occasion of introducing him to her father and mother.

Soon after their return, a Facebook message arrived for Scott; it came from Netherfield. Stiles saw his brother’s countenance change as he read it, and saw him dwelling intently on some particular
passages. Scott recollected himself soon, and shutting down his browser, tried to join with his usual cheerfulness in the general conversation; but Stiles felt an anxiety on the subject which drew off his attention even from Matt; and no sooner had Matt and his companion taken leave, than a glance from Scott invited Stiles to follow him up stairs. When they had gained their own room, Scott, taking out his Samsung tablet and opening Facebook, said:

"This is from Erica; what it contains has surprised me a good deal. The whole party have left Netherfield by this time, and are on their way to town - and without any intention of coming back again. You shall hear what she says."

Scott then read the first sentence aloud, which comprised the information of their having just resolved to follow their brother to town directly, and of their meaning to dine in Grosvenor Street, where Boyd had a house. The next was in these words: "I do not pretend to regret anything I shall leave in Hertfordshire, except your society, my dearest friend; but we will hope, at some future period, to enjoy many returns of that delightful intercourse we have known, and in the meanwhile may lessen the pain of separation by a very frequent and most unreserved Facebook friendship. I depend on you for that." To these highflown expressions Stiles listened with all the insensibility of distrust; and though the suddenness of their removal surprised him, he saw nothing in it really to lament; it was not to be supposed that their absence from Netherfield would prevent Isaac Lahey’s being there; and as to the loss of their society, he was persuaded that Scott must cease to regard it, in the enjoyment of Matt.

"It is unlucky," said Stiles, after a short pause, "that you should not be able to see your friends before they leave the country. But may we not hope that the period of future happiness to which Erica looks forward may arrive earlier than she is aware, and that the delightful intercourse you have known as friends will be renewed with yet greater satisfaction as in-laws? Isaac will not be detained in London by them."

"Erica decidedly says that none of the party will return into Hertfordshire this winter. I will read it to you:"

"When my brother left us yesterday, he imagined that the business which took him to London might be concluded in three or four days; but as we are certain it cannot be so, and at the same time convinced that when Isaac gets to town he will be in no hurry to leave it again, we have determined on following him thither, that he may not be obliged to spend his vacant hours in a comfortless hotel. Many of my acquaintances are already there for the winter; I wish that I could hear that you, my dearest friend, had any intention of making one of the crowd - but of that I despair. I sincerely hope your Christmas in Hertfordshire may abound in the gaieties which that season generally brings, and that your beaux will be so numerous as to prevent your feeling the loss of the pack of whom we shall deprive you."

"It is evident by this," added Scott, "that he comes back no more this winter."

"It is only evident that Erica does not mean that he should."

"Why will you think so? It must be his own doing. He is his own master. But you do not know all. I will read you the passage which particularly hurts me. I will have no reserves from you, we are brothers."

"Mr. Derek is impatient to see his brother; and, to confess the truth, we are scarcely less eager to meet him again. I really do not think Danny has his equal for beauty, elegance, and accomplishments - everyone likes Danny; and the affection he inspires in Boyd and myself is heightened into something still more interesting, from the hope we dare entertain of his being hereafter our brother. I do not know whether I ever before mentioned to you my feelings on this subject; but I will not leave
the country without confiding them, and I trust you will not esteem them unreasonable. My brother
admires Danny greatly already; he will have frequent opportunity now of seeing him on the most
intimate footing; Danny’s relations all wish the connection as much as Isaac’s own; and a sister’s
partiality is not misleading me, I think, when I call Isaac most capable of engaging any beta’s heart.
With all these circumstances to favour an attachment, and nothing to prevent it, am I wrong, my
dearest Scott, in indulging the hope of an event which will secure the happiness of so many?"

"What do you think of this sentence, my dear Stiles?" said Scott as he finished it. "Is it not clear
enough? Does it not expressly declare that Erica neither expects nor wishes me to be her in law; that
she is perfectly convinced of her brother's indifference; and that if she suspects the nature of my
feelings for him, she means (most kindly!) to put me on my guard? Can there be any other opinion
on the subject?"

"Yes, there can; for mine is totally different. Will you hear it?"

"Most willingly."

"You shall have it in a few words. Erica sees that her brother is in love with you, and wants him to
marry Danny. She follows him to town in hope of keeping him there, and tries to persuade you that
he does not care about you."

Scott shook his head.

"Indeed, Scott, you ought to believe me. No one who has ever seen you together can doubt his
affection. Erica, I am sure, cannot. She is not such a simpleton. Could she have seen half as much
love in Mr. Derek for herself, she would have ordered her wedding clothes. But the case is this: We
are not rich enough or grand enough or alpha enough for them; and she is the more anxious to get
Danny for her brother, from the notion that when there has been one intermarriage, she may have
less trouble in achieving a second; in which there is certainly some ingenuity, and I dare say it would
succeed, if Kate D’Argent were out of the way. But, my dearest Scott, you cannot seriously imagine
that because Erica tells you her brother greatly admires Danny, he is in the smallest degree less
sensible of your merit than when he took leave of you on Tuesday, or that it will be in her power to
persuade him that, instead of being in love with you, he is very much in love with her friend."

"If we thought alike of Erica," replied Scott, "your representation of all this might make me quite
easy. But I know the foundation is unjust. Erica is incapable of wilfully deceiving anyone; and all
that I can hope in this case is that she is deceiving herself."

"That is right. You could not have started a more happy idea, since you will not take comfort in
mine. Believe her to be deceived, by all means. You have now done your duty by her, and must fret
no longer."

"But, my dear brother, can I be happy, even supposing the best, in accepting a man whose sisters and
friends are all wishing him to marry elsewhere?"

"You must decide for yourself," said Stiles; "and if, upon mature deliberation, you find that the
misery of disobliging his two siblings is more than equivalent to the happiness of being his mate, I
advise you by all means to refuse him."

"How can you talk so?" said Scott, faintly smiling. "You must know that though I should be
exceedingly grieved at their disapprobation, I could not hesitate."

"I did not think you would; and that being the case, I cannot consider your situation with much
compassion."
"But if he returns no more this winter, my choice will never be required. A thousand things may arise in six lunar cycles!"

The idea of his returning no more Scott treated with the utmost contempt. It appeared to him merely the suggestion of Erica’s interested wishes, and he could not for a moment suppose that those wishes, however openly or artfully spoken, could influence a young man so totally independent of everyone.

He represented to his brother as forcibly as possible what he felt on the subject, and had soon the pleasure of seeing its happy effect. Scott’s temper was not desponding, and he was gradually led to hope, though the diffidence of affection sometimes overcame the hope, that Isaac would return to Netherfield and answer every wish of his heart.

They agreed that Mrs. McCall-Stilinski should only hear of the departure of the family, without being alarmed on the score of the gentleman’s conduct; but even this partial communication gave her a great deal of concern, and she bewailed it as exceedingly unlucky that the family should happen to go away just as they were all getting so intimate together. After lamenting it, however, at some length, she had the consolation that Mr. Lahey would be soon down again and soon dining at Longbourn, and the conclusion of all was the comfortable declaration, that though he had been invited only to a family dinner, she would take care to have two full courses.
Chapter Summary

The least agreeable circumstance in the business was the surprise it must occasion to Stiles Stilinski, whose friendship she valued beyond that of any other person. Stiles was her probably gay best friend, and she loved to hang out with him. Stiles would wonder, and probably would blame her; and though her resolution was not to be shaken, her feelings must be hurt by such a disapprobation.

The Stilinski’s were engaged to dine with the Silvers and again during the chief of the day was Allison so kind as to listen to Adrian Harris. Stiles took an opportunity of thanking her. "It keeps him in good humour," said he, "and I am more obliged to you than I can express." Allison assured her friend of her satisfaction in being useful, and that it amply repaid her for the little sacrifice of her time. This was very amiable, but Allison’s kindness extended farther than Stiles had any conception of; its object was nothing else than to secure Stiles from any return of Mr. Harris’s addresses, by engaging them towards herself. Such was Allison’s scheme; and appearances were so favourable, that when they parted at night, she would have felt almost secure of success if he had not been to leave Hertfordshire so very soon. But here she did injustice to the fire and independence of his character, for it led him to escape out of Longbourn House the next morning with admirable slyness, and hasten to Silver Lodge to throw himself at her feet. He was anxious to avoid the notice of his cousins, from a conviction that if they saw him depart, they could not fail to conjecture his design, and he was not willing to have the attempt known till its success might be known likewise; for though feeling almost secure, and with reason, for Allison had been tolerably encouraging, he was comparatively diffident since the adventure of Wednesday.

His reception, however, was of the most flattering kind. Allison perceived him from an upper window as he walked towards the house, and instantly set out to meet him accidentally in the lane. But little had she dared to hope that so much love and eloquence awaited her there.

In as short a time as Adrian Harris’s long speeches would allow, everything was settled between them to the satisfaction of both; and as they entered the house he earnestly entreated her to name the day that was to make him the happiest of men; and though such a solicitation must be waived for the present, the lady felt no inclination to trifle with his happiness. The stupidity with which he was favoured by nature must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance; and Allison, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment were gained.

Sir Chris Silver was speedily applied to for his consent; and it was bestowed with a most joyful alacrity. Adrian’s present circumstances made it a most eligible match for his daughter, to whom he could give little fortune; and his prospects of future wealth were exceedingly fair. Sir Chris gave it as his decided opinion, that whenever Adrian Harris should be in possession of the Longbourn estate, it would be highly expedient that both he and his wife should make their appearance at St. James’s. The whole family, in short, were properly overjoyed on the occasion. Allison herself was tolerably composed. She had gained her point, and had time to consider of it. Her reflections were in general
satisfactory. Mr. Harris, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of seventeen she felt all the good luck of it.

The least agreeable circumstance in the business was the surprise it must occasion to Stiles Stilinski, whose friendship she valued beyond that of any other person. Stiles was her probably gay best friend, and she loved to hang out with him. Stiles would wonder, and probably would blame her; and though her resolution was not to be shaken, her feelings must be hurt by such a disapprobation. She resolved to give Stiles the information herself, and therefore charged Adrian, when he returned to Longbourn to dinner, to drop no hint of what had passed before any of the family. A promise of secrecy was of course very dutifully given, but it could not be kept without difficulty; for the curiosity excited by his long absence burst forth in such very direct questions on his return as required some ingenuity to evade, and he was at the same time exercising great self-denial, for he was longing to publish his prosperous love.

As he was to begin his journey too early on the morrow to see any of the family, the ceremony of leave-taking was performed when the family moved for the night; and Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, with great politeness and cordiality, said how happy they should be to see him at Longbourn again, whenever his engagements might allow him to visit them.

"My dear madam," he replied, "this invitation is particularly gratifying, because it is what I have been hoping to receive; and you may be very certain that I shall avail myself of it as soon as possible."

They were all astonished; and Sheriff Stilinski, who could by no means wish for so speedy a return, immediately said:

"But is there not danger of Lady Victoria’s disapprobation here, my good sir? You had better neglect your relations than run the risk of offending your patroness."

"My dear sir," replied Adrian, "I am particularly obliged to you for this friendly caution, and you may depend upon my not taking so material a step without her ladyship's concurrence."

"You cannot be too much upon your guard. Risk anything rather than her displeasure; and if you find it likely to be raised by your coming to us again, which I should think exceedingly probable, stay quietly at home, and be satisfied that we shall take no offence."

"Believe me, my dear sir, my gratitude is warmly excited by such affectionate attention; and depend upon it, you will speedily receive from me a letter of thanks for this, and for every other mark of your regard during my stay in Hertfordshire. As for my fair cousins, though my absence may not be long enough to render it necessary, I shall now take the liberty of wishing them health and happiness, not excepting my cousin Stiles."

With proper civilities the teenagers then withdrew; all of them equally surprised that he meditated a quick return. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski wished to understand by it that he thought of paying his addresses to one of her younger teenagers, and Lydia might have been prevailed on to accept him. She rated his abilities much higher than any of the others; there was a solidity in his reflections which often struck her, and though by no means so clever as herself, she thought that if encouraged to read and improve himself by such an example as hers, he might become a very agreeable companion. But on the following morning, every hope of this kind was done away. Allison called soon after breakfast, and in a private conference with Stiles related the event of the day before.
The possibility of Adrian's fancying himself in love with his friend had once occurred to Stiles within the last day or two; but that Allison could encourage him seemed almost as far from possibility as he could encourage Adrian himself, and his astonishment was consequently so great as to overcome at first the bounds of decorum, and he could not help crying out:

"Engaged to Adrian! My dear Allison -impossible!"

The steady countenance which Miss Silver had commanded in telling her story, gave way to a momentary confusion here on receiving so direct a reproach; though, as it was no more than she expected, she soon regained her composure, and calmly replied:

"Why should you be surprised, my dear Stiles? Do you think it incredible that Adrian should be able to procure any person's good opinion, because he was not so happy as to succeed with you?"

But Stiles had now recollected himself, and making a strong effort for it, was able to assure with tolerable firmness that the prospect of their relationship was highly grateful to him, and that he wished her all imaginable happiness.

"I see what you are feeling," replied Allison. "You must be surprised, very much surprised - so lately as Adrian was wishing to marry you. But when you have had time to think it over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Adrian's character, connection, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state."

Stiles quietly answered "Undoubtedly;" and after an awkward pause, they returned to the rest of the family. Allison did not stay much longer, and Stiles was then left to reflect on what he had heard.

It was a long time before he became at all reconciled to the idea of so unsuitable a match. The strangeness of Adrian's making two offers of marriage within three days was nothing in comparison of his being now accepted. Stiles had always felt that Allison's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like his own, but he had not supposed it to be possible that, when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage. Allison the wife of Adrian Harris was a most humiliating picture! And to the pang of a friend disgracing herself and sunk in his esteem, was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen.
Chapter Summary

Even Stiles began to fear - not that Isaac was indifferent - but that his pack would be successful in keeping him away. Unwilling as he was to admit an idea so destructive of Scott's happiness, and so dishonorable to the stability of his lover, he could not prevent its frequently occurring.

Stiles was sitting with his mother and siblings, reflecting on what he had heard, and doubting whether he was authorised to mention it, when Sir Chris Silver himself appeared, sent by his daughter, to announce her engagement to the family. With many compliments to them, and much self-gratulation on the prospect of a connection between the houses, he unfolded the matter - to an audience not merely wondering, but incredulous; for Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, with more perseverance than politeness, protested he must be entirely mistaken; and Jackson, always unguarded and very often uncivil, boisterously exclaimed:

"Good Lord! Sir Chris, how can you tell such a story? Do not you know that Mr. Harris wants to marry Stiles?"

Nothing less than the complaisance of a courtier could have borne without anger such treatment; but Sir Chris's good breeding carried him through it all; and though he begged leave to be positive as to the truth of his information, he listened to all their impertinence with the most forbearing courtesy.

Stiles, feeling it incumbent on himself to relieve Sir Chris from so unpleasant a situation, now put himself forward to confirm the account, by mentioning his prior knowledge of it from Allison herself; and endeavoured to put a stop to the exclamations of his mother and siblings by the earnestness of his congratulations to Sir Chris, in which he was readily joined by Scott, and by making a variety of remarks on the happiness that might be expected from the match, the excellent character of Adrian, and the convenient distance of Hunsford from London.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was in fact too much overpowered to say a great deal while Sir Chris remained; but no sooner had he left them than her feelings found a rapid vent. In the first place, she persisted in disbelieving the whole of the matter; secondly, she was very sure that Adrian had been taken in; thirdly, she trusted that they would never be happy together; and fourthly, that the match might be broken off. Two inferences, however, were plainly deduced from the whole: one, that Stiles was the real cause of the mischief; and the other that she herself had been barbarously misused by them all; and on these two points she principally dwelt during the rest of the day. Nothing could console and nothing could appease her. Nor did that day wear out her resentment. A week elapsed before she could see Stiles without scolding him, a month passed away before she could speak to Sir Chris without being rude, and many months were gone before she could at all forgive his daughter.

Sheriff Stilinski's emotions were much more tranquil on the occasion, and such as he did experience he pronounced to be of a most agreeable sort; for it gratified him, he said, to discover that Allison
Silver, whom he had been used to think tolerably sensible, was as foolish as his wife, and more foolish than his son!

Scott confessed himself a little surprised at the match; but he said less of his astonishment than of his earnest desire for their happiness; nor could Stiles persuade him to consider it as improbable. Kanima and Jackson were far from envying Allison, for Adrian was only a clergyman; and it affected them in no other way than as a piece of news to spread at Beacon Hills.

Between Stiles and Allison there was a restraint which kept them mutually silent on the subject; and Stiles felt persuaded that no real confidence could ever subsist between them again. His disappointment in Allison made him turn with fonder regard to his brother, of whose rectitude and delicacy he was sure his opinion could never be shaken, and for whose happiness he grew daily more anxious, as Isaac had now been gone a week and nothing more was heard of his return.

Scott had sent Erica an early answer to her Facebook message, and was counting the days till he might reasonably hope to hear again. The promised letter of thanks from Adrian Harris arrived on Tuesday, addressed to their father, and written with all the solemnity of gratitude which a twelvemonth's abode in the family might have prompted. After discharging his conscience on that head, he proceeded to inform them, with many rapturous expressions, of his happiness in having obtained the affection of their amiable neighbour, Allison Silver, and then explained that it was merely with the view of enjoying her society that he had been so ready to close with their kind wish of seeing him again at Longbourn, whither he hoped to be able to return on Monday fortnight; for Lady Victoria, he added, so heartily approved his marriage, that she wished it to take place as soon as possible, which he trusted would be an unanswerable argument with his amiable Allison to name an early day for making him the happiest of men.

Adrian's return into Hertfordshire was no longer a matter of pleasure to Mrs. McCall-Stilinski. On the contrary, she was as much disposed to complain of it as her husband. It was very strange that he should come to Longbourn instead of to Silver Lodge; it was also very inconvenient and exceedingly troublesome. She hated having visitors in the house while her health was so indifferent, and lovers were of all people the most disagreeable. Such were the gentle murmurs of Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, and they gave way only to the greater distress of Mr. Lahey's continued absence.

Neither Scott nor Stiles were comfortable on this subject. Day after day passed away without bringing any other tidings of him than the report which shortly prevailed in Beacon Hills of his coming no more to Netherfield the whole winter; a report which highly incensed Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, and which she never failed to contradict as a most scandalous falsehood.

Even Stiles began to fear - not that Isaac was indifferent - but that his pack would be successful in keeping him away. Unwilling as he was to admit an idea so destructive of Scott's happiness, and so dishonorable to the stability of his lover, he could not prevent its frequently occurring. The united efforts of his two unfeeling siblings and of his overpowering friend, assisted by the attractions of Danny and the amusements of London might be too much, he feared, for the strength of Isaac's attachment.

As for Scott, his anxiety under this suspense was, of course, more painful than Stiles's, but whatever he felt he was desirous of concealing, and between himself and Stiles, therefore, the subject was never alluded to. But as no such delicacy restrained his mother, an hour seldom passed in which she did not talk of Isaac, express her impatience for his arrival, or even require Scott to confess that if he did not come back Scott would think himself very ill used. It needed all Scott's steady mildness to bear these attacks with tolerable tranquillity.

Adrian Harris returned most punctually on Monday fortnight, but his reception at Longbourn was not
quite so gracious as it had been on his first introduction. He was too happy, however, to need much
attention; and luckily for the others, the business of love-making relieved them from a great deal of
his company. The chief of every day was spent by him at Silver Lodge, and he sometimes returned
to Longbourn only in time to make an apology for his absence before the family went to bed.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was really in a most pitiable state. The very mention of anything concerning
the match threw her into an agony of ill-humour, and wherever she went she was sure of hearing it
talked of. The sight of Allison was odious to her. As her successor in that house, she regarded her
with jealous abhorrence. Whenever Allison came to see them, she concluded her to be anticipating
the hour of possession; and whenever she spoke in a low voice to Adrian, was convinced that they
were talking of the Longbourn estate, and resolving to turn herself and her teenagers out of the
house, as soon as Sheriff Stilinski were dead. She complained bitterly of all this to her husband.

"Indeed, Sheriff Stilinski," said she, "it is very hard to think that Allison Silver should ever be
mistress of this house, that I should be forced to make way for her, and live to see her take her place
in it!"

"My dear, do not give way to such gloomy thoughts. Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter
ourselves that I may be the survivor."

This was not very consoling to Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, and therefore, instead of making any answer,
she went on as before.

"I cannot bear to think that they should have all this estate. If it was not for the entail, I should not
mind it."

"What should not you mind?"

"I should not mind anything at all."

"Let us be thankful that you are preserved from a state of such insensibility."

"I never can be thankful, Sheriff Stilinski, for anything about the entail. How anyone could have the
conscience to entail away an estate from one's own children, I cannot understand; and all for the sake
of Adrian Harris too! Why should he have it more than anybody else?"

"I leave it to yourself to determine," said Sheriff Stilinski.
Volume 2 Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Everybody was pleased to know how much they had always disliked Mr. Derek

Erica's email arrived, and put an end to doubt. The very first sentence conveyed the assurance of their being all settled in London for the winter, and concluded with her brother's regret at not having had time to pay his respects to his friends in Hertfordshire before he left the country.

Hope was over, entirely over; and when Scott could attend to the rest of the email, he found little, except the professed affection of the writer, that could give him any comfort. Danny's praise occupied the chief of it. His many attractions were again dwelt on, and Erica boasted joyfully of their increasing intimacy, and ventured to predict the accomplishment of the wishes which had been unfolded in her former letter. She wrote also with great pleasure of her brother's being an inmate of Mr. Derek's house, and mentioned with raptures some plans of the latter with regard to new furniture.

Stiles, to whom Scott very soon communicated the chief of all this, heard it in silent indignation. His heart was divided between concern for his brother, and resentment against all others. To Erica's assertion of her brother's being partial to Danny he paid no credit. That he was really fond of Scott, Stiles doubted no more than he had ever done; and much as he had always been disposed to like Isaac, Stiles could not think without anger, hardly without contempt, on that easiness of temper, that want of proper resolution, which now made him the slave of his designing friends, and led him to sacrifice of his own happiness to the caprice of their inclination. Had his own happiness, however, been the only sacrifice, he might have been allowed to sport with it in whatever manner he thought best, but Stiles's brother's was involved in it, as Stiles thought Isaac must be sensible himself. It was a subject, in short, on which reflection would be long indulged, and must be unavailing. He could think of nothing else; and yet whether Isaac's regard had really died away, or were suppressed by his friends' interference; whether he had been aware of Scott's attachment, or whether it had escaped his observation; whatever were the case, though Stiles's opinion of him must be materially affected by the difference, Scott's situation remained the same, his peace equally wounded.

A day or two passed before Scott had courage to speak of his feelings to Stiles; but at last, on Mrs. McCall-Stilinski's leaving them together, after longer irritation than usual about Netherfield and its master, Scott could not help saying:

"Oh, that my dear mother had more command over herself! She can have no idea of the pain she gives me by her continual reflections on him. But I will not repine. It cannot last long. He will be forgot, and we shall all be as we were before."

Stiles looked at his brother with incredulous solicitude, but said nothing.

"You doubt me," cried Scott, slightly colouring; "indeed, you have no reason. He may live in my memory as the most amiable man of my acquaintance, but that is all. I have nothing either to hope or
fear, and nothing to reproach him with. Thank God! I have not that pain. A little time, therefore - I shall certainly try to get the better."

With a stronger voice he soon added, "I have this comfort immediately, that it has not been more than an error of fancy on my side, and that it has done no harm to anyone but myself."

"My dear Scott!" exclaimed Stiles, "you are too good. Your sweetness and disinterestedness are really angelic; I do not know what to say to you. I feel as if I had never done you justice, or loved you as you deserve."

Scott eagerly disclaimed all extraordinary merit, and threw back the praise on his brother's warm affection.

"Nay," said Stiles, "this is not fair. You wish to think all the world respectable, and are hurt if I speak ill of anybody. I only want to think you perfect, and you set yourself against it. Do not be afraid of my running into any excess, of my encroaching on your privilege of universal good-will. You need not. There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. The more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of merit or sense. I have met with two instances lately, one I will not mention; the other is Allison's marriage. It is unaccountable! In every view it is unaccountable!"

"My dear Stiles, do not give way to such feelings as these. They will ruin your happiness. You do not make allowance enough for difference of situation and temper. Consider Adrian's respectability, and Allison's steady, prudent character. Remember that she is one of a large family; that as to fortune, it is a most eligible match; and be ready to believe, for everybody's sake, that she may feel something like regard and esteem for our cousin."

"To oblige you, I would try to believe almost anything, but no one else could be benefited by such a belief as this; for were I persuaded that Allison had any regard for him, I should only think worse of her understanding than I now do of her heart. My dear Scott, Adrian is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man; you know he is, as well as I do; and you must feel, as well as I do, that the woman who married him cannot have a proper way of thinking. You shall not defend her, though it is Allison Silver. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger security for happiness."

"I must think your language too strong in speaking of both," replied Scott; "and I hope you will be convinced of it by seeing them happy together. But enough of this. You alluded to something else. You mentioned two instances. I cannot misunderstand you, dear Stiles, not to pain me by thinking that person to blame, and saying your opinion of him is sunk. We must not be so ready to fancy ourselves intentionally injured. We must not expect a lively young beta to be always so guarded and circumspect. It is very often nothing but our own vanity that deceives us. People often fancy admiration means more than it does."

"And some werewolves take care that they should."

"If it is designedly done, they cannot be justified; but I have no idea of there being so much design in the world as some persons imagine."

"I am far from attributing any part of Isaac's conduct to design," said Stiles; "but without scheming to do wrong, or to make others unhappy, there may be error, and there may be misery. Thoughtlessness, want of attention to other people's feelings, and want of resolution, will do the business."
"And do you impute it to either of those?"

"Yes; to the last. But if I go on, I shall displease you by saying what I think of persons you esteem. Stop me whilst you can."

"You persist, then, in supposing his pack influence him?"

"Yes, in conjunction with his friend."

"I cannot believe it. Why should they try to influence him? They can only wish his happiness; and if he is attached to me, no other werewolf can secure it."

"Your first position is false. They may wish many things besides his happiness; they may wish his increase of wealth and consequence; they may wish him to marry a werewolf who has all the importance of money, great connections, and pride."

"Beyond a doubt, they do wish him to choose Danny," replied Scott; but this may be from better feelings than you are supposing. They have known him much longer than they have known me; no wonder if they love him better. But, whatever may be their own wishes, it is very unlikely they should have opposed their brother's. What sibling would think themselves at liberty to do it, unless there were something very objectionable? If they believed him attached to me, they would not try to part us; if he were so, they could not succeed. By supposing such an affection, you make everybody acting unnaturally and wrong, and me most unhappy. Do not distress me by the idea. I am not ashamed of having been mistaken - or, at least, it is light, it is nothing in comparison of what I should feel in thinking ill of him or his siblings. Let me take it in the best light, in the light in which it may be understood."

Stiles could not oppose such a wish; and from this time Isaac's name was scarcely ever mentioned between them.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski still continued to wonder and repine at his returning no more, and though a day seldom passed in which Stiles did not account for it clearly, there was little chance of her ever considering it with less perplexity. Her son endeavoured to convince her of what he did not believe himself, that Isaac’s attentions to Scott had been merely the effect of a common and transient liking, which ceased when he saw Scott no more; but though the probability of the statement was admitted at the time, Stiles had the same story to repeat every day. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski's best comfort was that Isaac Lahey must be down again in the summer.

Sheriff Stilinski treated the matter differently. "So, Stiles," said he one day, "your brother is crossed in love, I find. I congratulate him. Next to being married, a teenager likes to be crossed a little in love now and then. It is something to think of, and it gives them a sort of distinction among their companions. When is your turn to come? You will hardly bear to be long outdone by Scott. Now is your time. Here are officers enough in Beacon Hills to disappoint all the young people in the country. Let Matt be your man. He is a pleasant fellow, and would jilt you creditably."

"Thank you, sir, but a less agreeable man would satisfy me. We must not all expect Scott's good fortune."

"True," said Sheriff Stilinski, "but it is a comfort to think that whatever of that kind may befall you, you have an affectionate mother who will make the most of it."

Matt’s society was of material service in dispelling the gloom which the late perverse occurrences had thrown on many of the Longbourn family. They saw him often, and to his other recommendations was now added that of general unreserve. The whole of what Stiles had already
heard, his claims on Mr. Derek, and all that he had suffered from him, was now openly acknowledged and publicly canvassed; and everybody was pleased to know how much they had always disliked Mr. Derek before they had known anything of the matter.

Scott was the only creature who could suppose there might be any extenuating circumstances in the case, unknown to the society of Hertfordshire; his mild and steady candour always pleaded for allowances, and urged the possibility of mistakes - but by everybody else Mr. Derek was condemned as the worst of alphas.
"I do not blame Scott," she continued, "for Scott would have got Mr. Lahey if he could. But Stiles! Oh, sister! It is very hard to think that he might have been Adrian Harris's partner by this time, had it not been for his own perverseness.

After a week spent in professions of love and schemes of felicity, Mr. Harris was called from his amiable Allison by the arrival of Saturday. The pain of separation, however, might be alleviated on his side, by preparations for the reception of his bride; as he had reason to hope, that shortly after his return into Hertfordshire, the day would be fixed that was to make him the happiest of men. He took leave of his relations at Longbourn with as much solemnity as before; wished his fair cousins health and happiness again, and promised their father another letter of thanks.

On the following Monday, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski had the pleasure of receiving her brother and his wife, who came as usual to spend the Christmas at Longbourn. Dr Deaton was a sensible, gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister, as well by magic as education. The Netherfield pack would have had difficulty in believing that a man who lived by the veterinarian trade, and within view of his own surgery, could have been so well-bred and agreeable. Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, who was several years younger than Mrs. McCall-Stilinski and Mrs. Phillips, was an amiable, intelligent, elegant, French speaking woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces and nephews. Between the two eldest teenagers and herself especially, there subsisted a particular regard. They had frequently been staying with her in town.

The first part of Mrs. Morrell-Deaton's business on her arrival was to distribute her presents and describe the newest fashions. When this was done she had a less active part to play. It became her turn to listen. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski had many grievances to relate, and much to complain of. They had all been very ill-used since she last saw her sister. Two of her boys had been upon the point of marriage, and after all there was nothing in it.

"I do not blame Scott," she continued, "for Scott would have got Mr. Lahey if he could. But Stiles! Oh, sister! It is very hard to think that he might have been Adrian Harris's partner by this time, had it not been for his own perverseness. He made Stiles an offer in this very room, and Stiles refused him. The consequence of it is, that Sir Chris will have a child married before I have, and that the Longbourn estate is just as much entailed as ever. The Silvers are very artful people indeed, sister. They are all for what they can get. I am sorry to say it of them, but so it is. It makes me very nervous and poorly, to be thwarted so in my own family, and to have neighbours who think of themselves before anybody else. However, your coming just at this time is the greatest of comforts, and I am very glad to hear what you tell us, of the latest Batman movie."

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, to whom the chief of this news had been given before, in the course of Scott and Stiles’s texting and emailing with her, made her sister a slight answer, and, in compassion to her nephews, turned the conversation.
When alone with Stiles afterwards, she spoke more on the subject. "It seems likely to have been a desirable match for Scott," she said. "I am sorry it went off. But these things happen so often! A young beta, such as you describe Isaac Lahey, so easily falls in love with a pretty boy for a few weeks, and when accident separates them, so easily forgets him, that these sort of inconsistencies are very frequent."

"An excellent consolation in its way," said Stiles, "but it will not do for us. We do not suffer by accident. It does not often happen that the interference of friends will persuade a young werewolf of independent fortune to think no more of a beta whom he was violently in love with only a few days before."

"But that expression of 'violently in love' is so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite, that it gives me very little idea. It is as often applied to feelings which arise from a half-hour's acquaintance, as to a real, strong attachment. Pray, how violent was Isaac Lahey's love?"

"I never saw a more promising inclination; he was growing quite inattentive to other people, and wholly engrossed by Scott. Every time they met, it was more decided and remarkable. At his own rave he offended two or three young people, by not asking them to dance; and I spoke to him twice myself, without receiving an answer. Could there be finer symptoms? Is not general incivility the very essence of love?"

"Oh, yes! of that kind of love which I suppose him to have felt. Poor Scott! I am sorry for him, because, with his disposition, he may not get over it immediately. He does tend to overdramatize these things. It had better have happened to you, Stiles; you would have laughed yourself out of it sooner with a sarcastic comment or two. But do you think Scott would be prevailed upon to go back with us? Change of scene might be of service - and perhaps a little relief from home may be as useful as anything."

Stiles was exceedingly pleased with this proposal, and felt persuaded of his brother's ready acquiescence.

"I hope," added Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, "that no consideration with regard to this young man will influence Scott. We live in so different a part of town, all our connections are so different, and, as you well know, we go out so little, that it is very improbable that they should meet at all, unless he really comes to see Scott."

"And that is quite impossible; for he is now in the custody of his alpha, and Mr. Derek would no more suffer him to call on Scott in such a part of London! My dear aunt, how could you think of it? Mr. Derek may perhaps have heard of such a place as Gracechurch Street, but he would hardly think a month's ablution enough to cleanse him from its impurities, were he once to enter it; and depend upon it, Isaac never stirs without him."

"So much the better. I hope they will not meet at all. But is not Scott Facebook friends with his sister? She will not be able to help calling."

"She will de-friend Scott entirely."

But in spite of the certainty in which Stiles affected to place this point, as well as the still more interesting one of Isaac’s being withheld from seeing Scott, he felt a solicititude on the subject which convinced him, on examination, that he did not consider it entirely hopeless. It was possible, and sometimes Stiles thought it probable, that Isaac’s affection might be reanimated, and the influence of his pack successfully combated by the more natural influence of Scott's attractions and puppy-dog eyes.
Scott accepted his aunt's invitation with pleasure; and the Laheys were no otherwise in his thoughts at the same time, than as he hoped by Erica's not living in the same house with her brother, he might occasionally spend a morning with her, without any danger of seeing Isaac.

The Deatons stayed a week at Longbourn; and what with the Phillipses, the Silvers, and the officers, there was not a day without its engagement. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski had so carefully provided for the entertainment of her brother and sister, that they did not once sit down to a family dinner. When the engagement was for home, some of the officers always made part of it - of which officers Matt was sure to be one; and on these occasions, Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, rendered suspicious by Stiles's warm commendation, narrowly observed them both. Without supposing them, from what she saw, to be very seriously in love, their preference of each other was plain enough to make her a little uneasy; and she resolved to speak to Stiles on the subject before she left Hertfordshire, and represent to him the imprudence of encouraging such an attachment.

To Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, Matt had one means of affording pleasure, unconnected with his general powers. About ten or a dozen years ago, before her marriage, she had spent a considerable time in that very part of Derbyshire to which he belonged. They had, therefore, many acquaintances in common; and though Matt had been little there since the death of Derek's father, it was yet in his power to give her fresher intelligence of her former friends than she had been in the way of procuring.

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton had seen Pemberley, and known the late Mr. Derek by character perfectly well. Here consequently was an inexhaustible subject of discourse. In comparing her recollection of Pemberley with the minute description which Matt could give, and in bestowing her tribute of praise on the character of its late possessor, she was delighting both him and herself. On being made acquainted with the present Mr. Derek's treatment of him, she tried to remember some of that gentleman's reputed disposition when quite a lad which might agree with it, and was confident at last that she recollected having heard Mr. Derek formerly spoken of as a very proud, ill-natured boy.
Chapter Summary

"My dearest Stiles will, I am sure, be incapable of triumphing in his better judgement, at my expense. I should have acknowledged that my dearest Stiles is always right, and I should never disagree with him, ever, for the sake of my wolflihood."

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton's caution to Stiles was punctually and kindly given on the first favourable opportunity of speaking to him alone; after honestly telling Stiles what she thought, and offering him some basic guidance counselling, she thus went on:

"You are too sensible a boy, Stiles, to fall in love merely because you are warned against it; and, therefore, I am not afraid of speaking openly. Seriously, I would have you be on your guard. Do not involve yourself or endeavour to involve him in an affection which the want of fortune would make so very imprudent. I have nothing to say against Matt; he is a most interesting young man; and if he had the fortune he ought to have, I should think you could not do better. But as it is, you must not let your fancy run away with you. You have sense, and we all expect you to use it. Your father would depend on your resolution and good conduct, I am sure. You must not disappoint your father."

"My dear aunt, this is being serious indeed."

"Yes, and I hope to engage you to be serious likewise."

"Well, then, you need not be under any alarm. I will take care of myself, and of Matt too. He shall not be in love with me, if I can prevent it."

"Stiles, you are not serious now."

"I beg your pardon, I will try again. At present I am not in love with Matt; no, I certainly am not. But he is, beyond all comparison, the most agreeable man I ever saw - and if he becomes really attached to me - I believe it will be better that he should not. I see the imprudence of it. Oh! that abominable Mr. Derek! My father's opinion of me does me the greatest honour, and I should be miserable to forfeit it. My father, however, is partial to Matt. In short, my dear aunt, I should be very sorry to be the means of making any of you unhappy; but since we see every day that where there is affection, young people are seldom withheld by immediate want of fortune from entering into engagements with each other, how can I promise to be wiser than so many of my fellow-creatures if I am tempted, or how am I even to know that it would be wisdom to resist? All that I can promise you, therefore, is not to be in a hurry. I will not be in a hurry to believe myself his first object. When I am in company with him, I will not be wishing. In short, I will do my best."

"Perhaps it will be as well if you discourage his coming here so very often to take photographs. At least, you should not remind your mother of inviting him."
"As I did the other day," said Stiles with a conscious smile: "very true, it will be wise in me to refrain from that. But do not imagine that he is always here so often. It is on your account that he has been so frequently invited this week. You know my mother's ideas as to the necessity of constant company for her friends. But really, and upon my honour, I will try to do what I think to be the wisest; and now I hope you are satisfied."

His aunt assured him that she was, and Stiles having thanked her for the kindness of her hints, they parted; a wonderful instance of advice being given on such a point, without being resented.

Adrian Harris returned into Hertfordshire soon after it had been quitted by the Deatons and Scott; but as he took up his abode with the Silvers, his arrival was no great inconvenience to Mrs. McCall-Stilinski. His marriage was now fast approaching, and she was at length so far resigned as to think it inevitable, and even repeatedly to say, in an ill-natured tone, that she "wished they might be happy." Thursday was to be the wedding day, and on Wednesday Allison paid her farewell visit; and when she rose to take leave, Stiles, ashamed of his mother's ungracious and reluctant good wishes, and sincerely affected himself, accompanied her out of the room. As they went downstairs together, Allison said:

"I shall depend on hearing from you very often, Stiles."

"That you certainly shall."

"And I have another favour to ask you. Will you come and see me?"

"We shall often meet, I hope, in Hertfordshire."

"I am not likely to leave Kent for some time. Promise me, therefore, to come to Hunsford."

Stiles could not refuse, though he foresaw little pleasure in the visit.

"My father and Maria are coming to me in March," added Allison, "and I hope you will consent to be of the party. Indeed, Stiles, you will be as welcome as either of them."

The wedding took place; the bride and bridegroom set off for Kent from the church door, and everybody had as much to say, or to hear, on the subject as usual. Stiles soon heard from his friend; and their Facebook comment and email correspondence was as regular and frequent as it had ever been; that it should be equally unreserved was impossible. Stiles could never address her without feeling that all the comfort of intimacy was over, and though determined not to slacken as a correspondent, it was for the sake of what had been, rather than what was. Allison's first emails were received with a good deal of eagerness; there could not but be curiosity to know how she would speak of her new home, how she would like Lady Victoria, and how happy she would dare pronounce herself to be; though, when the emails were read, Stiles felt that Allison expressed herself on every point exactly as he might have foreseen. She wrote cheerfully, seemed surrounded with comforts, and mentioned nothing which she could not praise. The house, furniture, neighbourhood, and roads, were all to her taste, and Lady Victoria's behaviour was most friendly and obliging. It was Adrian's picture of Hunsford and Rosings rationally softened; and Stiles perceived that he must wait for his own visit there to know the rest.

Scott had already texted a few lines to his brother to announce their safe arrival in London; and when he emailed, Stiles hoped it would be in Scott's power to say something of the Laheys.

His impatience for an email was as well rewarded as impatience generally is. Scott had been a week in town without either seeing or hearing from Erica. He accounted for it, however, by supposing that his last email to his friend from Longbourn had by some accident been caught in Erica’s junk mail.
"My aunt," Scott continued, "is going tomorrow into that part of the town, and I shall take the opportunity of calling in Grosvenor Street."

Scott wrote again when the visit was paid, and he had seen Erica. "I did not think Erica in spirits," were his words, "but she was very glad to see me, and reproached me for giving her no notice of my coming to London. I was right, therefore, my last email had never reached her. I inquired after their brother, of course. He was well, but so much engaged with Mr. Derek that they scarcely ever saw him. I found that Danny was expected to dinner. I wish I could see him. My visit was not long, as Erica and Boyd were going out. I dare say I shall see them soon here."

Stiles shook his head over this letter. It convinced him that accident only could discover to Isaac Scott’s being town.

Four weeks passed away, and Scott saw nothing of Isaac. Scott endeavoured to persuade himself that he did not regret it; but he could no longer be blind to Erica's inattention. After waiting at home every morning for a fortnight, and inventing every evening a fresh excuse for her, the visitor did at last appear; but the shortness of her stay, and yet more, the alteration of her manner would allow Scott to deceive himself no longer. The email which he wrote on this occasion to Stiles will prove what he felt.

"My dearest Stiles will, I am sure, be incapable of triumphing in his better judgement, at my expense. I should have acknowledged that my dearest Stiles is always right, and I should never disagree with him, ever, for the sake of my wolflihood. I must confess myself to have been entirely deceived in Erica's regard for me. But, my dear bro, though the event has proved you right, do not think me obstinate if I still assert that, considering what her behaviour was, my confidence was as natural as your suspicion. I do not at all comprehend her reason for wishing to be intimate with me; but if the same circumstances were to happen again, I am sure I should be deceived again. Erica did not return my visit till yesterday; and not an email, not a text, did I receive in the meantime. When she did come, it was very evident that she had no pleasure in it; she made a slight, formal apology, for not calling before, said not a word of wishing to see me again, and was in every respect so altered a creature, that when she went away I was perfectly resolved to continue the acquaintance no longer. I pity, though I cannot help blaming her. She was very wrong in singling me out as she did; I can safely say that every advance to intimacy began on her side. But I pity her, because she must feel that she has been acting wrong, and because I am very sure that anxiety for her brother is the cause of it. I need not explain myself farther; and though we know this anxiety to be quite needless, yet if she feels it, it will easily account for her behaviour to me; and so deservedly dear as he is to his sister, whatever anxiety she must feel on his behalf is natural and amiable. I cannot but wonder, however, at her having any such fears now, because, if he had at all cared about me, we must have met, long ago. He knows of my being in town, I am certain, from something Erica said herself; and yet it would seem, by her manner of talking, as if she wanted to persuade herself that he is really partial to Danny. I cannot understand it. If I were not afraid of judging harshly, I should be almost tempted to say that there is a strong appearance of duplicity in all this. But I will endeavour to banish every painful thought, and think only of what will make me happy - your affection, and the invariable kindness of my dear uncle and aunt. Let me hear from you very soon. Erica said something of his never returning to Netherfield again, of giving up the house, but not with any certainty. We had better not mention it. I am extremely glad that you have such pleasant accounts from our friends at Hunsford. Pray go to see them, with Sir Chris and Maria. I am sure you will be very comfortable there. With love and hugs, Scott"

This letter gave Stiles some pain; but his spirits returned as he considered that Scott would no longer be duped, by the sister at least. All expectation from the brother was now absolutely over. Stiles
would not even wish for a renewal of his attentions. His character sunk on every review of it; and as a punishment for him, as well as a possible advantage to Scott, she seriously hoped he might really soon marry Mr. Derek's brother, as by Matt's account, Danny would make Isaac abundantly regret what he had thrown away.

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton about this time reminded Stiles of his promise concerning that gentleman, and required information; and Stiles had such to send as might rather give contentment to his aunt than to himself. Matt's apparent partiality had subsided, his attentions were over, he was the admirer of some one else. Stiles was watchful enough to see it all, but he could see it and write of it without material pain.

Stiles's heart had been but slightly touched, and his vanity was satisfied with believing that he would have been Matt's only choice, had fortune permitted it. The sudden acquisition of a million pound garage business was the most remarkable charm of the young car mechanic to whom Matt was now rendering himself agreeable; but Stiles, less clear-sighted perhaps in this case than in Allison’s, did not quarrel with him for his wish of independence. Nothing, on the contrary, could be more natural; and while able to suppose that it cost him a few struggles to relinquish him, Stiles was ready to allow it a wise and desirable measure for both, and could very sincerely wish him happy.

All this was acknowledged to Mrs. Morrell-Deaton; and after relating the circumstances, Stiles thus went on: "I am now convinced, my dear aunt, that I have never been much in love; for had I really experienced that pure and elevating passion, I should at present detest Matt’s very name, and wish him all manner of evil. But my feelings are not only cordial towards him; they are even impartial towards the car mechanic. I cannot find out that I hate him at all, or that I am in the least unwilling to think him a very good sort of boy. There can be no love in all this. My watchfulness has been effectual; and though I certainly should be a more interesting object to all my acquaintances were I distractedly in love with him, I cannot say that I regret my comparative insignificance. Importance may sometimes be purchased too dearly. Kanima and Jackson take his defection much more to heart than I do. They are young in the ways of the world, and not yet open to the mortifying conviction that handsome young photographers must have something to live on as well as the plain."
As they drove to Dr Deaton’s door, Scott was at a drawing-room window watching their arrival; when they entered the passage he was there to welcome them, and Stiles, looking earnestly in his face, was pleased to see it healthful and lovely as ever.

With no greater events than these in the Longbourn family, and otherwise diversified by little beyond the walks to Beacon Hills, sometimes dirty and sometimes cold, did January and February pass away. March was to take Stiles to Hunsford. He had not at first thought very seriously of going thither; but Allison, he soon found, was depending on the plan and he gradually learned to consider it himself with greater pleasure as well as greater certainty. Absence had increased his desire of seeing Allison again, and weakened his disgust of Adrian. There was novelty in the scheme, and as, with such a mother and such uncompanionable siblings, home could not be faultless, a little change was not unwelcome for its own sake. The journey would moreover give Stiles a peep at Scott; and, in short, as the time drew near, he would have been very sorry for any delay. Everything, however, went on smoothly, and was finally settled according to Allison’s first sketch. Stiles was to accompany Sir Chris and his second daughter. The improvement of spending a night in London was added in time, and the plan became perfect as plan could be.

The only pain was in leaving his father, who would certainly miss him, and who, when it came to the point, so little liked his going, that he told Stiles to write to him, and almost promised to answer his email.

The farewell between Stiles and Matt was perfectly friendly; on his side even more. Matt’s present pursuit could not make him forget that Stiles had been the first to excite and to deserve his attention, the first to listen and to pity, the first to be admired; and in his manner of bidding Stiles adieu, wishing him every enjoyment, reminding him of what he was to expect in Lady Victoria D’Argent, and trusting their opinion of her - their opinion of everybody - would always coincide, there was a solicitude, an interest which Stiles felt must ever attach him to Matt with a most sincere regard; and Stiles parted from Matt convinced that, whether married or single, he must always be his model of the amiable and pleasing.

Stiles’s fellow-travellers the next day were not of a kind to make him think Matt less agreeable. Sir Chris Argent, and his daughter Maria, a good-humoured girl, but as empty-headed as himself, had nothing to say that could be worth hearing, and were listened to with about as much delight as the hum of the Toyota engine. Stiles loved absurdities, but he had known Sir Chris's too long. He could tell Stiles nothing new of the wonders of his presentation and knighthood, nor of how to strip down a semi-automatic, or how to prepare a wolfsbane bullet; and his civilities were worn out, like his information.

It was a journey of only twenty-four miles, and they began it so early as to be in Gracechurch Street by noon. As they drove to Dr Deaton’s door, Scott was at a drawing-room window watching their
arrival; when they entered the passage he was there to welcome them, and Stiles, looking earnestly in his face, was pleased to see it healthful and lovely as ever. On the stairs were a pack of little boys and girls, whose eagerness for their cousin's appearance would not allow them to wait in the drawing-room, and whose shyness, as they had not seen Stiles for a twelvemonth, prevented their coming lower. All was joy and kindness. The day passed most pleasantly away; the morning in bustle and shopping, and the evening at one of the theatres.

Stiles then contrived to sit by his aunt. Their first object was Scott; and Stiles was more grieved than astonished to hear, in reply to his minute inquiries, that though Scott always struggled to support his spirits, there were periods of dejection. It was reasonable, however, to hope that they would not continue long. Mrs. Morrell-Deaton gave Stiles the particulars also of Erica's visit in Gracechurch Street, and repeated conversations occurring at different times between Scott and herself, which proved that the former had, from his heart, given up the acquaintance.

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton then rallied her nephew on Matt's desertion, and complimented him on bearing it so well.

"But my dear Stiles," she added, "what sort of boy is this mechanic? I should be sorry to think our friend mercenary."

"Pray, my dear aunt, what is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and the prudent motive? Where does discretion end, and avarice begin? Last Christmas you were afraid of his marrying me, because it would be imprudent; and now, because he is trying to get a boy with only a million pounds and a swimmer's physique, you want to find out that he is mercenary."

"If you will only tell me what sort of boy the mechanic is, I shall know what to think."

"He is a very good kind of boy, I believe, though inclined to overcharge on car repairs. I know no other harm of him."

"But Matt paid him not the smallest attention till his grandfather's death made him master of this fortune."

"No - why should he? If it were not allowable for him to gain my affections because I had no money, what occasion could there be for making love to a boy whom he did not care about, and who was equally poor?"

"But there seems an indelicacy in directing his attentions towards him so soon after this event."

"A man in distressed circumstances has not time for all those elegant decorums which other people may observe. If he does not object to it, why should we?"

"The mechanic not objecting does not justify Matt. It only shows this boy being deficient in something himself - sense or feeling."

"Well," cried Stiles, "have it as you choose. Matt shall be mercenary, and the mechanic shall be foolish."

"No, Stiles, that is what I do not choose. I should be sorry, you know, to think ill of a young man who has lived so long in Derbyshire."

"Oh! if that is all, I have a very poor opinion of young men who live in Derbyshire; and their intimate friends who live in Hertfordshire are not much better. I am sick of them all. Thank Heaven! I am going to-morrow where I shall find a man who has not one agreeable quality, who has neither manner nor sense to recommend him. Stupid men are the only ones worth knowing, after all."
"Take care, Stiles; that speech savours strongly of disappointment."

Before they were separated by the conclusion of the play, Stiles had the unexpected happiness of an invitation to accompany his uncle and aunt in a tour of pleasure which they proposed taking in the summer.

"We have not determined how far it shall carry us," said Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, "but, perhaps, to the Lakes."

No scheme could have been more agreeable to Stiles, and his acceptance of the invitation was most ready and grateful. "Oh, my dear, dear aunt," he rapturously cried, "what delight! what felicity! You give me fresh life and vigour. Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are young men to rocks and mountains? Oh! what hours of transport we shall spend! And when we do return, it shall not be like other travellers, without being able to give one accurate idea of anything. We will know where we have gone - we will recollect what we have seen. Lakes, mountains, and rivers shall not be jumbled together in our imaginations; nor when we attempt to describe any particular scene, will we begin quarreling about its relative situation. Let our first effusions be less insupportable than those of the generality of travellers."
"It is the greatest of favours when Kate D’Argent comes in."

"I like her appearance," said Stiles, struck with other ideas. "She looks violent and cross. Yes, she will do for him very well. She will make him a very proper wife."

Every object in the next day's journey was new and interesting to Stiles; and his spirits were in a state of enjoyment; for he had seen his brother looking so well as to banish all fear for his health, and the prospect of Stiles’s northern tour was a constant source of delight.

When they left the high road for the lane to Hunsford, every eye was in search of the Parsonage, and every turning expected to bring it in view. The palings of Rosings Park was their boundary on one side. Stiles smiled at the recollection of all that he had heard of its inhabitants.

At length the Parsonage was discernible. The garden sloping to the road, the house standing in it, the green pales, and the laurel hedge, everything declared they were arriving. Mr. Harris and Allison appeared at the door, and the Toyota stopped at the small gate which led by a short gravel walk to the house, amidst the nods and smiles of the whole party. In a moment they were all out of the Toyota, rejoicing at the sight of each other. Allison welcomed her friend with the liveliest pleasure, and Stiles was more and more satisfied with coming when he found himself so affectionately received. Stiles saw instantly that his cousin's manners were not altered by his marriage; his formal civility was just what it had been, and he detained Stiles some minutes at the gate to hear and satisfy his inquiries after all his family. They were then, with no other delay than his pointing out the neatness of the entrance, taken into the house; and as soon as they were in the parlour, he welcomed them a second time, with ostentatious formality to his humble abode, and punctually repeated all his wife's offers of refreshment.

Stiles was prepared to see him in his glory; and he could not help in fancying that in displaying the good proportion of the room, its aspect and its furniture, Adrian addressed himself particularly to him, as if wishing to make him feel what he had lost in refusing Adrian. But though everything seemed neat and comfortable, Stiles was not able to gratify Adrian by any sigh of repentance, and rather looked with wonder at his friend that she could have so cheerful an air with such a companion.

When Adrian said anything of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, Stiles involuntarily turned his eye on Allison. Once or twice he could discern a faint blush; but in general Allison wisely did not hear. After sitting long enough to admire every article of furniture in the room, from the sideboard to the fender, to give an account of their journey, and of all that had happened in London, Adrian invited them to take a stroll in the garden, which was large and well laid out, and to the cultivation of which he attended himself. To work in this garden was one of his most respectable pleasures; and Stiles admired the command of countenance with which Allison talked of the healthfulness of the exercise, and owned she encouraged it as much as possible. Here,
leading the way through every walk and cross walk, and scarcely allowing them an interval to utter the praises he asked for, every view was pointed out with a minuteness which left beauty entirely behind. He could number the fields in every direction, and could tell how many trees there were in the most distant clump. But of all the views which his garden, or which the country or kingdom could boast, none were to be compared with the prospect of Rosings, afforded by an opening in the trees that bordered the park nearly opposite the front of his house. It was a handsome modern building, well situated on rising ground.

From his garden, Adrian would have led them round his two meadows; but the teenagers, wearing only canvas sneakers and not willing to encounter the remains of a white frost, turned back; and while Sir Chris accompanied him, Allison took her sister and friend over the house, extremely well pleased, probably, to have the opportunity of showing it without her husband’s help. It was rather small, but well built and convenient; and everything was fitted up and arranged with a neatness and consistency of which Stiles gave Allison all the credit. When Mr. Harris could be forgotten, there was really an air of great comfort throughout, and by Allison’s evident enjoyment of it, Stiles supposed he must be often forgotten.

Stiles had already learnt that Lady Victoria was still in the country. It was spoken of again while they were at dinner, when Adrian joining in, observed:

"Yes, Stiles, you will have the honour of seeing Lady Victoria D’Argent on the ensuing Sunday at church, and I need not say you will be delighted with her. She is all affability and condescension, and I doubt not but you will be honoured with some portion of her notice when service is over. I have scarcely any hesitation in saying she will include you and my sister Maria in every invitation with which she honours us during your stay here. Her behaviour to my dear Allison is charming. We dine at Rosings twice every week, and are never allowed to walk home. Her ladyship's limo is regularly ordered for us. I should say, one of her ladyship's limos, for she has several."

"Lady Victoria is a very respectable, sensible woman indeed," added Allison, "and a most attentive neighbour."

"Very true, my dear, that is exactly what I say. She is the sort of woman whom one cannot regard with too much deference."

The evening was spent chiefly in talking over Hertfordshire news, and telling again what had already been written; and when it closed, Stiles, in the solitude of his chamber, had to meditate upon Allison’s degree of contentment, to understand her address in guiding, and composure in bearing with, her husband, and to acknowledge that it was all done very well. He had also to anticipate how his visit would pass, the quiet tenor of their usual employments, the vexatious interruptions of Mr. Harris, and the gaieties of their intercourse with Rosings. A lively imagination soon settled it all.

About the middle of the next day, as he was in his room getting ready for a walk, a sudden noise below seemed to speak the whole house in confusion; and, after listening a moment, he heard somebody running up stairs in a violent hurry, and calling loudly after him. He opened the door and met Maria in the landing place, who, breathless with agitation, cried out--

"Oh, my dear Stiles! pray make haste and come into the dining-room, for there is such a sight to be seen! I will not tell you what it is. Make haste, and come down this moment."

Stiles asked questions in vain; Maria would tell him nothing more, and down they ran into the dining-room, which fronted the lane, in quest of this wonder; It was two ladies stopping in a low Porsche convertible at the garden gate.

"And is this all?" cried Stiles. "I expected at least that the pigs were got into the garden, and here is
nothing but Lady Victoria and her daughter."

"La! my dear," said Maria, quite shocked at the mistake, "it is not Lady Victoria. The old lady is Mrs. Jenkinson, who lives with them; the other is Kate D’Argent. Only look at her. She is quite a little creature. Who would have thought that she could be so thin and small?"

"She is abominably rude to keep Allison out of doors in all this wind. Why does she not come in?"

"Oh, Allison says she hardly ever does. It is the greatest of favours when Kate D’Argent comes in."

"I like her appearance," said Stiles, struck with other ideas. "She looks violent and cross. Yes, she will do for him very well. She will make him a very proper wife."

Adrian Harris and Allison were both standing at the gate in conversation with the ladies; and Sir Chris, to Stiles’ high diversion, was stationed in the doorway, in earnest contemplation of the greatness before him, and constantly bowing whenever Kate D’Argent looked that way.

At length there was nothing more to be said; the ladies drove on, and the others returned into the house. Adrian Harris no sooner saw the two teenagers than he began to congratulate them on their good fortune, which Allison explained by letting them know that the whole party was asked to dine at Rosings the next day.
Adrian Harris’s triumph, in consequence of this invitation, was complete. The power of displaying the grandeur of his patroness to his wondering visitors, and of letting them see her civility towards himself and his wife, was exactly what he had wished for; and that an opportunity of doing it should be given so soon, was such an instance of Lady Victoria’s condescension, as he knew not how to admire enough.

"I confess," said he, "that I should not have been at all surprised by her ladyship's asking us on Sunday to drink tea and spend the evening at Rosings. I rather expected, from my knowledge of her affability, that it would happen. But who could have foreseen such an attention as this? Who could have imagined that we should receive an invitation to dine there (an invitation, moreover, including the whole party) so immediately after your arrival!"

"I am the less surprised at what has happened," replied Sir Chris, "from that knowledge of what the manners of the great really are, which my situation in life has allowed me to acquire. About the court, such instances of elegant breeding are not uncommon."

Scarcely anything was talked of the whole day or next morning but their visit to Rosings. Adrian Harris was carefully instructing them in what they were to expect, that the sight of such rooms, so many servants, and so splendid a dinner, might not wholly overpower them.

When the party were separating for the toilette, he said to Stiles -

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel. Lady Victoria is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us which becomes herself and her daughter. I would advise you merely to put on whatever of your hoodies is superior to the rest - there is no occasion for anything designer or from a boutique. Lady Victoria will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the distinction of rank preserved."

While they were dressing, he came two or three times to their different doors, to recommend their being quick, as Lady Victoria very much objected to be kept waiting for her dinner. Such formidable accounts of her ladyship, and her manner of living, quite frightened Maria Silver who had been little used to company, and she looked forward to her introduction at Rosings with as much apprehension as her father had done to his presentation at St. James's.

As the weather was fine, they had a pleasant walk of about half a mile across the park. Every park has its beauty and its prospects; and Stiles saw much to be pleased with, though he could not be in such raptures as Mr. Harris expected the scene to inspire, and was but slightly affected by his enumeration of the windows in front of the house, and his relation of what the glazing altogether had originally cost Sir Gerard D’Argent.

When they ascended the steps to the hall, Maria's alarm was every moment increasing, and even Sir Chris did not look perfectly calm. Stiles's courage did not fail him. He had heard nothing of Lady Victoria that spoke her awful from any extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue, and the mere stateliness of money or rank he thought he could witness without trepidation.

From the entrance-hall, of which Mr. Harris pointed out, with a rapturous air, the fine proportion and the finished ornaments, they followed the servants through an ante-chamber, to the room where Lady Victoria, her daughter, and Mrs. Jenkinson were sitting. Her ladyship, with great condescension,
arose to receive them; and as Allison had settled it with her husband that the office of introduction should be hers, it was performed in a proper manner, without any of those apologies and thanks which he would have thought necessary.

In spite of having been at St. James's Sir Chris was so completely awed by the grandeur surrounding him, that he had but just courage enough to make a very low bow, and take his seat without saying a word; and his daughter, frightened almost out of her senses, sat on the edge of her chair, not knowing which way to look. Stiles found himself quite equal to the scene, and could observe the three ladies before him composedly. Lady Victoria was a tall, large woman, with strongly-marked features and ferociously staring eyes, who might once have been handsome. Her air was not conciliating, nor was her manner of receiving them such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank. She was not rendered formidable by silence; but whatever she said was spoken in so authoritative a tone, as marked her self-importance, and brought Matt immediately to Stiles's mind; and from the observation of the day altogether, he believed Lady Victoria to be exactly what Matt represented.

When, after examining the mother, in whose countenance and deportment he soon found some resemblance of Mr. Derek, Stiles turned her eyes on the daughter, he could almost have joined in Maria's astonishment at her being so thin. There was neither in figure nor face any likeness between the ladies. Kate D'Argent was pale and sickly; her features, though not plain, were insignificant; and she spoke very little, except in a low muttering, rambling voice, to Mrs. Jenkinson, in whose appearance there was nothing remarkable, and who was entirely engaged in listening to what she said, and placing a screen in the proper direction before her eyes.

After sitting a few minutes, they were all sent to one of the windows to admire the view, Mr. Harris attending them to point out its beauties, and Lady Victoria kindly informing them that it was much better worth looking at in the summer.

The dinner was exceedingly handsome, and there were all the servants and all the articles of plate which Adrian Harris had promised; and, as he had likewise foretold, he took his seat at the bottom of the table, by her ladyship's desire, and looked as if he felt that life could furnish nothing greater. He carved, and ate, and praised with delighted alacrity; and every dish was commended, first by him and then by Sir Chris, who was now enough recovered to echo whatever his son-in-law said, in a manner which Stiles wondered Lady Victoria could bear. But Lady Victoria seemed gratified by their excessive admiration, and gave most gracious smiles, especially when any dish on the table proved a novelty to them. The party did not supply much conversation. Stiles was ready to speak whenever there was an opening, but he was seated between Allison and Kate - the former of whom was engaged in listening to Lady Victoria, and the latter said not a word to her all dinner-time. Mrs. Jenkinson was chiefly employed in watching how little Kate D'Argent ate, pressing her to try some other dish, and fearing she was indisposed. Maria thought speaking out of the question, and the others did nothing but eat and admire.

When the party returned to the drawing-room, there was little to be done but to hear Lady Victoria talk, which she did without any intermission till coffee came in, delivering her opinion on every subject in so decisive a manner, as proved that she was not used to have her judgement controverted. She inquired into Allison's domestic concerns familiarly and minutely, gave her a great deal of advice as to the management of them all; told her how everything ought to be regulated in so small a family as hers, and instructed her as to the care of her cows and her poultry, and the practicing of her archery. Stiles found that nothing was beneath this great lady's attention, which could furnish her with an occasion of dictating to others. In the intervals of her discourse with Allison, she addressed a variety of questions to Maria and Stiles, but especially to the latter, of whose connections she knew the least, and who she observed to Allison was a very genteel, pretty kind of boy. She asked Stiles, at different times, how many siblings he had, whether they were older or younger than himself, whether any of them were likely to be married, whether they were handsome, where they had been educated,
what car his father kept, and what had been his mother's maiden name? Stiles felt all the impertinence of her questions but answered them very composedly. Lady Victoria then observed,

"Your father's estate is entailed on Mr. Harris, I think. For your sake," turning to Allion, "I am glad of it; but otherwise I see no occasion for entailing estates from the werewolf line. It was not thought necessary in Sir Gerard D'Argent's family. Do you play and sing, Stiles?"

"A little."

"Oh! then--some time or other we shall be happy to hear you. Our instrument is a capital one, probably superior to----You shall try it some day. Do your siblings play and sing?"

"One of them does."

"Why did not you all learn? You ought all to have learned. The Miss Webbs all play, and their father has not so good an income as yours. Do you draw?"

"No, not at all."

"What, none of you?"

"Not one."

"That is very strange. But I suppose you had no opportunity. Your mother should have taken you to town every spring for the benefit of masters."

"My mother would have had no objection, but my father hates London."

"Has your emissary left you?"

"We never had any emissary."

"No emissary! How was that possible? Five teenagers brought up at home without an emissary! I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education."

Stiles could hardly help smiling as he assured her that had not been the case.

"Then, who taught you? who attended to you? Without an emissary, you must have been neglected."

"Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might."

"Aye, no doubt; but that is what an emissary will prevent, and if I had known your mother, I should have advised her most strenuously to engage one. I always say that nothing is to be done in education without steady and regular instruction, and nobody but an emissary can give it. It is wonderful how many families I have been the means of supplying in that way. I am always glad to get a young person well placed out. Four nieces of Mrs. Jenkinson are most delightfully situated through my means; and it was but the other day that I recommended another young person, who was merely accidentally mentioned to me, and the family are quite delighted with her. Mrs. Harris, did I tell you of Lady Metcalf's calling yesterday to thank me? She finds Miss Pope a treasure. 'Lady Victoria,' said she, 'you have given me a treasure.' Are any of your younger siblings out, Stiles?"

"Yes, ma'am, all."

"All! What, all five out at once? Very odd! And you only the second. The younger ones out before
the elder ones are married! Your younger siblings must be very young?"

"Yes, my youngest is not sixteen. Perhaps he is full young to be much in company. But really, ma'am, I think it would be very hard upon younger siblings, that they should not have their share of society and amusement, because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early. The last-born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth at the first. And to be kept back on such a motive! I think it would not be very likely to promote family affection or delicacy of mind."

"Upon my word," said her ladyship, "you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person. Pray, what is your age?"

"With three younger siblings grown up," replied Stiles, smiling, "your ladyship can hardly expect me to own it."

Lady Victoria seemed quite astonished at not receiving a direct answer; and Stiles suspected himself to be the first creature who had ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence.

"You cannot be more than the age of consent, I am sure, therefore you need not conceal your age."

"I am not yet eighteen."  

When the tea was over, the card-tables were placed. Lady Victoria, Sir Chris, and Mr. and Mrs. Harris sat down to poker; and as Kate D’Argent chose to play at animal grab, the two teenagers had the honour of assisting Mrs. Jenkinson to make up her party. Their table was superlatively stupid. Scarcely a syllable was uttered that did not relate to the game, except when Mrs. Jenkinson expressed her fears of Kate D’Argent being too hot or too cold, or having too much or too little medication. A great deal more passed at the other table. Lady Victoria was generally speaking - stating the mistakes of the three others, or relating some anecdote of herself. Adrian Harris was employed in agreeing to everything her ladyship said, thanking her for every fish he won, and apologising if he thought he won too many. Sir Chris did not say much. He was storing his memory with anecdotes and noble names.

When Lady Victoria and her daughter had played as long as they chose, the tables were broken up, the limo was offered to Allison, gratefully accepted and immediately ordered. The party then gathered round the fire to hear Lady Victoria determine what weather they were to have on the morrow. From these instructions they were summoned by the arrival of the car; and with many speeches of thankfulness on Adrian Harris's side and as many bows on Sir Chris’s they departed. As soon as they had driven from the door, Stiles was called on by his cousin to give his opinion of all that he had seen at Rosings, which, for Allison's sake, he made more favourable than it really was. But his commendation, though costing him some trouble, could by no means satisfy Adrian, and he was very soon obliged to take her ladyship's praise into his own hands.
Colonel Miguel, who led the way, was about thirty, with a manly chest (shown to great advantage by his extremely tight orange and blue T-shirt), and in person and address most truly the gentleman.

Sir Chris stayed only a week at Hunsford, but his visit was long enough to convince him of his daughter's being most comfortably settled, and of her possessing such a husband and such a neighbour as were not often met with. While Sir Chris was with them, Adrian devoted his morning to driving him out in his Honda, and showing him the country; but when he went away, the whole family returned to their usual employments, and Stiles was thankful to find that they did not see more of his cousin by the alteration, for the chief of the time between breakfast and dinner was now passed by him either at work in the garden or in reading and writing, and looking out of the window in his own book-room, which fronted the road. The room in which the teenagers sat was backwards.

Stiles had at first rather wondered that Allison should not prefer the dining-parlour for common use; it was a better sized room, and had a more pleasant aspect; but he soon saw that his friend had an excellent reason for what she did, for Mr. Harris would undoubtedly have been much less in his own apartment, had they sat in one equally lively; and he gave Allison credit for the arrangement.

From the drawing-room they could distinguish nothing in the lane, and were indebted to Adrian Harris for the knowledge of what cars went along, and how often especially Kate D'Argent drove by in her Porsche convertible, which he never failed coming to inform them of, though it happened almost every day. She not unfrequently stopped at the Parsonage, and had a few minutes' conversation with Allison, but was scarcely ever prevailed upon to get out.

Very few days passed in which Adrian Harris did not walk to Rosings, and not many in which his wife did not think it necessary to go likewise; and till Stiles recollected that there might be other family livings to be disposed of, he could not understand the sacrifice of so many hours. Now and then they were honoured with a call from her ladyship, and nothing escaped her observation that was passing in the room during these visits. She examined into their employments, looked at their work, and advised them to do it differently; found fault with the arrangement of the furniture; or detected the housemaid in negligence; and if she accepted any refreshment, seemed to do it only for the sake of finding out that Mrs. Harris’s joints of meat were too large for her family.

Stiles soon perceived, that though this great lady was not in commission of the peace of the county, she was a most active magistrate in her own parish, the minutest concerns of which were carried to her by Adrian Harris; and whenever any of the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented, or too poor, she sallied forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty.

The entertainment of dining at Rosings was repeated about twice a week; and, allowing for the loss of Sir Chris, and there being only one card-table in the evening, every such entertainment was the counterpart of the first. Their other engagements were few, as the style of living in the neighbourhood in general was beyond Adrian Harris’s reach. This, however, was no evil to Stiles,
and upon the whole he spent his time comfortably enough; there were half-hours of pleasant conversation with Allison, and the weather was so fine for the time of year that he had often great enjoyment out of doors. His favourite walk, and where he frequently went while the others were calling on Lady Victoria, was along the open grove which edged that side of the park, where there was a nice sheltered path, which no one seemed to value but himself, and where he felt beyond the reach of Lady Victoria's curiosity.

In this quiet way, the first fortnight of his visit soon passed away. Easter was approaching, and the week preceding it was to bring an addition to the family at Rosings, which in so small a circle must be important. Stiles had heard soon after his arrival that Mr. Derek was expected there in the course of a few weeks, and though there were not many of Stiles's acquaintances whom he did not prefer, Mr. Derek's coming would furnish one comparatively new to look at in their Rosings parties, and Stiles thought that he might be amused in seeing how hopeless Erica's designs on Mr. Derek were, by his behaviour to his cousin, for whom he was evidently destined by Lady Victoria, who talked of his coming with the greatest satisfaction, spoke of him in terms of the highest admiration, and seemed almost angry to find that he had already been frequently seen by Miss Silver and himself.

His arrival was soon known at the Parsonage; for Adrian Harris was walking the whole morning within view of the lodges opening into Hunsford Lane, in order to have the earliest assurance of it, and after making his bow as the Toyota turned into the Park, hurried home with the great intelligence. On the following morning he hastened to Rosings to pay his respects. There were two nephews of Lady Victoria to require them, for Mr. Derek had brought with him a Colonel Miguel, the younger son of his uncle Lord ----, and, to the great surprise of all the party, when Mr. Harris returned, the gentlemen accompanied him. Allison had seen them from her husband's room, crossing the road, and immediately running into the other, told the others what an honour they might expect, adding:

"I may thank you, Stiles, for this piece of civility. Mr. Derek would never have come so soon to wait upon me."

Stiles had scarcely time to disclaim all right to the compliment, before their approach was announced by the door-bell, and shortly afterwards the three gentlemen entered the room. Colonel Miguel, who led the way, was about thirty, with a manly chest (shown to great advantage by his extremely tight orange and blue T-shirt), and in person and address most truly the gentleman. Mr. Derek looked just as he had been used to look in Hertfordshire - paid his compliments, with his usual reserve, to Mrs. Harris, and whatever might be his feelings toward her friend, met him with every appearance of composure. Stiles merely nodded to him without saying a word.

Colonel Miguel entered into conversation directly with the readiness and ease of a well-bred man, and talked very pleasantly; but his cousin, after having addressed a slight observation on the house and garden to Allison, sat for some time without speaking to anybody. At length, however, his civility was so far awakened as to inquire of Stiles after the health of his family. He answered him in the usual way, and after a moment's pause, added:

"My eldest brother has been in town these three months. Have you never happened to see him there?"

Stiles was perfectly sensible that he never had; but he wished to see whether he would betray any consciousness of what had passed between the Laheys and Scott, and he thought Mr. Derek looked a little confused as he answered that he had never been so fortunate as to meet Scott. The subject was pursued no farther, and the gentlemen soon afterwards went away.
Stiles saw what he was doing, and at the first convenient pause, turned to him with an arch smile, and said:

"You mean to frighten me, Mr. Derek, by coming in all this state to hear me? I will not be. There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me. I am not frightened of you. Well, maybe a little bit, but that is not the point."

Colonel Miguel's manners were very much admired at the Parsonage, and the teenagers all felt that he must add considerably to the pleasures of their engagements at Rosings. It was some days, however, before they received any invitation thither--for while there were visitors in the house, they could not be necessary; and it was not till Easter-day, almost a week after the gentlemen's arrival, that they were honoured by such an attention, and then they were merely asked on leaving church to come there in the evening. For the last week they had seen very little of Lady Victoria or her daughter. Colonel Miguel had called at the Parsonage more than once during the time, but Mr. Derek they had seen only at church.

The invitation was accepted of course, and at a proper hour they joined the party in Lady Victoria’s drawing-room. Her ladyship received them civilly, but it was plain that their company was by no means so acceptable as when she could get nobody else; and she was, in fact, almost engrossed by her nephews, speaking to them, especially to Derek, much more than to any other person in the room.

Colonel Miguel seemed really glad to see them; anything was a welcome relief to him at Rosings; and Allison’s pretty friend had moreover caught his fancy very much. He now seated himself by Stiles, and talked so agreeably of Kent and Hertfordshire, of travelling and staying at home, of new computer games and music, that Stiles had never been half so well entertained in that room before; and they conversed with so much spirit and flow, as to draw the attention of Lady Victoria herself, as well as of Mr. Derek. His eyes had been soon and repeatedly turned towards them with a look of curiosity; and that her ladyship, after a while, shared the feeling, was more openly acknowledged, for she did not scruple to call out:

"What is that you are saying, Miguel? What is it you are talking of? What are you telling Stiles? Let me hear what it is."

"We are speaking of lacrosse, madam," said he, when no longer able to avoid a reply.

"Of lacrosse! Then pray speak aloud. It is of all subjects my delight. I must have my share in the conversation if you are speaking of lacrosse. There are few people in England, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of lacrosse than myself, or of the muscular physiques of the players. If I had
never played, I should have been a great proficient. And so would Kate, if her violent tendencies had not prevented her from playing. I am confident that she would have played delightfully. How does Danny get on, Derek?"

Mr. Derek spoke with affectionate praise of his brother’s proficiency.

"I am very glad to hear such a good account of him," said Lady Catherine; "and pray tell him from me, that he cannot expect to excel if he does not practice a good deal."

"I assure you, madam," he replied, "that he does not need such advice. He practises very constantly."

"So much the better. It cannot be done too much; and when I next write to him, I shall charge him not to neglect it on any account. I often tell young men that no excellence in lacrosse is to be acquired without constant practice. I have told Stiles several times, that he will never play really well unless he practises more; and though Allison has no goal net, Stiles is very welcome, as I have often told him, to come to Rosings every day, and play on the lawn by Mrs. Jenkinson's room. Stiles would be in nobody's way, you know, in that part of the grounds."

Mr. Derek looked a little ashamed of his aunt's ill-breeding, and made no answer.

When coffee was over, Colonel Miguel reminded Stiles of having promised to play some drum riffs to him; and Stiles sat down directly to the drum kit. The Colonel drew a chair near him. Lady Victoria listened to half a selection, and then talked, as before, to her other nephew; till the latter walked away from her, and making with his usual deliberation towards the drums stationed himself so as to command a full view of the fair performer's countenance. Stiles saw what he was doing, and at the first convenient pause, turned to him with an arch smile, and said:

"You mean to frighten me, Mr. Derek, by coming in all this state to hear me? I will not be. There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me. I am not frightened of you. Well, maybe a little bit, but that is not the point."

"I shall not say you are mistaken," he replied, "because you could not really believe me to entertain any design of alarming you; and I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance long enough to know that you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own."

Stiles laughed heartily at this picture of himself, and said to Colonel Miguel, "Your cousin will give you a very pretty notion of me, and teach you not to believe a word I say. I am particularly unlucky in meeting with a person so able to expose my real character, in a part of the world where I had hoped to pass myself off with some degree of credit. Indeed, Mr. Derek, it is very ungenerous in you to mention all that you knew to my disadvantage in Hertfordshire - and, give me leave to say, very impolitic too - for it is provoking me to retaliate, and such things may come out as will shock your relations to hear."

"I am not afraid of you," said he, smilingly.

"Pray let me hear what you have to accuse him of," cried Colonel Miguel. "I should like to know how he behaves among strangers."

"You shall hear then - but prepare yourself for something very dreadful. The first time of my ever seeing him in Hertfordshire, you must know, was at a rave - and at this rave, what do you think he did? He danced only four tracks, though gentlemen looking like that were scarce; and, to my certain knowledge, more than one young person was sitting down in want of a partner. Mr. Derek, you cannot deny the fact."
"I had not at that time the honour of knowing any teenager in the assembly beyond my own party."

"True; and nobody can ever be introduced in a club. Well, Colonel Miguel, what do I play next? My drumsticks wait your orders."

"Perhaps," said Derek, "I should have judged better, had I sought an introduction; but I am ill-qualified to recommend myself to strangers."

"Shall we ask your cousin the reason of this?" said Stiles, still addressing Colonel Miguel. "Shall we ask him why a man of sense and education, and who has lived in the world, is ill qualified to recommend himself to strangers?"

"I can answer your question," said Miguel, "without applying to him. It is because he will not give himself the trouble."

"I certainly have not the talent which some people possess," said Derek, "of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done."

"My hands," said Stiles, "do not beat these drumsticks in the masterly manner which I see so many men’s do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I will not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe my sense of rhythm as capable as any other man's of superior execution."

Derek smiled and said, "You are perfectly right. You have employed your time much better. No one admitted to the privilege of hearing you can think anything wanting. We neither of us perform to strangers."

Here they were interrupted by Lady Victoria, who called out to know what they were talking of. Stiles immediately began playing again. Lady Victoria approached, and, after listening for a few minutes, said to Derek:

"Stiles would not play at all amiss if he practised more, and could have the advantage of a London master. He has a very good notion of riffing, though his taste is not equal to Kate's. Kate would have been a delightful performer, had her health allowed her to learn."

Stiles looked at Derek to see how cordially he assented to his cousin's praise; but neither at that moment nor at any other could he discern any symptom of love; and from the whole of his behaviour to Miss D’Argent he derived this comfort for Erica, that Mr Derek might have been just as likely to marry her, had she been his relation.

Lady Victoria continued her remarks on Stiles's performance, mixing with them many instructions on execution and taste. Stiles received them with all the forbearance of civility, and, at the request of the cousins, remained at the drum kit till her ladyship's limo was ready to take them all home.
Stiles was sitting by himself the next morning, and texting Scott while Allison and Maria were gone on business into the village, when he was startled by a ring at the door, the certain signal of a visitor. As he had heard no car he thought it not unlikely to be Lady Victoria, and under that apprehension was putting away his Samsung phone that he might escape all impertinent questions, when the door opened, and, to his very great surprise, Mr. Derek, and Mr. Derek only, entered the room.

He seemed astonished too on finding Stiles alone, and apologised for his intrusion by letting him know that he had understood all the teenagers were to be within.

They then sat down, and when Stiles’s inquiries after Rosings were made, seemed in danger of sinking into total silence. It was absolutely necessary, therefore, to think of something, and in this emergence recollecting when he had seen Derek last in Hertfordshire, and feeling curious to know what he would say on the subject of their hasty departure, Stiles observed:

"How very suddenly you all quitted Netherfield last November, Mr. Derek! It must have been a most agreeable surprise to Isaac to see you all after him so soon; for, if I recollect right, he went but the day before. He and his siblings were well, I hope, when you left London?"

"Perfectly so, I thank you."

Stile found that he was to receive no other answer, and, after a short pause added:

"I think I have understood that Mr. Lahey has not much idea of ever returning to Netherfield again?"

"I have never heard him say so; but it is probable that he may spend very little of his time there in the future. He has many friends, and is at a time of life when friends and engagements are continually increasing."

"If he means to be but little at Netherfield, it would be better for the neighbourhood that he should give up the place entirely, for then we might possibly get a settled pack there. But, perhaps, Isaac did not take the house so much for the convenience of the neighbourhood as for his own, and we must expect him to keep it or quit it on the same principle."

"I should not be surprised," said Derek, "if he were to give it up as soon as any eligible purchase offers."

Stiles made no answer. He was afraid of talking longer of Derek’s friend; and, having nothing else to say, was now determined to leave the trouble of finding a subject to Derek.

He took the hint, and soon began with, "This seems a very comfortable house. Lady Victoria, I believe, did a great deal to it when Mr. Harris first came to Hunsford."

"I believe she did - and I am sure she could not have bestowed her kindness on a more grateful object."

"Adrian Harris appears to be very fortunate in his choice of a wife."
"Yes, indeed, his friends may well rejoice in his having met with one of the very few sensible women who would have accepted him, or have made him happy if they had. My friend has an excellent understanding—though I am not certain that I consider her marrying Mr. Harris as the wisest thing she ever did. She seems perfectly happy, however, and in a prudential light it is certainly a very good match for her."

"It must be very agreeable for her to be settled within so easy a distance of her own family and friends."

"An easy distance, do you call it? It is nearly fifty miles."

"And what is fifty miles in a Camaro? Little more than an hour’s journey. Yes, I call it a very easy distance."

"I should never have considered the distance as one of the advantages of the match," cried Stiles. "I should never have said Allison was settled near her family."

"It is a proof of your own attachment to Hertfordshire. Anything beyond the very neighbourhood of Longbourn, I suppose, would appear far."

As he spoke there was a sort of smile which Stiles fancied he understood; he must be supposing her to be thinking of Scott and Netherfield, and he blushed as he answered:

"I do not mean to say that a person may not be settled too near their family. The far and the near must be relative, and depend on many varying circumstances. Where there is fortune to make the expenses of travelling unimportant, distance becomes no evil. But that is not the case here. Mr. and Mrs. Harris have a comfortable income, but not such a one as will allow of frequent journeys - and I am persuaded my friend would not call herself near her family under less than half the present distance."

Mr. Derek drew his chair a little towards Stiles, and said, "You cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment. You cannot have been always at Longbourn."

Stiles looked surprised. The gentleman experienced some change of feeling; he drew back his chair, took a newspaper from the table, and glancing over it, said, in a colder voice:

"Are you pleased with Kent?"

A short dialogue on the subject of the country ensued, on either side calm and concise—and soon put an end to by the entrance of Allison and her sister, just returned from their walk. The tete-a-tete surprised them. Mr. Derek related the mistake which had occasioned his intruding on Stiles, and after sitting a few minutes longer without saying much to anybody, went away.

"What can be the meaning of this?" said Allison, as soon as he was gone. "My dear, Stiles, he must be in love with you, or he would never have called us in this familiar way."

But when Stiles told of Derek’s silence; it did not seem very likely, even to Allison's wishes, to be the case; and after various conjectures, they could at last only suppose his visit to proceed from the difficulty of finding anything to do, which was the more probable from the time of year. All field sports were over. Within doors there was Lady Victoria, books, and an X-Box, but gentlemen cannot always be within doors; and in the nearness of the Parsonage, or the pleasantness of the walk to it, or of the people who lived in it, the two cousins found a temptation from this period of walking thither almost every day. They called at various times of the morning, sometimes separately, sometimes together, and now and then accompanied by their aunt. It was plain to them all that Colonel Miguel came because he had pleasure in their society, a persuasion which of course recommended him still
more; and Stiles was reminded by his own satisfaction in being with the Colonel, as well as by his evident admiration of Stiles, of his former favourite Matt Daehler; and though, in comparing them, Stiles saw there was less captivating softness in Colonel Miguel's manners, he believed he might have the best informed mind.

But why Mr. Derek came so often to the Parsonage, it was more difficult to understand. It could not be for society, as he frequently sat there ten minutes together glowering without opening his lips; and when he did speak, it seemed the effect of necessity rather than of choice - a sacrifice to propriety, not a pleasure to himself. He seldom appeared really animated. Allison knew not what to make of him. Colonel Miguel’s occasionally laughing at his stupidity, proved that he was generally different, which Allison’s own knowledge of him could not have told her; and as she would liked to have believed this change the effect of love, and the object of that love her friend Stiles, she set herself seriously to work to find it out. She watched him whenever they were at Rosings, and whenever he came to Hunsford; but without much success. Derek certainly glared at her friend a great deal, but the expression of that glare was disputable. It was an earnest, steadfast gaze, but she often doubted whether there were much admiration in it, and sometimes it seemed nothing but absence of mind.

She had once or twice suggested to Stiles the possibility of Derek’s being partial to him, but Stiles always laughed at the idea; and Allison did not think it right to press the subject, from the danger of raising expectations which might only end in disappointment; for in her opinion it admitted not of a doubt, that all her friend's dislike would vanish, if he could suppose Derek to be in his power.

In her kind schemes for Stiles, she sometimes planned her marrying Colonel Miguel. He was beyond comparison the most pleasant man; he certainly admired Stiles, and his situation in life was most eligible; but, to counterbalance these advantages, Mr. Derek had considerable patronage in the church, and his cousin could have none at all.
"To Scott himself," Stiles exclaimed, "there could be no possibility of objection; all loveliness and goodness and puppy eyes as he is! - his wolf howl awesome, his mind improved from what it was, and his manners captivating."

More than once did Stiles, in his ramble within the park, unexpectedly meet Mr. Derek. He felt all the perverseness of the mischance that should bring him where no one else was brought, and, to prevent its ever happening again, took care to inform him at first that it was a favourite haunt of his. How it could occur a second time, therefore, was very odd! Yet it did, and even a third. It seemed like wilful ill-nature, or a voluntary penance, for on these occasions it was not merely a few formal inquiries and an awkward pause and then away, but he actually thought it necessary to turn back and walk with him. He never said a great deal, nor did Stiles give himself the trouble of walking or of listening much; but it struck him in the course of their third rencontre that Mr. Derek was asking some odd unconnected questions — about his pleasure in being at Hunsford, his love of solitary walks, and his opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Harris's happiness; and that in speaking of Rosings and his not perfectly understanding the house, Mr. Derek seemed to expect that whenever Stiles came into Kent again he would be staying there too. His words seemed to imply it. Could he have Colonel Miguel in his thoughts? Sties supposed, if Derek meant anything, he must mean an allusion to what might arise in that quarter. It distressed Stiles a little, and he was quite glad to find himself at the gate in the pales opposite the Parsonage.

Stiles was engaged one day as he walked, in perusing (by means of his Samsung smart phone) Scott's last e-mail, and dwelling on some passages which proved that Scott had not written in spirits, when, instead of being again surprised by Mr. Derek, he saw on looking up that Colonel Miguel was meeting him. Putting away the Samsung immediately and forcing a smile, Stiles said:

"I did not know before that you ever walked this way."

"I have been making the tour of the park," he replied, "as I generally do every year, and intend to close it with a call at the Parsonage. Are you going much farther?"

"No, I should have turned in a moment."

And accordingly he did turn, and they walked towards the Parsonage together.

"Do you certainly leave Kent on Saturday?" said Stiles.

"Yes - if Derek does not put it off again. But I am at his disposal. He arranges the business just as he pleases."

"And if not able to please himself in the arrangement, he has at least pleasure in the great power of choice. I do not know anybody who seems more to enjoy the power of doing what he likes than Mr. Derek."

"He likes to have his own way very well," replied Colonel Miguel. "But so we all do. It is only that he has better means of having it than many others, because he is rich, and many others are poor. I
speak feelingly. A younger son, you know, must be inured to self-denial and dependence."

"In my opinion, the younger son of an earl can know very little of either. Now seriously, what have you ever known of self-denial and dependence? When have you been prevented by want of money from going wherever you chose, or procuring anything you had a fancy for?"

"These are home questions - and perhaps I cannot say that I have experienced many hardships of that nature. But in matters of greater weight, I may suffer from want of money. Younger sons cannot marry where they like."

"Unless where they like persons of fortune, which I think they very often do."

"Our habits of expense make us too dependent, and there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money."

"Is this," thought Stiles, "meant for me?" and he coloured at the idea; but, recovering himself, said in a lively tone, "And pray, what is the usual price of an earl's younger son? Unless the elder brother is very sickly, I suppose you would not ask above five million pounds."

He answered Stiles in the same style, and the subject dropped. To interrupt a silence which might make the Colonel fancy him affected with what had passed, he soon afterwards said:

"I imagine your cousin brought you down with him chiefly for the sake of having someone at his disposal. I wonder he does not marry, to secure a lasting convenience of that kind. But, perhaps, his brother does as well for the present, and, as he is under his sole care, he may do what he likes with him."

"No," said Colonel Miguel, "that is an advantage which he must divide with me. I am joined with him in the guardianship of Master Danny."

"Are you indeed? And pray what sort of guardians do you make? Does your charge give you much trouble? Young men of his age are sometimes a little difficult to manage, and if he has the true Derek spirit, he may like to have his own way."

As Stiles spoke he observed Colonel Miguel looking at him earnestly; and the manner in which he immediately asked Stiles why he supposed Danny likely to give them any uneasiness, convinced him that he had somehow or other got pretty near the truth. He directly replied:

"You need not be frightened. I never heard any harm of Danny, I am sure everyone likes Danny; and I dare say he is one of the most tractable creatures in the world. He is a very great favourite with a pack of my acquaintance, Boyd and Erica. I think I have heard you say that you know them."

"I know them a little. Their brother is a pleasant gentlemanlike man — he is a great friend of Derek's."

"Oh! yes," said Stiles drily; "Mr. Derek is uncommonly kind to Mr. Lahey, and takes a prodigious deal of care of him."

"Care of him! Yes, I really believe Derek does take care of him in those points where he most wants care. From something that he told me in our journey hither, I have reason to think Isaac Lahey very much indebted to him. But I ought to beg his pardon, for I have no right to suppose that Isaac Lahey was the person meant. It was all conjecture."

"What is it you mean?"
"It is a circumstance which Derek could not wish to be generally known, because if it were to get round to the young person's family, it would be an unpleasant thing."

"You may depend upon my not mentioning it."

"And remember that I have not much reason for supposing it to be Isaac. What he told me was merely this: that he congratulated himself on having lately saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage, but without mentioning names or any other particulars, and I only suspected it to be Isaac Lahey from believing him the kind of young man to get into a scrape of that sort, and from knowing them to have been together the whole of last summer."

"Did Mr. Derek give you reasons for this interference?"

"I understood that there were some very strong objections against the young person."

"And what arts did he use to separate them?"

"He did not talk to me of his own arts," said Miguel, smiling. "He only told me what I have now told you."

Stiles made no answer, and walked on, his heart swelling with indignation. After watching him a little, Miguel asked him why he was so thoughtful.

"I am thinking of what you have been telling me," said he. "Your cousin's conduct does not suit my feelings. Why was he to be the judge?"

"You are rather disposed to call his interference officious?"

"I do not see what right Mr. Derek had to decide on the propriety of his friend's inclination, or why, upon his own judgement alone, he was to determine and direct in what manner his friend was to be happy. But," he continued, recollecting himself, "as we know none of the particulars, it is not fair to condemn him. It is not to be supposed that there was much affection in the case."

"That is not an unnatural surmise," said Miguel, "but it is a lessening of the honour of my cousin's triumph very sadly."

This was spoken jestingly; but it appeared to Stiles so just a picture of Mr. Derek, that he would not trust himself with an answer, and therefore, abruptly changing the conversation talked on indifferent matters until they reached the Parsonage. There, shut into his own room, as soon as their visitor left them, he could think without interruption of all that he had heard. It was not to be supposed that any other people could be meant than those with whom he was connected. There could not exist in the world two betas over whom Mr. Derek could have such boundless influence. That he had been concerned in the measures taken to separate Isaac and Scott, Stiles had never doubted; but he had always attributed to Erica the principal design and arrangement of them. If Derek's own vanity, however, did not mislead him, he was the cause, his pride and caprice were the cause, of all that Scott had suffered, and still continued to suffer. He had ruined for a while every hope of happiness for the most affectionate, generous heart in the world; and no one could say how lasting an evil he might have inflicted.

"There were some very strong objections against the young person," were Colonel Miguel's words; and those strong objections probably were, his having one uncle who was a country attorney, and another who was in business in London.

"To Scott himself," Stiles exclaimed, "there could be no possibility of objection; all loveliness and goodness and puppy eyes as he is! - his wolf howl awesome, his mind improved from what it was,
and his manners captivating. Neither could anything be urged against my father, who, though with some peculiarities, has abilities Mr. Derek himself need not disdain, and respectability which he will probably never reach." When Stiles thought of his mother, his confidence gave way a little; but he would not allow that any objections there had material weight with Mr. Derek, whose pride, Stiles was convinced, would receive a deeper wound from the want of importance in his friend's connections, than from their want of sense; and he was quite decided, at last, that Mr. Derek had been partly governed by this worst kind of pride, and partly by the wish of retaining Mr. Lahey for his brother.

The agitation and tears which the subject occasioned, brought on a headache; and it grew so much worse towards the evening, that, added to his unwillingness to see Mr. Derek, it determined him not to attend his cousins to Rosings, where they were engaged to drink tea. Allison, seeing that Stiles was really unwell, did not press him to go and as much as possible prevented her husband from pressing him; but Adrian Harris could not conceal his apprehension of Lady Victoria's being rather displeased by Stiles staying at home.
Volume 2 Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Mr. Derek concluded with representing to Stiles the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all his endeavours, he had found impossible to conquer; and with expressing his hope that it would now be rewarded by Stile’s acceptance of his paw.

When they were gone, Stiles, as if intending to exasperate himself as much as possible against Mr. Derek, chose for his employment the examination of all the e-mails, Facebook posts and texts which Scott had written to him since his being in Kent. They contained no actual complaint, nor was there any revival of past occurrences, or any communication of present suffering. But in all, and in almost every line of each, there was a want of that cheerfulness which had been used to characterise Scott’s style, and which, proceeding from the serenity of a mind at ease with itself and kindly disposed towards everyone, had been scarcely ever clouded. Stiles noticed every sentence conveying the idea of uneasiness, with an attention which it had hardly received on the first perusal. Mr. Derek’s shameful boast of what misery he had been able to inflict, gave him a keener sense of his brother’s sufferings. It was some consolation to think that Mr. Derek’s visit to Rosings was to end on the day after the next - and, a still greater, that in less than a fortnight Stiles should himself be with Scott again, and enabled to contribute to the recovery of his spirits, by all that affection could do.

Stiles could not think of Derek's leaving Kent without remembering that his cousin was to go with him; but Colonel Miguel had made it clear that he had no intentions at all, and agreeable as he was, Stiles did not mean to be unhappy about him.

While settling this point, he was suddenly roused by the sound of the door-bell, and his spirits were a little fluttered by the idea of its being Colonel Miguel himself, who had once before called late in the evening, and might now come to inquire particularly after him. But this idea was soon banished, and his spirits were very differently affected, when, to his utter amazement, he saw Mr. Derek walk into the room. In an hurried manner Mr. Derek immediately began an inquiry after Stiles’s health, imputing his visit to a wish of hearing that he were better. He answered him with cold civility. Derek sat down for a few moments, and then getting up, walked about the room. Stiles was surprised, but said not a word. After a silence of several minutes, he came towards him in an agitated manner, and thus began:

"In vain I have struggled. It will not do. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."

Stiles's astonishment was beyond expression. He stared, coloured, doubted, flailed his arms around, and was silent. This Mr. Derek considered sufficient encouragement; and the avowal of all that he felt, and had long felt for Stiles, immediately followed. He spoke well; but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed; and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of Stiles’s inferiority – of its being a degradation - of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.

In spite of Stiles’s deeply-rooted dislike, he could not be insensible to the compliment of such an alpha's affection, and though his intentions did not vary for an instant, he was at first sorry for the
pain Mr. Derek was to receive; till, roused to resentment by his subsequent language, Stiles lost all compassion in anger. He tried, however, to compose himself to answer Mr. Derek with patience, when he should have done. Mr. Derek concluded with representing to Stiles the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all his endeavours, he had found impossible to conquer; and with expressing his hope that it would now be rewarded by Stile’s acceptance of his paw. As he said this, Stile’s could easily see that Derek had no doubt of a favourable answer. He spoke of apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance expressed real security. Such a circumstance could only exasperate farther, and, when he ceased, the colour rose into Stiles’s naturally pale cheeks, and he said:

"In such cases as this, it is, I believe, the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation should be felt, and if I could feel gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot - I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry to have occasioned pain to anyone. It has been most unconsciously done, however, and I hope will be of short duration. The feelings which, you tell me, have long prevented the acknowledgment of your regard, can have little difficulty in overcoming it after this explanation."

Mr. Derek, who was leaning against the mantelpiece with his eyes fixed on a mole on Stiles’s face, seemed to catch his words with no less resentment than surprise. His complexion became pale with anger, and the disturbance of his mind was visible in every feature. He was struggling for the appearance of composure and to prevent himself from pushing Stiles against a wall, and would not open his lips till he believed himself to have attained it. The pause was to Stiles's feelings dreadful. At length, with a voice of forced calmness, Mr. Derek said:

"And this is all the reply which I am to have the honour of expecting! I might, perhaps, wish to be informed why, with so little endeavour at civility, I am thus rejected. But it is of small importance."

"I might as well inquire," replied Stiles, "why with so evident a desire of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility, if I was uncivil? But I have other provocations. You know I have. Had not my feelings decided against you - had they been indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved brother?"

As Stiles pronounced these words, Mr. Derek changed colour; but the emotion was short, and he listened without attempting to interrupt Stiles while he continued:

"I have every reason in the world to think ill of you. No motive can excuse the unjust and ungenerous part you acted there. You dare not, you cannot deny, that you have been the principal, if not the only means of dividing them from each other - of exposing one to the censure of the world for caprice and instability, and the other to its derision for disappointed hopes, and involving them both in misery of the acutest kind."

Stiles paused, and saw with no slight indignation that Derek was listening with an air which proved him wholly unmoved by any feeling of remorse. He even looked at Stiles with a sinister leer of affected incredulity.

"Can you deny that you have done it?" Stiles repeated.

With assumed tranquillity he then replied: "I have no wish of denying that I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your brother, or that I rejoice in my success. Towards Isaac I have been kinder than towards myself."

Stiles disdained the appearance of noticing this civil reflection, but its meaning did not escape, nor
was it likely to conciliate him.

"But it is not merely this affair," Stiles continued, "on which my dislike is founded. Long before it had taken place my opinion of you was decided. Your character was unfolded in the recital which I received many months ago from Matt. On this subject, what can you have to say? In what imaginary act of friendship can you here defend yourself? Or under what misrepresentation can you here impose upon others?"

"You take an eager interest in that gentleman's concerns," said Derek, in a less tranquil tone, and with a heightened colour.

"Who that knows what his misfortunes have been, can help feeling an interest in him?"

"His misfortunes!" repeated Derek contemptuously; "yes, his misfortunes have been great indeed."

"And of your infliction," cried Stiles with energy. "You have reduced him to his present state of poverty - comparative poverty. You have withheld the advantages which you must know to have been designed for him. You have deprived the best years of his life of that independence which was no less his due than his desert. You have done all this! And yet you can treat the mention of his misfortune with contempt and ridicule."

"And this," cried Derek, as he walked with quick steps across the room, "is your opinion of me! This is the estimation in which you hold me! I thank you for explaining it so fully. My faults, according to this calculation, are heavy indeed! But perhaps," added he, stopping in his walk, and turning towards Stiles, "these offenses might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design. These bitter accusations might have been suppressed, had I, with greater policy, concealed my struggles, and flattered you into the belief of my being impelled by unqualified, unalloyed inclination; by reason, by reflection, by everything. But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence. Nor am I ashamed of the feelings I related. They were natural and just. Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? - to congratulate myself on the hope of relations, a pack whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?"

Stiles felt himself growing more angry every moment; yet he tried to the utmost to speak with composure when he said:

"You are mistaken, Mr. Derek, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner."

Stiles saw him start at this, but Derek said nothing, and so Stiles continued:

"You could not have made the offer of your paw in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it."

Again his astonishment was obvious; and he looked at Stiles with an expression of mingled incredulity and mortification. Stiles went on:

"From the very beginning - from the first moment, I may almost say – of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form the groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last werewolf in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to mate or marry."
"You have said quite enough, sir. I perfectly comprehend your feelings, and have now only to be ashamed of what my own have been. Forgive me for having taken up so much of your time, and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness."

And with these words Derek hastily left the room, and Stiles heard him the next moment open the front door and quit the house.

The tumult of his mind, was now painfully great. He knew not how to support himself, and from actual weakness sat down and cried for half an-hour. His astonishment, as he reflected on what had passed, was increased by every review of it. That he should receive an offer of marriage from Mr. Derek! That Derek should have been in love with him for so many months! So much in love as to wish to marry him in spite of all the objections which had made him prevent his friend's marrying Scott, and which must appear at least with equal force in his own case - was almost incredible! It was gratifying to have inspired unconsciously so strong an affection. But Derek’s pride, his abominable pride - his shameless avowal of what he had done with respect to Scott - his unpardonable assurance in acknowledging, though he could not justify it, and the unfeeling manner in which he had mentioned Matt, his cruelty towards whom he had not attempted to deny, soon overcame the pity which the consideration of his attachment had for a moment excited. Stiles continued in very agitated reflections till the sound of Lady Victoria's limo made him feel how unequal he was to encounter Allison's observation, and hurried him away to his room.
With no expectation of pleasure, but with the strongest curiosity, Stiles pulled out his Samsung and opened the email, and, to his still increasing wonder, perceived a file containing two pages of a word document, written quite through, in a very small font.

Stiles awoke the next morning to the same thoughts and meditations which had at length closed his eyes. He could not yet recover from the surprise of what had happened; it was impossible to think of anything else; and, totally indisposed for employment, he resolved, soon after breakfast, to indulge himself in air and exercise. He was proceeding directly to his favourite walk, when the recollection of Mr. Derek’s sometimes coming there stopped him, and instead of entering the park, he turned up the lane, which led farther from the turnpike-road. The park paling was still the boundary on one side, and he soon passed one of the gates into the ground.

After walking two or three times along that part of the lane, he was tempted, by the pleasantness of the morning, to stop at the gates and look into the park. The five weeks which he had now passed in Kent had made a great difference in the country, and every day was adding to the verdure of the early trees. Stiles was on the point of continuing his walk, when he caught a glimpse of a gentleman within the sort of grove which edged the park; he was moving that way; and, fearful of its being Mr. Derek, he was directly retreating. But the person who advanced was now near enough to see Stiles, and stepping forward with eagerness, pronounced his name. Stiles had turned away; but on hearing himself called, though in a voice which proved it to be Mr. Derek, he moved again towards the gate. Derek had by that time reached it also, and, brandishing his smart phone said, with a look of haughty composure, "I have been walking in the grove some time in the hope of meeting you. Will you do me the honour of reading the email I have just sent?" And then, with a slight bow, turned again into the plantation, and was soon out of sight.

With no expectation of pleasure, but with the strongest curiosity, Stiles pulled out his Samsung and opened the email, and, to his still increasing wonder, perceived a file containing two pages of a word document, written quite through, in a very small font. Pursuing his way along the lane, Stiles then began it. It was dated from Rosings, and the time stamp was eight o'clock in the morning, and was as follows:-

"Be not alarmed, sir, on receiving this email, by the apprehension of its containing any repetition of those sentiments or renewal of those offers which were last night so disgusting to you. I write without any intention of paining you, or humbling myself, by dwelling on wishes which, for the happiness of both, cannot be too soon forgotten; and the effort which the formation and the perusal of this email must occasion, should have been spared, had not my character required it to be written and read. You must, therefore, pardon the freedom with which I demand your attention; your feelings, I know, will bestow it unwillingly, but I demand it of your justice.

"Two offenses of a very different nature, and by no means of equal magnitude, you last night laid to my charge. The first mentioned was, that, regardless of the sentiments of either, I had detached Mr. Lahey from your brother, and the other, that I had, in defiance of various claims, in defiance of honour and humanity, ruined the immediate prosperity and blasted the prospects of Matt. Wilfully and wantonly to have thrown off the companion of my youth, the acknowledged favourite of my
father, a young man who had scarcely any other dependence than on our patronage, and who had been brought up to expect its exertion, would be a depravity, to which the separation of two young persons, whose affection could be the growth of only a few weeks, could bear no comparison. But from the severity of that blame which was last night so liberally bestowed, respecting each circumstance, I shall hope to be in the future secured, when the following account of my actions and their motives has been read. If, in the explanation of them, which is due to myself, I am under the necessity of relating feelings which may be offensive to yours, I can only say that I am sorry. The necessity must be obeyed, and further apology would be absurd.

"I had not been long in Hertfordshire, before I saw, in common with others, that Isaac preferred your elder brother to any other young beta in the country. But it was not till the evening of the dance at Netherfield that I had any apprehension of his feeling a serious attachment. I had often seen him in love before. At that rave, while I had the honour of dancing with you, I was first made acquainted, by Sir Chris Silver's accidental information, that Isaac’s attentions to your brother had given rise to a general expectation of their marriage. He spoke of it as a certain event, of which the time alone could be undecided. From that moment I observed my friend's behaviour attentively; and I could then perceive that his partiality for Scott was beyond what I had ever witnessed in him. Your brother I also watched. His look and manners were open, cheerful, and engaging as ever, but without any symptom of peculiar regard, and I remained convinced from the evening's scrutiny, that though Scott received Isaac’s attentions with pleasure, he did not invite them by any participation of sentiment. If you have not been mistaken here, I must have been in error. Your superior knowledge of your brother must make the latter probable. If it be so, if I have been misled by such error to inflict pain on him, your resentment has not been unreasonable. But I shall not scruple to assert, that the serenity of your brother's countenance and air was such as might have given the most acute observer a conviction that, however amiable his temper, his heart was not likely to be easily touched. That I was desirous of believing Scott indifferent is certain - but I will venture to say that my investigation and decisions are not usually influenced by my hopes or fears. I did not believe him to be indifferent because I wished it; I believed it on impartial conviction, as truly as I wished it in reason. My objections to the marriage were not merely those which I last night acknowledged to have the utmost force of passion to put aside, in my own case; the want of connection could not be so great an evil to my friend as to me. But there were other causes of repugnance; causes which, though still existing, and existing to an equal degree in both instances, I had myself endeavoured to forget, because they were not immediately before me. These causes must be stated, though briefly. The situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison to that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger siblings, and occasionally even by your father. Pardon me. It pains me to offend you. But amidst your concern for the defects of your nearest relations, and your displeasure at this representation of them, let it give you consolation to consider that, to have conducted yourselves so as to avoid any share of the like censure, is praise no less generally bestowed on you and your elder brother, than it is honourable to the sense and disposition of both. I will only say farther that from what passed that evening, my opinion of all parties was confirmed, and every inducement heightened which could have led me before, to preserve my friend from what I esteemed a most unhappy connection. He left Netherfield for London, on the day following, as you, I am certain, remember, with the design of soon returning.

"The part which I acted is now to be explained. His siblings’ uneasiness had been equally excited with my own; our coincidence of feeling was soon discovered, and, alike sensible that no time was to be lost in detaching their brother, we shortly resolved on joining him directly in London. We accordingly went - and there I readily engaged in the office of pointing out to my friend the certain evils of such a choice. I described, and enforced them earnestly. But, however this remonstrance might have staggered or delayed his determination, I do not suppose that it would ultimately have prevented the marriage, had it not been seconded by the assurance that I hesitated not in giving, of your brother's indifference. He had before believed Scott to return his affection with sincere, if not
with equal regard. But Isaac has great natural modesty, with a stronger dependence on my judgement than on his own. To convince him, therefore, that he had deceived himself, was no very difficult point. To persuade him against returning into Hertfordshire, when that conviction had been given, was scarcely the work of a moment. I cannot blame myself for having done thus much. There is but one part of my conduct in the whole affair on which I do not reflect with satisfaction; it is that I condescended to adopt the measures of art so far as to conceal from him your brother’s being in town. I knew it myself, as it was known to Erica; but her brother is even yet ignorant of it. That they might have met without ill consequence is perhaps probable; but his regard did not appear to me enough extinguished for him to see Scott without some danger. Perhaps this concealment, this disguise was beneath me; it is done, however, and it was done for the best. On this subject I have nothing more to say, no other apology to offer. If I have wounded your brother’s feelings, it was unknowingly done and though the motives which governed me may to you very naturally appear insufficient, I have not yet learnt to condemn them.

"With respect to that other, more weighty accusation, of having injured Matt, I can only refute it by laying before you the whole of his connection with my family. Of what he has particularly accused me I am ignorant; but of the truth of what I shall relate, I can summon more than one witness of undoubted veracity.

"Matt is the son of a very respectable man, who had for many years the management of all the Pemberley estates, and whose good conduct in the discharge of his trust naturally inclined my father to be of service to him; and on Matt, who was his godson, his kindness was therefore liberally bestowed. My father supported him at school, and afterwards at Cambridge - most important assistance, as his own father, always poor from the extravagance of his wife, would have been unable to give him a gentleman's education. My father was not only fond of this young man's society, whose manners were always engaging; he had also the highest opinion of him, and hoping photo journalism would be his profession, intended to provide for him in it. As for myself, it is many, many years since I first began to think of him in a very different manner. The vicious propensities - the want of principle, which he was careful to guard from the knowledge of his best friend, could not escape the observation of a young man of nearly the same age with himself, and who had opportunities of seeing him in unguarded moments, which my father could not have. Here again I shall give you pain - to what degree you only can tell. But whatever may be the sentiments which Matt has created, a suspicion of their nature shall not prevent me from unfolding his real character - it adds even another motive.

"My excellent father died about five years ago in a fire; and his attachment to Matt was to the last so steady, that in his will he particularly recommended it to me, to promote his advancement in the best manner that his profession might allow - and if he showed talent, desired that a valuable post on a website in our corporate empire might be his as soon as it became vacant. There was also a legacy of one hundred thousand pounds. His own father did not long survive mine, and within half a year from these events, Matt emailed to inform me that, having finally resolved against profession in photo journalism, he hoped I should not think it unreasonable for him to expect some more immediate pecuniary advantage, in lieu of the job with Perez Hilton, by which he could not be benefited. He had some intention, he added, of studying law, and I must be aware that the investment return of one hundred thousand pounds would be a very insufficient support therein. I rather wished, than believed him to be sincere; but, at any rate, was perfectly ready to accede to his proposal. I knew that Matt ought not to be a journalist; the business was therefore soon settled - he resigned all claim to assistance in the media, were it possible that he could ever be in a situation to receive it, and accepted in return three hundred thousand pounds. All connection between us seemed now dissolved. I thought too ill of him to invite him to Pemberley, or admit his society in town. In town I believe he chiefly lived, but his studying the law was a mere pretence, and being now free from all restraint, his life was a life of idleness and dissipation. For about three years I heard little of him; but on the
resignation the incumbent of the job which had been designed for him, he applied to me again by letter for the presentation. His circumstances, he assured me, and I had no difficulty in believing it, were exceedingly bad. He had found the law a most unprofitable study, and was now absolutely resolved on being a photographer, if I would present him to the job in question - of which he trusted there could be little doubt, as he was well assured that I had no other person to provide for, and I could not have forgotten my revered father's intentions. You will hardly blame me for refusing to comply with this entreaty, or for resisting every repetition to it. His resentment was in proportion to the distress of his circumstances - and he was doubtless as violent in his abuse of me to others as in his reproaches to myself. After this period every appearance of acquaintance was dropped. How he lived I know not. But last summer he was again most painfully obtruded on my notice.

"I must now mention a circumstance which I would wish to forget myself, and which no obligation less than the present should induce me to unfold to any human being. Having said thus much, I feel no doubt of your secrecy. My brother, who is more than six years my junior, was left to the guardianship of my mother's nephew, Colonel Miguel, and myself. About a year ago, Danny was taken from school, and an establishment formed for him in London; and last summer he went with the gentleman who presided over it, to Ramsgate; and thither also went Matt, undoubtedly by design; for there proved to have been a prior acquaintance between him and Mr. Gerard, in whose character we were most unhappily deceived; and by his connivance and aid, he so far recommended himself to Danny, whose affectionate heart retained a strong impression of his kindness to him as a child, that Danny was persuaded to believe himself in love, and to consent to an elopement. He was then but sixteen, which must be his excuse; and after stating his imprudence, I am happy to add, that I owed the knowledge of it to himself. I joined them unexpectedly a day or two before the intended elopement, and then Danny, unable to support the idea of grieving and offending a brother whom he almost looked up to as a father, acknowledged the whole to me. You may imagine what I felt and how I acted. Regard for my brother's credit and feelings prevented any public exposure; but I texted Matt, who left the place immediately, and Mr. Gerard was of course removed from his charge. Matt's chief object was unquestionably my brother's fortune, which is three million pounds; but I cannot help supposing that the hope of revenging himself on me was a strong inducement. His revenge would have been complete indeed.

"This, sir, is a faithful narrative of every event in which we have been concerned together; and if you do not absolutely reject it as false, you will, I hope, acquit me henceforth of cruelty towards Matt. I know not in what manner, under what form of falsehood he had imposed on you; but his success is not perhaps to be wondered at. Ignorant as you previously were of everything concerning either, detection could not be in your power, and suspicion certainly not in your inclination.

"You may possibly wonder why all this was not told you last night; but I was not then master enough of myself to know what could or ought to be revealed. For the truth of everything here related, I can appeal more particularly to the testimony of Colonel Miguel, who, from our near relationship and constant intimacy, and, still more, as one of the executors of my father's will, has been unavoidably acquainted with every particular of these transactions. If your abhorrence of me should make my assertions valueless, you cannot be prevented by the same cause from confiding in my cousin; and that there may be the possibility of consulting him, I shall endeavour to find some opportunity of making sure that you read this email in the course of the morning. I will only add, God bless you.

"Mr. Derek"
Chapter Summary

With amazement did he first understand that Derek believed any apology to be in his power; and steadfastly was Stiles persuaded, that Derek could have no explanation to give, which a just sense of shame would not conceal.

Chapter 36

If Stiles, when Mr. Derek sent him the email, did not expect it to contain a renewal of his offers, he had formed no expectation at all of its contents. But such as they were, it may well be supposed how eagerly he went through them, and what a contrariety of emotion they excited.

His feelings as he read were scarcely to be defined. With amazement did he first understand that Derek believed any apology to be in his power; and steadfastly was Stiles persuaded, that Derek could have no explanation to give, which a just sense of shame would not conceal. With a strong prejudice against everything Derek might say, Stiles began Derek’s account of what had happened at Netherfield. Stiles read with an eagerness which hardly left him power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before his eyes. Derek’s belief of Scott’s insensibility Stiles instantly resolved to be false; and his account of the real, the worst objections to the match, made Stiles too angry to have any wish of doing him justice. Derek expressed no regret for what he had done which satisfied Stiles; Derek’s style was not penitent, but haughty. It was all pride and insolence.

But when this subject was succeeded by his account of Matt – when Stiles read with somewhat clearer attention a relation of events which, if true, must overthrow every cherished opinion of Matt’s worth, and which bore so alarming an affinity to Matt’s own history of himself – Stiles’s feelings were yet more acutely painful and more difficult of definition. Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror, oppressed him. He wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming, "This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!" – and when he had gone through the whole email, though scarcely knowing anything of the last paragraph or two, closed it and put his Samsung hastily away, protesting that he would not regard it, that he would never look in it again.

In this perturbed state of mind, with thoughts that could rest on nothing, Stiles walked on; but it would not do; in half a minute the Samsung was out and the email was opened again, and collecting himself as well as he could, he again began the mortifying perusal of all that related to Matt, and commanded himself so far as to examine the meaning of every sentence.

The account of his connection with the Pemberley family was exactly what Matt had related himself; and the kindness of Derek’s father, though Stiles had not before known its extent, agreed equally well with his own words. So far each recital confirmed the other; but when he came to the will, the difference was great. What Matt had said of the photo journalism job was fresh in Stiles’s memory, and as he recalled Matt’s very words, it was impossible not to feel that there was gross duplicity on one side or the other; and, for a few moments, Stiles flattered himself that his wishes did not err. But when Stiles read and re-read with the closest attention, the particulars immediately following of Matt's resigning all pretensions to the job, of his receiving in lieu so considerable a sum as three
hundred thousand pounds, again was Stiles forced to hesitate. Stiles put down his Samsung, weighed every circumstance with what he meant to be impartiality - deliberated on the probability of each statement - but with little success. On both sides it was only assertion. Again he read on; but every line proved more clearly that the affair, which he had believed it impossible that any contrivance could so represent as to render Mr. Derek’s conduct in it less than infamous, was capable of a turn which must make him entirely blameless throughout the whole.

The extravagance and general profligacy which Mr. Derek scrupled not to lay at Matt's charge, exceedingly shocked Stiles; the more so, as he could bring no proof of its injustice. He had never heard of Matt before his entrance into the ----shire Militia, in which he had engaged at the persuasion of the young man who, on meeting him accidentally in town, had there renewed a slight acquaintance. Of his former way of life nothing had been known in Hertfordshire but what he told himself. As to his real character, had information been in Stiles’s power, he had never felt a wish of inquiring. Matt’s countenance, voice, and manner had established him at once in the possession of every virtue. Stiles tried to recollect some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence, that might rescue him from the attacks of Mr. Derek; or at least, by the predominance of virtue, atone for those casual errors under which he would endeavour to class what Mr. Derek had described as the idleness and vice of many years' continuance. But no such recollection befriended him. Stiles could see Matt instantly before him, in every charm of air and address; but he could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which his social powers had gained him in the mess. After pausing on this point a considerable while, Stiles once more continued to read. But, alas! the story which followed, of Matt’s designs on Danny, received some confirmation from what had passed between Colonel Miguel and himself only the morning before; and at last Stiles was referred for the truth of every particular to Colonel Miguel himself - from whom Stiles had previously received the information of his near concern in all his cousin's affairs, and whose character Stiles had no reason to question. At one time Stiles had almost resolved on applying to the Colonel, but the idea was checked by the awkwardness of the application, and at length wholly banished by the conviction that Mr. Derek would never have hazarded such a proposal, if he had not been well assured of his cousin's corroboration.

Stiles perfectly remembered everything that had passed in conversation between Matt and himself, in their first evening at Mr. Phillips's. Many of his expressions were still fresh in his memory. He was now struck with the impropriety of such communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped him before. He saw the indelicacy of Matt putting himself forward as he had done, and the inconsistency of his professions with his conduct. Stiles remembered that Matt had boasted of having no fear of seeing Mr. Derek - that Mr. Derek might leave the country, but that he should stand his ground; yet he had avoided the Netherfield rave the very next week. Stiles remembered also that, till the Netherfield family had quitted the country, Matt had told his story to no one but himself; but that after their removal it had been everywhere discussed; that he had then no reserves, no scruples in sinking Mr. Derek's character, though he had assured Stiles that respect for the father would always prevent his exposing the son.

How differently did everything now appear in which he was concerned! His attentions to the car mechanic were now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary; and the mediocre value of car mechanic’s garage business proved no longer the moderation of Matt's wishes, but his eagerness to grasp at anything. Matt’s behaviour to himself could now have had no tolerable motive; he had either been deceived with regard to Stiles’s fortune, or had been gratifying his vanity by encouraging the preference which Stiles believed he had most incautiously shown. Every lingering struggle in Matt’s favour grew fainter and fainter; and in farther justification of Mr. Derek, Stiles could not but allow that Isaac Lahey, when questioned by Scott, had long ago asserted his blamelessness in the affair; that proud and repulsive as were his manners, Stiles had never, in the
whole course of their acquaintance - an acquaintance which had latterly brought them much together, and given him a sort of intimacy with Mr. Derek’s ways - seen anything that betrayed him to be unprincipled or unjust - anything that spoke him of irreligious or immoral habits; that among his own connections he was esteemed and valued - that even Matt had allowed him merit as a brother, and that Stiles had often heard Derek speak so affectionately of Danny as to prove him capable of some amiable feeling; that had Derek’s actions been what Matt represented them, so gross a violation of everything right could hardly have been concealed from the world; and that friendship between a person capable of it, and such an amiable man as Isaac Lahey, was incomprehensible.

Stiles grew absolutely ashamed of himself. Of neither Derek nor Matt could he think without feeling he had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

"How despicably I have acted!" he cried; "I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my brother, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable mistrust! How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind! But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment I never knew myself."

From himself to Scott - from Scott to Isaac, his thoughts were in a line which soon brought to his recollection that Mr. Derek's explanation there had appeared very insufficient, and he read it again. Widely different was the effect of a second perusal. How could he deny that credit to Derek’s assertions in one instance, which he had been obliged to give in the other? He declared himself to be totally unsuspicious of Scott's attachment; and Stiles could not help remembering what Allison's opinion had always been. Neither could Stiles deny the justice of Derek’s description of Scott. Stiles felt that Scott’s feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and that there was a constant complacency in his air and manner not often united with great sensibility.

When Stiles came to that part of the email in which his family were mentioned in terms of such mortifying, yet merited reproach, his sense of shame was severe. The justice of the charge struck him too forcibly for denial, and the circumstances to which Derek particularly alluded as having passed at the Netherfield rave, and as confirming all his first disapprobation, could not have made a stronger impression on his mind than on that of Stiles.

The compliment to himself and his brother was not unfelt. It soothed, but it could not console him for the contempt which had thus been self-attracted by the rest of his family; and as Stiles considered that Scott's disappointment had in fact been the work of his nearest relations, and reflected how materially the credit of both must be hurt by such impropriety of conduct, he felt depressed beyond anything he had ever known before.

After wandering along the lane for two hours, giving way to every variety of thought - re-considering events, determining probabilities, and reconciling himself, as well as he could, to a change so sudden and so important, fatigue, and a recollection of his long absence, made him at length return home; and he entered the house with the wish of appearing cheerful as usual, and the resolution of repressing such reflections as must make him unfit for conversation.

He was immediately told that the two gentlemen from Rosings had each called during his absence; Mr. Derek, only for a few minutes, to take leave - but that Colonel Miguel had been sitting with them at least an hour, hoping for Stiles’s return, and almost resolving to walk after him till he could be found. Stiles could but just affect concern in missing him; he really rejoiced at it. Colonel Miguel was no longer an object; he could think only of his email.
"When my nephew Danny went to Ramsgate last summer, I made a point of his having two young, fit men-servants go with him."

The two werewolves left Rosings the next morning, and Adrian Harris having been in waiting near the lodges, to make them his parting obeisance, was able to bring home the pleasing intelligence, of their appearing in very good health, and in as tolerable spirits as could be expected, after the melancholy scene so lately gone through at Rosings. To Rosings he then hastened, to console Lady Victoria and her daughter; and on his return brought back, with great satisfaction, a message from her ladyship, importing that she felt herself so dull as to make her very desirous of having them all to dine with her.

Stiles could not see Lady Victoria without recollecting that, had he chosen it, he might by this time have been presented to her as her future nephew; nor could he think, without a smile, of what her ladyship's indignation would have been. "What would she have said? How would she have behaved?" were questions with which he amused herself.

Their first subject was the diminution of the Rosings party. "I assure you, I feel it exceedingly," said Lady Victoria; "I believe no one feels the loss of friends so much as I do. But I am particularly attached to these young men, and know them to be so much attached to me! They were excessively sorry to go! But so they always are. The dear Colonel rallied his spirits tolerably till just at last; but Derek seemed to feel it most acutely, more, I think, than last year. His attachment to Rosings certainly increases."

Adrian Harris had a compliment, and an allusion to throw in here, which were kindly smiled on by the mother and daughter.

Lady Victoria observed, after dinner, that Stiles seemed out of spirits, and immediately accounting for it by herself, by supposing that he did not like to go home again so soon, she added:

"But if that is the case, you must write to your mother and beg that you may stay a little longer. Allison will be very glad of your company, I am sure."

"I am much obliged to your ladyship for your kind invitation," replied Stiles, "but it is not in my power to accept it. I must be in town next Saturday."

"Why, at that rate, you will have been here only six weeks. I expected you to stay two months. I told Allison so before you came. There can be no occasion for your going so soon. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski could certainly spare you for another fortnight."

"But my father cannot. He wrote last week to hurry my return."

"Oh! your father of course may spare you, if your mother can. Younger sons are never of so much consequence to a father. And if you will stay another month complete, it will be in my power to take one of you as far as London, for I am going there early in June, for a week; and as Dawson does not object to the front seat of the Rolls-Royce, there will be very good room for one of you - and indeed,
if the weather should happen to be cool, I should not object to taking you both, as you are neither of you large."

"You are all kindness, madam; but I believe we must abide by our original plan."

Lady Victoria seemed resigned. "Allison, you must send a servant with them. You know I always speak my mind, and I cannot bear the idea of two young persons travelling on the train by themselves. It is highly improper. You must contrive to send somebody. I have the greatest dislike in the world to that sort of thing. Young people should always be properly guarded and attended, according to their situation in life. When my nephew Danny went to Ramsgate last summer, I made a point of his having two young, fit men-servants go with him. Danny, the brother of Mr. Derek, of Pemberley, could not have appeared with propriety in a different manner. I am excessively attentive to all those things. You must send John with the young people, Allison. I am glad it occurred to me to mention it; for it would really be discreditable to you to let them go alone."

"My uncle is to send a servant for us."

"Oh! Your uncle! He keeps a man-servant, does he? I am very glad you have somebody who thinks of these things. Where shall you change trains? Oh! Bromley, of course. If you mention my name at the Bell, you will be attended to."

Lady Victoria had many other questions to ask respecting their journey, and as she did not answer them all herself, attention was necessary, which Stiles believed to be lucky for him; or, with a mind so occupied, he might have forgotten where he was. Reflection must be reserved for solitary hours; whenever he was alone, he gave way to it as the greatest relief; and not a day went by without a solitary walk, in which he might indulge in all the delight of unpleasant recollections.

Mr. Derek's email he was in a fair way of soon knowing by heart. He studied every sentence; and his feelings towards its writer were at times widely different. When he remembered the style of his address, he was still full of indignation; but when he considered how unjustly he had condemned and upbraided Derek, his anger was turned against himself; and Derek’s disappointed feelings became the object of compassion. Derek’s attachment excited gratitude, his general character respect; but Stiles could not approve him; nor could he for a moment repent his refusal, or feel the slightest inclination ever to see him again. In Stiles’s own past behaviour, there was a constant source of vexation and regret; and in the unhappy defects of his family, a subject of yet heavier chagrin. They were hopeless of remedy. His father, contented with laughing at them, would never exert himself to restrain the wild giddiness of his youngest children; and his mother, with manners so far from right herself, was entirely insensible of the evil. Stiles had frequently united with Scott in an endeavour to check the imprudence of Kanima and Jackson; but while they were supported by their mother's indulgence, what chance could there be of improvement? Kanima, weak-spirited, irritable, paralysing and completely under Jackson's guidance nowadays, had been always affronted by their advice; and Jackson, self-willed and careless, would scarcely give them a hearing. They were ignorant, idle, and vain. While there was an officer in Beacon Hills, they would flirt with him; and while Beacon Hills was within a walk of Longbourn, they would be going there forever.

Anxiety on Scott's behalf was another prevailing concern; and Mr. Derek's explanation, by restoring Isaac to all his former good opinion, heightened the sense of what Scott had lost. Isaac’s affection was proved to have been sincere, and his conduct cleared of all blame, unless any could attach to the implicitness of his confidence in his friend. How grievous then was the thought that, of a situation so desirable in every respect, so replete with advantage, so promising for happiness, Scott had been deprived, by the folly and indecorum of his own family!

When to these recollections was added the development of Matt's character, it may be easily believed
that the happy spirits which had seldom been depressed before, were now so much affected as to make it almost impossible for Stiles to appear tolerably cheerful.

Their engagements at Rosings were as frequent during the last week of his stay as they had been at first. The very last evening was spent there; and her ladyship again inquired minutely into the particulars of their journey, gave them directions as to the best method of packing, and was so urgent on the necessity of placing T-shirts in the only right way, that Maria thought herself obliged, on her return, to undo all the work of the morning, and pack her wheelie suitcase afresh.

When they parted, Lady Victoria, with great condescension, wished them a good journey, and invited them to come to Hunsford again next year; and Miss D’Argent exerted herself so far as to curtsey and hold out her hand to both.
"Good gracious!" cried Maria, after a few minutes' silence, "it seems but a day or two since we first came! and yet how many things have happened!"

"A great many indeed," said her companion with a sigh.

"We have dined nine times at Rosings, besides drinking tea there twice! How much I shall have to tell!"

Stiles added privately, "And how much I shall have to conceal!"

On Saturday morning Stiles and Adrian Harris met for breakfast a few minutes before the others appeared; and he took the opportunity of paying the parting civilities which he deemed indispensably necessary.

"I know not, Stiles," said he, "whether Allison has yet expressed her sense of your kindness in coming to us; but I am very certain you will not leave the house without receiving her thanks for it. The favour of your company has been much felt, I assure you. We know how little there is to tempt anyone to our humble abode. Our plain manner of living, our small rooms and few domestics, and the limited number of Playstation games we have available, must make Hunsford extremely dull to a young man like yourself; but I hope you will believe us grateful for the condescension, and that we have done everything in our power to prevent your spending your time unpleasantly."

Stiles was eager with his thanks and assurances of happiness. He had spent six weeks with great enjoyment; and the pleasure of being with Allison, and the kind attentions he had received, must make him feel the obliged. Mr. Harris was gratified, and with a more smiling solemnity replied:

"It gives me great pleasure to hear that you have passed your time not disagreeably. We have certainly done our best; and most fortunately having it in our power to introduce you to very superior society, and, from our connection with Rosings, the frequent means of varying the humble home scene, I think we may flatter ourselves that your Hunsford visit cannot have been entirely irksome. Our situation with regard to Lady Victoria's family is indeed the sort of extraordinary advantage and blessing which few can boast. You see on what a footing we are. You see how continually we are engaged there. In truth I must acknowledge that, with all the disadvantages of this humble parsonage, I should not think anyone abiding in it an object of compassion, while they are sharers of our intimacy at Rosings."

Words were insufficient for the elevation of his feelings; and he was obliged to walk about the room, while Stiles tried to unite civility and truth in a few short sentences and flailing arm gestures.

"You may, in fact, carry a very favourable report of us into Hertfordshire, my dear cousin. I flatter myself at least that you will be able to do so. Lady Victoria's great attentions to Allison you have been a daily witness of; and altogether I trust it does not appear that your friend has drawn an unfortunate - but on this point it will be as well to be silent. Only let me assure you, my dear Stiles, that I can from my heart most cordially wish you equal felicity in marriage. My dear Allison and I have but one mind and one way of thinking. There is in everything a most remarkable resemblance
of character and ideas between us. We seem to have been designed for each other."

Stiles could safely say that it was a great happiness where that was the case, and with equal sincerity could add, that he firmly believed and rejoiced in Adrian Harris’s domestic comforts. Stiles was not sorry, however, to have the recital of them interrupted by the lady from whom they sprang. Poor Allison! It was melancholy to leave her to such society! But she had chosen it with her eyes open; and though evidently regretting that her visitors were to go, she did not seem to ask for compassion. Her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms.

At length the taxi arrived to take them to the train station, the suitcases were placed in the trunk, the parcels placed within, and it was pronounced to be ready. After an affectionate parting between the friends, Stiles was attended to the vehicle by Mr. Harris, and as they walked down the garden he was commissioning Stiles with his best respects to all his family, not forgetting his thanks for the kindness he had received at Longbourn in the winter, and his compliments to Dr. and Mrs. Morrel-Deaton, though unknown. He then handed Stiles in, Maria followed, and the door was on the point of being closed, when he suddenly reminded them, with some consternation, that they had hitherto forgotten to leave any message for the ladies at Rosings.

"But," he added, "you will of course wish to have your humble respects delivered to them, with your grateful thanks for their kindness to you while you have been here."

Stiles made no objection; the door was then allowed to be shut, and the taxi drove off.

"Good gracious!" cried Maria, after a few minutes' silence, "it seems but a day or two since we first came! and yet how many things have happened!"

"A great many indeed," said her companion with a sigh.

"We have dined nine times at Rosings, besides drinking tea there twice! How much I shall have to tell!"

Stiles added privately, "And how much I shall have to conceal!"

Their journey was performed without much conversation, or any alarm; and within four hours of their leaving Hunsford they reached Dr. Deaton's house, where they were to remain a few days.

Scott looked well, and Stiles had little opportunity of studying his spirits, amidst the various engagements which the kindness of his aunt had reserved for them. But Scott was to go home with Stiles, and at Longbourn there would be leisure enough for observation.

It was not without an effort, meanwhile, that Stiles could wait even for Longbourn, before he told his brother of Mr. Derek's proposals. To know that he had the power of revealing what would so exceedingly astonish Scott, and must, at the same time, so highly gratify whatever of his own vanity he had not yet been able to reason away, was such a temptation to openness as nothing could have conquered but the state of indecision in which he remained as to the extent of what he should communicate; and his fear, if he once entered on the subject, of being hurried into repeating something of Isaac Lahey which might only grieve Scott further.
Their reception at home was most kind. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski rejoiced to see Scott in undiminished beauty; and more than once during dinner did Sheriff Stilinski say voluntarily to Stiles:

"I am glad you are come back, Stiles."

It was the second week in May, in which the three young persons set out together from Gracechurch Street for the town of ----, in Hertfordshire; and, as they drew near the appointed inn where Sheriff Stilinski’s car was to meet them, they quickly perceived, in token of the chauffeur’s punctuality, both Kanima and Jackson looking out of a dining-room up stairs. These two teenagers had been above an hour in the place, happily employed in visiting an opposite Macy’s branch, watching the locals skateboarding on the sidewalk, and dressing a salad and cucumber.

After welcoming their brothers, they triumphantly displayed a table set out with such cold meat, curly fries and buffalo wings as an inn larder usually affords, exclaiming, "Is not this nice? Is not this an agreeable surprise?"

"And we mean to treat you all," added Jackson, "but you must lend us the money, for we have just spent ours at the Macy’s out there." Then, showing his purchases--"Look here, I have bought this T shirt. I do not think it is very fetching; but I thought I might as well buy it as not. I shall shrink it in the wash as soon as I get home, and see if I can get it to mould against my abs any better."

And when his brothers abused it as ugly, he added, with perfect unconcern, "Oh! but there were two or three much uglier in the shop; and when I have got it to mould to my pecs, I think it will be very tolerable. Besides, it will not much signify what one wears this summer, after the ----shire have left Beacon Hills, and they are going in a fortnight."

"Are they indeed!" cried Stiles, with the greatest satisfaction.

"They are going to be encamped near Brighton; and I do so want papa to take us all there for the summer! It would be such a delicious scheme; and I dare say would hardly cost anything at all. Mamma would like to go too of all things! Only think what a miserable summer else we shall have!"

"Yes," thought Stiles, "that would be a delightful scheme indeed, and completely do for us at once. Good Heaven! Brighton, and a whole campful of soldiers, to us, who have been overset already by one poor regiment of militia, and the monthly raves of Beacon Hills!"

"Now I have got some news for you," said Jackson, as they sat down at table. "What do you think? It is excellent news - capital news - and about a certain person we all like!"

Scott and Stiles looked at each other, and the waiter was told he need not stay. Jackson laughed, and said:

"Aye, that is just like your formality and discretion. You thought the waiter must not hear, as if he cared! I dare say he often hears worse things said than I am going to say. But he is an ugly fellow! I
am glad he is gone. I never saw such a weird jawline in my life. Well, but now for my news; it is about dear Matt; too good for the waiter, is it not? There is no danger of Matt’s marrying that hunky mechanic. There's for you! The mechanic was injured in a freak accident under a car ramp and is gone down to his uncle at Liverpool: gone to stay and recover. Matt is safe."

"And the hunky mechanic is safe!" added Stiles; "safe from a connection imprudent as to fortune."

"He is a great fool for going away, if he liked Matt."

"But I hope there is no strong attachment on either side," said Scott.

"I am sure there is not on Matt’s. I will answer for it, he never cared three straws about the mechanic - who could about such a nasty greasy, vulgar thing?"

Stiles was shocked to think that, however incapable of such coarseness of expression himself, the coarseness of the sentiment was little other than his own chest had harboured and fancied liberal!

As soon as all had ate, and the elder ones paid, the car was ordered; and after some contrivance, the whole party, with all their suitcases, lap tops, and parcels, and the unwelcome addition of Kanima’s and Jackson’s purchases, were seated in it.

"How nicely we are all crammed in," cried Jackson. "I am glad I bought my T shirt, if it is only for the fun of having another plastic bag! Well, now let us be quite comfortable and snug, and talk and laugh all the way home. And in the first place, let us hear what has happened to you all since you went away. Have you seen any pleasant men? Have you had any flirting? I was in great hopes that one of you would have got a partner before you came back. Scott will be quite an old man soon, I declare. He is almost eighteen! Lord, how ashamed I should be of not having a partner before eighteen! My aunt Phillips wants you so to get mates, you can't think. She says Stiles had better have taken Adrian Harris; but I do not think there would have been any fun in it. Lord! how I should like to be married before any of you; and then I would chaperon you about to all the raves. Dear me! We had such a good piece of fun the other day at Colonel Finstock's. Kanima and me were to spend the day there, and Mrs. Finstock promised to have a little dance in the evening; (by the bye, Mrs. Finstock and me are such friends!) and so she asked the two Harringtons to come, but Harriet was ill, and so Pen was forced to come by herself; and then, what do you think we did? We dressed up Greenberg in drag on purpose to pass for a lady, only think what fun! Not a soul knew of it, but Colonel and Mrs. Finstock, and Kanima and me, except my aunt, for we were forced to borrow one of her gowns; and you cannot imagine how well Greenberg looked! When the officers of the ---- shire came in, they did not know him in the least. Lord! how I laughed! and so did Mrs. Finstock. I thought I should have died. And that made the men suspect something, and then they soon found out what was the matter."

With such kinds of histories of their parties and good jokes, did Jackson, assisted by Kanima’s hints and additions, endeavour to amuse his companions all the way to Longbourn. Stiles listened as little as he could, but there was no escaping the frequent mention of Matt’s name.

Their reception at home was most kind. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski rejoiced to see Scott in undiminished beauty; and more than once during dinner did Sheriff Stilinski say voluntarily to Stiles:

"I am glad you are come back, Stiles."

Their party in the dining-room was large, for almost all the Argents came to meet Maria and hear the news; and various were the subjects that occupied them: Sir Chris Silver was inquiring of Maria, after the welfare and poultry of his eldest daughter; Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was doubly engaged, on one hand collecting an account of the present fashions from Scott, who sat some way below her, and,
on the other, retailing them all to the younger Argents; and Jackson, in a voice rather louder than any other person's, was enumerating the various pleasures of the morning to anybody who would hear him.

"Oh! Lydia," said he, "I wish you had gone with us, for we had such fun! As we went along, Kanima and I hid in the footwell of the back seat, and pretended there was nobody in the car; and I should have gone so all the way, if Kanima had not been sick; and when we got to the George, I do think we behaved very handsomely, for we treated the other three with the nicest cold luncheon in the world, and if you would have gone, we would have treated you too. And then when we came away it was such fun! I thought we never should have got into the car. I was ready to die of laughter. And then we were so merry all the way home! we talked and laughed so loud, that anybody might have heard us ten miles off!"

To this Lydia very gravely replied, "Far be it from me, my dear brother, to depreciate such pleasures! They would doubtless be congenial with the generality of teenage minds. But I confess they would have no charms for me - I should infinitely prefer a book of suduko puzzles."

But of this answer Jackson heard not a word. He seldom listened to anybody for more than half a minute, and never attended to Lydia at all.

In the afternoon Jackson was urgent with the rest of the teenagers to walk to Beacon Hills, and to see how everybody went on; but Stiles steadily opposed the scheme. It should not be said that the McCall-Stilinskis could not be at home half a day before they were in pursuit of the officers. There was another reason too for his opposition. He dreaded seeing Matt again, and was resolved to avoid it as long as possible. The comfort to Stiles of the regiment's approaching removal was indeed beyond expression. In a fortnight they were to go - and once gone, Stiles hoped there could be nothing more to plague him on Matt's account.

Stiles had not been many hours at home before he found that the Brighton scheme, of which Jackson had given them a hint at the inn, was under frequent discussion between his parents. Stiles saw directly that his father had not the smallest intention of yielding; but the Sheriff's answers were at the same time so vague and equivocal, that his mother, though often disheartened, had never yet despaired of succeeding at last.
Stiles then spoke of the email, repeating the whole of its contents as far as they concerned Matt. What a stroke was this for poor Scott! Who would willingly have gone through the world without believing that so much wickedness existed in the whole race of mankind or werewolfkind, as was here collected in one individual.

Stiles’s impatience to acquaint Scott with what had happened could no longer be overcome; and at length, resolving to suppress every particular in which his brother was concerned, and preparing him to be surprised, he related to Scott the next morning the chief of the scene between Mr. Derek and himself.

Scott’s astonishment was soon lessened by the strong bromantic partiality which made any admiration of Stiles appear perfectly natural; and all surprise was shortly lost in other feelings. Scott was sorry that Mr. Derek should have delivered his sentiments in a manner so little suited to recommend them; but still more was he grieved for the unhappiness which his brother’s refusal must have given Mr. Derek.

"His being so sure of succeeding was wrong," said Scott, "and certainly ought not to have appeared; but consider how much it must increase his disappointment!"

"Indeed," replied Stiles, "I am heartily sorry for him; but he has other feelings, which will probably soon drive away his regard for me. You do not blame me, however, for refusing him?"

"Blame you! Oh, no."

"But you blame me for having spoken so warmly of Matt?"

"No - I do not know that you were wrong in saying what you did."

"But you will know it, when I tell you what happened the very next day."

Stiles then spoke of the email, repeating the whole of its contents as far as they concerned Matt. What a stroke was this for poor Scott! Who would willingly have gone through the world without believing that so much wickedness existed in the whole race of mankind or werewolfkind, as was here collected in one individual. Nor was Derek’s vindication, though grateful to Scott’s feelings, capable of consoling him for such discovery. Most earnestly did he labour to prove the probability of error, and seek to clear the one without involving the other.

"This will not do," said Stiles; "you never will be able to make both of them good for anything. Take your choice, but you must be satisfied with only one. There is but such a quantity of merit between them; just enough to make one good sort of werewolf or man; and of late it has been shifting about pretty much. For my part, I am inclined to believe it all Derek’s; but you shall do as you choose."

It was some time, however, before a smile could be extorted from Scott.

"I do not know when I have been more shocked," said he. "Matt so very bad! It is almost past belief. And poor Mr. Derek! Dear Stiles, only consider what he must have suffered. Such a disappointment!"
and with the knowledge of your ill opinion, too! and having to relate such a thing of his brother Danny! It is really too distressing. I am sure you must feel it so."

"Oh! no, my regret and compassion are all done away by seeing you so full of both. I know you will do him such ample justice, that I am growing every moment more unconcerned and indifferent. Your profusion makes me saving; and if you lament over him much longer, my heart will be as light as a feather."

"Poor Matt! There is such an expression of goodness in his countenance! Such an openness and gentleness in his manner!"

"There certainly was some great mismanagement in the education of those two young men. One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it."

"I never thought Mr. Derek so deficient in the appearance of it as you used to do. I always thought that his glare and stubble were a disguise"

"And yet I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to him, and wanting him dead, without any reason. It is such a spur to one's genius, such an opening for wit, to have a dislike of that kind. One may be continually abusive without saying anything just; but one cannot always be laughing at a werewolf without now and then stumbling on something witty."

"Stiles, when you first read that email, I am sure you could not treat the matter as you do now."

"Indeed, I could not. I was uncomfortable enough, I may say unhappy. And with no one to speak to about what I felt, no Scott to comfort me and say that I had not been so very weak and vain and nonsensical as I knew I had! Oh! how I wanted you!"

"How unfortunate that you should have used such very strong expressions in speaking of Matt to Mr. Derek, for now they do appear wholly undeserved."

"Certainly. But the misfortune of speaking with bitterness is a most natural consequence of the prejudices I had been encouraging. There is one point on which I want your advice. I want to be told whether I ought, or ought not, to make our acquaintances in general understand Matt's character."

Scott paused a little, and then replied, "Surely there can be no occasion for exposing him so dreadfully. What is your opinion?"

"That it ought not to be attempted. Mr. Derek has not authorised me to make his communication public. On the contrary, every particular relative to his brother was meant to be kept as much as possible to myself; and if I endeavour to undeceive people as to the rest of his conduct, who will believe me? It is not as if Matt has murdered anyone. The general prejudice against Mr. Derek is so violent, and he is so widely regarded as a 'person of interest', that it would be the death of half the good people in Beacon Hills to attempt to place him in an amiable light. I am not equal to it. Matt will soon be gone; and therefore it will not signify to anyone here what he really is. Some time hence it will be all found out, and then we may laugh at their stupidity in not knowing it before. At present I will say nothing about it."

"You are quite right. To have his errors made public might ruin him for ever. He is now, perhaps, sorry for what he has done, and anxious to re-establish a character. We must not make him desperate."

The tumult of Stiles’s mind was allayed by this conversation. He had got rid of two of the secrets which had weighed on him for a fortnight, and was certain of a willing listener in Scott, whenever he
might wish to talk again of either. But there was still something lurking behind, of which prudence forbade the disclosure. He dared not relate the other half of Mr. Derek’s email, nor explain to his brother how sincerely he had been valued by Isaac. Here was knowledge in which no one could partake; and Stiles was sensible that nothing less than a perfect understanding between the parties could justify him in throwing off this last encumbrance of mystery. "And then," said Stiles, "if that very improbable event should ever take place, I shall merely be able to tell what Isaac may tell in a much more agreeable manner himself. The liberty of communication cannot be mine till it has lost all its value!"

Stiles was now, on being settled at home, at leisure to observe the real state of his brother's spirits. Scott was not happy. He still cherished a very tender affection for Isaac. Having never even fancied himself in love before, his regard had all the warmth of first attachment, and, from his age and disposition, greater steadiness than most first attachments often boast; and so fervently did he value Isaac’s remembrance, and prefer him to every other man, that all Scott’s good sense, and all his attention to the feelings of his friends, were requisite to check the indulgence of those regrets which must have been injurious to his own health and their tranquillity.

"Well, Stiles," said Mrs. McCall-Stilinski one day, "what is your opinion now of this sad business of Scott’s? For my part, I am determined never to speak of it again to anybody. I told my sister Phillips so the other day. But I cannot find out that Scott saw anything of him in London. Well, Isaac is a very undeserving young beta - and I do not suppose there's the least chance in the world of Scott ever getting him now. There is no talk of his coming to Netherfield again in the summer; and I have inquired of everybody, too, who is likely to know."

"I do not believe he will ever live at Netherfield any more."

"Oh well! it is just as he chooses. Nobody wants him to come. Though I shall always say he used my son extremely ill; and if I was Scott, I would not have put up with it. Well, my comfort is, I am sure Scott will die of a broken heart; and then he will be sorry for what he has done."

But as Stiles could not receive comfort from any such expectation, he made no answer.

"Well, Stiles," continued his mother, soon afterwards, "and so the Harrises live very comfortable, do they? Well, well, I only hope it will last. And what sort of table do they keep? Allison is an excellent manager, I dare say. If she is half as sharp as her mother, she is saving enough. There is nothing extravagant in their housekeeping, I dare say."

"No, nothing at all."

"A great deal of good management, depend upon it. Yes, yes. They will take care not to outrun their income. They will never be distressed for money. Well, much good may it do them! And so, I suppose, they often talk of having Longbourn when your father is dead. They look upon it as quite their own, I dare say, whenever that happens."

"It was a subject which they could not mention before me."

"No; it would have been strange if they had; but I make no doubt they often talk of it between themselves. Well, if they can be easy with an estate that is not lawfully their own, so much the better. I should be ashamed of having one that was only entailed on me."
"Jackson will never be easy until he has exposed himself and his finely toned body on a beach in some public place or other, and we can never expect him to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to his family as under the present circumstances."

The first week of their return was soon gone. The second began. It was the last of the regiment's stay in Beacon Hills, and all the young people in the neighbourhood were drooping apace. The dejection was almost universal. Scott and Stiles alone were still able to eat, drink, play videogames and sleep, and pursue the usual course of their employments. Very frequently were they reproached for this insensibility by Kanima and Jackson, whose own misery was extreme, and who could not comprehend such hard-heartedness in any of the family.

"Good Heaven! what is to become of us? What are we to do?" would they often exclaim in the bitterness of woe. "How can you be smiling so, Stiles?"

Their affectionate mother shared all their grief; she remembered what she had herself endured on a similar occasion, five-and-twenty years ago.

"I am sure," said she, "I cried for two days together when Colonel Cupcake’s regiment went away. I thought I should have broken my heart."

"I am sure I shall break mine," said Jackson.

"If one could but go to Brighton!" observed Mrs. McCall-Stilinski.

"Oh, yes! - if one could but go to Brighton! But papa is so disagreeable."

"A little sea-bathing would set me up forever."

"And my aunt Phillips is sure it would do me a great deal of good, and help clear up my skin problem and overcome my fear of water" added Kanima.

Such were the kind of lamentations resounding perpetually through Longbourn House. Stiles tried to be diverted by them; but all sense of pleasure was lost in shame. He felt anew the justice of Mr. Derek’s objections; and never had he been so much disposed to pardon his interference in the views of his friend.

But the gloom of Jackson’s prospect was shortly cleared away; for he received an invitation from Mrs. Finstock, the wife of the colonel of the regiment, to accompany her to Brighton. This invaluable friend was a very young woman, and very lately married. A resemblance in good humour and good spirits had recommended her and Jackson to each other, and out of their three months' acquaintance they had been intimate two.

The rapture of Jackson on this occasion, his adoration of Mrs. Finstock, the delight of Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, and the mortification of Kanima, are scarcely to be described. Wholly inattentive to his sister's feelings, Jackson flew about the house in restless ecstasy, calling for everyone's congratulations, and laughing and talking with more violence than ever; whilst the luckless Kanima
continued in the parlour repined at her fate in terms as unreasonable as her accent was peevish.

"I cannot see why Mrs. Finstock should not ask me as well as Jackson," said she, "Though I am not her particular friend. I have just as much right to be asked as Jackson has, and more too, for I am two hours older."

In vain did Stiles attempt to make her reasonable, and Scott to make her resigned. As for Stiles himself, this invitation was so far from exciting in him the same feelings as in his mother and Jackson, that he considered it as the death warrant of all possibility of common sense for the latter; and detestable as such a step must make him were it known, he could not help secretly advising his father not to let Jackson go. Stiles represented to the Sheriff all the improprieties of Jackson's general behaviour, the little advantage he could derive from the friendship of such a woman as Mrs. Finstock, and the probability of his being yet more imprudent with such a companion at Brighton, where the temptations must be greater than at home. Sheriff Stilinski heard Stiles attentively, and then said:

"Jackson will never be easy until he has exposed himself and his finely toned body on a beach in some public place or other, and we can never expect him to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to his family as under the present circumstances."

"If you were aware," said Stiles, "of the very great disadvantage to us all which must arise from the public notice of Jackson’s unguarded and imprudent manner - nay, which has already arisen from it, I am sure you would judge differently in the affair."

"Already arisen?" repeated Sheriff Stilinski. "What, has Jackson frightened away some of your lovers? Poor little Stiles! But do not be cast down. Such squeamish youths as cannot bear to be connected with a little absurdity are not worth a regret. Come, let me see the list of pitiful fellows who have been kept aloof by Jackson's folly."

"Indeed you are mistaken. I have no such injuries to resent. It is not of particular, but of general evils, which I am now complaining. Our importance, our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Jackson's character. Excuse me, for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking Jackson’s exuberant spirits, and of teaching him that his present pursuits are not to be the business of his life, he will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. His character will be fixed, and he will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made himself or his family ridiculous; a flirt, too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable body; and, from the ignorance and emptiness of his mind, and the nastiness of his character, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which his rage for admiration and being front line will excite. In this danger Kanima also is comprehended. She will follow wherever Jackson leads. Vain, ignorant, idle, with a tendency to violence and revenge, and absolutely uncontrolled! Oh! my dear father, can you suppose it possible that they will not be censured and despised wherever they are known, and that their siblings will not be often involved in the disgrace?"

Sheriff Stilinski saw that Stiles’s whole heart was in the subject, and affectionately taking his hand said in reply:

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my boy. Wherever you and Scott are known you must be respected and valued; and you will not appear to less advantage for having a couple of - or I may say, three - very silly siblings. We shall have no peace at Longbourn if Jackson does not go to Brighton. Let him go, then. Colonel Finstock is a sensible if slightly peculiar man, and will keep Jackson out of any real mischief; and he is luckily too poor to be an object of prey to anybody. At Brighton he will be of less importance even as a common flirt than he has been here. The officers will find people better worth
their notice. Let us hope, therefore, that his being there may teach him his own insignificance. At any rate, he cannot grow many degrees worse, without authorising us to lock him up in a police station wagon for the rest of his life."

With this answer Stiles was forced to be content; but his own opinion continued the same, and he left his father disappointed and sorry. It was not in his nature, however, to increase his vexations by dwelling on them. He was confident of having performed his duty, and to fret over unavoidable evils, or augment them by anxiety, was no part of his disposition.

Had Jackson and their mother known the substance of his conference with his father, their indignation would hardly have found expression in their united volubility. In Jackson’s imagination, a visit to Brighton comprised every possibility of earthly happiness. He saw, with the creative eye of fancy, the streets of that gay bathing-place covered with officers. He saw herself and his cheekbones the object of attention, to tens and to scores of them at present unknown. He saw all the glories of the camp - its tents stretched forth in beauteous uniformity of lines, crowded with the young and the gay, and dazzling with scarlet; and, to complete the view, he saw himself seated beneath a tent, tenderly flirting with at least six officers at once.

Had Jackson known his brother sought to tear him from such prospects and such realities as these, what would have been his sensations? They could have been understood only by his mother, who might have felt nearly the same. Jackson's going to Brighton was all that consoled Mrs. McCall-Stilinski for her melancholy conviction of her husband's never intending to go there himself.

But they were entirely ignorant of what had passed; and their raptures continued, with little intermission, to the very day of Jackson's leaving home.

Stiles was now to see Matt for the last time. Having been frequently in company with him since his return from Rosings, agitation was pretty well over; the agitations of formal partiality entirely so. Stiles had even learnt to detect, in the very gentleness which had first delighted him, an affectation and a sameness to disgust and weary. In Matt’s present behaviour to himself, moreover, he had a fresh source of displeasure, for the inclination Matt soon testified of renewing those intentions which had marked the early part of their acquaintance could only serve, after what had since passed, to provoke him. Stiles lost all concern for him in finding himself thus selected as the object of such idle and frivolous gallantry; and while he steadily repressed it, could not but feel the reproof contained in Matt’s believing, that however long, and for whatever cause, his attentions had been withdrawn, Stiles’s vanity would be gratified, and his preference secured at any time by their renewal.

On the very last day of the regiment's remaining at Beacon Hills, he dined, with other of the officers, at Longbourn; and so little was Stiles disposed to part from him in good humour, that on his making some inquiry as to the manner in which his time had passed at Hunsford, he mentioned Colonel Miguel’s and Mr. Derek’s having both spent three weeks at Rosings, and asked him, if he was acquainted with the former.

Matt looked surprised, displeased, alarmed; but with a moment's recollection and a returning smile, replied, that he had formerly seen him often; and, after observing that he was a very gentlemanlike man, asked Stiles how he had liked him. Stiles’s answer was warmly in his favour. With an air of indifference he soon afterwards added:

"How long did you say he was at Rosings?"

"Nearly three weeks."

"And you saw him frequently?"
"Yes, almost every day."

"His manners are very different from his cousin's."

"Yes, very different. But I think Mr. Derek improves upon acquaintance."

"Indeed!" cried Matt with a look which did not escape Stiles. "And pray, may I ask? - " But checking himself, he added, in a gayer tone, "Is it in address that he improves? Has he deigned to add aught of civility to his ordinary style? Has he stopped glowering and throwing people into inanimate objects? -for I dare not hope," he continued in a lower and more serious tone, "that he is improved in essentials."

"Oh, no!" said Stiles. "In essentials, I believe, he is very much what he ever was."

While he spoke, Matt looked as if scarcely knowing whether to rejoice over his words, or to distrust their meaning. There was a something in his countenance which made him listen with an apprehensive and anxious attention, while Stiles added:

"When I said that he improved on acquaintance, I did not mean that his mind or his manners were in a state of improvement, but that, from knowing him better, his disposition was better understood."

Matt's alarm now appeared in a heightened complexion and agitated fiddling with the camera around his neck; for a few minutes he was silent, till, shaking off his embarrassment, he turned to Stiles again, and said in the gentlest of accents:

"You, who so well know my feeling towards Mr. Derek, will readily comprehend how sincerely I must rejoice that he is wise enough to assume even the appearance of what is right. His pride, in that direction, may be of service, if not to himself, to many others, for it must only deter him from such foul misconduct as I have suffered by. I only fear that the sort of cautiousness to which you, I imagine, have been alluding, is merely adopted on his visits to his aunt, of whose good opinion and judgement he stands much in awe. His fear of her and her scary eyes has always operated, I know, when they were together; and a good deal is to be imputed to his wish of forwarding the match with Miss D’Argent, which I am certain he has very much at heart."

Stiles could not repress a smile at this, but he answered only by a slight inclination of the head. He saw that Matt wanted to engage him on the old subject of his grievances, and he was in no humour to indulge him. The rest of the evening passed with the appearance, on his side, of usual cheerfulness, but with no further attempt to distinguish Stiles; and they parted at last with mutual civility, and possibly a mutual desire of never meeting again.

When the party broke up, Jackson returned with Mrs. Finstock to Beacon Hills, from whence they were to set out early the next morning. The separation between him and his family was rather noisy than pathetic. Kanima was the only one who shed tears; but she did weep from vexation and envy. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was diffuse in her good wishes for the felicity of her son, and impressive in her injunctions that he should not miss the opportunity of enjoying himself as much as possible - advice which there was every reason to believe would be well attended to; and in the clamorous happiness of Jackson himself in bidding farewell, the more gentle adieu of his elder brothers were uttered without being heard.
Volume 2 Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Stiles said no more - but his mind could not acquiesce. The possibility of meeting Mr. Derek, while viewing the place, instantly occurred. It would be dreadful! Stiles blushed at the very idea.

Had Stiles’s opinion been all drawn from his own family, he could not have formed a very pleasing opinion of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort. His father, captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of a good pair of pins which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown. But Sheriff Stilinski was not of a disposition to seek comfort for the disappointment which his own imprudence had brought on, in any of those pleasures which too often console the unfortunate for their folly or their vice. He was fond of the country, of burgers and of books; and from these tastes had arisen his principal enjoyments. To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement. This is not the sort of happiness which a man would in general wish to owe to his wife; but where other powers of entertainment are wanting, the true philosopher will derive benefit from such as are given.

Stiles, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of his father's behaviour as a husband. He had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of himself, he endeavoured to forget what he could not overlook, and to banish from his thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. But Stiles had never felt so strongly as now the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents, which, rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his children, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife.

When Stiles had rejoiced over Matt’s departure he found little other cause for satisfaction in the loss of the regiment. Their parties abroad were less varied than before, and at home he had a mother and sister whose constant repinings at the dullness of everything around them threw a real gloom over their domestic circle; and, though Kanima might in time regain her natural degree of sense, since the disturbers of her brain were removed, Jackson, from whose disposition greater evil might be apprehended, was likely to be hardened in all his folly and assurance by a situation of such double danger as a watering-place and a camp. Upon the whole, therefore, Stiles found, what has been sometimes found before, that an event to which he had been looking with impatient desire did not, in taking place, bring all the satisfaction he had promised himself. It was consequently necessary to name some other period for the commencement of actual felicity - to have some other point on which his wishes and hopes might be fixed, and by again enjoying the pleasure of anticipation, console himself for the present, and prepare for another disappointment. His tour to the Lakes was now the object of his happiest thoughts; it was his best consolation for all the uncomfortable hours which the discontentedness of his mother and Kanima made inevitable; and could he have included his bro Scott in the scheme, every part of it would have been perfect.

"But it is fortunate," thought Stiles, "that I have something to wish for. Were the whole arrangement
complete, my disappointment would be certain. But here, by carrying with me one ceaseless source of regret in my brother's absence, I may reasonably hope to have all my expectations of pleasure realised. A scheme of which every part promises delight can never be successful; and general disappointment is only warded off by the defence of some little peculiar vexation."

When Jackson went away he promised to write very often and very minutely to his mother and Kanima; but his emails were always long expected, and always very short. Those to his mother contained little else than that they were just returned from the bowling alley, where such and such officers had attended them, and where he had seen such sports cars as made him quite wild; that he had a new T shirt, or a new pair of jeans, which he would have described more fully, but was obliged to leave off in a violent hurry, as Mrs. Finstock called him, and they were going off to the camp; and from his correspondence with his sister, there was still less to be learnt - for his emails and texts to Kanima, though rather longer, were much too full of bold fonts and dubious photographs and gifs to be made public.

After the first fortnight or three weeks of Jackson’s absence, health, good humour, and cheerfulness began to reappear at Longbourn. Everything wore a happier aspect. The families who had been in town for the winter came back again, and summer finery and summer engagements arose. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was restored to her usual querulous serenity; and, by the middle of June, Kanima was so much recovered as to be able to enter Beacon Hills without tears; an event of such happy promise as to make Stiles hope that by the following Christmas she might be so tolerably reasonable as not to mention an officer above once a day, unless, by some cruel and malicious arrangement at the War Office, another regiment should be quartered in Beacon Hills.

The time fixed for the beginning of their northern tour was now fast approaching, and a fortnight only was wanting of it, when an email arrived from Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, which at once delayed its commencement and curtailed its extent. Dr. Deaton would be prevented by business from setting out till a fortnight later in July, and must be in London again within a month, and as that left too short a period for them to go so far, and see so much as they had proposed, or at least to see it with the leisure and comfort they had built on, they were obliged to give up the Lakes, and substitute a more contracted tour, and, according to the present plan, were to go no farther northwards than Derbyshire. In that county there was enough to be seen to occupy the chief of their three weeks; and to Mrs. Morrell-Deaton it had a peculiarly strong attraction. The town where she had formerly passed some years of her life, and where they were now to spend a few days, was probably as great an object of her curiosity as all the celebrated beauties of Matlock, Chatsworth, Dovedale, or the Peak.

Stiles was excessively disappointed; he had set his heart on seeing the Lakes, and still thought there might have been time enough. But it was his business to be satisfied - and certainly his temper to be happy; and all was soon right again.

With the mention of Derbyshire there were many ideas connected. It was impossible for Stiles to see the word without thinking of Pemberley and its owner. "But surely," said he, "I may enter his county with impunity, and rob it of a few petrified spars without his perceiving me."

The period of expectation was now doubled. Four weeks were to pass away before his uncle and aunt's arrival. But they did pass away, and Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, with their four children, did at length appear at Longbourn. The children, two girls of six and eight years old, and two younger boy werewolves, were to be left under the particular care of their cousin Scott, who was the general favourite, and whose steady sense, veterinarian skill and sweetness of temper exactly adapted him for attending to them in every way - teaching them, playing with them, and loving them.

The Morrell-Deatons stayed only one night at Longbourn, and set off the next morning with Stiles in pursuit of novelty and amusement. One enjoyment was certain - that of suitableness of companions; a
suitableness which comprehended health and temper to bear inconveniences--cheerfulness to
enhance every pleasure--and affection and intelligence, which might supply it among themselves if
there were disappointments abroad.

It is not the object of this work to give a description of Derbyshire, nor of any of the remarkable
places through which their route thither lay; Oxford, Blenheim, Warwick, Kenilworth, Birmingham,
etc. are sufficiently known. A small part of Derbyshire is all the present concern. To the little town of
Mystic Falls, the scene of Mrs. Morrell-Deaton's former residence, and where she had lately learned
some acquaintance still remained, they bent their steps, after having seen all the principal wonders of
the country; and within five miles of Mystic Falls, Stiles found from his aunt that Pemberley was
situated. It was not in their direct road, nor more than a mile or two out of it. In talking over their
route the evening before, Mrs. Morrell-Deaton expressed an inclination to see the place again. Dr.
Deaton declared his willingness, and Stiles was applied to for his approbation.

"My love, should not you like to see a place of which you have heard so much?" said his aunt; "a
place, too, with which so many of your acquaintances are connected. Matt passed all his youth there,
you know."

Stiles was distressed. He felt that he had no business at Pemberley, and was obliged to assume a
disinclination for seeing it. He must own that he was tired of seeing great houses; after going over so
many, he really had no pleasure in fine carpets or satin curtains.

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton abused his stupidity. "If it were merely a fine house richly furnished," said she,
"I should not care about it myself; but the grounds are delightful. They have some of the finest
woods in the country."

Stiles said no more - but his mind could not acquiesce. The possibility of meeting Mr. Derek, while
viewing the place, instantly occurred. It would be dreadful! Stiles blushed at the very idea, and
thought it would be better to speak openly to his aunt than to run such a risk. But against this there
were objections; and he finally resolved that it could be the last resource, if his private inquiries to the
absence of the family were unfavourably answered.

Accordingly, when Stiles retired at night, he asked the chambermaid whether Pemberley were not a
very fine place? what was the name of its proprietor? and, with no little alarm, whether the family
were down for the summer? A most welcome negative followed the last question - and his alarms
now being removed, he was at leisure to feel a great deal of curiosity to see the house himself; and
when the subject was revived the next morning, and he was again applied to, could readily answer,
and with a proper air of indifference, that he had not really any dislike to the scheme. To Pemberley,
therefore, they were to go.
Stiles blushed again and again and flailed his arms around over the perverseness of the meeting. And Derek’s behaviour, so strikingly altered - what could it mean? That he should even speak to Stiles was amazing! - but to speak with such civility, to inquire after his family! Never in his life had Stiles seen Derek’s manners so little dignified, never had Derek spoken with such gentleness as on this unexpected meeting. He had not so much as slammed Stiles against a wall, even though the wall to the kitchen garden had been within easy reach.

Stiles, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance of Pemberley Woods with some perturbation; and when at length they turned in at the lodge, his spirits were in a high flutter.

The park was very large, and contained great variety of ground. They entered it in one of its lowest points, and drove for some time through a beautiful wood stretching over a wide extent.

Stiles’s mind was too full for conversation, but he saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half-a-mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal nor falsely adorned. Stiles was delighted. He had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment Stiles felt that to be master of Pemberley might be something!

They descended the hill, crossed the bridge, and drove to the door; and, while examining the nearer aspect of the house, all his apprehension of meeting its owner returned. Stiles dreaded lest the chambermaid had been mistaken. On applying to see the place, they were admitted into the hall; and Stiles, as they waited for the housekeeper, had leisure to wonder at his being where he was.

The housekeeper came; a respectable-looking elderly beta, much less fine, and more civil, than Stiles had any notion of finding him. They followed him into the dining-parlour. It was a large, well proportioned room, handsomely fitted up. Stiles, after slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its prospect. The hill, crowned with wood, which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and he looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks and the winding of the valley, as far as he could trace it, with delight. As they passed into other rooms these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen. The rooms were lofty and handsome, and their furniture suitable to the fortune of its proprietor; but Stiles saw, with admiration of Derek’s taste, that it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendour, and more real elegance and sombre (principally black leather) decorating scheme, than the furniture of Rosings.

"And of this place," thought Stiles, "I might have been master! With these rooms I might now have been familiarly acquainted! Instead of viewing them as a stranger, I might have rejoiced in them as
my own, and welcomed to them as visitors my uncle and aunt. But no," —recollecting himself - "that
could never be; my uncle and aunt would have been lost to me; I should not have been allowed to
invite them."

This was a lucky recollection - it saved him from something very like regret.

Stiles longed to inquire of the housekeeper whether his alpha was really absent, but had not the
courage for it. At length however, the question was asked by his uncle; and he turned away with
alarm, while Peter Hale replied that he was, adding, "But we expect him to-morrow, with a large
party of friends." How rejoiced was Stiles that their own journey had not by any circumstance been
delayed a day!

His aunt now called him to look at a photograph. Stiles approached and saw the likeness of Matt,
suspended, amongst several other small pictures, over the mantelpiece. His aunt asked him,
smilingly, how he liked it. The housekeeper came forward, and told them it was a picture of a young
gentleman, the son of his late master's steward, who had been brought up by him at his own expense.
"He is now gone into the army," he added; "but I am afraid he has turned out very wild."

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton looked at her nephew with a smile, but Stiles could not return it.

"And that," said Peter Hale, pointing to another of the photographs, "is my master - and very like
him. It was taken at the same time as the other - about eight years ago."

"I have heard much of your master's fine person," said Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, looking at the picture;
"it is a handsome face. But, Stiles, you can tell us whether it is like or not."

Peter Hale’s respect for Stiles seemed to increase on this intimation of his knowing his alpha.

"Does that young man know Mr. Derek?"

Stiles coloured, and said: "A little."

"And do not you think him a very handsome gentleman, sir?"

"Yes, very handsome."

"I am sure I know none so handsome; but in the gallery up stairs you will see a finer, larger picture of
him than this. This room was my late master's favourite room, and these miniatures are just as they
used to be then. He was very fond of them."

This accounted to Stiles for Matt's being among them.

Peter Hale then directed their attention to one of Danny, taken when he was only eight years old.

"And is Danny as handsome as his brother?" said Mrs. Morrell-Deaton.

"Oh! Yes - the handsomest young man that ever was seen; and so accomplished! He plays lacrosse
all day long. In the gym is a new weights machine just come down for him - a present from my
master; Danny comes here to-morrow with him."

Dr. Deaton, whose manners were very easy and pleasant, encouraged Peter’s communicativeness by
his questions and remarks; Peter Hale, either by pride or attachment, had evidently great pleasure in
talking of his alpha and his alpha’s brother.

"Is your master much at Pemberley in the course of the year?"
"Not so much as I could wish, sir; but I dare say he may spend half his time here; and Danny is always down for the summer months."

"Except," thought Stiles, "when he goes to Ramsgate."

"If your master would marry, you might see more of him."

"Yes, sir; but I do not know when that will be. I do not know who is good enough for him."

Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton smiled. Stiles could not help saying, "It is very much to his credit, I am sure, that you should think so."

"I say no more than the truth, and everybody will say that knows him," replied the other. Stiles thought this was going pretty far; and he listened with increasing astonishment as the housekeeper added, "I have never known a cross word from him in my life, and I have known him ever since he was born."

This was praise, of all others most extraordinary, most opposite to Stiles's ideas. That Mr. Derek was a Sourwolf had been his firmest opinion. His keenest attention was awakened; he longed to hear more, and was grateful to his uncle for saying:

"There are very few people of whom so much can be said. You are lucky in having such an alpha."

"Yes, sir, I know I am. If I were to go through the world, I could not meet with a better. But I have always observed, that they who are good-natured when cubs, are good-natured when they grow up; and he was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted wolf-cub in the world."

Stiles almost stared at the housekeeper. "Can this be Mr. Derek?" thought he.

"His father was an excellent alpha," said Mrs. Morrell-Deaton.

"Yes, ma'am, that he was indeed; and his son will be just like him – just as affable to the poor and tolerant of omegas."

Stiles listened, wondered, doubted, and was impatient for more. Peter Hale could interest him on no other point. The housekeeper related the subjects of the pictures, the dimensions of the rooms, and the price of the furniture, in vain. Dr. Deaton, highly amused by the kind of family prejudice to which he attributed his excessive commendation of his master, soon led again to the subject; and Peter dwelt with energy on his many merits as they proceeded together up the great staircase.

"He is the best landlord, and the best alpha," said he, "that ever lived; not like the wild young wolves nowadays, who think of nothing but themselves. There is not one of his tenants, pack or servants but will give him a good name. Some people call him proud; but I am sure I never saw anything of it. To my fancy, it is only because he does not howl away like other young wolves."

"In what an amiable light does this place him!" thought Stiles.

"This fine account of him," whispered his aunt as they walked, "is not quite consistent with his behaviour to our poor friend."

"Perhaps we might be deceived."

"That is not very likely; our authority was too good."

On reaching the spacious lobby above they were shown into a very pretty sitting-room, lately fitted
up with greater elegance and lightness than the apartments below; and were informed that it was but just done to give pleasure to Danny, who had taken a liking to the room when last at Pemberley.

"He is certainly a good brother," said Stiles, as he walked towards one of the windows.

Peter Hale anticipated Danny's delight, when he should enter the room. "And this is always the way with him," he added. "Whatever can give his brother any pleasure is sure to be done in a moment. There is nothing he would not do for him."

The picture-gallery, and two or three of the principal bedrooms, were all that remained to be shown. In the former were many good paintings and photographs; but Stiles knew nothing of the art; and from such as had been already visible below, he had willingly turned to look at some prints of Danny's, derived from Photoshop, whose subjects were usually more interesting, and also more intelligible.

In the gallery there were many family portraits, but they could have little to fix the attention of a stranger. Stiles walked in quest of the only face whose features would be known to him. At last it arrested him - and he beheld a striking resemblance to Mr. Derek, with such a smile over the face as he remembered to have sometimes seen when he looked at him. Mr. Derek was standing shirtless, in front of Pemberley lake, dripping with water having evidently just dived in. Stiles stood several minutes before the picture, in earnest contemplation, and returned to it again before they quitted the gallery. Peter Hale informed them that it had been taken in his father's lifetime.

There was certainly at this moment, in Stiles's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original than he had ever felt at the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed on him by Peter Hale was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, an alpha, he considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship! — how much of pleasure or pain was it in his power to bestow! - how much of good or evil must be done by him! Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character, and as Stiles stood before the photo on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon himself, Stiles thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; he remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression.

When all of the house that was open to general inspection had been seen, they returned downstairs, and, taking leave of the housekeeper, were consigned over to the gardener, who met them at the hall-door.

As they walked across the hall towards the river, Stiles turned back to look again; his uncle and aunt stopped also, and while the former was conjecturing as to the date of the building, the owner of it himself suddenly came forward from the road, which led behind it to the garages. Stiles was able to catch a glimpse of a Camaro parked to the side of the house.

They were within twenty yards of each other, and so abrupt was his appearance, that it was impossible to avoid his sight. Their eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of both were overspread with the deepest blush. He absolutely started, and for a moment seemed immovable from surprise; but shortly recovering himself, advanced towards the party, and spoke to Stiles, if not in terms of perfect composure, at least of perfect civility.

Stiles had instinctively turned away, flailing slightly in surprise; but stopping on his approach, received his compliments with an embarrassment impossible to be overcome. Had his first appearance, or his resemblance to the picture they had just been examining, been insufficient to assure the other two that they now saw Mr. Derek, the gardener's expression of surprise, on beholding his master, must immediately have told it. They stood a little aloof while he was talking to
their nephew, who, astonished and confused, scarcely dared lift his eyes to his face, and knew not what answer he returned to his civil inquiries after his family. Amazed at the alteration of Derek’s manner since they last parted, every sentence that he uttered was increasing Stiles’s embarrassment; and every idea of the impropriety of his being found there recurring to his mind, the few minutes in which they continued were some of the most uncomfortable in his life. Nor did Mr. Derek seem much more at ease; when he spoke, his accent had none of its usual sedateness; and he repeated his inquiries as to the time of Stiles having left Longbourn, and of his having stayed in Derbyshire, so often, and in so hurried a way, as plainly spoke the distraction of his own thoughts.

At length every idea seemed to fail him; and, after standing a few moments without saying a word, he suddenly recollected himself, and took leave.

The others then joined him, and expressed admiration of Mr Derek’s figure; but Stiles heard not a word, and wholly engrossed by his own feelings, followed them in silence. He was overpowered by shame and vexation. His coming there was the most unfortunate, the most ill-judged thing in the world! How strange it must appear to Mr. Derek! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a man! It might seem as if he had purposely thrown himself in his way again! Oh! Why had Stiles come? Or, why did Mr. Derek thus come a day before he was expected? Had they been only ten minutes sooner, they should have been beyond the reach of his discrimination; for it was plain that he was that moment arrived - that moment alighted from his Camaro. Stiles blushed again and again and flailed his arms around over the perverseness of the meeting. And Derek’s behaviour, so strikingly altered - what could it mean? That he should even speak to Stiles was amazing! - but to speak with such civility, to inquire after his family! Never in his life had Stiles seen Derek’s manners so little dignified, never had Derek spoken with such gentleness as on this unexpected meeting. He had not so much as slammed Stiles against a wall, even though the wall to the kitchen garden had been within easy reach. What a contrast did it offer to his last address in Rosings Park, when he sent his email to Stiles’s smartphone! Stiles knew not what to think, or how to account for it.

They had now entered a beautiful walk by the side of the water, and every step was bringing forward a nobler fall of ground, or a finer reach of the woods to which they were approaching; but it was some time before Stiles was sensible of any of it; and, though he answered mechanically to the repeated appeals of his uncle and aunt, and seemed to direct his eyes to such objects as they pointed out, he distinguished no part of the scene. His thoughts were all fixed on that one spot of Pemberley House, whichever it might be, where Mr. Derek then was. Stiles longed to know what at the moment was passing in Derek’s mind – in what manner Derek thought of him, and whether, in defiance of everything, he was still dear to him. Perhaps Derek had been civil only because he felt himself at ease; yet there had been that in his voice which was not like ease. Whether he had felt more of pain or of pleasure in seeing Stiles, Stiles could not tell, but he certainly had not seen Stiles with composure.

At length, however, the remarks of his companions on his absence of mind aroused Stiles, and he felt the necessity of appearing more like himself.

They entered the woods, and bidding adieu to the river for a while, ascended some of the higher grounds; when, in spots where the opening of the trees gave the eye power to wander, were many charming views of the valley, the opposite hills, with the long range of woods overspreading many, and occasionally part of the stream. Dr. Deaton expressed a wish of going round the whole park, but feared it might be beyond a walk. With a triumphant smile they were told that it was ten miles round. It settled the matter; and they pursued the accustomed circuit; which brought them again, after some time, in a descent among hanging woods, to the edge of the water, and one of its narrowest parts. They crossed it by a simple bridge, in character with the general air of the scene; it was a spot less adorned than any they had yet visited; and the valley, here contracted into a glen, allowed room only for the stream, and a narrow walk amidst the rough coppice-wood which bordered it. Stiles longed to
explore its windings; but when they had crossed the bridge, and perceived their distance from the house, Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, who was not a great walker, could go no farther, and thought only of returning to the car as quickly as possible. Her nephew was, therefore, obliged to submit, and they took their way towards the house on the opposite side of the river, in the nearest direction; but their progress was slow, for Dr. Deaton, though seldom able to indulge the taste, was very fond of fishing, and was so much engaged in watching the occasional appearance of some trout in the water, and talking to the man about them, that he advanced but little. Whilst wandering on in this slow manner, they were again surprised, and Stiles's astonishment was quite equal to what it had been at first, by the sight of Mr. Derek approaching them, and at no great distance. The walk being here less sheltered than on the other side, allowed them to see him before they met. Stiles, however astonished, was at least more prepared for an interview than before, and resolved to appear and to speak with calmness, if he really intended to meet them. For a few moments, indeed, Stiles felt that he would probably strike into some other path. The idea lasted while a turning in the walk concealed him from their view; the turning past, he was immediately before them. With a glance, Stiles saw that he had lost none of his recent civility; and, to imitate his politeness, he began, as they met, to admire the beauty of the place; but Stiles had not got beyond the words "delightful," and "charming," when some unlucky recollections obtruded, and he fancied that praise of Pemberley from him might be mischievously construed. His colour changed, and he said no more.

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton was standing a little behind; and on Stiles pausing, Derek asked him if he would do him the honour of introducing him to his friends. This was a stroke of civility for which Stiles was quite unprepared; and he could hardly suppress a smile at his being now seeking the acquaintance of some of those very people against whom Derek's pride had revolted in his offer to himself. "What will be his surprise," thought Stiles, "when he knows who they are? He takes them now for people of fashion."

The introduction, however, was immediately made; and as Stiles named their relationship to himself, he stole a sly look at Derek, to see how he bore it, and was not without the expectation of his decamping as fast as he could from such disgraceful companions. That he was surprised by the connection was evident; he sustained it, however, with fortitude, and so far from going away, turned back with them, and entered into conversation with Dr. Deaton. Stiles could not but be pleased, could not but triumph. It was consoling that he should know Stiles had some relations for whom there was no need to blush. He listened most attentively to all that passed between them, and gloried in every expression, every sentence of his uncle, which marked his intelligence, his taste, or his good manners.

The conversation soon turned upon fishing; and he heard Mr. Derek invite his uncle, with the greatest civility, to fish there as often as he chose while he continued in the neighbourhood, offering at the same time to supply him with fishing tackle, and pointing out those parts of the stream where there was usually most sport. Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, who was walking arm-in-arm with Stiles, gave him a look expressive of wonder. Stiles said nothing, but it gratified him exceedingly; the compliment must be all for himself. His astonishment, however, was extreme, and continually was he repeating, "Why is he so altered? From what can it proceed? It cannot be for me - it cannot be for my sake that his manners are thus softened. My reproofs at Hunsford could not work such a change as this. It is impossible that he should still love me."

After walking some time in this way, Stiles and his aunt in front, Mr. Derek and his uncle behind, on resuming their places, after descending to the brink of the river for the better inspection of some curious water-plant, there chanced to be a little alteration. It originated in Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, who, fatigued by the exercise of the morning, found Stiles's pale 147 pounds of skin and fragile bone inadequate to her support, and consequently preferred her husband's arm. Mr. Derek took her place by her nephew, and they walked on together. After a short silence, Stiles first spoke. Stiles wished Derek to know that he had been assured of his absence before he came to the place, and accordingly
began by observing, that his arrival had been very unexpected - "for your housekeeper," he added, "informed us that you would certainly not be here till to-morrow; and indeed, before we left Mystic Falls, we understood that you were not immediately expected in the country." Derek acknowledged the truth of it all, and said that business with his steward had occasioned his coming forward a few hours before the rest of the party with whom he had been travelling. "They will join me early to-morrow," he continued, "and among them are some who will claim an acquaintance with you- Mr. Lahey and his siblings."

Stiles answered only by a slight bow. His thoughts were instantly driven back to the time when Isaac’s name had been the last mentioned between them; and, if he might judge by Derek’s complexion, his mind was not very differently engaged.

"There is also one other person in the party," Derek continued after a pause, "who more particularly wishes to be known to you. Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my brother Danny to your acquaintance during your stay at Mystic Falls?"

The surprise of such an application was great indeed; it was too great for Stiles to know in what manner he acceded to it. He immediately felt that whatever desire Danny might have of being acquainted with him must be the work of Derek, and, without looking farther, it was satisfactory; it was gratifying to know that Derek’s resentment had not made Derek think really ill of him.

They now walked on in silence, each of them deep in thought. Stiles was not comfortable; that was impossible; but he was flattered and pleased. Derek’s wish of introducing his brother to him was a compliment of the highest kind. They soon outstripped the others, and when they had reached the car, Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton were half a quarter of a mile behind.

Derek then asked Stiles to walk into the house - but he declared himself not tired, and they stood together on the lawn. At such a time much might have been said, and silence was very awkward. Stiles wanted to talk, but there seemed to be an embargo on every subject. At last he recollected that he had been travelling, and they talked of Matlock and Dove Dale with great perseverance. Yet time and his aunt moved slowly -and his patience and his ideas were nearly worn out before the tete-a-tete was over. On Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton's coming up they were all pressed to go into the house and take some refreshment; but this was declined, and they parted on each side with utmost politeness. Mr. Derek helped Mrs. Morrell-Deaton and Stiles into the car; and when it drove off, Stiles saw him walking slowly towards the house.

The observations of his uncle and aunt now began; and each of them pronounced Derek to be infinitely superior to anything they had expected. "He is perfectly well behaved, polite, and unassuming," said his uncle.

"There is something a little stately in him, to be sure," replied his aunt, "but it is confined to his air, and is not unbecoming. I can now say with the housekeeper, that though some people may call him proud, I have seen nothing of it."

"I was never more surprised than by his behaviour to us. It was more than civil; it was really attentive; and there was no necessity for such attention. His acquaintance with Stiles was very trifling."

"To be sure, Stiles," said his aunt, "he is not so handsome as Matt; or, rather, he has not Matt's countenance, for his features are perfectly good. But how came you to tell me that he was so disagreeable?"

Stiles excused himself as well as he could; said that he had liked Derek better when they had met in Kent than before, and that he had never seen him so pleasant as this morning.
"But perhaps he may be a little whimsical in his civilities," replied his uncle. "Your great alphas often are; and therefore I shall not take him at his word, as he might change his mind another day, and warn me off his territory."

Stiles felt that they had entirely misunderstood Derek’s character, but said nothing.

"From what we have seen of him," continued Mrs. Morrell_Deaton, "I really should not have thought that he could have behaved in so cruel a way by anybody as he has done by poor Matt. He has not an ill-natured look. On the contrary, there is something pleasing about his mouth when he speaks. And there is something of dignity in his countenance that would not give one an unfavourable idea of his heart. But, to be sure, the good beta who showed us his house did give him a most flaming character! I could hardly help laughing aloud sometimes. But he is a liberal master, I suppose, and that in the eye of a servant comprehends every virtue."

Stiles here felt himself called on to say something in vindication of Derek’s behaviour to Matt; and therefore gave them to understand, in as guarded a manner as he could, that by what he had heard from Derek’s relations in Kent, his actions were capable of a very different construction; and that his character was by no means so faulty, nor Matt’s so amiable, as they had been considered in Hertfordshire. In confirmation of this, he related the particulars of all the pecuniary transactions in which they had been connected, without actually naming his authority, but stating it to be such as might be relied on.

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton was surprised and concerned; but as they were now approaching the scene of her former pleasures, every idea gave way to the charm of recollection; and she was too much engaged in pointing out to her husband all the interesting spots in its environs to think of anything else. Fatigued as she had been by the morning’s walk they had no sooner dined at the Mystic Falls Bar and Grill than she set off again in quest of her former acquaintance, and the evening was spent in the satisfactions of a intercourse renewed after many years’ discontinuance.

The occurrences of the day were too full of interest to leave Stiles much attention for any of these new friends; and he could do nothing but think, and think with wonder, of Mr. Derek’s civility, and, above all, of Derek’s wishing Stiles to be acquainted with his brother.
Stiles had no reason to fear Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton’s curiosity; it was not their wish to force his communication. It was evident that he was much better acquainted with Mr. Derek than they had before any idea of; it was evident that Derek was very much in love with Stiles. They saw much to interest, but nothing to justify inquiry.

Stiles had settled it that Mr. Derek would bring his brother to visit him the very day after his reaching Pemberley; and was consequently resolved not to be out of sight of the Mystic Falls Bed and Breakfast the whole of that morning.

But his conclusion was false; for on the very morning after Stiles’s arrival at Mystic Falls, these visitors came. They had been walking about the place with some of their new friends, and were just returning to the Bed and Breakfast to dress themselves for dining with the same family, when the sound of a Toyota SUV drew them to a window, and they saw a gentleman and a lady in a new black car driving up the street. Stiles immediately recognizing the number plates, guessed what it meant, and imparted no small degree of his surprise to his relations by acquainting them with the honour which he expected. His uncle and aunt were all amazement; and the embarrassment of his manner as he spoke, joined to the circumstance itself, and many of the circumstances of the preceding day, opened to them a new idea on the business. Nothing had ever suggested it before, but they felt that there was no other way of accounting for such attentions from such a quarter than by supposing a partiality for their nephew. While these newly-born notions were passing in their heads, the perturbation of Stiles’s feelings was at every moment increasing, quite overcoming the dose of Adderall he had taken that lunchtime. He was quite amazed at his own discomposure; but amongst other causes of disquiet, he dreaded lest the partiality of the brother should have said too much in his favour; and, more than commonly anxious to please, he naturally suspected that every power of pleasing would fail him.

Stiles retreated from the window, fearful of being seen; and as he walked up and down the room, endeavouring to compose himself, saw such looks of inquiring surprise in his uncle and aunt as made everything worse.

Danny and his brother appeared, and this formidable introduction took place. With astonishment did Stiles see that his new acquaintance was at least as much embarrassed as himself. Since his being at Mystic Falls, he had heard that everyone liked Danny; but the observation of a very few minutes convinced him that Danny was also naturally shy. He found it difficult to obtain even a word from Danny beyond a monosyllable.

Danny was tall, and on a larger scale than Stiles; and, though little more than sixteen, his figure was formed, and his appearance manly, muscular and (particularly around the pecs) pumped. He was less handsome than his brother; but there was sense and good humour in his face, and his manners were perfectly unassuming and gentle. Stiles, who had expected to find in him as acute and unembarrassed an observer as ever Mr. Derek had been, was much relieved by discerning such different feelings.

They had not long been together before Mr. Derek told Stiles that Isaac was also coming to wait on him; and he had barely time to express his satisfaction, and prepare for such a visitor, when Isaac’s
quick step was heard on the stairs, and in a moment he entered the room. All Stiles's anger against him had been long done away; but had he still felt any, it could hardly have stood its ground against the unaffected cordiality with which Isaac expressed himself on seeing Stiles again. He inquired in a friendly, though general way, after Stiles’s family, and looked and spoke with the same good-humoured ease that he had ever done.

To Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton he was scarcely a less interesting personage than to Stiles. They had long wished to see him. The whole party before them, indeed, excited a lively attention. The suspicions which had just arisen of Mr. Derek and their nephew directed their observation towards each with an earnest though guarded inquiry; and they soon drew from those inquiries the full conviction that one of them at least knew what it was to love. Of the younger man’s sensations they remained a little in doubt; but that the alpha was overflowing with admiration was evident enough.

Stiles, on his side, had much to do. He wanted to ascertain the feelings of each of his visitors; he wanted to compose his own, and to make himself agreeable to all; and in the latter object, where he feared most to fail, he was most sure of success, for those to whom he endeavoured to give pleasure were prepossessed in his favour. Isaac was ready, Danny was eager, and Derek determined, to be pleased. Despite which it was impossible not to see Stiles’s face, or hear his sarcasm, without feeling pleasure.

In seeing Isaac, Stiles’s thoughts naturally flew to his brother; and, oh! how ardently did he long to know whether any of Isaac’s were directed in a like manner. Sometimes he could fancy that Isaac talked less than on former occasions, and once or twice pleased himself with the notion that, as Isaac looked at him, he was trying to trace a resemblance. But, though this might be imaginary, Stiles could not be deceived as to Isaac’s behaviour to Danny, who had been set up as a rival to Scott. No look appeared on either side that spoke particular regard. Nothing occurred between them that could justify the hopes of Danny's brother or Erica. On this point Stiles was soon satisfied; and two or three little circumstances occurred ere they parted, which, in his anxious interpretation, denoted a recollection of Scott not untinctured by tenderness, and a wish of saying more that might lead to the mention of him, had Isaac dared. He observed to Stiles, at a moment when the others were talking together, and in a tone which had something of real regret, that it "was a very long time since he had had the pleasure of seeing Stiles;" and, before he could reply, he added, "It is above eight months. We have not met since the 26th of November, when we were all dancing together at Netherfield."

Stiles was pleased to find his memory so exact; and Isaac afterwards took occasion to ask Stiles, when unattended to by any of the rest, whether all his siblings were at Longbourn. There was not much in the question, nor in the preceding remark; but there was a look and a manner which gave them meaning.

It was not often that Stiles could turn his eyes on Mr. Derek himself; but, whenever he did catch a glimpse, he saw an expression of general complaisance, and in all that Derek said he heard an accent so removed from hauteur or growling or disdain of his companions, as convinced Stiles that the improvement of manners which he had yesterday witnessed however temporary its existence might prove, had at least outlived one day. When Stiles saw him thus seeking the acquaintance and courting the good opinion of people with whom any intercourse a few months ago would have been a disgrace - when Stiles saw him thus civil, not only to himself, but to the very relations whom he had openly disdained, and recollected their last lively scene in Hunsford Parsonage - the difference, the change was so great, and struck so forcibly on his mind, that he could hardly restrain his astonishment from being visible. Never, even in the company of his dear friends at Netherfield, or his dignified relations at Rosings, had Stiles seen Derek so desirous to please, so free from self-consequence or unbending reserve, as now, when no importance could result from the success of his endeavours, and when even the acquaintance of those to whom his attentions were addressed would draw down the ridicule and censure of the pack both of Netherfield and Rosings.
Their visitors stayed with them above half-an-hour; and when they arose to depart, Mr. Derek called on his brother to join him in expressing their wish of seeing Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, and Stiles, to dinner at Pemberley, before they left the country. Danny, though with a diffidence which marked him little in the habit of giving invitations, readily obeyed. Mrs. Morrell-Deaton looked at her nephew, desirous of knowing how he, whom the invitation most concerned, felt disposed as to its acceptance, but Stiles had turned away his head. Presuming however, that this studied avoidance spoke rather a momentary embarrassment than any dislike of the proposal, and seeing in her husband, who was fond of society, a perfect willingness to accept it, she ventured to engage for their attendance, and the day after the next was fixed on.

Isaac expressed great pleasure in the certainty of seeing Stiles again, having still a great deal to say to him, and many inquiries to make after all their Hertfordshire friends. Stiles, construing all this into a wish of hearing him speak of his brother, was pleased, and on this account, as well as some others, found himself, when their visitors left them, capable of considering the last half-hour with some satisfaction, though while it was passing, the enjoyment of it had been little. Eager to be alone, and fearful of inquiries or hints from his uncle and aunt, he stayed with them only long enough to hear their favourable opinion of Isaac, and then hurried away to dress.

But he had no reason to fear Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton’s curiosity; it was not their wish to force his communication. It was evident that he was much better acquainted with Mr. Derek than they had before any idea of; it was evident that Derek was very much in love with Stiles. They saw much to interest, but nothing to justify inquiry.

Of Mr. Derek it was now a matter of anxiety to think well; and, as far as their acquaintance reached, there was no fault to find. They could not be untouched by his politeness; and had they drawn his character from their own feelings and his servant's report, without any reference to any other account, the circle in Hertfordshire to which he was known would not have recognized it for Mr. Derek. There was now an interest, however, in believing the housekeeper; and they soon became sensible that the authority of a servant who had known him since he was but a cub, and whose own manners indicated respectability (if a certain creepiness), was not to be hastily rejected. Neither had anything occurred in the intelligence of their Mystic Falls friends that could materially lessen its weight. They had nothing to accuse him of but pride; pride he probably had, and if not, it would certainly be imputed by the inhabitants of a small market-town where the family did not visit. It was acknowledged, however, that he was a liberal man, and did much good among the poor.

With respect to Matt, the travellers soon found that he was not held there in much estimation; for though the chief of his concerns with the son of his patron were imperfectly understood, it was yet a well-known fact that, on his quitting Derbyshire, he had left many debts behind him, which Mr. Derek afterwards discharged.

As for Stiles, his thoughts were at Pemberley this evening more than the last; and the evening, though as it passed it seemed long, was not long enough to determine his feelings towards one in that mansion; and he lay awake two whole hours endeavouring to make them out. Stiles certainly did not hate Derek. No; hatred had vanished long ago, and Stiles had almost as long been ashamed of ever feeling a dislike against him, that could be so called. The respect created by the conviction of his valuable qualities, though at first unwillingly admitted, had for some time ceased to be repugnant to Stiles’s feeling; and it was now heightened into somewhat of a friendlier nature, by the testimony so highly in his favour, and bringing forward his disposition in so amiable a light, which yesterday had produced. But above all, above respect and esteem, there was a motive within Stiles of goodwill which could not be overlooked.

It was gratitude; gratitude, not merely for having once loved him, but for loving him still well enough to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of Stiles’s manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying the rejection. He who, Stiles had been persuaded, would avoid him as his
greatest enemy, seemed, on this accidental meeting, most eager to preserve the acquaintance, and without any indelicate display of regard, or any peculiarity of manner, where their two selves only were concerned, was soliciting the good opinion of Stiles’s friends, and bent on making Stiles known to his brother. Such a change in a werewolf, an alpha werewolf of so much pride exciting not only astonishment but gratitude - for to love, ardent love, it must be attributed; and as such its impression on Stiles was of a sort to be encouraged, as by no means unpleasing, though it could not be exactly defined. Stiles respected, Stiles esteemed, Stiles was grateful to him, Stiles felt a real interest in his welfare; and Stiles only wanted to know how far he wished that welfare to depend upon himself, and how far it would be for the happiness of both that he should employ the power, which his fancy told him he still possessed, of bringing on him the renewal of Mr Derek’s addresses.

It had been settled in the evening between the aunt and the nephew, that such a striking civility as Danny’s in coming to see them on the very day of his arrival at Pemberley, for he had reached it only to a late breakfast, ought to be imitated, though it could not be equalled, by some exertion of politeness on their side; and, consequently, that it would be highly expedient to wait on Danny at Pemberley the following morning. They were, therefore, to go. Stiles was pleased; though when he asked himself the reason, he had very little to say in reply.

Dr. Deaton left them soon after breakfast. The fishing scheme had been renewed the day before, and a positive engagement made of his meeting some of the gentlemen at Pemberley before noon.
"I remember, when we first knew him in Hertfordshire, how amazed we all were to find that he was a reputed beauty; and I particularly recollect your saying one night, after they had been dining at Netherfield, 'He a beauty! - I should as soon call his brother an alpha.' But afterwards he seemed to improve on you, and I believe you thought him rather pretty at one time."

"Yes," replied Darcy, who could contain himself no longer, "but that was only when I first saw him, for it is many months since I have considered Stiles as one of the handsomest young men of my acquaintance."

Convinced as Stiles now was that Erica’s dislike of him had originated in jealousy, he could not help feeling how unwelcome his appearance at Pemberley must be to her, and was curious to know with how much civility on that beta’s side the acquaintance would now be renewed. He made a careful note to keep out of her range, in case she should clonk him over the head with a spare car part or similar blunt instrument.

On reaching the house, they were shown through the hall into the saloon, whose northern aspect rendered it delightful for summer. Its windows opening to the ground, admitted a most refreshing view of the high woody hills behind the house, and of the beautiful oaks and Spanish chestnuts which were scattered over the intermediate lawn.

In this house they were received by Danny, who was sitting there with Boyd and Erica, and Jeff Davis (the gentleman with whom he lived in London). Danny’s reception of them was very civil, but attended with all the embarrassment which, though proceeding from shyness and the fear of doing wrong, would easily give to those who felt themselves inferior the belief of his being proud and reserved. Mrs. Morrell-Deaton and her nephew, however, did Danny justice, and pitied him.

By Boyd and Erica they were noticed only by a barely audible “hey”; and, on their being seated, a pause, awkward as such pauses must always be, succeeded for a few moments. It was first broken by Jeff Davis, a genteel, agreeable-looking man, whose endeavour to introduce some kind of discourse proved him to be more truly well-bred than either of the others; and between him and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, with occasional help from Stiles, the conversation was carried on. Danny looked as if he wished for courage enough to join in it; and sometimes did venture a short sentence when there was least danger of its being heard.

Stiles soon saw that he was himself closely watched by Erica, and that he could not speak a word, especially to Danny, without calling her attention. This observation would not have prevented Stiles from trying to talk to the latter, had they not been seated at an inconvenient distance; but he was not sorry to be spared the necessity of saying much. His own thoughts were employing him. He expected every moment that some of the werewolves would enter the room. He wished, he feared that the master of the house might be amongst them; and whether he wished or feared it most, he could scarcely determine. After sitting in this manner a quarter of an hour without hearing Erica’s voice, Stiles was roused by receiving from her a cold inquiry after the health of his family. He answered with equal indifference and brevity, and the other said no more.
The next variation which their visit afforded was produced by the entrance of servants with pizza, curly fries, and a variety of all the finest fruits in season; but this did not take place till after many a significant look and smile from Mr. Davis to Danny had been given, to remind him of his post. There was now employment for the whole party - for though they could not all talk, they could all eat; and the beautiful pyramids of grapes, nectarines, and Reese's Pieces soon collected them round the table.

While thus engaged, Stiles had a fair opportunity of deciding whether he most feared or wished for the appearance of Mr. Derek, by the feelings which prevailed on his entering the room; and then, though but a moment before he had believed his wishes to predominate, he began to regret that Mr. Derek came.

Derek had been some time with Dr. Deaton, who, with two or three other gentlemen from the house, was engaged by the river, and had left him only on learning that Stiles and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton intended a visit to Danny that morning. No sooner did he appear than Stiles wisely resolved to be perfectly easy and unembarrassed; a resolution the more necessary to be made, but perhaps not the more easily kept, because he saw that the suspicions of the whole party were awakened against them, and that there was scarcely an eye which did not watch Mr. Derek’s behaviour when he first came into the room. In no countenance was attentive curiosity so strongly marked as in Erica’s, in spite of the smiles which overspread her face whenever she spoke to one of its objects; for jealousy had not yet made her desperate, and her attentions to Mr. Derek were by no means over. Danny, on his brother's entrance, exerted himself much more to talk, and Stiles saw that Mr. Derek was anxious for his brother and he to get acquainted, and forwarded as much as possible, every attempt at conversation on either side. Erica saw all this likewise; and, in the imprudence of anger, took the first opportunity of saying, with sneering civility:

"Pray, Stiles, are not the ----shire Militia removed from Beacon Hills? They must be a great loss to your family."

In Derek's presence she dared not mention Matt's name; but Stiles instantly comprehended that Matt was uppermost in Erica’s thoughts; and the various recollections connected with him gave Stiles a moment's distress; but exerting himself vigorously to repel the ill-natured attack, he presently answered the question in a tolerably detached tone. While he spoke, an involuntary glance showed him Derek, with a heightened complexion, earnestly looking at him, and Danny overcome with confusion and unable to lift up his eyes. Had Erica known what pain she was then giving her beloved friend, she undoubtedly would have refrained from the hint; but she had merely intended to discompose Stiles by bringing forward the idea of a man to whom she believed him partial, to make him betray a sensibility which might injure him in Derek's opinion, and, perhaps, to remind the latter of all the follies and absurdities by which some part of Stiles’s family were connected with that corps. Not a syllable had ever reached her of Danny's meditated elopement. To no creature had it been revealed, where secrecy was possible, except to Stiles; and from all Isaac’s connections Derek was particularly anxious to conceal it, from the very wish which Stiles had long ago attributed to him, of their becoming hereafter Danny’s connections through marriage to Isaac. He had certainly formed such a plan, and without meaning that it should affect his endeavour to separate him from Scott, it is probable that it might add something to his lively concern for the welfare of his friend.

Stiles's uncharacteristically calm behaviour, however, soon quieted his emotion; and as Erica, vexed and disappointed, dared not approach nearer to the subject of Matt, Danny also recovered in time, though not enough to be able to speak any more. His brother, whose eye he feared to meet, scarcely recollected Danny's interest in the affair, and the very circumstance which had been designed to turn Derek’s thoughts from Stiles seemed to have fixed them on him more and more cheerfully.

Their visit did not continue long after the question and answer above mentioned; and while Mr. Derek was attending them to their Toyota Erica was venting her feelings in criticisms on Stiles's
person, behaviour, and the taut fit of his Ben Sherman T-Shirt across his chest. But Danny would not join her. His brother's recommendation was enough to ensure his favour; Derek’s judgement could not err. And he had spoken in such terms of Stiles as to leave Danny without the power of finding him otherwise than lovely and amiable. When Derek returned to the saloon, Erica could not help repeating to him some part of what she had been saying to his brother.

"How very ill Stiles looks this morning, Mr. Derek," she cried; "I never in my life saw anyone so much altered as he is since the winter. He is grown so thin and coarse! Boyd and I were agreeing that we should not have known him again."

However little Mr. Derek might have liked such an address, he contented himself with coolly replying that he perceived no other alteration than Stiles being rather toned, no miraculous consequence of all the lacrosse he had doubtless been playing before the summer.

"For my own part," Erica rejoined, "I must confess that I never could see any beauty in him. His face is too thin; his complexion has too many moles; and his pecs are not at all handsome. His snub nose wants character - there is nothing marked in its lines. His teeth are tolerable, but not out of the common way – just your normal Hollywood Homely; and as for his eyes, which have sometimes been called so fine, I could never see anything extraordinary in them. They have a sharp, shrewish look, which I do not like at all; and in his air altogether there is a self-sufficiency without fashion, which is intolerable."

Persuaded as Erica was that Derek admired Stiles, this was not the best method of recommending herself; but angry people are not always wise; and in seeing Derek at last look somewhat nettled, she had all the success she expected. He was resolutely silent, however, and, from a determination of making him speak, she continued:

"I remember, when we first knew him in Hertfordshire, how amazed we all were to find that he was a reputed beauty; and I particularly recollect your saying one night, after they had been dining at Netherfield, 'He a beauty! - I should as soon call his brother an alpha.' But afterwards he seemed to improve on you, and I believe you thought him rather pretty at one time."

"Yes," replied Darcy, who could contain himself no longer, "but that was only when I first saw him, for it is many months since I have considered Stiles as one of the handsomest young men of my acquaintance."

He then went away, and Erica was left to all the satisfaction of having forced him to say what gave no one any pain but herself.

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton and Stiles talked of all that had occurred during their visit, as they returned, except what had particularly interested them both. The look and behaviour of everybody they had seen were discussed, except of the person who had mostly engaged their attention. They talked of his brother, his friends, his house, his fruit - of everything but himself; yet Stiles was longing to know what Mrs. Morrell-Deaton thought of him, and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton would have been highly gratified by her nephew's beginning the subject.
Never had he so honestly felt that he could have loved Derek, as now, when all love must be vain.

Stiles had been a good deal disappointed in not getting an email from Scott on their first arrival at Mystic Falls, but the wifi access was down through some broadband problem affecting the whole town; and this disappointment had been renewed on each of the mornings that had now been spent there; but on the third his repining was over, and his brother justified, by the receipt of two emails from him at once, as soon as the wifi had been restored.

They had just been preparing to walk as the emails came in; and his uncle and aunt, leaving him to enjoy them in quiet, set off by themselves. The earlier email must first be attended to; it had been written five days ago. The beginning contained an account of all their little parties and engagements, with such news as the country afforded; but the latter half, which was dated a day later, and written in evident agitation, gave more important intelligence. It was to this effect:

"Since writing the above, my dearest, best bro Stiles, something has occurred of a most unexpected and serious nature; but I am afraid of alarming you – be assured that we are all well and no one else has received the bite. What I have to say relates to poor Jackson.

An urgent fax came at twelve last night, just as we were all gone to bed, from Colonel Finstock, to inform us that Jackson was gone off to Scotland with one of his officers; to own the truth, with Matt! Imagine our surprise. To Kanima, however, it does not seem so wholly unexpected. I am very, very sorry. So imprudent a match on both sides! But I am willing to hope the best, and that his character has been misunderstood.

Thoughtless and indiscreet I can easily believe Matt, but this step (and let us rejoice over it) marks nothing bad at heart. His choice is disinterested at least, for he must know my father can give Jackson nothing.

Our poor mother is sadly grieved. My father bears it better. How thankful am I that we never let them know what has been said against Matt; we must forget it ourselves. They were off Saturday night about twelve, as is conjectured, but were not missed till yesterday morning at eight. The fax was sent off directly. My dear Stiles, they must have passed within ten miles of us. Colonel Finstock gives us reason to expect him here soon. Jackson texted a few lines to his wife, informing her of their intention. I must conclude, for I cannot be long from my poor mother. I am afraid you will not be able to make it out, but I hardly know what I have written."

Without allowing himself time for consideration, and scarcely knowing what he felt, Stiles on finishing this email instantly clicked open the other, and opening it with the utmost impatience, read as follows: it had been written a day later than the conclusion of the first.

"By this time, my dearest brother, you have received my hurried email; I wish this may be more intelligible, but though not confined for time, my head is so bewildered that I cannot answer for being coherent; I can barely spell check the text. Dearest Stiles, I hardly know what I would write, but I have bad news for you, and it cannot be delayed. Imprudent as the marriage between Mr.
Daehler and our poor Jackson would be, we are now anxious to be assured it has taken place, for there is but too much reason to fear they are not gone to Scotland. Colonel Finstock came yesterday, having left Brighton the day before, not many hours after the fax. Though Jackson's short text to Mrs. F. gave them to understand that they were going to Gretna Green, and though Jackson changed his Facebook status to “engaged”, something was dropped by Greenberg expressing his belief that Matt never intended to go there, or to marry Jackson at all, and Matt’s Facebook status is still set as “single.” All of which was repeated to Colonel F., who, instantly taking the alarm, set off from Brighton intending to trace their route. He did trace them easily to Clapham, but no further; for on entering that place, they removed into a black cab, and dismissed the hire car that brought them from Epsom. All that is known after this is, that they were seen to continue the London road.

I know not what to think. After making every possible inquiry on that side London, Colonel F. came on into Hertfordshire, anxiously renewing them at all the service stations and diners, and at the Bed and Breakfasts in Barnet and Hatfield, but without any success - no such people had been seen to pass through. With the kindest concern he came on to Longbourn, and broke his apprehensions to us in a manner most creditable to his heart. I am sincerely grieved for him and Mrs. F., but no one can throw any blame on them. Our distress, my dear Stiles, is very great. My father and mother believe the worst, but I cannot think so ill of him. Many circumstances might make it more eligible for them to be married privately in town than to pursue their first plan; and even if Matt could form such a design against a young man of Jackson's connections, which is not likely, can I suppose Jackson so lost to everything? Impossible! I grieve to find, however, that Colonel F. is not disposed to depend upon their marriage; he shook his head when I expressed my hopes, and said he feared Matt was not a man to be trusted. My poor mother is really ill, and keeps her room. Could she exert herself, it would be better; but this is not to be expected. And as to my father, I never in my life saw him so affected. Poor Kanima has anger for having concealed their attachment; but as it was a matter of confidence, one cannot wonder. I am truly glad, dearest Stiles, that you have been spared something of these distressing scenes; but now, as the first shock is over, shall I own that I long for your return? I am not so selfish, however, as to press for it, if inconvenient. Adieu!

I take up my Samsung tablet again to do what I have just told you I would not; but circumstances are such that I cannot help earnestly begging you all to come here as soon as possible. I know my dear uncle and aunt so well, that I am not afraid of requesting it, though I have still something more to ask of the former. My father is going to London with Colonel Finstock instantly, to try to discover Jackson. What he means to do I am sure I know not; but his excessive distress will not allow him to pursue any measure in the best and safest way, and Colonel Finstock is obliged to be at Brighton again to-morrow evening. In such an exigence, my uncle's advice and assistance would be everything in the world; he will immediately comprehend what I must feel, and I rely upon his goodness."

"Oh! where, where is my uncle?" cried Stiles, darting from his seat as he finished the email, in eagerness to follow him, without losing a moment of the time so precious; but as Stiles reached the door it was opened by a servant, and Mr. Derek appeared. Stiles's face, even more pale than normal, and his impetuous manner made Derek start, and before he could recover himself to speak, Stiles, in whose mind every idea was superseded by Jackson's situation, hastily exclaimed, "I beg your pardon, but I must leave you. I must find Dr. Deaton this moment, on business that cannot be delayed; I have not an instant to lose."

"Good God! what is the matter?" cried Derek, with more feeling than politeness; then recollecting himself, "I will not detain you a minute; but let me, or let the servant go after Dr. Deaton. You are not well enough; you cannot go yourself."

Stiles hesitated, but his knees trembled under him and he leant back against the wall, flailing slightly in an ineffective manner. Stiles felt how little would be gained by his attempting to pursue them.
Calling back the servant, therefore, he commissioned him, though in so breathless an accent as made him almost unintelligible, to fetch his master and mistress home instantly.

On his quitting the room Stiles gripped the lapels of Mr. Derek’s leather jacket, unable to support himself, and looking so miserably ill, that it was impossible for Derek to leave him, or to refrain from saying, in a tone of gentleness and commiseration,

"Let me call your servant. Is there nothing you could take to give you present relief? A glass of Jack Daniels; shall I get you one? You are very ill."

"No, I thank you," Stiles replied, releasing Derek’s jacket and endeavouring to recover himself as his smoothed Derek’s lapels. "There is nothing the matter with me. I am quite well; I am only distressed by some dreadful news which I have just received from Longbourn."

He burst into tears as he alluded to it, and for a few minutes could not speak another word. Derek, in wretched suspense, could only say something indistinctly of his concern, and sniff as he scented the anxiety coming in waves off of Stiles, and observe him in compassionate silence. At length Stiles spoke again. "I have just had an email from Scott, with such dreadful news. It cannot be concealed from anyone. My youngest brother has left all his friends - has eloped; has thrown himself into the power of - of Matt Daehler. They are gone off together from Brighton. You know him too well to doubt the rest. Jackson has no money, no connections, nothing that can tempt Matt to - he is lost for ever."

Derek was fixed in astonishment.

"When I consider," Stiles added in a yet more agitated voice, "that I might have prevented it! I, who knew what he was. Had I but explained some part of it only - some part of what I learnt, to my own family! Had his character been known, this could not have happened. But it is all - all too late now."

"I am grieved indeed," cried Derek; "grieved - shocked. But is it certain - absolutely certain?"

"Oh, yes! They left Brighton together on Sunday night, and were traced almost to London, but not beyond; they are certainly not gone to Scotland."

"And what has been done, what has been attempted, to recover Jackson?"

"My father is gone to London, and Scott has written to beg my uncle's immediate assistance; and we shall be off, I hope, in half-an-hour. But nothing can be done - I know very well that nothing can be done. How is such a man to be worked on? How are they even to be discovered? I have not the smallest hope. It is every way horrible!"

Derek shook his head in silent acquiescence.

"When my eyes were opened to his real character. Oh! had I known what I ought, what I dared to do! But I knew not - I was afraid of doing too much. Wretched, wretched mistake!"

Derek made no answer. He seemed scarcely to hear Stiles, and was walking up and down the room in earnest meditation, his eyebrows contracted, his eyes glowing red, and his air gloomy. Stiles soon observed, and instantly understood it. Stiles’s power was sinking; everything must sink under such a proof of family weakness, such an assurance of the deepest disgrace. Stiles could neither wonder nor condemn, but the belief of Derek’s self-conquest brought nothing consolatory to his chest, afforded no palliation of his distress. It was, on the contrary, exactly calculated to make Stiles understand his own wishes; and never had he so honestly felt that he could have loved Derek, as now, when all love must be vain.
But self, though it would intrude, could not engross Stiles. Jackson — the humiliation, the misery he was bringing on them all, soon swallowed up every private care; and covering his face with the edge of his plaid shirt, Stiles was soon lost to everything else; and, after a pause of several minutes, was only recalled to a sense of his situation by the voice of his companion, who, in a manner which, though it spoke compassion, spoke likewise restraint, said, "I am afraid you have been long desiring my absence, nor have I anything to plead in excuse of my stay, but real, though unavailing concern. Would to Heaven that anything could be either said or done on my part that might offer consolation to such distress! But I will not torment you with vain wishes, which may seem purposely to ask for your thanks. This unfortunate affair will, I fear, prevent my brother's having the pleasure of seeing you at Pemberley to-day."

"Oh, yes. Be so kind as to apologise for us to Danny. Say that urgent business calls us home immediately. Conceal the unhappy truth as long as it is possible, I know it cannot be long."

Derek readily assured him of his secrecy; again expressed his sorrow for his distress, wished it a happier conclusion than there was at present reason to hope, and leaving his compliments for his relations, with only one serious, parting look, went away.

As he quitted the room, Stiles felt how improbable it was that they should ever see each other again on such terms of cordiality as had marked their several meetings in Derbyshire; and as he threw a retrospective glance over the whole of their acquaintance, so full of contradictions and varieties, sighed at the perverseness of those feelings which would now have promoted its continuance, and would formerly have rejoiced in its termination.

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Stiles's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise - if regard springing from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged, nothing can be said in his defence, except that he had given somewhat of a trial to the latter method in his partiality for Matt, and that its ill success might, perhaps, authorise him to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. Be that as it may, Stiles saw Derek go with regret; and in this early example of what Jackson's infamy must produce, found additional anguish as he reflected on that wretched business. Never, since reading Scott’s second email, had he entertained a hope of Matt's meaning to marry Jackson. No one but Scott, Stiles thought, could flatter himself with such an expectation. Surprise was the least of his feelings on this development. While the contents of the first email remained in his mind, he was all surprise -all astonishment that Matt should marry a boy whom it was impossible he could marry for money; and how Jackson could ever have attached him had appeared incomprehensible. But now it was all too natural. For such an attachment as this Jackson might have sufficient charms, impossibly high cheekbones, and a suitably attractive physique; and though Stiles did not suppose Jackson to be deliberately engaging in an elopement without the intention of marriage, he had no difficulty in believing that neither Jackson’s virtue nor Jackson’s understanding would preserve him from falling an easy prey.

Stiles had never perceived, while the regiment was in Hertfordshire, that Jackson had any partiality for Matt; but Stiles was convinced that Jackson wanted only encouragement to attach himself to anybody. Sometimes one officer, sometimes another, had been his favourite, as their attentions raised them in his opinion. Jackson’s affections had continually been fluctuating but never without an object. The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a boy - oh! how acutely did Stiles now feel it!

Stiles was wild to be at home - to hear, to see, to be upon the spot to share with Scott in the cares that must now fall wholly upon him, in a family so deranged, a father absent, a mother incapable of exertion, and requiring constant attendance; and though almost persuaded that nothing could be done
for Jackson, their uncle's interference seemed of the utmost importance, and till he entered the room
Stiles's impatience was severe. Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton had hurried back in alarm, supposing
by the servant's account that their nephew was taken suddenly ill; but satisfying them instantly on
that head, Stiles eagerly communicated the cause of their summons, reading the two emails aloud,
and dwelling on the postscript of the last with trembling energy, though Jackson had never been a
favourite with them, Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton could not but be deeply afflicted. Not Jackson
only, but all were concerned in it; and after the first exclamations of surprise and horror, Dr. Deaton
promised every assistance in his power. Stiles, though expecting no less, thanked him with tears of
gratitude; and all three being actuated by one spirit, everything relating to their journey was speedily
settled. They were to be off as soon as possible. "But what is to be done about Pemberley?" cried
Mrs. Morrell-Deaton. "John told us Mr. Derek was here when you sent for us; was it so?"

"Yes; and I told him we should not be able to keep our engagement. That is all settled."

"What is all settled?" repeated the other, as she ran into her room to prepare. "And are they upon
such terms as for her to disclose the real truth? Oh, that I knew how it was!" But wishes were vain,
or at least could only serve to amuse her in the hurry and confusion of the following hour.

Had Stiles been at leisure to be idle, he would have remained certain that all employment was
impossible to one so wretched as himself; but he had his share of business as well as his aunt, and
amongst the rest there were emails to be written to all their friends at Mystic Falls, with false excuses
for their sudden departure. An hour, however, saw the whole completed; and Dr. Deaton meanwhile
having settled his account at the Bed and Breakfast, nothing remained to be done but to go; and
Stiles, after all the misery of the morning, found himself, in a shorter space of time than he could
have supposed, seated in the SUV, and on the road to Longbourn.
"But why all this secrecy? Why any fear of detection? Why must their marriage be kept off Facebook? Oh, no, no - this is not likely. His most particular friend, you see by Scott’s account, was persuaded of his never intending to marry Jackson. Matt will never marry a person without some money. He cannot afford it. And what claims has Jackson -what attraction has he beyond youth, a healthy set of pecs, and good abs that could make Matt, for Jackson’s sake, forego every chance of benefiting himself by marrying well?

"I have been thinking it over again, Stiles," said his uncle, as they drove from the town; "and really, upon serious consideration, I am much more inclined than I was to judge as your eldest brother does on the matter. It appears to me so very unlikely that any young man should form such a design against a boy who is by no means unprotected or friendless, and who was actually staying in his colonel's family, that I am strongly inclined to hope the best. Could he expect that Jackson’s friends would not step forward? Could he expect to be noticed again by the regiment, after such an affront to Colonel Finstock? His temptation is not adequate to the risk!"

"Do you really think so?" cried Stiles, brightening up for a moment.

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, "I begin to be of your uncle's opinion. It is really too great a violation of decency, honour, and interest, for him to be guilty of. I cannot think so very ill of Matt. Can you yourself, Stiles, so wholly give him up, as to believe him capable of it?"

"Not, perhaps, of neglecting his own interest; but of every other neglect I can believe him capable. If, indeed, it should be so! But I dare not hope it. Why should they not go on to Scotland if that had been the case?"

"In the first place," replied Dr. Deaton, "there is no absolute proof that they are not gone to Scotland."

"Oh! but their removing from the car into a black cab is such a presumption! And, besides, no traces of them were to be found on the Barnet road."

"Well, then - supposing them to be in London. They may be there, though for the purpose of concealment, for no more exceptional purpose. It is not likely that money should be very abundant on either side; and it might strike them that they could be more economically, though less expeditiously, married in London than in Scotland."

"But why all this secrecy? Why any fear of detection? Why must their marriage be kept off Facebook? Oh, no, no - this is not likely. His most particular friend, you see by Scott’s account, was persuaded of his never intending to marry Jackson. Matt will never marry a person without some money. He cannot afford it. And what claims has Jackson -what attraction has he beyond youth, a healthy set of pecs, and good abs that could make Matt, for Jackson’s sake, forego every chance of benefiting himself by marrying well? As to what restraint the apprehensions of disgrace in the corps might throw on a dishonourable elopement with Jackson, I am not able to judge; for I know nothing of the effects that such a step might produce. But as to your other objection, I am afraid it will hardly
hold good. Jackson has no alpha to step forward; and Matt might imagine, from my father's behaviour, from his indolence and the little attention he has ever seemed to give to what was going forward in his family, that he would do as little, and think as little about it, as any father could do, in such a matter."

"But can you think that Jackson is so lost to everything but love of Matt as to consent to live with him on any terms other than marriage?"

"It does seem, and it is most shocking indeed," replied Stiles, with tears dampening his long eyelashes, "that a brother's sense of decency and virtue in such a point should admit of doubt. But, really, I know not what to say. Perhaps I am not doing him justice. But he is very young, and honestly a bit of a douchebag; he has never been taught to think on serious subjects; and for the last half-year, nay, for a twelvemonth - he has been given up to nothing but amusement and vanity. Jackson has been allowed to dispose of his time in the most idle and frivolous manner, and to adopt any opinions that came in his way. Since the ----shire were first quartered in Beacon Hills, nothing but love, flirtation, and officers have been in his head. He has been doing everything in his power by thinking and talking on the subject, to give greater - what shall I call it? susceptibility to his feelings; which are naturally lively enough. And we all know that Matt has every charm of person and address that can captivate a boy."

"But you see that Scott," said his aunt, "does not think so very ill of Matt as to believe him capable of the attempt."

"Of whom does Scott ever think ill? And who is there, whatever might be their former conduct, that he would think capable of such an attempt, till it were proved against them? Scott thinks everyone can be saved, and he has to save them. But Scott knows, as well as I do, what Matt really is. We both know that he has been profligate in every sense of the word; that he has neither integrity nor honour; that he is as false and deceitful as he is insinuating."

"And do you really know all this?" cried Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, whose curiosity as to the mode of Stiles's intelligence was all alive.

"I do indeed," replied Stiles, colouring. "I told you, the other day, of his infamous behaviour to Mr. Derek; and you yourself, when last at Longbourn, heard in what manner he spoke of the alpha who had behaved with such forbearance and liberality towards him. And there are other circumstances which I am not at liberty - which it is not worth while to relate; but his lies about the whole Pemberley family are endless. From what he said of Danny I was thoroughly prepared to see a proud, reserved, disagreeable boy. Yet he knew to the contrary himself. He must know that Danny was as amiable and unpretending as we have found him."

"But does Jackson know nothing of this? can he be ignorant of what you and Scott seem so well to understand?"

"Oh, yes! - -that, that is the worst of all. Till I was in Kent, and saw so much both of Mr. Derek and his relation Miguel, I was ignorant of the truth myself. And when I returned home, the ----shire was to leave Beacon Hills in a week or fortnight's time. As that was the case, neither Scott, to whom I related the whole, nor I, thought it necessary to make our knowledge public; for of what use could it apparently be to any one, that the good opinion which all the neighbourhood had of him should then be overthrown? And even when it was settled that Jackson should go with Mrs. Finstock, the necessity of opening his eyes to Matt's character never occurred to me. That Jackson could be in any danger from the deception never entered my head. That such a consequence as this could ensue, you may easily believe, was far enough from my thoughts."

"When they all removed to Brighton, therefore, you had no reason, I suppose, to believe them fond
of each other?"

"Not the slightest. I can remember no symptom of affection on either side; and had anything of the
kind been perceptible, you must be aware that ours is not a family on which it could be thrown away.
When first Matt entered the corps, Jackson was ready enough to admire him; but so we all were.
Every teen in or near Beacon Hills was out of their senses about Matt for the first two months; but he
never distinguished Jackson by any particular attention; and, consequently, after a moderate period of
extravagant and wild admiration, his fancy for Matt gave way, and others of the regiment, who
treated Jackson with more distinction, again became his favourites."

* * * * *

It may be easily believed, that however little of novelty could be added to their fears, hopes, and
conjectures, on this interesting subject, by its repeated discussion, no other could detain them from it
long, during the whole of the journey. From Stiles's thoughts it was never absent.

Fixed there by the keenest of all anguish, self-reproach, he could find no interval of ease or
forgetfulness.

They travelled as expeditiously as possible, and, sleeping one night at a motel on the road, reached
Longbourn by dinner time the next day. It was a comfort to Stiles to consider that Scott could not
have been wearied by long expectations.

The little Morrell-Deatons, attracted by the sight of an SUV, were standing on the steps of the house
as they entered the paddock; and, when the four wheel drive drove up to the door, the joyful surprise
that lighted up their faces, and displayed itself over their whole bodies, in a variety of capers and
frisks, was the first pleasing earnest of their welcome.

Stiles jumped out; and, after giving each of them a hasty kiss, hurried into the vestibule, where Scott,
who came running down from their mother's apartment, immediately met him.

Stiles, as he affectionately embraced Scott in a bone crushing hug, whilst tears filled the eyes of both,
lost not a moment in asking whether anything had been heard of the fugitives.

"Not yet," replied Scott. "But now that my dear uncle is come, I hope everything will be well."

"Is my father in town?"

"Yes, he went on Tuesday, as I wrote you word."

"And have you heard from him often?"

"We have heard only twice. He texted me a few lines on Wednesday to say that he had arrived in
safety, and to give me his directions, which I particularly begged him to do. He merely added that he
should not email again till he had something of importance to mention."

"And my mother - how is she? How are you all?"

"My mother is tolerably well, I trust; though her spirits are greatly shaken. She is up stairs and will
have great satisfaction in seeing you all. She does not yet leave her dressing-room. Lydia and
Kanima, thank Heaven, are quite well."

"But you - how are you?" cried Stiles. "You look pale, your tattoo is really standing out against your
skin. How much you must have gone through!"
His brother, however, assured Stiles of his being perfectly well; and their conversation, which had been passing while Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton were engaged with their children, was now put an end to by the approach of the whole party. Scott ran to his uncle and aunt, and welcomed and thanked them both, with alternate smiles and tears.

When they were all in the drawing-room, the questions which Stiles had already asked were of course repeated by the others, and they soon found that Scott had no intelligence to give. The sanguine hope of good, however, which the benevolence of his heart suggested had not yet deserted him; Scott still expected that it would all end well, and that every morning would bring some email or fax, either from Jackson or their father, to explain their proceedings, and, perhaps, announce their marriage.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, to whose apartment they all repaired, after a few minutes' conversation together, received them exactly as might be expected; with tears and lamentations of regret, invectives against the villainous conduct of Matt, and complaints of her own sufferings and ill-usage; blaming everybody but the person to whose ill-judging indulgence the errors of her son must principally be owing.

"If I had been able," said she, "to carry my point in going to Brighton, with all my family, this would not have happened; but poor dear Jackson had nobody to take care of him. Why did the Finstocks ever let him go out of their sight? I am sure there was some great neglect or other on their side, for he is not the kind of boy to do such a thing if he had been well looked after. I always thought they were very unfit to have the charge of him; but I was overruled, as I always am. Poor dear child! And now here's Sherriff Stilinski gone away, and I know he will fight Matt, wherever he meets him and then he will be killed, and what is to become of us all? The Harrises will turn us out before he is cold in his grave, and if you are not kind to us, brother, I do not know what we shall do."

They all exclaimed against such terrific ideas; and Dr. Deaton, after general assurances of his affection for her and all her family, told her that he meant to be in London the very next day, and would assist Sherriff Stilinski in every endeavour for recovering Jackson.

"Do not give way to useless alarm," added he; "though it is right to be prepared for the worst, there is no occasion to look on it as certain. It is not quite a week since they left Brighton. In a few days more we may gain some news of them; and till we know that they are not married, and have no design of marrying, do not let us give the matter over as lost. As soon as I get to town I shall go to my brother, and make him come home with me to Gracechurch Street; and then we may consult together as to what is to be done."

"Oh! my dear brother," replied Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, "that is exactly what I could most wish for. And now do, when you get to town, find them out, wherever they may be; and if they are not married already, make them marry. And as for wedding clothes, do not let them wait for that, but tell Jackson he shall have as much money as he chooses to buy them – from Hugo Boss too, after they are married. And, above all, keep Sherriff Stilinski from fighting. Tell him what a dreadful state I am in, that I am frightened out of my wits - and have such tremblings, such flutterings, all over me – such spasms in my side and pains in my head, and such beatings at heart, that I can get no rest by night nor by day. And tell my dear Jackson not to give any directions about where to register for wedding presents till he has seen me, for he does not know which are the best department stores. Macys will not do. Oh, brother, how kind you are! I know you will contrive it all."

But Dr. Deaton, though he assured her again of his earnest endeavours in the cause, could not avoid recommending moderation to her, as well in her hopes as her fear; and after talking with her in this manner till dinner was on the table, they all left her to vent all her feelings on the housekeeper, who attended in the absence of her children.
Though her brother and sister were persuaded that there was no real occasion for such a seclusion from the family, they did not attempt to oppose it, for they knew that she had not prudence enough to hold her tongue before the servants, while they waited at table, and judged it better that one only of the household, and the one whom they could most trust should comprehend all her fears and solicitude on the subject.

In the dining-room they were soon joined by Lydia and Kanima, who had been too busily engaged in their separate apartments to make their appearance before. One came from her mathematics books, and the other from her toilette. The faces of both, however, were tolerably calm; and no change was visible in either, except that the loss of her favourite brother, or the anger which she had herself incurred in this business, had given more of fretfulness than usual to the accents of Kanima. As for Lydia, she was mistress enough of herself to whisper to Stiles, with a countenance of grave reflection, soon after they were seated at table:

"This is a most unfortunate affair, and will probably be much talked of on Twitter and the like. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other the balm of family consolation."

Then, perceiving in Stiles no inclination of replying, she added,

"Unhappy as the event must be for Jackson, we may draw from it this useful lesson: that loss of virtue in a teenager is irretrievable; that one false step involves them in endless ruin; that their reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful; and that they cannot be too much guarded in their behaviour towards those who think only of sex."

Stiles rolled his eyes in amazement, but was too much oppressed to make any witty putdown by way of reply. Lydia, however, continued to console herself with such kind of moral extractions from the evil before them.

In the afternoon, the two elder teens were able to be for half-an-hour by themselves; and Stiles instantly availed himself of the opportunity of making any inquiries, which Scott was equally eager to satisfy.

After joining in general lamentations over the dreadful sequel of this event, which Stiles considered as all but certain, and Scott could not assert to be wholly impossible, the former continued the subject, by saying, "But tell me all and everything about it which I have not already heard. Give me further particulars. What did Colonel Finstock say? Had they no apprehension of anything before the elopement took place? They must have seen them together for ever."

"Colonel Finstock did own that he had often suspected some partiality, especially on Jackson's side, but nothing to give him any alarm. I am so grieved for him! His behaviour was attentive and kind to the utmost. He was coming to us, in order to assure us of his concern, before he had any idea of their not being gone to Scotland: when that apprehension first got abroad, it hastened his journey."

"And was Greenberg convinced that Matt would not marry? Did he know of their intending to go off? Had Colonel Finstock seen Greenberg himself?"

"Yes; but, when questioned by him, Greenberg denied knowing anything of their plans, and would not give his real opinion about it. He did not repeat his persuasion of their not marrying - and from that, I am inclined to hope, he might have been misunderstood before."

"And till Colonel Finstock came himself, not one of you entertained a doubt, I suppose, of their being really married?"
"How was it possible that such an idea should enter our brains? I felt a little uneasy - a little fearful of my brother's happiness with Matt in marriage, because I knew that his conduct had not been always quite right. My father and mother knew nothing of that; they only felt how imprudent a match it must be. Kanima then owned, with a very natural triumph on knowing more than the rest of us, that in Jackson's last email he had prepared her for such a step. Kanima had known, it seems, of their being in love with each other, many weeks."

"But not before they went to Brighton?"

"No, I believe not."

"And did Colonel Finstock appear to think well of Matt himself? Does he know his real character?"

"I must confess that he did not speak so well of Matt as he formerly did. He believed him to be imprudent and extravagant. And since this sad affair has taken place, it is said that he left Beacon Hills greatly in debt; but I hope this may be false."

"Oh, Scott, had we been less secret, had we told what we knew of him, this could not have happened!"

"Perhaps it would have been better," replied his brother. "But to expose the former faults of any person without knowing what their present feelings were, seemed unjustifiable. We acted with the best intentions."

"Could Colonel Finstock repeat the particulars of Jackson’s SMS to his wife?"

"He brought a print out of it for us to see."

Scott then took it from the back pocket of his jeans – not without difficulty, for the jeans were rather tight - and gave it to Stiles. These were the contents:

"HARRIET,

"You will lol when you know where I am gone, and I cannot help lol myself at your surprise, as soon as I am missed. I am going to Gretna Green, and if you cannot guess with who, I shall think you a simpleton, for there is but one man in the world I <3, and he is an angel. I should never be happy without him, so think it no harm to be off. You need not send them word at Longbourn of my going, if you do not like it, for it will make the surprise the greater, when I email to them with a new log in name 'Jackson Daehler.' What a good joke it will be! I can hardly text for SWL. Pray make my excuses to Greenberg for not dancing with him 2night and tell him I will dance with him at the next rave we meet. I shall send for my clothes when I get to Longbourn; but I wish you would tell Sally to mend a great slit in my Hugo Boss blazer before they are packed up. Good-bye. Give my <3 to Colonel Finstock. SWAK

"Jackson."

"Oh! thoughtless, thoughtless Jackson!" cried Stiles when he had finished it. "What a text is this, to be sent at such a moment! But at least it shows that he was serious on the subject of their journey. Whatever Matt might afterwards persuade Jackson to, it was not on Jackson's side a scheme of infamy. My poor father! how he must have felt it!"

"I never saw anyone so shocked. He could not speak a word for full ten minutes. My mother was taken ill immediately, and the whole house in such confusion!"
"Oh! Scott," cried Stiles, "was there a servant belonging to it who did not know the whole story before the end of the day?"

"I do not know. I hope there was. But to be guarded at such a time is very difficult. My mother was in hysterics, and though I endeavoured to give her every assistance in my power, I am afraid I did not do so much as I might have done! But the horror of what might possibly happen almost took from me my faculties."

"Your attendance upon her has been too much for you. You do not look well. Oh that I had been with you! you have had every care and anxiety upon yourself alone."

"Lydia and Kanima have been very kind, and would have shared in every fatigue, I am sure; but I did not think it right for either of them. Kanima is slight and a little unbalanced; and Lydia studies so much, that her hours of repose should not be broken in on. My aunt Phillips came to Longbourn on Tuesday, after my father went away; and was so good as to stay till Thursday with me. She was of great use and comfort to us all. And Sir Chris Silver has been very kind; he walked here on Wednesday morning to condole with us, and offered his services, or loan us a shot gun or two, if they should be of use to us."

"He had better have stayed at home," cried Stiles; "perhaps he meant well, but, under such a misfortune as this, one cannot see too little of one's neighbours. Assistance is impossible; condolence insufferable. Let them triumph over us at a distance, and be satisfied."

Stiles then proceeded to inquire into the measures which their father had intended to pursue, while in town, for the recovery of his son.

"He meant I believe," replied Scott, "to go to Epsom, the place where they last changed cars, see the Avis car hire people and try if anything could be made out from them. His principal object must be to discover the number of the black cab which took them from Clapham. It had come with a fare from London; and as he thought that the circumstance of a gentleman and young teen removing from a hire car into taxi might be remarked he meant to make inquiries at Clapham. If he could anyhow discover at what house the cab driver had before set down his fare, he determined to make inquiries there, and hoped it might not be impossible to find out their onward route. I do not know of any other designs that he had formed; but he was in such a hurry to be gone, and his spirits so greatly discomposed, that I had difficulty in finding out even so much as this."
Chapter Summary

The death of Jackson, or his getting fat and losing the definition of his abs, or his moving to Los Angeles and becoming an actor in an American comic book based television series would have been blessings in comparison of this. And it is the more to be lamented, because there is reason to suppose as my dear Allison informs me, that this licentiousness of behaviour in Jackson has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence – I could mention the Porsche; though, at the same time, for the consolation of yourself and Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, I am inclined to think that his own disposition must be naturally bad.

The whole party were in hopes of an email from Sheriff Stilinski the next morning, but there was not so much as a single text message from him. His family knew him to be, on all common occasions, a most negligent and dilatory correspondent; but at such a time they had hoped for exertion. They were forced to conclude that he had no pleasing intelligence to send; but even of that they would have been glad to be certain. Dr. Deaton had only waited until it was clear no email was forthcoming before he set off.

When he was gone, they were certain at least of receiving constant information of what was going on, and their uncle promised, at parting, to prevail on Sheriff Stilinski to return to Longbourn, as soon as he could, to the great consolation of his sister, who considered it as the only security for her husband's not being killed in a duel.

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton and the children were to remain in Hertfordshire a few days longer, as the former thought her presence might be serviceable to her nephews. She shared in their attendance on Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, and was a great comfort to them in their hours of freedom. Their other aunt also visited them frequently, and always, as she said, with the design of cheering and heartening them up--though, as she never came without reporting some fresh instance of Matt’s extravagant spending on camera equipment or stalker like behaviour, she seldom went away without leaving them more dispirited than she found them.

All Beacon Hills seemed striving to blacken the man who, but three months before, had been almost an angel of light. He was declared to have run up unpaid store card bills with every Macys in the neighbourhood, and his artistic photographs, all honoured with the title of stalker pornography, had been extended into every tradesman's family. Everybody declared that he was the wickedest young man in the world; and everybody began to find out that they had always distrusted the appearance of his goodness. Stiles, though he did not credit above half of what was said, believed enough to make his former assurance of his brother's ruin more certain; and even Scott, who believed still less of it, became almost hopeless, more especially as the time was now come when, if they had gone to Scotland, which Scott had never before entirely despaired of, they must in all probability have gained some news of them.

Dr. Deaton left Longbourn on Sunday; on Tuesday his wife received an email from him; it told them that, on his arrival, he had immediately found out his brother, and persuaded him to come to Gracechurch Street; that Sheriff Stilinski had been to Epsom and Clapham, before his arrival, but without gaining any satisfactory information; and that he was now determined to inquire at all the
principal hotels in town, as Sheriff Stilinski thought it possible they might have gone to one of them, on their first coming to London, before they procured lodgings. Dr. Deaton himself did not expect any success from this measure, but as his brother was eager in it, he meant to assist him in pursuing it. He added that Sheriff Stilinski seemed wholly disinclined at present to leave London and promised to email again very soon. There was also a postscript to this effect:

"I have written to Colonel Finstock to desire him to find out, if possible, from some of the young man's intimates in the regiment, whether Matt has any relations or connections who would be likely to know in what part of town he has now concealed himself. If there were anyone that one could apply to with a probability of gaining such a clue as that, it might be of essential consequence. At present we have nothing to guide us. Colonel Finstock will, I dare say, do everything in his power to satisfy us on this head. But, on second thoughts, perhaps, Stiles could tell us what relations he has now living, better than any other person."

Stiles was at no loss to understand from whence this deference to his authority proceeded; but it was not in his power to give any information of so satisfactory a nature as the compliment deserved. He had never heard of Matt having had any relations, except a father and mother, both of whom had been dead many years. It was possible, however, that some of his companions in the ----shire might be able to give more information; and though Stiles was not very sanguine in expecting it, the application was something to look forward to.

Every day at Longbourn was now a day of anxiety; but the most anxious part of each was when emails or Facebook updates might reasonably be expected. The constant refreshing of inbox screens was the sole occupation of every morning's impatience. Through emails whatever of good or bad was to be told would be communicated, and every succeeding day was expected to bring some news of importance.

But before they heard again from Dr Dearon, an email arrived for their father, from a different quarter, from Mr. Harris; which, as Scott had received directions (and relevant password) to open all that came for him in his absence, he accordingly read; and Stiles, who knew what curiosities Mr. Harris's emails always were, looked over Scott, and read it likewise. It was as follows:

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I feel myself called upon, by our relationship, and my situation in life, to condole with you on the grievous affliction you are now suffering under, of which we were yesterday informed by a letter from Hertfordshire. Be assured, my dear sir, that Mrs. Harris and myself sincerely sympathise with you and all your respectable family, in your present distress, which must be of the bitterest kind, because proceeding from a cause which no time can remove. No arguments shall be wanting on my part that can alleviate so severe a misfortune - or that may comfort you, under a circumstance that must be of all others the most afflicting to a parent's mind. The death of Jackson, or his getting fat and losing the definition of his abs, or his moving to Los Angeles and becoming an actor in an American comic book based television series would have been blessings in comparison of this. And it is the more to be lamented, because there is reason to suppose as my dear Allison informs me, that this licentiousness of behaviour in Jackson has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence - I could mention the Porsche; though, at the same time, for the consolation of yourself and Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, I am inclined to think that his own disposition must be naturally bad, or he could not be guilty of such an enormity, at so early an age. Howsoever that may be, you are grievously to be pitied; in which opinion I am not only joined by Mrs. Harris, but likewise by Lady D’Argent and her daughter, to whom I have related the affair. They agree with me in apprehending that this false step in one child will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others; for who, as Lady D’Argent herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family? And this consideration leads me moreover to reflect, with augmented satisfaction, on a certain event of last November; for had it been
otherwise, I must have been involved in all your sorrow and disgrace. Let me then advise you, dear sir, to console yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave him to reap the fruits of his own heinous offense.

"I am, dear sir, etc., etc."

Dr Deaton did not email again till he had received an answer from Colonel Finstock; and then he had nothing of a pleasant nature to send. It was not known that Matt had a single relationship with whom he kept up any connection, and it was certain that he had no near one living. His former acquaintances had been numerous, generally based in a local photography society; but since he had been in the militia, it did not appear that he was on terms of particular friendship with any of them. He was a bit of a weird loner, in short. There was no one, therefore, who could be pointed out as likely to give any news of him. And in the wretched state of his own finances, there was a very powerful motive for secrecy, in addition to his fear of discovery by Jackson’s relations, for it had just transpired that he had left gaming debts behind him to a very considerable amount. Colonel Finstock believed that more than a hundred thousand pounds would be necessary to clear his expenses at Brighton. He owed a good deal in town, but his debts of honour were still more formidable. Dr Deaton did not attempt to conceal these particulars from the Longbourn family. Scott heard them with horror. "A gamester!" he cried. "This is wholly unexpected. I had not an idea of it."

Dr. Deaton added in his email, that they might expect to see their father at home on the following day, which was Saturday. Rendered spiritless by the ill-success of all their endeavours, he had yielded to his brother-in-law’s entreaty that he would return to his family, and leave it to him to do whatever occasion might suggest to be advisable for continuing their pursuit. When Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was told of this, she did not express so much satisfaction as her children expected, considering what her anxiety for his life had been before.

"What, is he coming home, and without poor Jackson?" she cried. "Sure he will not leave London before he has found them. Who is to fight Matt, and make him marry Jackson, if he comes away?"

As Mrs. Morrell-Deaton began to wish to be at home, it was settled that she and the children should go to London, at the same time that Sherriff Stilinski came from it. The Toyota SUV, therefore, took them the first stage of their journey, and brought its master back to Longbourn.

Mrs. Morrell-Deaton went away in all the perplexity about Stiles and his Derbyshire friend that had attended her from that part of the world. Derek’s name had never been voluntarily mentioned before them by her nephew; and the kind of half-expectation which Mrs. Morrell-Deaton had formed, of their being followed by an email or a Skype from him, had ended in nothing. Stiles had received no electronic communication since his return that could come from Pemberley. The present unhappy state of the family rendered any other excuse for the lowness of his spirits unnecessary; nothing, therefore, could be fairly conjectured from that, though Stiles, who was by this time tolerably well acquainted with his own feelings, was perfectly aware that, had he known nothing of Derek, he could have borne the dread of Jackson’s infamy somewhat better. It would have spared him, he thought, one sleepless night out of two.

When Sherriff Stilinski arrived, he had all the appearance of his usual philosophic composure. He said as little as he had ever been in the habit of saying; made no mention of the business that had taken him away, and it was some time before his eldest sons had courage to speak of it.

It was not till the afternoon, when he had joined them at tea, that Stiles ventured to introduce the
subject; and then, on his briefly expressing his sorrow for what he must have endured, he replied, "Say nothing of that. Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it."

"You must not be too severe upon yourself," replied Stiles.

"You may well warn me against such an evil. Human nature is so prone to fall into it! No, Stiles, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough."

"Do you suppose them to be in London?"

"Yes; where else can they be so well concealed?"

"And Jackson used to want to go to London," added Kanima "Ever since he saw that film. You know, the werewolf one".

"He is happy then," said her father drily; "and his residence there will probably be of some duration."

Then after a short silence he continued:

"Stiles, I bear you no ill-will for being justified in your advice to me last May, which, considering the event, shows some greatness of mind."

They were interrupted by Scott, who came to fetch his mother's tea.

"This is a parade," he cried, "which does one good; it gives such an elegance to misfortune! Another day I will do the same; I will sit in my library, in my sweatpants and T-shirt, and give as much trouble as I can; or, perhaps, I may defer it till Kanima runs away."

"I am not going to run away, papa," said Kanima fretfully. "If I should ever go to Brighton, I would behave better than Jackson."

"You go to Brighton. I would not trust you so near it as Eastbourne for five thousand pounds! No, Kanima, I have at last learnt to be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it. No officer is ever to enter into my house again, nor even to pass through the village. Balls will be absolutely prohibited, unless you stand up with one of your siblings. And you are never to use laptop or Samsung phone till you can prove that you have spent ten minutes of every day in a rational manner."

Kanima, who took all these threats in a serious light, began to cry.

"Well, well," said he, "do not make yourself unhappy. If you are a good girl for the next ten years, I will take you to a review at the end of them."
"Money! My uncle!" cried Scott, "what do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, that no man in his senses would marry Jackson on so slight a temptation as ten thousand a year during my life, and a five thousand a year after I am gone."

"That is very true," said Stiles; "though it had not occurred to me before. His debts to be discharged, and something still to remain! Oh! it must be my uncle's doings! Generous, good man, I am afraid he has distressed himself. A small sum could not do all this."

"No," said his father; "Matt Daehler's a fool if he takes Jackson with a farthing less than a million pounds. I should be sorry to think so ill of him, in the very beginning of our relationship."

Two days after Sheriff Stilinski’s return, as Scott and Stiles were walking together in the shrubbery behind the house, they saw the housekeeper coming towards them, and, concluding that she came to call them to their mother, went forward to meet her; but, instead of the expected summons, when they approached her, she said to Scott, "I beg your pardon, young master, for interrupting you, but I was in hopes you might have got some good news from town, so I took the liberty of coming to ask."

"What do you mean, Hill? We have heard nothing from town."

"Dear master," cried Mrs. Hill, in great astonishment, "don't you know there is an email come for the Sheriff from Dr. Deaton?"

Away ran the boys, too eager to get in to have time for speech. They ran through the vestibule into the breakfast-room; from thence to the library; their father was in neither; and they were on the point of seeking him up stairs with their mother, when they were met by the butler, who said:

"If you are looking for the Sheriff, young masters, he is walking towards the little copse."

Upon this information, they instantly passed through the hall once more, and ran across the lawn after their father, who was deliberately pursuing his way towards a small wood on one side of the paddock. Scott, who was not so light nor so much in the habit of running in human form as Stiles, soon lagged behind, while his brother, panting for breath, came up with him, and eagerly cried out:

"Oh, papa, what news - what news? Have you heard from my uncle?"

"Yes I have had an email from him."

"Well, and what news does it bring - good or bad?"

"What is there of good to be expected?" said he, taking his Samsung from his pocket. "But perhaps you would like to read it."
Stiles impatiently caught the phone from his hand and started to scroll down the text. Scott now came up.

"Read it aloud," said their father, "for I hardly know myself what it is about."

"Gracechurch Street, Monday, August 2.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"At last I am able to send you some tidings of my nephew, and such as, upon the whole, I hope it will give you satisfaction. Soon after you left me on Saturday, I was fortunate enough to find out in what part of London they were. The particulars I reserve till we meet; it is enough to know they are discovered. I have seen them both--"

"Then it is as I always hoped," cried Scott; "they are married!"

Stiles read on:

"I have seen them both. They are not married, nor can I find there was any intention of being so; but if you are willing to perform the engagements which I have ventured to make on your side, I hope it will not be long before they are. All that is required of you is, to assure to your son, by settlement, his equal share of the five hundred thousand pounds secured among your children after the decease of yourself and my sister; and, moreover, to enter into an engagement of allowing him, during your life, ten thousand pounds per annum. These are conditions which, considering everything, I had no hesitation in complyng with, as far as I thought myself privileged, for you. I shall email this straight away, that no time may be lost in bringing me your answer. You will easily comprehend, from these particulars, that Matt’s circumstances are not so hopeless as they are generally believed to be. The world has been deceived in that respect; and I am happy to say there will be some little money, even when all his debts are discharged, to settle on my nephew, in addition to his own fortune. If, as I conclude will be the case, you send me full powers to act in your name throughout the whole of this business, I will immediately give directions to Haggerston for preparing a proper settlement. There will not be the smallest occasion for your coming to town again; therefore stay quiet at Longbourn, and depend on my diligence and care. Send back your answer as fast as you can, and be careful to write explicitly. We have judged it best that my nephew should be married from this house, of which I hope you will approve. He comes to us to-day. I shall write again as soon as anything more is determined on. Yours, etc.,

"DEATON"

"Is it possible?" cried Stiles, when he had finished. "Can it be possible that he will marry Jackson?"

"Matt is not so undeserving, then, as we thought him," said his brother. "My dear father, I congratulate you."

"And have you answered the email?" cried Stiles.

"No; but it must be done soon."

Most earnestly did Stiles then entreat him to lose no more time before he replied.

"Oh! my dear father," Stiles cried, "come back and write immediately. Consider how important every moment is in such a case."

"Let me email for you," said Scott, "if you dislike the trouble yourself."
"I dislike it very much," he replied; "but it must be done."

And so saying, he turned back with them, and walked towards the house.

"And may I ask -" said Stiles; "but the terms, I suppose, must be complied with."

"Complied with! I am only ashamed of his asking so little."

"And they must marry! Yet he is such a man!"

"Yes, yes, they must marry. There is nothing else to be done. But there are two things that I want very much to know; one is, how much money your uncle has laid down to bring it about; and the other, how am I ever to pay him."

"Money! My uncle!" cried Scott, "what do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, that no man in his senses would marry Jackson on so slight a temptation as ten thousand a year during my life, and a five thousand a year after I am gone."

"That is very true," said Stiles; "though it had not occurred to me before. His debts to be discharged, and something still to remain! Oh! it must be my uncle's doings! Generous, good man, I am afraid he has distressed himself. A small sum could not do all this."

"No," said his father; "Matt Daehler’s a fool if he takes Jackson with a farthing less than a million pounds. I should be sorry to think so ill of him, in the very beginning of our relationship."

"A million pounds! Heaven forbid! How is half such a sum to be repaid?"

Sheriff Stilinski made no answer, and each of them, deep in thought, continued silent till they reached the house. Their father then went on to the library to email using the broadband connection there, and the boys walked into the breakfast-room.

"And they are really to be married!" cried Stiles, as soon as they were by themselves. "How strange this is! And for this we are to be thankful. That they should marry, small as is their chance of happiness, and wretched as is his character, we are forced to rejoice. Oh, Jackson!"

"I comfort myself with thinking," replied Scott, "that he certainly would not marry Jackson if he had not a real regard for him. Though our kind uncle has done something towards clearing him, I cannot believe that a million pounds, or anything like it, has been advanced. He has children of his own, and may have more. How could he spare even half a million pounds?"

"If we were ever able to learn what Matt's debts have been," said Stiles, "and how much is settled on his side on our brother, we shall exactly know what Dr. Deaton has done for them, because Matt has not sixpence of his own. The kindness of my uncle and aunt can never be requited. Their taking Jackson home, and affording him their personal protection and countenance, is such a sacrifice to his advantage as years of gratitude cannot enough acknowledge. By this time he is actually with them! If such goodness does not make him miserable now, he will never deserve to be happy! What a meeting for him, when he first sees my aunt!"

"We must endeavour to forget all that has passed on either side," said Scott: "I hope and trust they will yet be happy. His consenting to marry Jackson is a proof, I will believe, that he is come to a right way of thinking. Their mutual affection will steady them; and I flatter myself they will settle so quietly, and live in so rational a manner, as may in time make their past imprudence forgotten."
"Their conduct has been such," replied Stiles, "as neither you, nor I, nor anybody can ever forget. It is useless to talk of it."

It now occurred to the boys that their mother was in all likelihood perfectly ignorant of what had happened. They went to the library, therefore, and asked their father whether he would not wish them to make it known to her. He was typing and, without raising his head, coolly replied:

"Just as you please."

"May we forward my uncle's email to read to her?"

"Forward whatever you like, and get away."

Stiles forwarded the email from his father's Samsung, and they went upstairs together. Lydia and Kanima were both with Mrs. McCall-Stilinski: one communication would, therefore, do for all. After a slight preparation for good news, the email was read aloud. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski could hardly contain herself. As soon as Scott had read Dr. Deaton's hope of Jackson's being soon married, her joy burst forth, and every following sentence added to its exuberance. She was now in an irritation as violent from delight, as she had ever been fidgety from alarm and vexation. To know that her son would be married was enough. She was disturbed by no fear for his felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of his misconduct.

"My dear, dear Jackson!" she cried. "This is delightful indeed! He will be married! I shall see him again! He will be married at sixteen! My good, kind brother! I knew how it would be. I knew he would manage everything! How I long to see Jackson! and to see dear Matt too! But the clothes, the wedding clothes! I will write to my sister Morrell-Deaton about them directly. Stiles, my dear, run down to your father, and ask him how much he will give Jackson. Stay, stay, I will go myself. Ring the bell, Kanima, for Hill. I will put on my things in a moment. My dear, dear Jackson! How merry we shall be together when we meet!"

Her eldest son endeavoured to give some relief to the violence of these transports, by leading her thoughts to the obligations which Deaton's behaviour laid them all under.

"For we must attribute this happy conclusion," Scott added, "in a great measure to his kindness. We are persuaded that he has pledged himself to assist Matt with money."

"Well," cried his mother, "it is all very right; who should do it but his own uncle? If he had not had a family of his own, I and my children must have had all his money, you know; and it is the first time we have ever had anything from him, except a few presents. Well! I am so happy! In a short time I shall have a son married. And he was only sixteen last June. My dear Scott, I am in such a flutter, that I am sure I can't type; so I will dictate, and you email for me. We will settle with your father about the money afterwards; but the things should be ordered immediately."

She was then proceeding to all the particulars of Hugo Boss, Armani, and Zegna, and would shortly have dictated some very plentiful orders, had not Scott, though with some difficulty, persuaded her to wait till his father was at leisure to be consulted. One day's delay, Scott observed, would be of small importance; and his mother was too happy to be quite so obstinate as usual. Other schemes, too, came into her head.

"I will go to Beacon Hills," said she, "as soon as I am dressed, and tell the good, good news to my sister Philips. And as I come back, I can call on Mrs. Long. Kanima, run down and order the SUV. An airing would do me a great deal of good, I am sure. Kids, can I do anything for you in Beacon Hills? Oh! Here comes Hill! My dear Hill, have you heard the good news? Jackson is going to be married; and you shall all have a bowl of Jack Daniels to make merry at his wedding."
Mrs. Hill began instantly to express her joy. Stiles received her congratulations amongst the rest, and then, sick of this folly, took refuge in his own room, that he might think with freedom. Poor Jackson’s situation must, at best, be bad enough; but that it was no worse, he had need to be thankful. Stiles felt it so; and though, in looking forward, neither rational happiness nor worldly prosperity could be justly expected for his brother, in looking back to what they had feared, only two hours ago, he felt all the advantages of what they had gained.
I understand from Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, that Jackson is very desirous of seeing you all before he leaves for Starling City. Jackson is well, and seems to spend all his time doing sit ups, and he begs to be dutifully remembered to you and his mother.

Sheriff Stilinski had very often wished before this period of his life that, instead of spending his whole income, he had laid by an annual sum for the better provision of his children, and of his wife, if she survived him. He now wished it more than ever. Had he done his duty in that respect, Jackson need not have been indebted to his uncle for whatever of honour or credit could now be purchased for him. The satisfaction of prevailing on one of the most worthless young men in Great Britain to be Jackson’s husband might then have rested in its proper place.

The Sherriff was seriously concerned that a cause of so little advantage to anyone should be forwarded at the sole expense of his brother-in-law, and he was determined, if possible, to find out the extent of his assistance, and to discharge the obligation as soon as he could.

Five hundred thousand pounds was settled by marriage articles on Mrs. McCall-Stilinski and the children. But in what proportions it should be divided amongst the latter depended on the will of the parents. This was one point, with regard to Jackson, at least, which was now to be settled, and Sheriff Stilinski could have no hesitation in acceding to the proposal before him. In terms of grateful acknowledgment for the kindness of his brother, though expressed most concisely, he then delivered via email his perfect approbation of all that was done, and his willingness to fulfill the engagements that had been made for him. He had never before supposed that, could Matt be prevailed on to marry his son, it would be done with so little inconvenience to himself as by the present arrangement. He would scarcely be a thousand pounds a year the loser by the ten thousand that was to be paid them; for, with Jackson’s board, fuel for the Porsche and pocket allowance, and the continual presents in money which passed to him through his mother's hands, Jackson's expenses had been very little within that sum.

That it would be done with such trifling exertion on his side, too, was another very welcome surprise; for his wish at present was to have as little trouble in the business as possible. When the first transports of rage which had produced his activity in seeking Jackson were over, he naturally returned to all his former indolence. His email was soon dispatched; for, though dilatory in undertaking business, he was quick in its execution. He begged to know further particulars of what he was indebted to his brother, but was too angry with Jackson to send any message to him.

The good news spread quickly through the house, and with proportionate speed through the neighbourhood. It was borne in the latter with decent philosophy. To be sure, it would have been more for the advantage of conversation had Jackson come upon the town; or, as the happiest alternative, been secluded from the world, in some distant farmhouse. But there was much to be talked of in marrying him; and the good-natured wishes for his well-doing which had proceeded before from all the spiteful old ladies in Beacon Hills lost but a little of their spirit in this change of circumstances, because with such an husband his misery was considered certain.

It was a fortnight since Mrs. McCall-Stilinski had been downstairs; but on this happy day she again
took her seat at the head of her table, and in spirits oppressively high. No sentiment of shame gave a
damp to her triumph. The marriage of a child, which had been the first object of her wishes since
Scott was sixteen, was now on the point of accomplishment, and her thoughts and her words ran
wholly on those attendants of elegant nuptials, fine suits, new sports cars, and servants. She was
busily searching through the neighbourhood for a proper situation for her son, and, without knowing
or considering what their income might be, rejected many as deficient in size and importance.

"Haye Park might do," said she, "if the Gouldings could quit it - or the great house at Stoke, if the
drawing-room were larger; but Ashworth is too far off! I could not bear to have Jackson ten miles
from me; and as for Pulvis Lodge, the attics are dreadful."

Her husband allowed her to talk on without interruption while the servants remained. But when they
had withdrawn, he said to her: "Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, before you take any or all of these houses for
your son and his husband, let us come to a right understanding. Into one house in this neighbourhood
they shall never have admittance. I will not encourage the impudence of either, by receiving them at
Longbourn."

A long dispute followed this declaration; but Sherriff Stilinski was firm. It soon led to another; and
Mrs. McCall-Stilinski found, with amazement and horror, that her husband would not advance a
guinea to buy clothes for his son. He protested that Jackson should receive from him no mark of
affection whatever on the occasion. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski could hardly comprehend it. That his
anger could be carried to such a point of inconceivable resentment as to refuse his son a privilege
without which the marriage would scarcely seem valid, exceeded all she could believe possible. She
was more alive to the disgrace which Jackson’s want of new designer clothes must reflect on her
son's nuptials, than to any sense of shame at Jackson eloping and living with Matt a fortnight before
they took place.

Stiles was now most heartily sorry that he had, from the distress of the moment, been led to make Mr.
Derek acquainted with their fears for Jackson; for since his marriage would so shortly give the proper
termination to the elopement, they might hope to conceal its unfavourable beginning from all those
who were not immediately on the spot.

Stiles had no fear of its spreading farther through his means. There were few people on whose
secrecy he would have more confidently depended; but, at the same time, there was no one whose
knowledge of a brother's frailty would have mortified him so much - not, however, from any fear of
disadvantage from it individually to himself, for, at any rate, there seemed a gulf impassable between
them. Had Jackson's marriage been concluded on the most honourable terms, it was not to be
supposed that Mr. Derek would connect himself with a family where, to every other objection,
would now be added an alliance and relationship of the nearest kind with a man whom he so justly
scorned.

From such a connection Stiles could not wonder that he would shrink. The wish of procuring his
regard, which Stiles had assured himself of his feeling in Derbyshire, could not in rational
expectation survive such a blow as this. Stiles was humbled, he was grieved; he repented, though he
hardly knew of what. He became jealous of Derek’s esteem, when he could no longer hope to be
benefited by it. Stiles wanted to hear of him, when there seemed the least chance of gaining
intelligence. Stiles was convinced that he could have been happy with Derek, when it was no longer
likely they should meet.

What a triumph for Derek, as Stiles often thought, could Derek know that the proposals which he
had proudly spurned only four months ago, would now have been most gladly and gratefully
received! Derek was as generous, Stiles doubted not, as the most generous of his sex; but while he
was mortal, there must be a triumph.
Stiles began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man who, in disposition and talents, would most suit him. His understanding and temper, though unlike Stiles’s own, would have answered all his wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both; by Stiles’s ease and liveliness, Derek’s mind might have been softened, his manners improved, his inclination to slam people into inanimate objects and glower at them lessened; and from his judgement, information, access to bestiaries and knowledge of the supernatural world, Stiles must have received benefit of greater importance.

But no such happy marriage could now teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was. An union of a different tendency, and precluding the possibility of the other, was soon to be formed in their family.

How Matt and Jackson were to be supported in tolerable independence, Siles could not imagine. But how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, he could easily conjecture.

Dr Deaton soon emailed his brother again. To the Sheriff’s acknowledgments he briefly replied, with assurance of his eagerness to promote the welfare of any of his family; and concluded with entreaties that the subject might never be mentioned to him again. The principal purport of his mail was to inform them that Matt had resolved on quitting the militia.

"It was greatly my wish that he should do so," he added, "as soon as his marriage was fixed on. And I think you will agree with me, in considering the removal from that corps as highly advisable, both on his account and my nephew’s. It is Matt’s intention to go into the regulars; and among his former friends, there are still some who are able and willing to assist him in the army. He has the promise of an ensigncy in General Queen’s regiment, now quartered in Starling City. It is an advantage to have it so far from this part of the kingdom. He promises fairly; and I hope among different people, where they may each have a character to preserve, they will both be more prudent. I have written to Colonel Finstock, to inform him of our present arrangements, and to request that he will satisfy the various creditors of Matt in and near Brighton, with assurances of speedy payment, for which I have pledged myself. And will you give yourself the trouble of carrying similar assurances to his creditors in Beacon Hills, of whom I shall attach a pdf according to his information? He has given in all his debts; I hope at least he has not deceived us. Haggerston has our directions, and all will be completed in a week. They will then join his regiment, unless they are first invited to Longbourn; and I understand from Mrs. Morrell-Deaton, that Jackson is very desirous of seeing you all before he leaves for Starling City. Jackson is well, and seems to spend all his time down the gym doing sit ups, and he begs to be dutifully remembered to you and his mother.--Yours, etc.,

"DEATON"

The Sheriff and his two eldest sons saw all the advantages of Matt's removal from the ----shire as clearly as Dr. Deaton could do. But Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was not so well pleased with it. Jackson’s being settled in Starling City, just when she had expected most pleasure and pride in his company, for she had by no means given up her plan of their residing in Hertfordshire, was a severe disappointment; and, besides, it was such a pity that Jackson should be taken from a regiment where he was acquainted with everybody, and had so many favourites.

"Jackson is so fond of Mrs. Finstock," said she, "it will be quite shocking to send him away! And there are several of the young men, too, that he likes very much. The officers may not be so pleasant in General Queen’s regiment."
His son's request, for such it might be considered, of being admitted into his family again before he set off for Starling City, received at first an absolute negative. But Scott and Stiles, who agreed in wishing, for the sake of their brother's feelings and consequence, that he should be noticed on his marriage by his parents, urged him so earnestly yet so rationally and so mildly, to receive Jackson and his husband at Longbourn, as soon as they were married, that he was prevailed on to think as they thought, and act as they wished. And their mother had the satisfaction of knowing that she would be able to show her married son in the neighbourhood before he was banished to Starling City. When Sheriff Stilinski wrote again to his brother, therefore, he sent his permission for them to come; and it was settled, that as soon as the ceremony was over, they should proceed to Longbourn. Stiles was surprised, however, that Matt should consent to such a scheme, and had he consulted only his own inclination, any meeting with Matt would have been the last object of his wishes.
Stiles was disgusted, and even Scott was shocked. Jackson was Jackson still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, snarky, arrogant, high-cheekboned and fearless.

Their brother's wedding day arrived; and Scott and Stiles felt for Jackson probably more than he felt for himself. The SUV was sent to meet them at the train station, and they were to return in it by dinner-time. Their arrival was dreaded by the elder teens, and Scott more especially, who gave Jackson the feelings which would have attended himself, had he been the culprit, and was wretched in the thought of what his brother must endure.

They came. The family were assembled in the breakfast room to receive them. Smiles decked the face of Mrs. McCall-Stilinski as the carriage drove up to the door; her husband looked impenetrably grave; her children, alarmed, anxious, uneasy.

Jackson's voice was heard in the vestibule; the door was thrown open, and he ran into the room. His mother stepped forwards, embraced him, and welcomed him with rapture; gave her hand, with an affectionate smile, to Matt, who followed his husband; and wished them both joy with an alacrity which shewed no doubt of their happiness.

Their reception from Sheriff Stilinski, to whom they then turned, was not quite so cordial. His countenance rather gained in austerity; and he scarcely opened his lips. The easy assurance of the young couple, indeed, was enough to provoke him. Stiles was disgusted, and even Scott was shocked. Jackson was Jackson still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, snarky, arrogant, high-cheekboned and fearless. He turned from sibling to sibling, demanding their congratulations; and when at length they all sat down, looked eagerly round the room, took notice of some little alteration in it, and observed, with a laugh, that it was a great while since he had been there.

Matt was not at all more distressed than Jackson, but his manners were always so pleasing, that had his character and his marriage been exactly what they ought, his smiles and his easy address, while he claimed their relationship, would have delighted them all. Stiles had not before believed him quite equal to such assurance; but he sat down, resolving within himself to draw no limits in future to the impudence of an impudent man. Stiles blushed, and Scott blushed; but the cheeks of the two who caused their confusion suffered no variation of colour.

There was no want of discourse. Jackson and his mother could neither of them talk fast enough; and Matt, who happened to sit near Stiles, began inquiring after his acquaintance in that neighbourhood, with a good humoured ease which Stiles felt very unable to equal in his replies. They seemed each of them to have the happiest memories in the world. Nothing of the past was recollected with pain; and Jackson led voluntarily to subjects which his siblings would not have alluded to for the world.

"Only think of its being three months," he cried, "since I went away; it seems but a fortnight I declare; and yet there have been things enough happened in the time. Good gracious! when I went away, I am sure I had no more idea of being married till I came back again! though I thought it would be very good fun if I was."

His father lifted up his eyes. Scott was distressed. Stiles looked expressively at Jackson; but he, who
never heard nor saw anything of which he chose to be insensible, gaily continued, "Oh! mamma, do the people hereabouts know I am married to-day? I was afraid they might not; and we overtook William Goulding in his sports car, so I was determined he should know it, and so I wound down the window of the SUV and let my hand just rest upon the window frame, so that he might see the ring, and then I bowed and smiled like anything."

Stiles could bear it no longer. He got up, and ran out of the room; and returned no more, till he heard them passing through the hall to the dining parlour. He then joined them soon enough to see Jackson, with anxious parade, walk up to his mother's right hand, and hear him say to his eldest brother, "Ah! Scott, I take your place in the pack now, and you must go lower, because I am a married man."

It was not to be supposed that time would give Jackson that embarrassment from which he had been so wholly free at first. His ease and good spirits increased. He longed to see Mrs. Phillips, the Silvers, and all their other neighbours, and to hear himself called "Jackson Daehler" by each of them; and in the mean time, he went after dinner to show his ring, and boast of being married, to Mrs. Hill and the two housemaids.

"Well, mamma," said Jackson, when they were all returned to the breakfast room, "and what do you think of my husband? Is not he a charming man? I am sure my siblings must all envy me. I only hope they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Brighton. That is the place to get husbands. What a pity it is, mamma, we did not all go."

"Very true; and if I had my will, we should. But my dear Jackson, I don't at all like your going such a way off. Must it be so?"

"Oh, lord! yes; - there is nothing in that. I shall like it of all things. You and papa, and my siblings, must come down and see us. We shall be at Starling City all the winter, and I dare say there will be some balls, and I will take care to get good partners for them all."

"I should like it beyond anything!" said her mother.

"And then when you go away, you may leave one or two of them behind you; and I dare say I shall get husbands for them before the winter is over."

"I thank you for my share of the favour," said Stiles; "but I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands."

Their visitors were not to remain above ten days with them. Matt had received his commission before he left London, and he was to join his regiment at the end of a fortnight.

No one but Mrs. McCall-Stilinski regretted that their stay would be so short; and she made the most of the time by visiting about with her youngest son, and having very frequent parties at home. These parties were acceptable to all; to avoid a family circle was even more desirable to such as did think, than such as did not.

Matt's affection for Jackson was just what Stiles had expected to find it; not equal to Jackson's for him. Stiles had scarcely needed his present observation to be satisfied, from the reason of things, that their elopement had been brought on by the strength of Jackson’s love, rather than by Matt’s; and Stiles would have wondered why, without violently caring for Jackson, he chose to record a sex tape and elope with him at all, had Stiles not felt certain that Matt’s flight was rendered necessary by distress of circumstances; and if that were the case, he was not the young man to resist an opportunity of having a companion.

Jackson was exceedingly fond of him. He was his dear Matt on every occasion; no one was to be put
in competition with him. He did every thing best in the world; and Jackson was sure he would kill more birds on the first of September, than any body else in the country.

One morning, soon after their arrival, as Jackson was sitting with his two elder brothers, he said to Stiles:

"Stiles, I never gave you an account of my wedding, I believe. You were not by, when I told mamma and the others all about it. Are not you curious to hear how it was managed?"

"No really," replied Stiles; "I think there cannot be too little said on the subject."

"La! You are so strange! But I must tell you how it went off. We were married, you know, at St. Clement's, because Matt's lodgings were in that parish. And it was settled that we should all be there by eleven o'clock. My uncle and aunt and I were to go together; and the others were to meet us at the church. Well, Monday morning came, and I was in such a fuss! I was so afraid, you know, that something would happen to put it off, and then I should have gone quite distracted. And there was my aunt, all the time I was dressing, preaching and talking away just as if she was reading a sermon. However, I did not hear above one word in ten, for I was thinking, you may suppose, of my dear Matt. I longed to know whether he would be married in his blue coat."

"Well, and so we breakfasted at ten as usual; I thought it would never be over; for, by the bye, you are to understand, that my uncle and aunt were horrid unpleasant all the time I was with them. If you'll believe me, I did not once put my foot out of doors, though I was there a fortnight. Not one party, or scheme, or anything. To be sure London was rather thin, but, however, there were a couple of nightclubs and a gay bar or two that were open. Well, and so just as the taxi came to the door, my uncle was called away upon business to that horrid man Mr. Stone. And then, you know, when once they get together, there is no end of it. Well, I was so frightened I did not know what to do, for my uncle was to give me away; and if we were beyond the hour, we could not be married all day. But, luckily, he came back again in ten minutes' time, and then we all set out. However, I recollected afterwards that if he had been prevented going, the wedding need not be put off, for Mr. Derek might have done as well."

"Mr. Derek!" repeated Stiles, in utter amazement.

"Oh, yes! - he was to come there with Matt, you know. But gracious me! I quite forgot! I ought not to have said a word about it. I promised them so faithfully! What will Matt say? It was to be such a secret!"

"If it was to be secret," said Scott, "say not another word on the subject. You may depend upon my seeking no further."

"Oh! certainly," said Stiles, though burning with curiosity; "we will ask you no questions."

"Thank you," said Jackson, "for if you did, I should certainly tell you all, and then Matt would be angry."

On such encouragement to ask, Stiles was forced to put it out of his power, by running away.

But to live in ignorance on such a point was impossible; or at least it was impossible not to try for information. Mr. Derek had been at his brother's wedding. It was exactly a scene, and exactly among people, where he had apparently least to do, and least temptation to go.

Conjectures as to the meaning of it, rapid and wild, hurried into his brain; but he was satisfied with none. Those that best pleased him, as placing his conduct in the noblest light, seemed most
improbable. He could not bear such suspense; and hastily seizing his Samsung notepad, wrote a
email to his aunt, to request an explanation of what Jackson had dropt, if it were compatible with the
secrecy which had been intended.

"You may readily comprehend," Stiles added, "what my curiosity must be to know how a person
unconnected with any of us, and (comparatively speaking) a stranger to our family, should have been
amongst you at such a time. Pray email instantly, and let me understand it--unless it is, for very
cogent reasons, to remain in the secrecy which Jackson seems to think necessary; and then I must
endeavour to be satisfied with ignorance."

"Not that I shall, though," Stiles added to himself, as he finished the mail; "and my dear aunt, if you
do not tell me in an honourable manner, I shall certainly be reduced to tricks and stratagems and
Google and Facebook stalking to find it out."

Scott's delicate sense of honour would not allow him to speak to Stiles privately of what Jackson had
let fall; Stiles was glad of it; - till it appeared whether his inquiries would receive any satisfaction, he
had rather be without a confidante.
They owed the restoration of Jackson, his character, every thing, to Mr. Derek. Oh! how heartily did Stiles grieve over every ungracious sensation he had ever encouraged, every saucy speech he had ever directed towards him. For himself, Stiles was humbled; but he was proud of Derek. Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself. Stiles read over his aunt's commendation of Derek again and again. It was hardly enough; but it pleased him. Stiles was even sensible of some pleasure, though mixed with regret, on finding how steadfastly both his aunt and his uncle, and indeed the whole of Tumblr, had been persuaded that affection and confidence subsisted between Mr. Derek and himself.

Stiles had the satisfaction of receiving an answer to his email as soon as he possibly could. He was no sooner in possession of it than, hurrying into the little copse, where he was least likely to be interrupted, he sat down on one of the benches and prepared to be happy; for the length of the mail convinced him that it did not contain a denial.

"Gracechurch street, Sept. 6.

"MY DEAR NEPHEW,

"I have just received your email, and shall devote this whole morning to answering it, as I foresee that a little writing will not comprise what I have to tell you. I must confess myself surprised by your application; after everything I have seen on Tumblr I did not expect it from you. Don't think me angry, however, for I only mean to let you know that I had not imagined such inquiries to be necessary on your side. If you do not choose to understand me, forgive my impertinence. Your uncle is as much surprised as I am - and nothing but the belief of your being a party concerned would have allowed him to act as he has done. But if you are really innocent and ignorant, I must be more explicit.

"On the very day of my coming home from Longbourn, your uncle had a most unexpected visitor. Mr. Derek called, and was shut up with him several hours. It was all over before I arrived; so my curiosity was not so dreadfully racked as yours seems to have been. He came to tell your uncle that he had found out where Jackson and Matt were, and that he had seen and talked with them both; Matt repeatedly, Jackson once. From what I can collect, he left Derbyshire only one day after ourselves, and came to town with the resolution of hunting for them. The motive professed was his conviction of its being owing to himself that Matt's worthlessness had not been so well known as to make it impossible for any young person of character to love or confide in him. He generously imputed the whole to his mistaken pride, and confessed that he had before thought it beneath him to lay his private actions open to the world. His character was to speak for itself. He called it, therefore, his duty to step forward, and endeavour to remedy an evil which had been brought on by himself. If he had another motive, I am sure it would never disgrace him. He had been some days in town, before he was able to discover them; but he had something to direct his search, which was more than we had; and the consciousness of this was another reason for his resolving to follow us.

"There is a man, it seems, a Mr. Gerard, who was some time ago tutor to Danny, and was dismissed
from his charge on some cause of disapprobation, though he did not say what. Mr. Gerard then took a large house in Edward-street, and has since maintained himself by running a home for wayward werewolves. This Mr. Gerard was, he knew, intimately acquainted with Matt; and Mr. Derek went to him for intelligence of Matt as soon as he got to town. But it was two or three days before he could get from Mr. Gerard what he wanted. He would not betray his trust, I suppose, without bribery and corruption, for he really did know where Matt was to be found. Matt indeed had gone to Mr. Gerard on their first arrival in London, and had he been able to receive them into his house, they would have taken up their abode with him. At length, however, our kind friend procured the wished-for direction. They were in ---- street. He saw Matt, and afterwards insisted on seeing Jackson. His first object with Jackson, Mr. Derek acknowledged, had been to persuade him to quit his present disgraceful situation, and return to his friends as soon as they could be prevailed on to receive him, offering his assistance, as far as it would go. But he found Jackson absolutely resolved on remaining where he was. He cared for none of his friends; he wanted no help of Derek’s; he would not hear of leaving Matt. He was sure they should be married some time or other, and it did not much signify when. Since such were his feelings, it only remained, Derek thought, to secure and expedite a marriage, which, in his very first conversation with Matt, he easily learnt had never been his design. Matt confessed himself obliged to leave the regiment, on account of some debts of honour, which were very pressing; and scrupled not to lay all the ill-consequences of Jackson's flight on his own folly alone. Matt meant to resign his commission immediately; and as to his future situation, he could conjecture very little about it. He must go somewhere, but he did not know where, and he knew he should have nothing to live on.

"Mr. Derek asked him why he had not married your brother at once. Though Sheriff Stilinski was not imagined to be very rich, he would have been able to do something for Matt, and his situation must have been benefited by marriage. But he found, in reply to this question, that Matt still cherished the hope of more effectually making his fortune by marriage in some other country. Under such circumstances, however, he was not likely to be proof against the temptation of immediate relief.

"They met several times, for there was much to be discussed. Matt of course wanted more than he could get; but at length was reduced to be reasonable.

"Every thing being settled between them, Mr. Derek's next step was to make your uncle acquainted with it, and he first called in Gracechurch street the evening before I came home. But Dr. Deaton could not be seen, and Mr. Derek found, on further inquiry, that your father was still with him, but would quit town the next morning. He did not judge your father to be a person whom he could so properly consult as your uncle, and therefore readily postponed seeing him till after the departure of the former. He did not leave his name, and till the next day it was only known that a gentleman had called on business.

"On Saturday he came again. Your father was gone, your uncle at home, and, as I said before, they had a great deal of talk together.

"They met again on Sunday, and then I saw him too. It was not all settled before Monday: as soon as it was, the express was sent off to Longbourn. But our visitor was very obstinate. I fancy, Stiles, that obstinacy is the real defect of his character, after all. He has been accused of many faults at different times, but this is the true one.

Nothing was to be done that he did not do himself; though I am sure (and I do not speak it to be thanked, therefore say nothing about it), your uncle would most readily have settled the whole.

"They battled it together for a long time, which was more than either the Matt or Jackson deserved. But at last your uncle was forced to yield, and instead of being allowed to be of use to his nephew,
was forced to put up with only having the probable credit of it, which went sorely against the grain; and I really believe your email this morning gave him great pleasure, because it required an explanation that would rob him of his borrowed feathers, and give the praise where it was due. But, Stiles, this must go no farther than yourself, or Scott at most.

"You know pretty well, I suppose, what has been done for the young people. Matt’s debts are to be paid, amounting, I believe, to considerably more than a hundred thousand pounds, another hundred thousand in addition to Jackson’s own settled upon Jackson, and Matt’s commission purchased. The reason why all this was to be done by Mr. Derek alone, was such as I have given above. It was owing to him, to his reserve and want of proper consideration, that Matt’s character had been so misunderstood, and consequently that he had been received and noticed as he was. Perhaps there was some truth in this; though I doubt whether his reserve, or anybody's reserve, can be answerable for the event. But in spite of all this fine talking, my dear Stiles, you may rest perfectly assured that your uncle would never have yielded, if we had not given him credit for another interest in the affair.

"When all this was resolved on, Mr. Derek returned again to his friends, who were still staying at Pemberley; but it was agreed that he should be in London once more when the wedding took place, and all money matters were then to receive the last finish.

"I believe I have now told you every thing. It is a relation which you tell me is to give you great surprise; I hope at least it will not afford you any displeasure. Jackson came to us; and Matt had constant admission to the house. He was exactly what he had been, when I knew him in Hertfordshire; but I would not tell you how little I was satisfied with Jackson’s behaviour while he staid with us, if I had not perceived, by Scott’s Facebook message last Wednesday, that Jackson’s conduct on coming home was exactly of a piece with it, and therefore what I now tell you can give you no fresh pain. I talked to Jackson repeatedly in the most serious manner, representing to hi all the wickedness of what he had done, and all the unhappiness he had brought on his family. If he heard me, it was by good luck, for I am sure he did not listen – he spent most of the time doing sit ups while I was talking to him. I was sometimes quite provoked, but then I recollected my dear Stiles and Scott, and for their sakes had patience with him.

"Mr. Derek was punctual in his return, and as Jackson informed you, attended the wedding. He dined with us the next day, and was to leave town again on Wednesday or Thursday. Will you be very angry with me, my dear Stiles, if I take this opportunity of saying (what I was never bold enough to say before) how much I like him. His behaviour to us has, in every respect, been as pleasing as when we were in Derbyshire. His understanding and opinions all please me; he wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and that, if he marry prudently, his husband may teach him. I thought him very sly;--he hardly ever mentioned your name. But slyness seems the fashion.

"Pray forgive me if I have been very presuming, or at least do not punish me so far as to exclude me from P. I shall never be quite happy till I have been all round the park. A quad bike would be the very thing.

"But I must write no more. The children have been wanting me this half hour.

"Yours, very sincerely,

"Morrell-Deaton."

The contents of this letter threw Stiles into a flutter of spirits, in which it was difficult to determine whether pleasure or pain bore the greatest share. The vague and unsettled suspicions which uncertainty had produced of what Mr. Derek might have been doing to forward Jackson's match,
which Stiles had feared to encourage as an exertion of goodness too great to be probable, and at the same time dreaded to be just, from the pain of obligation, were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true! Mr. Derek had followed them purposely to town, he had taken on himself all the trouble and mortification attendant on such a research; in which supplication had been necessary to an old man whom he must abominate and despise, and where he was reduced to meet, frequently meet, reason with, persuade, and finally bribe, the man whom he always most wished to avoid, and whose very name it was punishment to him to pronounce. He had done all this for Jackson, whom he could neither regard nor esteem. Stiles’s heart did whisper that he had done it for him. But it was a hope shortly checked by other considerations, and he soon felt that even his vanity was insufficient, when required to depend on Derek’s affection for him—for a boy who had already refused him - as able to overcome a sentiment so natural as abhorrence against relationship with Matt. Brother-in-law of Matt! Every kind of pride must revolt from the connection. He had, to be sure, done much. Stiles was ashamed to think how much. But he had given a reason for his interference, which asked no extraordinary stretch of belief. It was reasonable that he should feel he had been wrong; he had liberality, and he had the means of exercising it; and though Stiles would not place himself as his principal inducement, he could, perhaps, believe that remaining partiality for him might assist Derek’s endeavours in a cause where Stiles’s peace of mind must be materially concerned. It was painful, exceedingly painful, to know that they were under obligations to a person who could never receive a return. They owed the restoration of Jackson, his character, every thing, to Mr. Derek. Oh! how heartily did Stiles grieve over every ungracious sensation he had ever encouraged, every saucy speech he had ever directed towards him. For himself, Stiles was humbled; but he was proud of Derek. Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself. Stiles read over his aunt’s commendation of Derek again and again. It was hardly enough; but it pleased him. Stiles was even sensible of some pleasure, though mixed with regret, on finding how steadfastly both his aunt and his uncle, and indeed the whole of Tumblr, had been persuaded that affection and confidence subsisted between Mr. Derek and himself.

Stiles was roused from his seat, and his reflections, by some one's approach; and before he could strike into another path, he was overtaken by Matt.

"I am afraid I interrupt your solitary ramble, my dear bro?" said he, as he joined him.

"You certainly do," Stiles replied with a smile; "but it does not follow that the interruption must be unwelcome."

"I should be sorry indeed, if it were. We were always good friends; and now we are better."

"True. Are the others coming out?"

"I do not know. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski and Jackson are going in the SUV to Beacon Hills. And so, my dear brother, I find, from our uncle and aunt, that you have actually seen Pemberley."

Stiles replied in the affirmative.

"I almost envy you the pleasure, and yet I believe it would be too much for me, or else I could take it in my way to Starling City. And you saw the old housekeeper, I suppose? Poor Peter, he was always very fond of me. But of course he did not mention my name to you."

"Yes, he did."

"And what did he say?"
"That you were gone into the army, and he was afraid had not turned out well. At such a distance as that, you know, things are strangely misrepresented."

"Certainly," he replied, biting his lips. Stiles hoped he had silenced him; but he soon afterwards said:

"I was surprised to see Derek in town last month. We passed each other several times. I wonder what he can be doing there."

"Perhaps preparing for his marriage with Miss Kate D’Argent," said Stiles. "It must be something particular, to take him there at this time of year."

"Undoubtedly. Did you see him while you were at Lambton? I thought I understood from the Deatons that you had."

"Yes; he introduced us to his brother."

"And do you like him?"

"Very much."

"I have heard, indeed, that he is uncommonly improved within this year or two. When I last saw him, he was not very promising –quite weedy in fact. I am very glad you liked him. I hope he will turn out to be a survivor."

"I dare say he will; he has got over the most trying age."

"Did you go by the village of Kympton?"

"I do not recollect that we did."

"I mention it, because it is the headquarters of the news corporation where I ought to have had my job. A most delightful place! - Excellent village pub! It would have suited me in every respect."

"How should you have liked photo journalism?"

"Exceedingly well. I should have considered it a pleasure to take candid snaps of people, as art - nothing creepy about it - and the exertion would soon have been nothing. One ought not to repine; but, to be sure, it would have been such a thing for me! The quiet pursuit of celebrity, the getting close to one’s subjects in such a life would have answered all my ideas of happiness! But it was not to be. Did you ever hear Derek mention the circumstance, when you were in Kent?"

"I have heard from authority, which I thought as good, that it was left you conditionally only, and at the will of the present patron."

"You have. Yes, there was something in that; I told you so from the first, you may remember."

"I did hear, too, that there was a time, when photo journalism was not so palatable to you as it seems to be at present; that you actually declared your resolution of never working for Perez Hiton, and that the business had been compromised accordingly."

"You did! and it was not wholly without foundation. You may remember what I told you on that point, when first we talked of it."

They were now almost at the door of the house, for Stiles had walked fast to get rid of him; and unwilling, for his brother's sake, to provoke him, he only said in reply, with a good-humoured smile:
"Come, Matt, we are brothers, you know. Do not let us quarrel about the past. In future, I hope we shall be always of one mind."

Stiles held out his hand; he fist bumped it with affectionate gallantry, though he hardly knew how to look, and they entered the house.
"I saw you look at me to-day, Stiles, when my aunt told us of the present report; and I know I appeared distressed. But don't imagine it was from any silly cause. I was only confused for the moment, because I felt that I should be looked at. I do assure you that the news does not affect me either with pleasure or pain. I am glad of one thing, that he comes alone; because we shall see the less of him. Not that I am afraid of myself, but I dread other people's remarks on Facebook and Tumblr."

Matt Daehler was so perfectly satisfied with this conversation that he never again distressed himself, or provoked his dear brother Stiles, by introducing the subject of it; and Stiles was pleased to find that he had said enough to keep him quiet.

The day of Matt and Jackson's departure soon came, and Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was forced to submit to a separation, which, as her husband by no means entered into her scheme of their all going to Starling City, was likely to continue at least a twelvemonth.

"Oh! my dear Jackson," she cried, "when shall we meet again?"

"Oh, lord! I don't know. Not these two or three seasons, perhaps. It depends on the contracts and what our agent decides"

"Email me very often, my dear."

"As often as I can. But you know married men have never much time for writing. My siblings may follow me on Twitter. They will have nothing else to do."

Matt's adieus were much more affectionate than his husband’s. He smiled, looked handsome, and said many pretty things.

"He is as fine a fellow," said Sheriff Stilinski, as soon as they were out of the house, "as ever I saw. He simpers, and smirks, and makes love to us all. I am prodigiously proud of him. I defy even Sir Chris Silver himself to produce a more valuable son-in-law."

The loss of her son made Mrs. McCall-Stilinski very dull for several days.

"I often think," said she, "that there is nothing so bad as parting with one's friends. One seems so forlorn without them."

"This is the consequence, you see, Madam, of marrying a son," said Stiles. "It must make you better satisfied that your other children are single."

"It is no such thing. Jackson does not leave me because he is married, but only because his husband's regiment happens to be so far off. If that had been nearer, he would not have gone so soon."

But the spiritless condition which this event threw her into was shortly relieved, and her mind opened again to the agitation of hope, by an article of news which then began to be in circulation. The housekeeper at Netherfield had received orders to prepare for the arrival of her master, who was
coming down in a day or two, to shoot there for several weeks. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was quite in
the fidgets. She looked at Scott, and smiled and shook her head by turns.

"Well, well, and so Mr. Lahey is coming down, sister," (for Mrs. Phillips first brought her the news).
"Well, so much the better. Not that I care about it, though. He is nothing to us, you know, and I am
sure I never want to see him again. But, however, he is very welcome to come to Netherfield, if he
likes it. And who knows what may happen? But that is nothing to us. You know, sister, we agreed
long ago never to mention a word about it. And so, is it quite certain he is coming?"

"You may depend on it," replied the other, "for Mrs. Nicholls was in Beacon Hills last night; I saw
her passing by, and went out myself on purpose to know the truth of it; and she told me that it was
certain true. He comes down on Thursday at the latest, very likely on Wednesday. She was going to
the butcher's, she told me, on purpose to order in some meat on Wednesday, and she has got three
couple of rabbits just fit to be killed."

Scott had not been able to hear of his coming without changing colour. It was many months since he
had mentioned his name to Stiles; but now, as soon as they were alone together, he said:

"I saw you look at me to-day, Stiles, when my aunt told us of the present report; and I know I
appeared distressed. But don't imagine it was from any silly cause. I was only confused for the
moment, because I felt that I should be looked at. I do assure you that the news does not affect me
either with pleasure or pain. I am glad of one thing, that he comes alone; because we shall see the
less of him. Not that I am afraid of myself, but I dread other people's remarks on Facebook and
Tumblr."

Stiles did not know what to make of it. Had he not seen Isaac in Derbyshire, he might have supposed
him capable of coming there with no other view than what was acknowledged; but Stiles still thought
Isaac partial to Scott, and he wavered as to the greater probability of his coming there with his
friend's permission, or being bold enough to come without it.

"Yet it is hard," Stiles sometimes thought, "that this poor man cannot come to a house which he has
legally hired, without raising all this speculation! I will leave him to himself."

In spite of what his brother declared, and really believed to be his feelings in the expectation of
Isaac’s arrival, Stiles could easily perceive that his spirits were affected by it. They were more
disturbed, more unequal, than he had often seen them.
The subject which had been so warmly canvassed between their parents, about a twelvemonth ago,
was now brought forward again.

"As soon as ever Mr. Lahey comes, my dear," said Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, "you will wait on him of
course."

"No, no. You forced me into visiting him last year, and promised, if I went to see him, he should
marry one of my teenagers. But it ended in nothing, and I will not be sent on a fool's errand again."

His wife represented to him how absolutely necessary such an attention would be from all the
neighbouring gentlemen, on his returning to Netherfield.

"'Tis an etiquette I despise," said he. "If he wants our society, let him seek it. He knows where we
live, he knows our email addresses. I will not spend my hours in running after my neighbours every
time they go away and come back again."

"Well, all I know is, that it will be abominably rude if you do not wait on him. But, however, that
shan't prevent my asking him to dine here, I am determined. We must have Mrs. Long and the
Gouldings soon. That will make thirteen with ourselves, so there will be just room at table for him."

Consoled by this resolution, she was the better able to bear her husband's incivility; though it was very mortifying to know that her neighbours might all see Isaac, in consequence of it, before they did. As the day of his arrival drew near,

"I begin to be sorry that he comes at all," said Scott to his brother. "It would be nothing; I could see him with perfect indifference, but I can hardly bear to hear it thus perpetually talked of. My mother means well; but she does not know, no one can know, how much I suffer from what she says. Happy shall I be, when his stay at Netherfield is over!"

"I wish I could say anything to comfort you," replied Stiles; "but it is wholly out of my power. You must feel it; and the usual satisfaction of preaching patience to a sufferer is denied me, because you have always so much."

Mr. Lahey arrived. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, through the assistance of servants, contrived to have the earliest tidings of it, that the period of anxiety and fretfulness on her side might be as long as it could. She counted the days that must intervene before their invitation could be sent; hopeless of seeing him before. But on the third morning after his arrival in Hertfordshire, she saw him, from her dressing-room window, enter the gate and drive towards the house.

Her children were eagerly called to partake of her joy. Scott resolutely kept his place at the table; but Stiles, to satisfy his mother, went to the window - he looked, - he saw Mr. Derek with him, and sat down again by his brother.

"There is a gentleman with him, in the passenger seat, mamma," said Kanima; "who can it be?"

"Some acquaintance or other, my dear, I suppose; I am sure I do not know."

"La!" replied Kanima, "it looks just like that man that used to be with him before. Mr. what's-his-name. That tall, proud man."

"Good gracious! Mr. Derek! - and so it does, I vow. Well, any friend of Isaac's will always be welcome here, to be sure; but else I must say that I hate the very sight of him."

Scott looked at Stiles with surprise and concern. Scott knew but little of their meeting in Derbyshire, and therefore felt for the awkwardness which must attend his bro, in seeing Derek almost for the first time after receiving his explanatory email.

Both brothers were uncomfortable enough. Each felt for the other, and of course for themselves; and their mother talked on, of her dislike of Mr. Derek, and her resolution to be civil to him only as Isaac's friend, without being heard by either of them. But Stiles had sources of uneasiness which could not be suspected by Scott, to whom he had never yet had courage to shew Mrs. Morrell-Deaton's email, or to relate his own change of sentiment towards the alpha.

To Scott, he could be only a man whose proposals Stiles had refused, and whose merit Stiles had undervalued; but to his own more extensive information, he was the person to whom the whole family were indebted for the first of benefits, and whom he regarded himself with an interest, if not quite so tender, at least as reasonable and just as what Scott felt for Isaac. Stiles’s astonishment at his coming - at his coming to Netherfield, to Longbourn, and voluntarily seeking him again, was almost equal to what he had known on first witnessing Derek’s altered behaviour in Derbyshire.

The colour which had been driven from Stiles’s face, returned for half a minute with an additional glow, and a smile of delight added lustre to his perfect brown eyes, as he thought for that space of time that Derek’s affection and wishes must still be unshaken. But Stiles would not be secure.
"Let me first see how he behaves," said he; "it will then be early enough for expectation."

He sat intently at work on his laptop, striving to be composed, and without daring to lift up his eyes from the screen, till anxious curiosity carried them to the face of his brother as the servant was approaching the door. Scott looked a little paler than usual, but more sedate if perhaps a little more dopey than Stiles had expected. On the gentlemen's appearing, Scott's colour increased; yet he received them with tolerable ease, and with a propriety of behaviour equally free from any symptom of resentment or any unnecessary complaisance.

Stiles said as little to either as civility would allow, and sat down again to his work, with an eagerness which it did not often command. He had ventured only one glance at Derek. He looked serious, as usual, with a slight glower about his eyebrows; and, he thought, more as he had been used to look in Hertfordshire, than as Stiles had seen him at Pemberley. But, perhaps he could not in Stiles's mother's presence be what he was before Stiles's uncle and aunt. It was a painful, but not an improbable, conjecture.

Isaac, he had likewise seen for an instant, and in that short period saw him looking both pleased and embarrassed. He was received by Mrs. McCall-Stilinski with a degree of civility which made her two sons ashamed, especially when contrasted with the cold and ceremonious politeness of her curtsey and address to his friend.

Stiles, particularly, who knew that his mother owed to the latter the preservation of her favourite son from irremediable infamy, was hurt and distressed to a most painful degree by a distinction so ill applied.

Derek, after inquiring of Stiles how Dr. and Mrs. Morrell-Deaton did, a question which he could not answer without confusion, said scarcely anything. He was not seated by Stiles; perhaps that was the reason of his silence; but it had not been so in Derbyshire. There he had talked to Stiles's friends, when he could not to Stiles himself. But now several minutes elapsed without bringing the sound of his voice; and when occasionally, unable to resist the impulse of curiosity, Stiles raised his eyes to the stubble of Derek's face, he as often found him looking at Scott as at himself, and frequently on no object but the ground. More thoughtfulness and less anxiety to please, than when they last met, were plainly expressed. Stiles was disappointed, and angry with himself for being so.

"Could I expect it to be otherwise!" said Stiles. "Yet why did he come?"

Stiles was in no humour for conversation with anyone but Derek; and to him Stiles had hardly courage to speak, though reiterating that he was not afraid of him.

Stiles inquired after Danny, but could do no more.

"It is a long time, Isaac, since you went away," said Mrs. McCall-Stilinski.

He readily agreed to it.

"I began to be afraid you would never come back again. People did say you meant to quit the place entirely at Michaelmas; but, however, I hope it is not true. A great many changes have happened in the neighbourhood, since you went away. Allison Silver is married and settled. And one of my own children. I suppose you have heard of it; indeed, you must have seen it on Facebook and Perez Hilton’s website; though it was not phrased as it ought to be. It was only said, 'Lately, Matt Daehler, Esq. to Jackson McCall-Stilinski,' without there being a syllable said of his father, or the place where he lived, or anything. It was my brother Deaton who posted it too, and I wonder how he came to make such an awkward business of it. Did you see it?"
Isaac replied that he did, and made his congratulations. Stiles dared not lift up his eyes. How Mr. Derek looked, therefore, he could not tell.

"It is a delightful thing, to be sure, to have a son well married," continued his mother, "but at the same time, Isaac, it is very hard to have him taken such a way from me. They are gone down to Starling City, a place quite northward, it seems, on a different network entirely, and there are to stay I do not know how long. His regiment is there; for I suppose you have heard of his leaving the --shire, and of his being gone into the regulars. Thank Heaven! he has some friends, though perhaps not so many as he deserves."

Stiles, who knew this to be levelled at Mr. Derek, was in such misery of shame, that he could hardly keep his seat. It drew from him, however, the exertion of speaking, which nothing else had so effectually done before; and he asked Isaac whether he meant to make any stay in the country at present. A few weeks, he believed.

"When you have killed all your own birds, Isaac," said Mrs McCall-Stilinski, "I beg you will come here, and shoot as many as you please on the Sheriff's manor. I am sure he will be vastly happy to oblige you, and will save all the best of the covies for you."

Stile's misery increased, at such unnecessary, such officious attention! Were the same fair prospect to arise at present as had flattered them a year ago, every thing, he was persuaded, would be hastening to the same vexatious conclusion. At that instant, Stiles felt that years of happiness could not make Scott or himself amends for moments of such painful confusion.

"The first wish of my heart," said Stiles to himself, "is never more to be in company with either of them. Their society can afford no pleasure that will atone for such wretchedness as this! Let me never see either one or the other again!"

Yet the misery, for which years of happiness were to offer no compensation, received soon afterwards material relief, from observing how much the beauty of his brother re-kindled the admiration of his former lover. When first Isaac came in, he had spoken to Scott but little; but every five minutes seemed to be giving him more of his attention. He found Scott as handsome as he had been last year; as good natured, and as unaffected, though not quite so chatty. Scott was anxious that no difference should be perceived in him at all, and was really persuaded that he talked as much as ever. But Scott’s mind was so busily engaged, that he did not always know when he was silent.

When the gentlemen rose to go away, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was mindful of her intended civility, and they were invited and engaged to dine at Longbourn in a few days time.

"You are quite a visit in my debt, Mr. Lahey," she added, "for when you went to town last winter, you promised to take a family dinner with us, as soon as you returned. I have not forgot, you see; and I assure you, I was very much disappointed that you did not come back and keep your engagement."

Isaac looked a little silly, albeit in an angelic manner, at this reflection, and said something of his concern at having been prevented by business. They then went away.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski had been strongly inclined to ask them to stay and dine there that day; but, though she always kept a very good table, she did not think anything less than two courses could be good enough for a man on whom she had such anxious designs, or satisfy the appetite and pride of one who had a million a year.
Derek had walked away to another part of the room. Stiles followed him with his eyes, envied everyone to whom he spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged against himself for being so silly!

"An alpha who has once been refused! How could I ever be foolish enough to expect a renewal of his love? Is there one among the pack, who would not protest against such a weakness as a second proposal to the same man? There is no indignity so abhorrent to their feelings!"

As soon as they were gone, Stiles walked out to recover his spirits; or in other words, to dwell without interruption on those subjects that must deaden them more. Mr. Derek's behaviour astonished and vexed him.

"Why, if he came only to be silent, grave, all eyebrow-y and indifferent," said he, "did he come at all?"

He could settle it in no way that gave him pleasure.

"He could be still amiable, still pleasing, to my uncle and aunt, when he was in town; and why not to me? If he fears me, why come hither? If he no longer cares for me, why silent? Teasing, teasing, man! I will think no more about him."

Stiles’s resolution was for a short time involuntarily kept by the approach of his brother, who joined him with a cheerful, dopey sort of look, which showed him better satisfied with their visitors, than Stiles.

"Now," said Scott, "that this first meeting is over, I feel perfectly easy. I know my own strength, and I shall never be embarrassed again by his coming. I am glad he dines here on Tuesday. It will then be publicly seen that, on both sides, we meet only as common and indifferent acquaintance."

"Yes, very indifferent indeed," said Stiles, laughingly and punching his bro on the shoulder. "Oh, Scott, take care."

"My dear Stiles, you cannot think me so weak, as to be in danger now?"

"I think you are in very great danger of making him as much in love with you as ever."

They did not see the gentlemen again till Tuesday; and Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, in the meanwhile, was giving way to all the happy schemes, which the good humour and common politeness of Isaac, in half an hour's visit, had revived.

On Tuesday there was a large party assembled at Longbourn; and the two who were most anxiously expected, to the credit of their punctuality as sportsmen, were in very good time. When they repaired to the dining-room, Stiles eagerly watched to see whether Isaac would take the place, which, in all
their former parties, had belonged to him, by Scott. Their prudent mother, occupied by the same ideas, forbore to invite him to sit by herself. On entering the room, he seemed to hesitate; but Scott happened to look round, and happened to smile his cutest half smile: it was decided. He placed himself by Scott.

Stiles, with a triumphant sensation, looked towards his friend. He bore it with noble indifference, and Stiles would have imagined that Isaac had received his alpha’s sanction to be happy, had he not seen Isaac’s eyes likewise turned towards Mr. Derek, with an expression of half-laughing alarm.

Isaac’s behaviour to Scott was such, during dinner time, as showed an admiration of him, which, though more guarded than formerly, persuaded Stiles, that if left wholly to himself, Scott's happiness, and his own, would be speedily secured. Though he dared not depend upon the consequence, he yet received pleasure from observing Isaac’s behaviour. It gave Stiles all the animation that his spirits could boast; for he was in no cheerful humour. Mr. Derek was almost as far from him as the table could divide them. He was on one side of their mother. Stiles knew how little such a situation would give pleasure to either, or make either appear to advantage. He was not near enough to hear any of their discourse, but he could see how seldom they spoke to each other, and how formal and cold was their manner whenever they did. His mother's ungraciousness, made the sense of what they owed him more painful to Stiles's mind; and he would, at times, have given anything to be privileged to tell Derek that his kindness was neither unknown nor unfelt by the whole of the family.

Stiles was in hopes that the evening would afford some opportunity of bringing them together; that the whole of the visit would not pass away without enabling them to enter into something more of conversation than the mere ceremonious salutation attending his entrance. Anxious and uneasy, the period which passed in the drawing-room, before the werewolves came, was wearisome and dull to a degree that almost made him uncivil. Stiles looked forward to their entrance as the point on which all his chance of pleasure for the evening must depend.

"If he does not come to me, then," said he, "I shall give him up for ever."

The gentlemen came; and Stiles thought he looked as if he would have answered his hopes; but, alas! the betas had crowded round the table, where Scott was making tea, and Stiles pouring out the coffee, in so close a confederacy that there was not a single vacancy near him which would admit of a chair.

Derek had walked away to another part of the room. Stiles followed him with his eyes, envied everyone to whom he spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged against himself for being so silly!

"An alpha who has once been refused! How could I ever be foolish enough to expect a renewal of his love? Is there one among the pack, who would not protest against such a weakness as a second proposal to the same man? There is no indignity so abhorrent to their feelings!"

Stiles was a little revived, however, by his bringing back his coffee cup himself; and he seized the opportunity of saying:

"Is Danny at Pemberley still?"

"Yes, he will remain there till Christmas."

"And quite alone? Have all his friends left him?"

"Jeff Davies is with him. The others have been gone on to Scarborough, these three weeks."
Stiles could think of nothing more to say; but if Derek wished to converse with him, he might have better success. He stood by Stiles, however, for some minutes, in silence; and, at last, he walked away.

When the tea-things were removed, and the Nintendo Wii brought out, Stiles was then hoping to be soon joined by him, when all his views were overthrown by seeing him fall a victim to her mother's rapacity for Super Mario Brothers’ players, and in a few moments after seated with the rest of the party. Stiles now lost every expectation of pleasure. They were confined for the evening at different games, and he had nothing to hope, but that Derek’s eyes were so often turned towards his side of the room, as to make Derek play as unsuccessfully as himself.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski had designed to keep the two Netherfield gentlemen to supper; but their Toyota was unluckily ordered before any of the others, and she had no opportunity of detaining them

"Well," said she, as soon as they were left to themselves, "What say you to the day? I think every thing has passed off uncommonly well, I assure you. The dinner was as well dressed as any I ever saw. The venison was roasted to a turn - and everybody said they never saw so curly a selection of curly fries. The soup was fifty times better than what we had at the Lucases' last week; and even Mr. Derek acknowledged, that the partridges were remarkably well done; and I suppose he has two or three French cooks at least. And, my dear Scott, I never saw you look in greater beauty. Mrs. Long said so too, for I asked her whether you did not. And what do you think she said besides? 'Ah! Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, we shall have him at Netherfield at last.' She did indeed. I do think Mrs. Long is as good a creature as ever lived - and her nieces are very pretty behaved girls, and not at all handsome: I like them prodigiously."

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, in short, was in very great spirits; she had seen enough of Isaac's behaviour to Scott, to be convinced that he would get him at last; and her expectations of advantage to her family, when in a happy humour, were so far beyond reason, that she was quite disappointed at not seeing him there again the next day, to make his proposals.

"It has been a very agreeable day," said Scott to Stiles. "The party seemed so well selected, so suitable one with the other. I hope we may often meet again."

Stiles grinned widely.

"Stiles, dude, you must not do so. You must not suspect me. It mortifies me. I assure you that I have now learnt to enjoy his conversation as an agreeable and sensible young man, without having a wish beyond it. I am perfectly satisfied, from what his manners now are, that he never had any design of engaging my affection. It is only that he is blessed with greater sweetness of address, and a stronger desire of generally pleasing, than any other man."

"You are very cruel," said his brother, "you will not let me smile, and are provoking me to it every moment."

"How hard it is in some cases to be believed!"

"And how impossible in others!"

"But why should you wish to persuade me that I feel more than I acknowledge?"

"That is a question which I hardly know how to answer. We all love to instruct, though we can teach only what is not worth knowing. Forgive me; and if you persist in indifference, do not make me your confidante."
He came, and in such very good time that the teens were none of them dressed. In ran Mrs. McCall-Stilinski to her son's room, in her dressing gown, and with her hair half finished, crying out:

"My dear Scott, make haste and hurry down. He is come - Isaac is come. He is, indeed. Make haste, make haste. Here, Sarah, come to Scott this moment, and help him on with a nice tight T shirt. Never mind gelling Stiles's hair."

A few days after this visit, Mr. Lahey called again, and alone. His alpha had left him that morning for London, but was to return home in ten days time. He sat with them above an hour, and was in remarkably good spirits. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski invited him to dine with them; but, with many expressions of concern, he confessed himself engaged elsewhere.

"Next time you call," said she, "I hope we shall be more lucky."

He should be particularly happy at any time, etc. etc.; and if she would give him leave, would take an early opportunity of waiting on them.

"Can you come to-morrow?"

Yes, he had no engagement at all for to-morrow; and her invitation was accepted with alacrity.

He came, and in such very good time that the teens were none of them dressed. In ran Mrs. McCall-Stilinski to her son's room, in her dressing gown, and with her hair half finished, crying out:

"My dear Scott, make haste and hurry down. He is come - Isaac is come. He is, indeed. Make haste, make haste. Here, Sarah, come to Scott this moment, and help him on with a nice tight T shirt. Never mind gelling Stiles's hair."

"We will be down as soon as we can," said Scott; "but I dare say Kanima is forwarder than either of us, for she went up stairs half an hour ago."

"Oh! hang Kanima! what has she to do with it? He’s not interested in girls. Come be quick, be quick! Where are your skinny jeans, my dear?"

But when their mother was gone, Scott would not be prevailed on to go down without one of his siblings.

The same anxiety to get them by themselves was visible again in the evening. After tea, Sheriff Stilinski retired to the library, as was his custom, and Lydia went upstairs to her Sudoku puzzles. Two obstacles of the five being thus removed, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski sat looking and winking at Stiles and Kanima for a considerable time, without making any impression on them. Stiles would not observe her; and when at last Kanima did, she very innocently said, "What is the matter mamma? What do you keep winking at me for? What am I to do?"

"Nothing child, nothing. I did not wink at you." She then sat still five minutes longer; but unable to
waste such a precious occasion, she suddenly got up, and saying to Kanima, "Come here, my love, I want to speak to you," took her out of the room. Scott instantly gave a look at Stiles which spoke his distress at such premeditation, and his entreaty that he would not give in to it. In a few minutes, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski half-opened the door and called out:

"Stiles, my dear, I want to speak with you."

Stiles was forced to go.

"We may as well leave them by yourselves you know;" said his mother, as soon as he was in the hall. "Kanima and I are going up stairs to sit in my dressing-room."

Stiles made no attempt to reason with his mother, but remained quietly in the hall, till she and Kanima were out of sight, then returned into the drawing-room.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski’s schemes for this day were ineffectual. Isaac was everything that was charming, except the professed lover of her son. His ease and cheerfulness rendered him a most agreeable addition to their evening party; and he bore with the ill-judged officiousness of the mother, and heard all her silly remarks with a forbearance and command of countenance particularly grateful to the son.

He scarcely needed an invitation to stay supper; and before he went away, an engagement was formed, chiefly through his own and Mrs. McCall-Stilinski’s means, for his coming next morning to shoot with her husband.

After this day, Scott said no more of his indifference. Not a word passed between the brothers concerning Isaac; but Stiles went to bed in the happy belief that all must speedily be concluded, unless Mr. Derek returned within the stated time. Seriously, however, he felt tolerably persuaded that all this must have taken place with that gentleman's concurrence.

Isaac was punctual to his appointment; and he and Sheriff Stilinski spent the morning together, as had been agreed on. The latter was much more agreeable than his companion expected. There was nothing of presumption or folly in Isaac that could provoke his ridicule, or disgust him into silence; and he was more communicative, and less eccentric, than the other had ever seen him. Isaac of course returned with him to dinner; and in the evening Mrs. McCall-Stilinski's invention was again at work to get every body away from him and her son. Stiles, who had a Tumblr page to update, went into the breakfast room for that purpose soon after tea; for as the others were all going to sit down watch a DVD, he could not be wanted to counteract his mother's schemes.

But on returning to the drawing-room, when his Destiel gifs were all uploaded, he saw, to his infinite surprise, there was reason to fear that his mother had been too ingenious for him. On opening the door, Stiles perceived his brother and Isaac standing together over the hearth, as if engaged in earnest conversation; and had this led to no suspicion, the faces of both, as they hastily turned round and moved away from each other, would have told it all. Their situation was awkward enough; but his, he thought, was still worse. Not a syllable was uttered by either; and Stiles was on the point of going away again, when Isaac, who as well as the other had sat down, suddenly rose, and whispering a few words to Scott, scampered out of the room like an eager little puppy.

Scott could have no reserves from Stiles, where confidence would give pleasure; and instantly embracing him, acknowledged, with the liveliest emotion, that he was the happiest beta in the world.

"'Tis too much!" he added, "by far too much. I do not deserve it. Oh! why is not everybody as happy?"
Stiles’s congratulations were given with a sincerity, a warmth, a delight, which words could but poorly express. Every sentence of kindness was a fresh source of happiness to Scott. But he would not allow himself to stay with his brother, or say half that remained to be said for the present.

"I must go instantly to my mother;" he cried. "I would not on any account trifle with her affectionate solicitude; or allow her to hear it from anyone but myself. He is gone to my father already. Oh! Stiles, to know that what I have to relate will give such pleasure to all my dear family! how shall I bear so much happiness!"

Scott then hastened away to his mother, who had purposely paused the DVD, and was sitting up stairs with Kanima.

Stiles, who was left by himself, now smiled at the rapidity and ease with which an affair was finally settled, that had given them so many previous months of suspense and vexation.

"And this," said he, "is the end of all his friend's anxious circumspection! of all his sister's falsehood and contrivance! The happiest, wisest, most reasonable end!"

In a few minutes he was joined by Isaac, whose conference with Sheriff Stilinski had been short and to the purpose.

"Where is your brother?" said he hastily, as he opened the door.

"With my mother up stairs. He will be down in a moment, I dare say."

He then shut the door, and, coming up to Stiles, claimed the good wishes and affection of a brother. Stiles honestly and heartily expressed his delight in the prospect of their relationship. They fist bumped with great cordiality; and then, till his brother came down, Stiles had to listen to all he had to say of his own happiness, and of Scott's perfections; and in spite of his being a lover, Stiles really believed all his expectations of felicity to be rationally founded, because they had for basis the excellent understanding, and super-excellent disposition of Scott, and a general similarity of feeling and taste between Scott and himself.

It was an evening of no common delight to them all; the satisfaction of Scott's mind gave a glow of such sweet animation to his face, as made him look handsomer than ever. Kanima simpered and smiled, and hoped her turn was coming soon. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski could not give her consent or speak her approbation in terms warm enough to satisfy her feelings, though she talked to Isaac of nothing else for half an hour; and when Sheriff Stilinski joined them at supper, his voice and manner plainly showed how really happy he was.

Not a word, however, passed his lips in allusion to it, till their visitor took his leave for the night; but as soon as he was gone, he turned to his son, and said:

"Scott, I congratulate you. You will be a very happy man."

Scott went to him instantly, kissed him, and thanked him for his goodness.

"You are a good boy;" he replied, rubbing Scott’s ears "and I have great pleasure in thinking you will be so happily settled. I have not a doubt of your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike. You are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income."

"I hope not so. Imprudence or thoughtlessness in money matters would be unpardonable in me."

"Exceed their income! My dear Sheriff Stilinski," cried his wife, "what are you talking of? Why, he
has four or five hundred thousand a year, and very likely more." Then addressing her son, "Oh! my dear, dear Scott, I am so happy! I am sure I shan't get a wink of sleep all night. I knew how it would be. I always said it must be so, at last. I was sure your pecs could not be so beautiful for nothing! I remember, as soon as ever I saw him, when he first came into Hertfordshire last year, I thought how likely it was that you should come together. Oh! he is the handsomest young beta that ever was seen!"

Matt, Jackson, were all forgotten. Scott was beyond competition her favourite child. At that moment, she cared for no other. Scott's sisters soon began to make interest with him for objects of happiness which he might in future be able to dispense. Lydia petitioned for the use of the library at Netherfield; and Kanima begged very hard for a few raves there every winter.

Isaac, from this time, was of course a daily visitor at Longbourn; coming frequently before breakfast, and always remaining till after supper; unless when some barbarous neighbour, who could not be enough detested, had given him an invitation to dinner which he thought himself obliged to accept.

Stiles had now but little time for conversation with his brother; for while Isaac was present, Scott had no attention to bestow on anyone else; but he found himself considerably useful to both of them in those hours of separation that must sometimes occur. In the absence of Scott, Isaac always attached himself to Stiles, for the pleasure of talking of Scott; and when Isaac was gone, Scott constantly sought the same means of relief.

"He has made me so happy," said he, one evening, "by telling me that he was totally ignorant of my being in town last spring! I had not believed it possible."

"I suspected as much," replied Stiles. "But how did he account for it?"

"It must have been his sister's doing. They were certainly no friends to his acquaintance with me, which I cannot wonder at, since he might have chosen so much more advantageously in many respects. But when they see, as I trust they will, that their brother is happy with me, they will learn to be contented, and we shall be on good terms again; though we can never be what we once were to each other."

"That is the most unforgiving speech," said Stiles, "that I ever heard you utter. Who's a good boy, then? You are, Scotty. Yes you are! It would vex me, indeed, to see you again the dupe of Erica's pretended regard."

"Would you believe it, Stiles, that when he went to town last November, he really loved me, and nothing but a persuasion of my being indifferent would have prevented his coming down again!"

"He made a little mistake to be sure; but it is to the credit of his modesty."

This naturally introduced a panegyric from Scott on Isaac's diffidence, and the little value he put on his own good qualities. Sties was pleased to find that he had not betrayed the interference of his friend; for, though Scott had the most generous and forgiving heart in the world, he knew it was a circumstance which must prejudice him against Derek.

"I am certainly the most fortunate creature that ever existed!" cried Scott. "Oh! Stiles, why am I thus singled from my family, and blessed above them all! If I could but see you as happy! If there were but such another man for you!"

"If you were to give me forty such men, I never could be so happy as you. Till I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can have your happiness. No, no, let me shift for myself; and, perhaps, if I have very good luck, I may meet with another Mr. Harris in time."
The situation of affairs in the Longbourn family could not be long a secret. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was privileged to whisper it to Mrs. Phillips, and she ventured, without any permission, to do the same by all her neighbours in Beacon Hills.

The McCall-Stilinkis were speedily pronounced to be the luckiest family in the world, though only a few weeks before, when Jackson had first run away, they had been generally proved to be marked out for misfortune.
"This is not to be borne. Stiles, I insist on being satisfied. Has he, has my nephew, made you an offer of marriage?"

"Your ladyship has declared it to be impossible."

"It ought to be so; it must be so, while he retains the use of his reason. But your arts and allurements, your sarcasm, your cute little moles and the perfection of your face may, in a moment of infatuation, have made him forget what he owes to himself and to all his family. You may have drawn him in."

One morning, about a week after Isaac’s engagement with Scott had been formed, as he and the others of the family were sitting together in the dining-room, their attention was suddenly drawn to the window, by the sound of a car; and they perceived an ostentatious limousine drive up the lawn. It was too early in the morning for visitors, and besides, the brand did not answer to that of any of their neighbours. Neither the car, nor the livery of the servant who drove it, were familiar to them. As it was certain, however, that somebody was coming, Isaac instantly prevailed on Scott to avoid the confinement of such an intrusion, and walk away with him into the shrubbery. They both set off, and the conjectures of the remaining three continued, though with little satisfaction, till the door was thrown open and their visitor entered. It was Lady Victoria d’Argent.

They were of course all intending to be surprised; but their astonishment was beyond their expectation; and on the part of Mrs. McCall-Stilinski and Kanima, though she was perfectly unknown to them, even inferior to what Stiles felt.

She entered the room with an air more than usually ungracious, made no other reply to Stiles’s salutation than a slight inclination of the head accompanied by a particularly staring glare, and sat down without saying a word. Stiles had mentioned her name to his mother on her ladyship's entrance, though no request of introduction had been made.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, all amazement, though flattered by having a guest of such high importance, received her with the utmost politeness. After sitting for a moment in silence, she said very stiffly to Stiles,

"I hope you are well, Stiles. That lady, I suppose, is your mother."

Stiles replied very concisely that she was.

"And that I suppose is one of your sisters."

"Yes, madam," said Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, delighted to speak to Lady Victoria. "She is my youngest girl but one. My youngest of all is lately married, and my eldest son is somewhere about the grounds, walking with a young man who, I believe, will soon become a part of the family."

"You have a very small park here," returned Lady Victoria after a short silence.

"It is nothing in comparison of Rosings, my lady, I dare say; but I assure you it is much larger than
Sir Chris Silver’s.

"This must be a most inconvenient sitting room for the evening, in summer; the windows are full west."

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski assured her that they never sat there after dinner, and then added:

"May I take the liberty of asking your ladyship whether you left Mr. and Mrs. Harris well."

"Yes, very well. I saw them the night before last."

Stiles now expected that she would produce some communication or present for him from Allison, as it seemed the only probable motive for her calling. But nothing appeared, and he was completely puzzled.

Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, with great civility, begged her ladyship to take some refreshment; but Lady Victoria very resolutely, and not very politely, declined eating anything; and then, rising up, said to Stiles,

"Stiles, there seemed to be a prettyish kind of a little wilderness on one side of your lawn. I should be glad to take a turn in it, if you will favour me with your company."

"Go, my dear," cried his mother, "and show her ladyship about the different walks. I think she will be pleased with the hermitage."

Stiles obeyed, and running into his own room for his hoodie, attended his noble guest downstairs. As they passed through the hall, Lady Victoria opened the doors into the dining-parlour and drawing-room, and pronouncing them, after a short survey, to be decent looking rooms, walked on.

Her car remained at the door, and Stiles saw that her waiting-woman was in it. They proceeded in silence along the gravel walk that led to the copse; Stiles was determined to make no effort for conversation with a woman who was now more than usually insolent and disagreeable.

"How could I ever think her like her nephew?" said he, as he looked in her face.

As soon as they entered the copse, Lady Victoria began in the following manner:-

"You can be at no loss, Stiles, to understand the reason of my journey hither. Your own heart, your own conscience, must tell you why I come."

Stiles looked with unaffected astonishment.

"Indeed, you are mistaken, Madam. I have not been at all able to account for the honour of seeing you here."

"Stiles," replied her ladyship, in an angry tone, "you ought to know, that I am not to be trifled with. But however insincere you may choose to be, you shall not find me so. My character has ever been celebrated for its sincerity and frankness, and in a cause of such moment as this, I shall certainly not depart from it. A report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago. I was told that not only your brother was on the point of being most advantageously married, but that you, that Stiles Stilinski, would, in all likelihood, be soon afterwards united to my nephew, my own nephew, Mr. Derek. Though I know it must be a scandalous falsehood, though I would not injure him so much as to suppose the truth of it possible, I instantly resolved on setting off for this place, that I might make my sentiments known to you."
"If you believed it impossible to be true," said Stiles, colouring to the roots of his gelled hair with astonishment and disdain, "I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far. What could your ladyship propose by it?"

"At once to insist upon having such a report universally contradicted."

"Your coming to Longbourn, to see me and my family," said Stiles coolly, "will be rather a confirmation of it; if, indeed, such a report is in existence."

"If! Do you then pretend to be ignorant of it? Has it not been industriously circulated by yourselves? Do you not know that such a report is spread abroad?"

"I never heard that it was."

"And can you likewise declare, that there is no foundation for it?"

"I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your ladyship. You may ask questions which I shall not choose to answer."

"This is not to be borne. Stiles, I insist on being satisfied. Has he, has my nephew, made you an offer of marriage?"

"Your ladyship has declared it to be impossible."

"It ought to be so; it must be so, while he retains the use of his reason. But your arts and allurements, your sarcasm, your cute little moles and the perfection of your face may, in a moment of infatuation, have made him forget what he owes to himself and to all his family. You may have drawn him in."

"If I have, I shall be the last person to confess it."

"Stiles, do you know who I am? I have not been accustomed to such language as this. I am almost the nearest relation he has in the world, and am entitled to know all his dearest concerns."

"But you are not entitled to know mine; nor will such behaviour as this, ever induce me to be explicit."

"Let me be rightly understood. This match, to which you have the presumption to aspire, can never take place. No, never. Mr. Derek is engaged to my daughter. Now what have you to say?"

"Only this; that if he is so, you can have no reason to suppose he will make an offer to me."

Lady Victoria hesitated for a moment, and then replied:

"The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. From their infancy, they have been intended for each other. It was the favourite wish of his mother, as well as of hers. While in their cradles, we planned the union: and now, at the moment when the wishes of both sisters would be accomplished in their marriage, to be prevented by a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family! Do you pay no regard to the wishes of his friends? To his tacit engagement with Kate D’Argent? Are you lost to every feeling of propriety and delicacy? Have you not heard me say that from his earliest hours he was destined for his cousin?"

"Yes, and I had heard it before. But what is that to me? If there is no other objection to my marrying your nephew, I shall certainly not be kept from it by knowing that his mother and aunt wished him to marry Kate. You both did as much as you could in planning the marriage. Its completion depended on others. If Mr. Derek is neither by honour nor inclination confined to his cousin, why is not he to
make another choice? And if I am that choice, why may not I accept him?"

"Because honour, decorum, prudence, nay, interest, forbid it. Yes, Stiles, interest; for do not expect to be noticed by his family or pack, if you wilfully act against the inclinations of all. You will be censured, slighted, and despised, by everyone connected with him. Your alliance will be a disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us."

"These are heavy misfortunes," replied Stiles. "But the husband or wife of Mr. Derek must have such extraordinary sources of happiness necessarily attached to their situation, that they could, upon the whole, have no cause to repine."

"Obstinate, headstrong boy! I am ashamed of you! Is this your gratitude for my attentions to you last spring? Is nothing due to me on that score? Let us sit down. You are to understand, Stiles, that I came here with the determined resolution of carrying my purpose; nor will I be dissuaded from it. I have not been used to submit to any person's whims. I have not been in the habit of brooking disappointment."

"That will make your ladyship's situation at present more pitiable; but it will have no effect on me."

"I will not be interrupted. Hear me in silence. My daughter and my nephew are formed for each other. They are descended, on the maternal side, from the same noble line; and, on the father's, from respectable, honourable, and ancient - though untitled - families. Their fortune on both sides is splendid. They are destined for each other by the voice of every member of their respective houses; and what is to divide them? The upstart pretensions of a young boy without family, pack, or fortune. Is this to be endured! But it must not, shall not be. If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up."

"In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's son; so far we are equal."

"True. You are a gentleman's son. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition."

"Whatever my connections may be," said Stiles, "if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to you."

"Tell me once for all, are you engaged to him?"

Though Stiles would not, for the mere purpose of obliging Lady Victoria D'Argent, have answered this question, he could not but say, after a moment's deliberation:

"I am not."

Lady Victoria seemed pleased.

"And will you promise me, never to enter into such an engagement?"

"I will make no promise of the kind."

"Stiles I am shocked and astonished. I expected to find a more reasonable young man. But do not deceive yourself into a belief that I will ever recede. I shall not go away till you have given me the assurance I require."

"And I certainly never shall give it. I am not to be intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. Your ladyship wants Mr. Derek to marry your daughter; but would my giving you the wished-for
promise make their marriage at all more probable? Supposing him to be attached to me, would my refusing to accept his hand make him wish to bestow it on his cousin? Allow me to say, Lady Victoria, that the arguments with which you have supported this extraordinary application have been as frivolous as the application was ill-judged. You have widely mistaken my character, if you think I can be worked on by such persuasions as these. How far your nephew might approve of your interference in his affairs, I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject."

"Not so hasty, if you please. I have by no means done. To all the objections I have already urged, I have still another to add. I am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest brother's infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young man's marrying him was a patched-up business, at the expense of your father and uncles. And is such a boy to be my nephew's brother? Is his husband, is the son of Derek's late father's steward, to be his brother? Heaven and earth!--of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?"

"You can now have nothing further to say," Stiles resentfully answered. "You have insulted me in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house."

And he rose as he spoke. Lady Victoria rose also, and they turned back. Her ladyship was highly incensed.

"You have no regard, then, for the honour and credit of my nephew! Unfeeling, selfish boy! Do you not consider that a connection with you must disgrace him in the eyes of everybody?"

"Lady Victoria, I have nothing further to say. You know my sentiments."

"You are then resolved to have him?"

"I have said no such thing. I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me."

"It is well. You refuse, then, to oblige me. You refuse to obey the claims of duty, honour, and gratitude. You are determined to ruin him in the opinion of all his friends, and make him the contempt of the world."

"Neither duty, nor honour, nor gratitude," replied Stiles, "have any possible claim on me, in the present instance. No principle of either would be violated by my marriage with Mr. Derek. And with regard to the resentment of his family, or the indignation of the world, if the former were excited by his marrying me, it would not give me one moment's concern - and the world in general would have too much sense to join in the scorn."

"And this is your real opinion! This is your final resolve! Very well. I shall now know how to act. Do not imagine, Stiles Stilinski, that your ambition will ever be gratified. I came to try you. I hoped to find you reasonable; but, depend upon it, I will carry my point."

In this manner Lady Victoria talked on, till they were at the door of the limo, when, turning hastily round, she added, "I take no leave of you, Stiles. I send no compliments to your mother. You deserve no such attention. I am most seriously displeased."

Stiles made no answer; and without attempting to persuade her ladyship to return into the house, walked quietly into it himself. He heard the limo drive away as he proceeded up stairs. His mother impatiently met him at the door of the dressing-room, to ask why Lady Victoria would not come in again and rest herself.
"She did not choose it," said her son, "she would go."

"She is a very fine-looking woman! and her calling here was prodigiously civil! for she only came, I suppose, to tell us the Harrises were well. She is on her road somewhere, I dare say, and so, passing through Beacon Hills, thought she might as well call on you. I suppose she had nothing particular to say to you, Stiles?"

Stiles was forced to give into a little falsehood here; for to acknowledge the substance of their conversation was impossible.
Stiles had never been more at a loss to make his feelings appear what they were not. It was necessary to laugh, when he would rather have cried. His father had most cruelly mortified him, by what he said of Mr. Derek's indifference, and he could do nothing but wonder at such a want of penetration, or fear that perhaps, instead of his seeing too little, he and the world of Tumblr might have fancied too much.

The discomposure of spirits which this extraordinary visit threw Stiles into, could not be easily overcome; nor could he, for many hours, learn to think of it less than incessantly. Lady Victoria D’Argent, it appeared, had actually taken the trouble of this journey from Rosings, for the sole purpose of breaking off his supposed engagement with Mr. Derek. It was a rational scheme, to be sure! but from what the report of their engagement could originate, Stiles was at a loss to imagine; till he recollected that Derek’s being the intimate friend and alpha of Isaac, and he himself being the brother of Scott, was enough, at a time when the expectation of one wedding made everybody eager for another, to supply the idea. Stiles had not himself forgotten to feel that the marriage of his brother must bring them more frequently together. And his neighbours at Silver Lodge, therefore (for through their communication with the Harrises, the report, he concluded, had reached Lady Victoria), had only set that down as almost certain and immediate, which he had looked forward to as possible at some future time.

In revolving Lady Victoria's expressions and staring eyes, however, Stiles could not help feeling some uneasiness as to the possible consequence of her persisting in this interference. From what she had said of her resolution to prevent their marriage, it occurred to Stiles that she must meditate an application to her nephew; and how he might take a similar representation of the evils attached to a connection with him, he dared not pronounce. He knew not the exact degree of Derek’s affection for his aunt, or his dependence on her judgment, but it was natural to suppose that Derek thought much higher of her ladyship than he could do; and it was certain that, in enumerating the miseries of a marriage with one, whose immediate connections were so unequal to his own, his aunt would address Derek on his weakest side. With his notions of dignity, he would probably feel that the arguments, which to Stiles had appeared weak and ridiculous, contained much good sense and solid reasoning.

If he had been waveriing before as to what he should do, which had often seemed likely, the advice and entreaty of so near a relation might settle every doubt, and determine him at once to be as happy as dignity unblemished could make him. In that case he would return no more. Lady Victoria might see him in her way through town; and his engagement to Isaac of coming again to Netherfield must give way.

"If, therefore, an excuse for not keeping his promise should come to his friend within a few days," Stiles added, "I shall know how to understand it. I shall then give over every expectation, every wish of his constancy. If he is satisfied with only regretting me, when he might have obtained my affections and hand, I shall soon cease to regret him at all."
The surprise of the rest of the family, on hearing who their visitor had been, was very great; but they obligingly satisfied it, with the same kind of supposition which had appeased Mrs. McCall-Stilinski's curiosity; and Stiles was spared from much teasing on the subject.

The next morning, as Stiles was going downstairs, he was met by his father, who came out of his library.

“Stiles,” said he, "I was going to look for you; come into my room."

Stiles followed him thither; and his curiosity to know what he had to tell him was heightened by the supposition of its being in some manner connected with the email he had just opened. It suddenly struck Stiles that it might be from Lady Victoria; and he anticipated with dismay all the consequent explanations.

Stiles followed his father to the pc, and they both sat down. He then said,

"I have received an email this morning that has astonished me exceedingly. As it principally concerns yourself, you ought to know its contents. I did not know before, that I had two sons on the brink of matrimony. Let me congratulate you on a very important conquest."

The colour now rushed into Stiles's pale cheeks in the instantaneous conviction of its being an email from the nephew, instead of the aunt; and he was undetermined whether most to be pleased that he explained himself at all, or offended that his email was not rather addressed to himself; when his father continued:

"You look conscious. Young men have great penetration in such matters as these; but I think I may defy even your sagacity, to discover the name of your admirer. This letter is from Mr. Harris."

"From Mr. Harris! and what can he have to say?"

"Something very much to the purpose of course. He begins with congratulations on the approaching nuptials of my eldest son, of which, it seems, he has been told by some of the good-natured, gossiping Silvers. I shall not sport with your impatience, by reading what he says on that point. What relates to yourself, is as follows: 'Having thus offered you the sincere congratulations of Allison and myself on this happy event, let me now add a short hint on the subject of another; of which we have been advertised by the same authority. Your son Stiles, it is presumed, will not long bear the name of Stilinski, after his elder brother has double-barrelled his name, and the chosen partner of his fate may be reasonably looked up to as one of the most illustrious personages in this land.'"

"Can you possibly guess, Stiles, who is meant by this?" 'This young gentleman is blessed, in a peculiar way, with every thing the heart of mortal can most desire, - splendid property, noble kindred, and extensive patronage. Yet in spite of all these temptations, let me warn my cousin Stiles, and yourself, of what evils you may incur by a precipitate closure with this gentleman's proposals, which, of course, you will be inclined to take immediate advantage of.'

"Have you any idea, Stiles, who this gentleman is? But now it comes out:

"My motive for cautioning you is as follows. We have reason to imagine that his aunt, Lady Victoria D'Argent, does not look on the match with a friendly eye.'

"Mr. Derek, you see, is the man! Now, Stiles, I think I have surprised you. Could he, or the Silvers, have pitched on any man within the circle of our acquaintance, whose name would have given the lie more effectually to what they related? Mr. Derek, who never looks at any person but to see a blemish, and who probably never looked at you in his life without glowering with those eyebrows of
his! It is admirable!"

Stiles tried to join in his father's pleasantry, but could only force one most reluctant smile. Never had the Sheriff's wit been directed in a manner so little agreeable to him.

"Are you not diverted?"

"Oh! yes. Pray read on."

"After mentioning the likelihood of this marriage to her ladyship last night, she immediately, with her usual condescension, expressed what she felt on the occasion; when it became apparent, that on the score of some family objections on the part of my cousin, she would never give her consent to what she termed so disgraceful a match. I thought it my duty to give the speediest intelligence of this to my cousin, that he and his noble admirer may be aware of what they are about, and not run hastily into a marriage which has not been properly sanctioned.' Mr. Harris moreover adds, 'I am truly rejoiced that my cousin Jackson's sad business has been so well hushed up, and am only concerned that their living together before the marriage took place should be so generally known. I must not, however, neglect the duties of my station, or refrain from declaring my amazement at hearing that you received the young couple into your house as soon as they were married. It was an encouragement of vice; and had I been the rector of Longbourn, I should very strenuously have opposed it. You ought certainly to forgive them, as a Christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing.' That is his notion of Christian forgiveness! The rest of his letter is only about his dear Allison's situation, and his expectation of a young olive-branch. But, Stiles, you look as if you did not enjoy it. You are not going to be all slashy, I hope, and pretend to be affronted at an idle report. For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?"

"Oh!" cried Stiles, "I am excessively diverted. But it is so strange!"

"Yes - that is what makes it amusing. Had they fixed on any other man it would have been nothing; but his perfect indifference other than irritation, and your pointed dislike and always wanting him killed, make it so delightfully absurd! Much as I abominate emailing, I would not give up Mr. Harris's correspondence for any consideration. Nay, when I read an email of his, I cannot help giving him the preference even over Matt, much as I value the impudence and hypocrisy of my son-in-law. And pray, Stiles, what said Lady Victoria about this report? Did she call to refuse her consent?"

To this question his son replied only with a laugh; and as it had been asked without the least suspicion, he was not distressed by his repeating it. Stiles had never been more at a loss to make his feelings appear what they were not. It was necessary to laugh, when he would rather have cried. His father had most cruelly mortified him, by what he said of Mr. Derek's indifference, and he could do nothing but wonder at such a want of penetration, or fear that perhaps, instead of his seeing too little, he and the world of Tumblr might have fancied too much.
Stiles, feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of Derek’s situation (for Derek had pushed him against a tree and was brooding over him with a most passionate expression on his face), now forced himself to speak; and immediately, though not very fluently and with a certain amount of possibly manly squeaking, gave Derek to understand that his sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which he alluded, as to make him receive with gratitude and pleasure his present assurances. The happiness which this reply produced, was such as Derek had probably never felt before; and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do. Had Stiles been able to encounter Derek’s eye beneath the animated eyebrows, he might have seen how well the expression of heartfelt delight, diffused over his face, became him; but, though Stiles could not look, he could listen, and Derek told him of feelings, which, in proving of what importance Stiles was to him, made his affection every moment more valuable.

Instead of receiving any such text message of excuse from his friend, as Stiles half expected Isaac Lahey to do, he was able to bring Derek with him to Longbourn before many days had passed after Lady Victoria’s visit. The gentlemen arrived early; and, before Mrs. McCall-Stilinski had time to tell Derek of their having seen his aunt, of which her son sat in momentary dread, Isaac, who wanted to be alone with Scott, proposed their all walking out. It was agreed to. Mrs. McCall-Stilinski was not in the habit of walking; Lydia could never spare time; but the remaining five set off together. Isaac and Scott, however, soon allowed the others to outstrip them. They lagged behind, while Stiles, Kanima, and Derek were to entertain each other. Very little was said by either; Kanima was too much afraid of him to talk; Stiles was secretly forming a desperate resolution; and perhaps Derek might be doing the same.

They walked towards the Silvers, because Kanima wished to call upon Maria; and as Stiles saw no occasion for making it a general concern, when Kanima left them he went boldly on with Derek alone. Now was the moment for Stiles’s resolution to be executed, and, while his courage was high, he immediately said:

"Mr. Derek, I am a very selfish creature; and, for the sake of giving relief to my own feelings, care not how much I may be wounding yours. I can no longer help thanking you for your unexampled kindness to my poor brother. Ever since I have known it, I have been most anxious to acknowledge to you how gratefully I feel it. Were it known to the rest of my family, I should not have merely my own gratitude to express."

"I am sorry, exceedingly sorry," replied Derek, in a tone of surprise and emotion, "that you have ever been informed of what may, in a mistaken light, have given you uneasiness. I did not think Mrs. Morrell-Deaton was so little to be trusted."

"You must not blame my aunt. Jackson's thoughtlessness first betrayed to me that you had been concerned in the matter; and, of course, I could not rest till I knew the particulars. Let me thank you again and again, in the name of all my family, for that generous compassion which induced you to take so much trouble, and bear so many mortifications, for the sake of discovering them."
"If you will thank me," he replied, "let it be for yourself alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny. But your family owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe I thought only of you."

Stiles was too much embarrassed to say a word. After a short pause, his companion added, "You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever."

Stiles, feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of Derek’s situation (for Derek had pushed him against a tree and was brooding over him with a most passionate expression on his face), now forced himself to speak; and immediately, though not very fluently and with a certain amount of possibly manly squeaking, gave Derek to understand that his sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which he alluded, as to make him receive with gratitude and pleasure his present assurances. The happiness which this reply produced, was such as Derek had probably never felt before; and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do. Had Stiles been able to encounter Derek’s eye beneath the animated eyebrows, he might have seen how well the expression of heartfelt delight, diffused over his face, became him; but, though Stiles could not look, he could listen, and Derek told him of feelings, which, in proving of what importance Stiles was to him, made his affection every moment more valuable.

They walked on, without knowing in what direction. There was too much to be thought, and felt, and said, for attention to any other objects. Stiles soon learnt that they were indebted for their present good understanding to the efforts of his aunt, who did call on him in her return through London, and there relate her journey to Longbourn, its motive, and the substance of her conversation with Stiles; dwelling emphatically on every expression of the latter which, in her ladyship’s apprehension, peculiarly denoted Stiles’s perverseness and assurance; in the belief that such a relation must assist her endeavours to obtain that promise from her nephew which Stiles had refused to give. But, unluckily for her ladyship, its effect had been exactly contrariwise.

"It taught me to hope," said Derek, "as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before. I knew enough of your disposition to be certain that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Victoria, frankly and openly."

Stiles coloured and laughed as he replied, "Yes, you know enough of my frankness to believe me capable of that. After abusing you so abominably to your face, I could have no scruple in abusing you to all your relations."

"What did you say of me, that I did not deserve? For, though your accusations were ill-founded, formed on mistaken premises, my behaviour to you at the time had merited the severest reproof. It was unpardonable. I cannot think of it without abhorrence."

"We will not quarrel for the greater share of blame annexed to that evening," said Stiles. "The conduct of neither, if strictly examined, will be irreprouachable; but since then, we have both, I hope, improved in civility."

"I cannot be so easily reconciled to myself. The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my glowering, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget: ‘had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner.’ Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me; - though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice."
"I was certainly very far from expecting them to make so strong an impression. I had not the smallest idea of their being ever felt in such a way."

"I can easily believe it. You thought me then devoid of every proper feeling, I am sure you did. The turn of your countenance I shall never forget, as you said that I could not have addressed you in any possible way that would induce you to accept me."

"Oh! do not repeat what I then said. These recollections will not do at all. I assure you that I have long been most heartily ashamed of it."

Derek mentioned his email. "Did it," said he, "did it soon make you think better of me? Did you, on reading it, give any credit to its contents?"

Stiles explained what its effect on him had been, and how gradually all his former prejudices had been removed.

"I knew," said Derek, "that what I wrote must give you pain, but it was necessary. I hope you have deleted the email. There was one part especially, the opening of it, which I should dread your having the power of reading again. I can remember some expressions which might justly make you hate me."

"The email shall certainly be deleted from my hard drive, if you believe it essential to the preservation of my regard; but, though we have both reason to think my opinions not entirely unalterable, they are not, I hope, quite so easily changed as that implies."

"When I wrote that mail," replied Derek, "I believed myself perfectly calm and cool, but I am since convinced that it was written in a dreadful bitterness of spirit."

"The email, perhaps, began in bitterness, but it did not end so. The adieu is charity itself. But think no more of the mail. The feelings of the werewolf who wrote, and the person who received it are now so widely different from what they were then, that every unpleasant circumstance attending it ought to be forgotten. You must learn some of my philosophy. Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure."

"I cannot give you credit for any philosophy of the kind. Your retrospections must be so totally void of reproach, that the contentment arising from them is not of philosophy, but, what is much better, of innocence. But with me, it is not so. Painful recollections will intrude which cannot, which ought not, to be repelled. I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was right, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately an only son (for many years an only child), I was spoilt by my parents, who, though good themselves (my father, particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable), allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing – a Sourwolf, in short; to care for none beyond my own family and pack circles; to think meanly of all the rest of the world; to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Stiles! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a man worthy of being pleased."

"Had you then persuaded yourself that I should?"

"Indeed I had. What will you think of my vanity? I believed you to be wishing, expecting my addresses."
"My manners must have been in fault, but not intentionally, I assure you. I never meant to deceive you, but my spirits might often lead me wrong. How you must have hated me after that evening?"

"Hate you! I was angry perhaps at first, but my anger soon began to take a proper direction."

"I am almost afraid of asking what you thought of me, when we met at Pemberley. You blamed me for coming?"

"No indeed; I felt nothing but surprise."

"Your surprise could not be greater than mine in being noticed by you. My conscience told me that I deserved no extraordinary politeness, and I confess that I did not expect to receive more than my due."

"My object then," replied Derek, "was to show you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past; and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended to. How soon any other wishes introduced themselves I can hardly tell, but I believe in about half an hour after I had seen you."

Derek then told him of Danny's delight in his acquaintance, of how attractive Danny had found Stiles and of his disappointment at the sudden interruption of their friendship; which naturally leading to the cause of that interruption, Stiles soon learnt that his resolution of following him and his aunt and uncle from Derbyshire in quest of Jackson had been formed before he quitted the inn, and that his gravity and thoughtfulness there had arisen from no other struggles than what such a purpose must comprehend.

Stiles expressed his gratitude again, but it was too painful a subject to each, to be dwelt on farther. After walking several miles in a leisurely manner, and too busy to know anything about it, they found at last, on examining their Samsung phones, that it was time to be at home.

"What could become of Isaac and Scott!" was a wonder which introduced the discussion of their affairs. Derek was delighted with their engagement; his friend had given him the earliest information of it.

"I must ask whether you were surprised?" said Stiles.

"Not at all. When I went away, I felt that it would soon happen."

"That is to say, you had given your permission. I guessed as much." And though he exclaimed at the term, Stiles found that it had been pretty much the case.

"On the evening before my going to London," said he, "I made a confession to him, which I believe I ought to have made long ago. I told him of all that had occurred to make my former interference in his affairs absurd and impertinent. His surprise was great. He had never had the slightest suspicion. I told him, moreover, that I believed myself mistaken in supposing, as I had done, that your brother was indifferent to him; and as I could easily perceive that his attachment to Scott was unabated, I felt no doubt of their happiness together."

Stiles could not help smiling at his easy manner of directing his friend.

"Did you speak from your own observation," said Stiles, "when you told him that my brother loved him, or merely from my information last spring?"

"From the former. I had narrowly observed Scott during the two visits which I had lately made here;
and I was convinced of his affection."

"And your assurance of it, I suppose, carried immediate conviction to him."

"It did. Isaac is most unaffectedly modest. His diffidence had prevented his depending on his own judgment in so anxious a case, but his reliance on mine made every thing easy. I was obliged to confess one thing, which for a time, and not unjustly, offended him. I could not allow myself to conceal that your brother had been in town three months last winter, that I had known it, and purposely kept it from him. He was angry. But his anger, I am persuaded, lasted no longer than he remained in any doubt of your brother's sentiments. He has heartily forgiven me now."

Stiles longed to observe that Isaac had been a most delightful friend; so easily guided that his worth was invaluable; but he checked himself. He remembered that Derek had yet to learn to be laughed at, and it was rather too early to begin. In anticipating the happiness of Isaac, which of course was to be inferior only to his own, Derek continued the conversation till they reached the house. In the hall they parted.
Chapter Summary

"I do, I do like him," Stiles replied, with tears in his eyes, "I love him. Indeed he has no improper pride. He is perfectly amiable. He is a lot like Scott in many ways. You do not know what he really is; then pray do not pain me by speaking of him in such terms."

"Stiles," said his father, "I have given him my consent. He is the kind of werewolf, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse anything, which he condescended to ask. I now give it to you, if you are resolved on having him. But let me advise you to think better of it. I know your disposition, Stiles. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life. You know not what you are about."

"My dearest Stiles, where can you have been walking to?" was a question which Stiles received from Scott as soon as he entered their room, and from all the others when they sat down to table. Stiles had only to say in reply, that they had wandered about, till he was beyond his own knowledge and had no reception to use the Samsung GPS. Stiles coloured as he spoke; but neither that, nor anything else, awakened a suspicion of the truth.

The evening passed quietly, unmarked by anything extraordinary. The acknowledged lovers talked and laughed, the unacknowledged were silent. Derek was not of a disposition in which happiness overflows in mirth; and Stiles, agitated and confused, rather knew that he was happy than felt himself to be so; for, besides the immediate embarrassment, there were other evils before her. He anticipated what would be felt in the family when his situation became known; he was aware that no one liked Derek but Scot; and even feared that with the others it was a dislike which not all his fortune and consequence might do away.

At night Stiles opened his heart to Scott. Though suspicion was very far from Scott's general habits, he was absolutely incredulous here.

"You are joking, Stiles. This cannot be! - engaged to Mr. Derek! No, no, you shall not deceive me. I know it to be impossible."

"This is a wretched beginning indeed! My sole dependence was on you; and I am sure nobody else will believe me, if you do not. Yet, indeed, I am in earnest. I speak nothing but the truth. He still loves me, and we are engaged."

Scott looked at him doubtingly. "Oh, Stiles! it cannot be. I know how much you dislike him."

"You know nothing of the matter. That is all to be forgot. Perhaps I did not always love him so well as I do now. But in such cases as these, a good memory is unpardonable. This is the last time I shall ever remember it myself."

Scott still looked all amazement. Stiles again, and more seriously assured him of its truth.
"Good Heaven! can it be really so! Yet now I must believe you," cried Scott. "My dear, dear Stiles, I would - I do congratulate you - but are you certain? forgive the question - are you quite certain that you can be happy with him?"

"There can be no doubt of that. It is settled between us already, that we are to be the happiest couple in the world. But are you pleased, Scott? Shall you like to have such a brother?"

"Very, very much. Nothing could give either Isaac or myself more delight. But we considered it, we talked of it as impossible. And do you really love him quite well enough? Oh, Stiles! do anything rather than marry without affection. Are you quite sure that you feel what you ought to do?"

"Oh, yes! You will only think I feel more than I ought to do, when I tell you all."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I must confess that I love him better than I do Isaac, for all his curls. I am afraid you will be angry."

"My dearest bro, now be serious. I want to talk very seriously. Let me know everything that I am to know, without delay. Will you tell me how long you have loved him?"

"It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley."

Another entreaty that he would be serious, however, produced the desired effect; and Stiles soon satisfied Scott by his solemn assurances of attachment. When convinced on that article, Scott had nothing further to wish.

"Now I am quite happy," said he, "for you will be as happy as myself. I always had a value for Derek. Were it for nothing but his love of you, I must always have esteemed him; but now, as Isaac’s alpha and your husband, there can be only Isaac and yourself more dear to me. But Stiles, you have been very sly, very reserved with me. How little did you tell me of what passed at Pemberley and Mystic Falls! I owe all that I know of it to another, not to you."

Stiles told him the motives of his secrecy. He had been unwilling to mention Isaac; and the unsettled state of his own feelings had made him equally avoid the name of Isaac’s friend. But now he would no longer conceal from Scott Derek’s share in Jackson’s marriage. All was acknowledged, and half the night spent in conversation with occasional interludes of pillow fighting.

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, as she stood at a window the next morning, "if that disagreeable Mr. Derek is not coming here again with our dear Isaac! What can he mean by being so tiresome as to be always coming here? I had no notion but he would go a-shooting, or something oother, and not disturb us with his company. What shall we do with him? Stiles, you must walk out with him again, that he may not be in Isaac's way."

Stiles could hardly help laughing at so convenient a proposal; yet was really vexed that his mother should be always giving Derek such an epithet.

As soon as they entered, Isaac looked at Stiles so expressively, and shook hands with such warmth, as left no doubt of his good information; and he soon afterwards said aloud, "Mrs. McCall Stilinski, have you no more lanes hereabouts in which Stiles may lose his way again to-day?"

"I advise Mr. Derek, and Stiles, and Kanima," said Mrs. McCall-Stilinski, "to walk to Werewolf
Rock this morning. It is a nice long walk, and Mr. Derek has never seen the view of Beacon Hills from there."

"It may do very well for the others," replied Isaac; "but I am sure it will be too much for Kanima. Won't it, Kanima?" Kanima owned that she had rather stay at home. Derek professed a great curiosity to see the view from the Rock, and Stiles silently consented. As he went upstairs to get ready, Mrs. McCall Stilinski followed him, saying:

"I am quite sorry, Stiles, that you should be forced to have that disagreeable Sourwolf all to yourself. But I hope you will not mind it: it is all for Scott's sake, you know; and there is no occasion for talking to him, except just now and then. So, do not put yourself to inconvenience."

During their walk, it was resolved that Sheriff Stilinski's consent should be asked in the course of the evening. Stiles reserved to himself the application for his mother's. He could not determine how his mother would take it; sometimes doubting whether all his wealth and grandeur would be enough to overcome her abhorrence of the alpha. But whether she were violently set against the match, or violently delighted with it, it was certain that her manner would be equally ill adapted to do credit to her sense; and Stiles could no more bear that Mr. Derek should hear the first raptures of her joy, than the first vehemence of her disapprobation.

In the evening, soon after Sheriff Stilinski withdrew to the library, Stiles saw Mr. Derek rise also and follow him, and his agitation on seeing it was extreme. Stiles did not fear his father's opposition, but he was going to be made unhappy; and that it should be through Stiles's means - that he, his father's favourite child, should be distressing him by his choice, should be filling him with fears and regrets in disposing of Stiles - was a wretched reflection, and Stiles sat in misery till Mr. Derek appeared again, when, looking at him, he was a little relieved by his slightly bunny toothed smile. In a few minutes he approached the table where Stiles was sitting with Kanima; and, while pretending to admire his Tumblr page said in a whisper, "Go to your father, he wants you in the library." Stiles was gone directly.

Stiles's father was walking about the room, looking grave and anxious.

"Stiles," said he, "what are you doing? Are you out of your senses, to be accepting this alpha? Have not you always hated him, and suggested killing him even?"

How earnestly did Stiles then wish that his former opinions had been more reasonable, his expressions more moderate! It would have spared him from explanations and professions which it was exceedingly awkward to give; but they were now necessary, and he assured his father, with some confusion, of his attachment to Mr. Derek.

"Or, in other words, you are determined to have him. He is rich, to be sure, and you may have more fine T-shirts and fine sports cars than Scott. But will they make you happy?"

"Have you any other objection," said Stiles, "than your belief of my indifference?"

"None at all. We all know him to be a proud, unpleasant sort of werewolf; but this would be nothing if you really liked him."

"I do, I do like him," Stiles replied, with tears in his eyes, "I love him. Indeed he has no improper pride. He is perfectly amiable. He is a lot like Scott in many ways. You do not know what he really is; then pray do not pain me by speaking of him in such terms."
"Stiles," said his father, "I have given him my consent. He is the kind of werewolf, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse anything, which he condescended to ask. I now give it to you, if you are resolved on having him. But let me advise you to think better of it. I know your disposition, Stiles. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life. You know not what you are about."

Stiles, still more affected, was earnest and solemn in his reply; and at length, by repeated assurances that Mr. Derek was really the object of his choice, by explaining the gradual change which his estimation of Derek had undergone, relating his absolute certainty that his affection was not the work of a day, but had stood the test of many months' suspense, and enumerating with energy all his good qualities, Stiles did conquer his father's incredulity, and reconcile him to the match.

"Well, my dear," said he, when Stiles ceased speaking, "I have no more to say. If this be the case, he deserves you. I could not have parted with you, my Stiles, to anyone less worthy."

To complete the favourable impression, Stiles then told him what Mr. Derek had voluntarily done for Jackson. Sheriff Stilinski heard him with astonishment.

"This is an evening of wonders, indeed! And so, Derek did everything; made up the match, gave the money, paid the fellow's debts, and got him his job! So much the better. It will save me a world of trouble and economy. Had it been your uncle's doing, I must and would have paid him; but these violent young lovers carry everything their own way. I shall offer to pay him to-morrow; he will rant and storm about his love for you, and there will be an end of the matter."

He then recollected Stiles's embarrassment a few days before, on his reading Mr. Harris's email; and after laughing at Stiles some time, allowed him at last to go - saying, as he quitted the room, "If any young men come for Lydia or Kanima, send them in, for I am quite at leisure."

Stiles's mind was now relieved from a very heavy weight; and, after half an hour's quiet reflection in his own room, he was able to join the others with tolerable composure. Everything was too recent for gaiety, but the evening passed tranquilly away; there was no longer anything material to be dreaded, and the comfort of ease and familiarity would come in time.

When their mother went up to her dressing-room at night, Stiles followed her, and made the important communication. Its effect was most extraordinary; for on first hearing it, Mrs. McCall-Stilinski sat quite still, and unable to utter a syllable. Nor was it under many, many minutes that she could comprehend what she heard; though not in general backward to credit what was for the advantage of her family, or that came in the shape of a lover to any of them. She began at length to recover, to fidget about in her chair, get up, sit down again, wonder, and bless herself.

"Good gracious! Lord bless me! only think! dear me! Mr. Derek! Who would have thought it! And is it really true? Oh! my sweetest Stiles! how rich and how great you will be! What money, what houses, what limos you will have! Scott's is nothing to it - nothing at all. I am so pleased - so happy. Such a charming alpha! - so handsome! so tall! - Oh, my dear Stiles! pray apologise for my having disliked him so much before. I hope he will overlook it. Dear, dear Stiles. A house in town! Every thing that is charming! Three sons married! A million a year! Oh, Lord! What will become of me. I shall go distracted."

This was enough to prove that her approbation need not be doubted: and Stiles, rejoicing that such an effusion was heard only by himself, soon went away. But before he had been three minutes in his own room, his mother followed him.
"My dearest child," she cried, "I can think of nothing else! A million a year, and very likely more! 'Tis as good as a Lord! And a special licence. You must and shall be married by a special licence. But my dearest love, tell me what dish Mr. Derek is particularly fond of, that I may have it tomorrow."

This was a sad omen of what his mother's behaviour to the gentleman himself might be; and Stiles found that, though in the certain possession of Derek's warmest affection, and secure of his relations' consent, there was still something to be wished for. But the morrow passed off much better than Stiles expected; for Mrs. McCall-Stilinski luckily stood in such awe of her intended son-in-law that she ventured not to speak to him, unless it was in her power to offer him any attention, or mark her deference for his opinion.

Stiles had the satisfaction of seeing his father taking pains to get acquainted with him; and Sheriff Stilinski soon assured Stiles that Derek was rising every hour in his esteem.

"I admire all my three sons-in-law highly," said he. "Matt, perhaps, is my favourite; but I think I shall like your husband quite as well as Scott's."
"You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the people who were always speaking, and looking, and thinking for your approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike them. Had you not been really amiable, you would have hated me for it; but in spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself, your feelings were always noble and just; and in your heart, you thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously courted you. There - I have saved you the trouble of accounting for it; and really, all things considered, I begin to think it perfectly reasonable. To be sure, you knew no actual good of me - but nobody thinks of that when they fall in love."

Stiles's spirits soon rising to playfulness again, he wanted Mr. Derek to account for his having ever fallen in love with him. "How could you begin?" said Stiles. "I can comprehend your going on charmingly, when you had once made a beginning; but what could set you off in the first place?"

"I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words, which laid the foundation. It is too long ago. I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun."

"My beauty you had early withstood, and as for my manners - my behaviour to you was at least always bordering on the uncivil if not the downright sassy, and I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain than not. Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?"

"For the liveliness of your mind, I did."

"You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the people who were always speaking, and looking, and thinking for your approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike them. Had you not been really amiable, you would have hated me for it; but in spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself, your feelings were always noble and just; and in your heart, you thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously courted you. There - I have saved you the trouble of accounting for it; and really, all things considered, I begin to think it perfectly reasonable. To be sure, you knew no actual good of me - but nobody thinks of that when they fall in love."

"Was there no good in your affectionate behaviour to Scott while he was ill at Netherfield?"

"Dearest Scotty! who could have done less for him? But make a virtue of it by all means. My good qualities are under your protection, and you are to exaggerate them as much as possible; and, in return, it belongs to me to find occasions for teasing and quarrelling with you as often as may be; and I shall begin directly by asking you what made you so unwilling to come to the point at last. What made you so shy of me, when you first called, and afterwards dined here? Why, especially, when you called, did you look as if you did not care about me?"

"Because you were grave and silent, and gave me no encouragement."
"But I was embarrassed."

"And so was I."

"You might have talked to me more when you came to dinner."

"A man who had felt less, might."

"How unlucky that you should have a reasonable answer to give, and that I should be so reasonable as to admit it! But I wonder how long you would have gone on, if you had been left to yourself. I wonder when you would have spoken, if I had not asked you! My resolution of thanking you for your kindness to Jackson had certainly great effect. Too much, I am afraid; for what becomes of the moral, if our comfort springs from a breach of promise? for I ought not to have mentioned the subject. This will never do."

"You need not distress yourself. The moral will be perfectly fair. Lady Victoria's unjustifiable endeavours to separate us were the means of removing all my doubts. I am not indebted for my present happiness to your eager desire of expressing your gratitude. I was not in a humour to wait for any opening of yours. My aunt's intelligence had given me hope, and I was determined at once to know every thing."

"Lady Victoria has been of infinite use, which ought to make her happy, for she loves to be of use. But tell me, what did you come down to Netherfield for? Was it merely to ride to Longbourn and be embarrassed? or had you intended any more serious consequence?"

"My real purpose was to see you, and to judge, if I could, whether I might ever hope to make you love me. My avowed one, or what I avowed to myself, was to see whether your brother were still partial to Isaac, and if he were, to make the confession to him which I have since made."

"Shall you ever have courage to announce to Lady Victoria what is to befall her?"

"I am more likely to want more time than courage, Stiles. But it ought to be done, and if you will give me a Samsung tablet, it shall be done directly."

"And if I had not an email to write myself, I might sit by you and admire the evenness of your typing, as another young person once did. But I have an aunt, too, who must not be longer neglected."

From an unwillingness to confess how much her intimacy with Mr. Derek had been over-rated, Stiles had never yet answered Mrs. Morrel-Deaton's long email; but now, having that to communicate which he knew would be most welcome, he was almost ashamed to find that his uncle and aunt had already lost three days of happiness, and immediately emailed a reply as follows:

"I would have thanked you before, my dear aunt, as I ought to have done, for your long, kind, satisfactory, detail of particulars; but to say the truth, I was too cross to mail. You supposed more than really existed. But now suppose as much as you choose; give a loose rein to your fancy, indulge your imagination in every possible flight which the subject will afford, and unless you believe me actually married, you cannot greatly err. You must write again very soon, and praise him a great deal more than you did in your last. I thank you, again and again, for not going to the Lakes. How could I be so silly as to wish it! Your idea of the ponies is delightful. We will go round the Park every day. I am the happiest creature in the world. Perhaps other people have said so before, but not one with such justice. I am happier even than Scott; he only smiles, I laugh. Mr. Derek sends you all the love in the world that he can spare from me. You are all to come to Pemberley at Christmas. Yours, etc."
Mr. Derek’s email to Lady Victoria was in a different style; and still different from either was what Sheriff Stilinski sent to Mr. Harris, in reply to his last.

"DEAR SIR,

"I must trouble you once more for congratulations. Stiles will soon be the husband of Mr. Derek. Console Lady Victoria as well as you can. But, if I were you, I would stand by the nephew. He has more to give.

"Yours sincerely, etc."

Erika’s congratulations to her brother, on his approaching marriage, were all that was affectionate and insincere. She texted to Scott on the occasion, to express her delight, and repeat all her former professions of regard. Scott was not deceived, but he was affected; and though feeling no reliance on her, could not help texting her a much kinder answer than he knew was deserved.

The joy which Danny expressed on receiving similar information, was as sincere as his brother's in sending it. Four separate text messages were insufficient to contain all his delight, and all his earnest desire of being loved by Stiles.

Before any answer could arrive from Mr. Harris, or any congratulations to Stiles from his wife, the Longbourn family heard that the Harrises were come themselves to Silver Lodge. The reason of this sudden removal was soon evident. Lady Victoria had been rendered so exceedingly angry by the contents of her nephew's email, that Allison, really rejoicing in the match, was anxious to get away till the storm was blown over. At such a moment, the arrival of his friend was a sincere pleasure to Stiles, though in the course of their meetings he must sometimes think the pleasure dearly bought, when he saw Mr. Derek exposed to all the parading and obsequious civility of her husband. He bore it, however, with admirable calmness. He could even listen to Sir Chris Silver, when he complimented him on carrying away the brightest jewel of the country, and expressed his hopes of their all meeting frequently at St. James's, with very decent composure. If he did shrug his shoulders, it was not till Sir Chris was out of sight.

Mrs. Phillips's vulgarity was another, and perhaps a greater, tax on his forbearance; and though Mrs. Phillips, as well as her sister, stood in too much awe of him to speak with the familiarity which Isaac's good humour encouraged, yet, whenever she did speak, she must be vulgar. Nor was her respect for him, though it made her more quiet, at all likely to make her more elegant. Stiles did all he could to shield Derek from the frequent notice of either, and was ever anxious to keep Derek to himself, and to those of his family with whom Derek might converse without mortification; and though the uncomfortable feelings arising from all this took from the season of courtship much of its pleasure, it added to the hope of the future; and Stiles looked forward with delight to the time when they should be removed from society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley.
Chapter Summary

Isaac and Scott remained at Netherfield only a twelvemonth. So near a vicinity to Scott’s mother and Beacon Hills relations was not desirable even to Isaac’s easy temper, or Scott’s affectionate heart. The darling wish of Isaac’s siblings was then gratified; he bought an estate in a neighbouring county to Derbyshire, and Scott and Stiles, in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other.

Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. McCall-Stilinski got rid of her two most deserving sons. With what delighted pride she afterwards visited Mr. McCall-Lahey, and talked of Mr. Stilinski-Hale, may be guessed. I wish I could say, for the sake of her family, that the accomplishment of her earnest desire in the establishment of so many of her children produced so happy an effect as to make her a sensible, amiable, well-informed woman for the rest of her life; though perhaps it was lucky for her husband, who might not have relished domestic felicity in so unusual a form, that she still was occasionally nervous and invariably silly.

Sheriff Stilinski missed his second son exceedingly; his affection for Stiles drew him oftener from home than anything else could do. He delighted in going to Pemberley, especially when he was least expected.

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Kanima, to her very material advantage, spent the chief of her time with her two elder brothers. In society so superior to what she had generally known, her improvement was great. She was not of so ungovernable a temper or so much of a douchebag as Jackson; and, removed from the influence of Jackson’s example, she became, by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid. From the further disadvantage of Jackson’s society she was of course carefully kept, and though Jackson frequently invited her to come and stay with him, with the promise of raves and young men, her father would never consent to her going.

Lydia was the only daughter who remained at home; and she was necessarily drawn from the pursuit of accomplishments by Mrs. McCall-Stilinski’s being quite unable to sit alone. Lydia was obliged to mix more with the world, but she could still moralize over every morning visit; and as she was no longer mortified by comparisons between her brothers’ beauty and her own, it was suspected by her father that she submitted to the change without much reluctance.

As for Matt and Jackson, their characters suffered no revolution from the marriage of his brothers. Matt bore with philosophy the conviction that Stiles must now become acquainted with whatever of Matt’s ingratitude and falsehood had before been unknown to him; and in spite of everything, was not wholly without hope that Derek might yet be prevailed on to make his fortune. The congratulatory email which Stiles received from Jackson on his marriage, explained to him that, by Matt’s husband at least, if not by Matt, such a hope was cherished. The email was to this effect:
"MY DEAR STILES,

"I wish you joy. If you love Mr. Derek half as well as I do my dear Matt, you must be very happy. It is a great comfort to have you so rich, and when you have nothing else to do, I hope you will think of us.

I am sure Wickham would like a place at court very much, and I do not think we shall have quite money enough to live upon without some help. Any place would do, of about thirty or forty thousand a year; but however, do not speak to Mr. Derek about it, if you had rather not.

"Yours, etc."

As it happened that Stiles had much rather not, he endeavoured in his answer to put an end to every entreaty and expectation of the kind. Such relief, however, as it was in his power to afford, by the practice of what might be called economy in his own private expenses, moderation in the purchase of T-shirts and restraint in purchasing the latest video games, he frequently sent them. It had always been evident to Stiles that such an income as theirs, under the direction of two persons so extravagant in their wants, and heedless of the future, must be very insufficient to their support; and whenever they changed their quarters, either Scott or he were sure of being applied to for some little assistance towards discharging their bills. Their manner of living, even when the restoration of peace dismissed them to a home, was unsettled in the extreme. They were always moving from place to place in quest of a cheap situation, and always spending more than they ought. Matt’s affection for Jackson soon sunk into indifference; Jackson’s lasted a little longer; and in spite of his youth and her manners, he retained all the claims to reputation which his marriage and perfect abs had given him.

Though Derek could never receive Matt at Pemberley, yet, for Stile's sake, he assisted him further in his profession. Jackson was occasionally a visitor there, when his husband was gone to enjoy himself in London or Bath; and with the Laheys they both of them frequently staid so long, that even Isaac's good humour was overcome, and he proceeded so far as to talk of giving them a hint to be gone.

Erica was very deeply mortified by Derek's marriage; but as she thought it advisable to retain the right of visiting at Pemberley, she dropt all her resentment; was fonder than ever of Danny, almost as attentive to Derek as heretofore, and paid off every arrear of civility to Stiles.

Pemberley was now Danny’s home; and the attachment of the brothers was exactly what Derek had hoped to see. They were able to love each other even as well as they intended. Danny had the highest opinion in the world of Stiles; though at first he often listened with an astonishment bordering on alarm at his lively, sportive, manner of talking to Derek. Derek, who had always inspired in Danny a respect which almost overcame his affection, he now saw the object of open pleasantry. Danny's mind received knowledge which had never before fallen in his way. By Stiles’s instructions, Danny began to comprehend that a man may take liberties with his husband which a brother will not always allow in a sibling more than ten years younger than himself.

Lady Victoria was extremely indignant on the marriage of her nephew; and as she gave way to all the genuine frankness of her character in her reply to the email which announced its arrangement, she sent him language so very abusive, especially of Stiles, that for some time all intercourse was at an end. But at length, by Stiles’s persuation, he was prevailed on to overlook the offence, and seek a reconciliation; and, after a little further resistance on the part of his aunt, her resentment gave way, either to her affection for him, or her curiosity to see how his husband conducted himself; and she condescended to wait on them at Pemberley, in spite of that pollution which its woods had received, not merely from the presence of such as Stiles, but the visits of Stiles’s uncle and aunt from the city.

With the Morrell-Deatons, they were always on the most intimate terms. Derek, as well as Stiles, really loved them; and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons
who, by bringing Stiles into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them.

FIN

Notes, or Apologia if you prefer:

This was the fic that got me onto AO3. It was something to ease me into writing again, after a long hiatus, and it worked. After a month or so, other original stuff came out. Whether me writing other, original stuff is a good thing for human civilisation is another matter entirely. If you ask me what I like most of my original stuff (you didn’t? Let us overlook that breach of polite behaviour and pretend you did), I would say "I scratched my Jeep", because Scott and Stiles’s relationship is actually the one that gets me every time, in an “&” not a “/” way, and "A deliberate fake boyfriend trope" for the same reason, plus I like doing humour.

This fic specifically was prompted when I was watching the BBC Pride and Prejudice (is there any other version?) in the long period of deprivation after TW Season 2 concluded. Two relationships – Stiles and Scott, and Stiles and Derek – seemed to parallel the relationships of P&P in a rather eerie way, and prompted this.

From the outset, this was supposed to be a classic parody. The cry of “you are just changing the pronouns” has been raised several times over the months. I would defend myself vigorously by pointing out that from the moment I posted Volume 1 Chapter 1 I had a preceding note saying “I am just changing the pronouns. This is the voice of Jane Austen not Teen Wolf” etc. Go have a look at the notes if you don’t believe me. It is there, on AO3 in black and white, and anything that is on AO3 in black and white must be true. It is ordained, or something – "Isn’t it?” (copyright, Lydia Martin, TW season 1).

There have also been alternative suggestions as to which TW character should play which “Austen” character, and they are all valid. It is all in the interpretation I think. The core of Scott, Stiles and Derek seems to me to be fairly fixed – theirs are the relationships that make Pride and Prejudice what it is, and (to a lesser extent) TW what it is. I would add in the Sheriff’s relationship with his son, and Mr Bennett’s relationship with Elizabeth as worthy and obvious parallels. Who is Bingley (Isaac for me) is less relevant – one could almost put in “Scott’s love interest” and allow the reader to fill the blanks. Jackson (TW) as Lydia (P&P) is the one other obvious characterisation, I would contend, but if others want to take shots at me for that I will hold my hands up submissively. But the Scott, Stiles, Derek characterisations I will defend to the death. Otherwise, whatever floats your ship. I feel sorry for (TW) Lydia, who does get a raw deal here, and for Melissa McCall (a really raw deal). Also for Allison as well. But no parody can be entirely perfect. Harris as the pompous Mr Collins works I think, and I always felt there was something more than usually unpleasant about Mr Collins in P&P – not quite evil, but getting there –which lends to the parody here.

The main point of this piece, perhaps, is to serve as a rebuttal to those who say “Sterek could never be canon, they do not like each other.” Personally I do not care if Sterek is canon or not (great message to today’s TV audience if they are, but I am not that concerned if not, and I think TW has
moved the debate on prejudice forwards in a massive way whether Sterek happens or no). But the idea that one starts out disliking one’s eventual love is not an obstacle, it is practically a trope. “Much ado about nothing”, “Pride and Prejudice”, hell “When Harry met Sally” if we want to be more modern about it. The relationship between Stiles and Derek comes clearly into the early stages of those stories. Again, not saying the path followed is always the same, however much one may wish it, but there are precedents.

For the specific precedents here, Derek’s pride in being a werewolf (“the bite is a gift”) is obvious. His contempt – and I think it is contempt at first – for Stiles is also obvious. “You think your little buddy Stiles can just Google werewolves and you got all the answers, is that it?” [eternal gratitude to Suiane and their “Ultimate Derek/Stiles Essay of Doom” which is a Godsend to any Sterek shipper wishing to stay within grapeshot range of the canon]. But the chemistry, acknowledged by no less a luminary than Jeff Davies, is also clear – this may be because the actors are friends when the characters are not, it may have morphed into great acting from both of them. Again, to my mind it is not relevant. There is a chemistry, whether explosive or corrosive, and it is something the team at TW have not shied away from. Being in the UK I have not seen season 3 except through gifs and recaps, but the “Stiles hand on Derek’s shoulder” in “Currents” whether romantic or not indicates a deeper relationship than “your little buddy Stiles” from the first season.

For Stiles, the prejudice is more obvious. Not prejudice about being a werewolf –Stiles is clearly not prejudiced about that, as his relationship with Scott (I would say love for Scott, in a Damon-Pythias way) demonstrates. But he is prejudiced about Derek. Before he knows about Laura being Laura, he refers to her as “the girl you killed” in conversation with Derek. Having believed Derek to be the alpha who ruined Scott’s life (much as Elizabeth Bennett believes Darcy to have ruined Wickham’s life), Stiles is seemingly irretrievable prejudiced against Derek (ditto) – until of course it becomes clear that Derek did not bite Scott. Once that is evident, Stiles’s prejudice fades (ditto Elizabeth Bennett’s prejudice). In P&P the prejudice gives way to love. In TW we await further developments with considerable interest.

Ultimately, TW is on some level about overcoming pride and prejudice, I think. Pride destroys Derek’s world (“I’m the alpha now” has descended into “I’m an Omega”, or almost). Prejudice is something TW tries to overcome overtly (Coach trying to fix up Scott and Danny in Season 1) and covertly (the Derek-Stiles story arc, however it ultimately plays out, is about them both overcoming prejudice). Pride and prejudice in the real world remain all too corrosive a set of features of society. Pride and prejudice are there in Teen Wolf too, but TW, like P&P 200 years earlier, can ridicule the existence of both to the advantage of all.

I hope I have managed to change all the pronouns I should have. This has not been betaed, so if there are errors please do point them out. Thanks to everyone for commenting, leaving kudos and sticking by through the erratic publishing schedule.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!