She could see his face change, gain in austerity, and he stepped back as if she had struck him.

‘-- and that I rejoice in my success.’

Elizabeth was so livid that she could practically feel the mould sprouting in the corners of the house. She would have to uproot it.

Eventually. At present she hoped it would poison the man in front of her.

‘Your sister--’ he said, every word clipped. ‘Do you pretend to think that she felt anything beyond the most trifling affection for my friend?’

‘That is your opinion of her? That she would marry on such-- ‘trifling’ feelings? My sister, of all people, could never confuse a passing infatuation with heartfelt love, she is the most empathetic person in the world.’

He looked at her as if she had sprouted horns, the blood draining out of his face. Elizabeth wondered if his particular gift was to infuriate vast numbers of people by his mere presence.

‘Your sister-- is an empath.’

‘What else?’ She was almost near to feeling something akin to pity -- she forced her thoughts around to Wickham, his gracious, agreeable aspect, his dreadful poverty. Why should Jane’s magic matter to him? What did he know of others’ feelings? ‘But that is not the only cause of repugnance.’
Minutes later, he gave her a cold, level stare that erased any compassion she might have felt for him and left her, despite herself, rather unnerved. She could see his face change, gain in austerity, and he stepped back as if she had struck him. He stopped mid sentence, then gathered himself together, concluded -- ‘and please accept my best wishes for your health and happiness.’

The instant he left Elizabeth felt drained of all the assurance that had carried her through the scene. She sat down, and cried. She longed for Jane-- the weekend could not come soon enough.

And, somewhere, in a barely conscious, angrily ignored, part of her mind, she wondered that he had not used his power, whatever it was, to coerce her when he could so easily have done so.

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