Evenings of wonder

by midnightsugar

Summary

‘This is an evening of wonders, indeed! And so, Darcy did everything; made up the match, gave the money, paid the fellow’s debts, and got him his commission! 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 tomorrow; he will rant and storm about his love for you, and there will be an end to the matter.’ – Mr Bennet, Chapter 59, Pride and Prejudice

Is Mr Darcy capable of ranting and storming, even for his beloved Miss Elizabeth Bennet?

‘This is an evening of wonders, indeed! And so, Darcy did everything; made up the match, gave the money, paid the fellow’s debts, and got him his commission! 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 tomorrow; he will rant and storm about his love for you, and there will be an end to the matter.’ – Mr Bennet, Chapter 59, Pride and Prejudice

* After staying in the sitting room with Mrs Bennet- her awe of Darcy now very obvious and making him rather uncomfortable and even more so with each passing minute- Bingley and Jane by the window talking quietly, and with Elizabeth beside him with her enigmatic smile directed at him, Fitzwilliam Darcy leaned forward in his chair to catch the words of affianced more clearly. Her smile was for him now, something he hadn’t quite realised until that moment. He had often seen her smile. Her ‘tolerable but nothing out of the common way’ teeth gleamed and shined and it was for him. Elizabeth Bennet had fallen in love with him, despite his own faults, and they would be married.
Her mother was quiet now, but he wasn’t quite sure when that would end, nor what improper
coment would come with that end. Darcy noticed that Elizabeth’s lips were moving. An
inquiring tilt of her head told him that she knew he hadn’t been listening. He gave a small smile in
return.

‘Forgive me, my dear. I was just admiring certain features of your face. Pray, what were you
telling me?’ he said. Elizabeth shook her head and gave a little sigh, but he was learning that it did
not mean that she had taken offense to his reverie. Her fine eyes sparkled in pleasure at his open
admiration of her.

‘I was informing you that I spoke with my father about what you did for Lydia and Wickham,’
she told him. She searched his face for signs of disapproval but all she could make out was slight
surprise and a small crease between his eyes that only suggested that he was thinking it through.

‘And what did he say to it?’

‘It rather raised you in his estimation, I believe. Of course, I informed him after I listed your many
virtues in order to convince him that I did want you as my husband because of love, not for
mercenary reasons’ The sparkle in her eyes had returned and Darcy had to smile with her.

Elizabeth, mercenary? Impossible. ‘He said you have saved him a world of trouble and economy.
Had it been Uncle Gardiner that had done it all, he would have paid him back somehow. As it is,
these violent young lovers carry everything their own way. He shall entreat to find you and offer
to pay you as well, but he expects you to rant and storm about your love for me and refuse.’ Darcy
nearly laughed at her commentary. Mr Bennet probably did not think him capable of ranting and
storming. His mask of pride and quiet had often hidden his more passionate nature. He would
never have dreamed of allowing himself to show such a display in front of his future father-in-law,
but here was a chance to also give Elizabeth a glimpse of his more relaxed nature. If Mr Bennet
was expecting a ranting Darcy, then he might just indulge the older gentleman.

‘And did you rant and storm about your love for me to him?’ he inquired curiously.

‘I beg your pardon, but I do not rant and storm. I am a lady,’ Elizabeth replied with a huff, but
couldn’t help a small laugh at her antics. They both knew very well that she was rather capable of
it and Darcy couldn’t help but wish that the next time he saw her ranting and storming, it would be
about her love for him.

‘And is your father in his library at this moment?’

Elizabeth nodded and stood up and went over to her mother in order to distract her from staring so
officiously at her husband-to-be by asking Mrs Bennet her opinion on materials for her wedding
gown. Darcy also stood from his seat, spared a glance at his friend and Miss Bennet, still
engrossed in their own tete-a-tete. He left the sitting room, heading to the library. He knocked on
the door, waited for Mr Bennet’s permission for him to enter and walked in, a grave look on his
face. Mr Bennet looked up from his volume to find the tall imposing fellow in his sanctuary.
Closing his tome, he also stood to converse with his son-in-law to be. It was still rather baffling to
Mr Bennet how his dearest daughter had found this man to be amiable and all things good. But it
had also seemed that Elizabeth had hidden details of her acquaintance with the man before him.
He supposed that after Mr Darcy had conveyed what it was he had come in there for, he would
offer the man compensation for Lydia’s horrific situation.

Darcy cleared his throat, startling Mr Bennet. ‘Sir, Miss Elizabeth has informed me that you wish
to repay me for what I have put towards the match between your youngest daughter and Mr
Wickham’

Mr Bennet sighed and stood up as tall as he could. Darcy wasn’t the only man in the country who
had some pride. Lydia was not his proudest achievement, even if Mrs Bennet thought otherwise. ‘Yes. I don’t believe my brother was quite so honest in telling the true terms of the match. I fear you may have put too much upon yourself, Mr Darcy. Much more than Lydia, Wickham or I deserve. Shall we discuss the terms of repayment?’

Elizabeth excused herself from her mother’s presence, claiming she wished to find something she had left in the gardens quickly before Mr Darcy returned from speaking with her father. She had to assure Mrs Bennet that indeed, Mr Darcy had not gone to Mr Bennet to seek to break the engagement, but to get to know his future family a bit better. Mrs Bennet had been only slightly mollified by this; she would always worry that her second daughter’s high spirits and impertinence may cause the great gentleman to question his choice of bride and she would not be completely satisfied until Elizabeth walked down that aisle, all the vows were said and the registry signed. Her estimation of Mr Darcy had grown considerably since Elizabeth had told her of the engagement. His pride was now perfectly all right, necessary even for such a wealthy man, and his grave propriety was all that was good. He was the very model of all that was proper in this world, and she would never understand how her least favoured daughter had managed to catch his attention and affection, especially after he had slighted her on the very first day of meeting her. She supposed that Elizabeth had somehow managed to get into his good graces somehow, though she hoped that it wasn’t through any means that could be construed as scandalous. Mrs Bennet then glanced over at her eldest and most beautiful daughter with the lovely, amiable and handsome Mr Bingley, and all thoughts of whether Miss Elizabeth had been in any way improper flew out the window as she contemplated her good fortune, and Elizabeth slipped outside to the gardens.

Elizabeth smiled as she slowly made her way to the large bay window of her father’s library. She could smell the lavender in the early autumn breeze. Had it only been a few days since Mr Darcy and she had cleared away their misunderstandings and he had offered her marriage again? She was an engaged woman, as was Jane, and Elizabeth was sure that the four of them would find happiness in the marriage state. She briefly wondered if Bingley and Jane would stay at Netherfield long after the wedding. She knew Bingley might have an easy temper and Jane had her beautifully affectionate heart, but Elizabeth recalled a stilted conversation she and Mr Darcy had in Hunsford, about a woman being too near her family and he had correctly assuaged that she would not always want to be near Longbourn. She loved her family dearly, faults and all, but she was rather excited to begin her new family life with her fiancé and Georgiana. At the thought of her shy but gracious sister-to-be, Elizabeth made a mental note to write to Georgiana to further their relationship. She had the feeling that the poor young girl had few real friends and Elizabeth wanted to get to know her better without the presence of Miss Bingley to get in the way with sharp remarks and reminders of Wickham. It was bad enough that Georgiana would have to claim him as a brother by marriage soon enough, but she knew the young woman would be able to get through it. Darcy would refuse Wickham’s person anywhere near Pemberley and Elizabeth was quite in silent agreement on that score. She was sure she would hear from Lydia shortly after her wedding, knowing she would now be the wife of a wealthy gentleman, and not knowing the true history between the two men. Elizabeth pushed the distasteful thoughts of her youngest sister and her brother-in-law and neared closer to the window and peered through from the corner she knew her father would near closest to. She wasn’t disappointed. She could see the two men, her father standing and facing away from the window and her affianced pacing the room, his formidable height proudly held high and his face set in a familiar grave look. Elizabeth had to put her hand over her mouth to stop an unladylike giggle from escaping. It would be no good to ruin the performance now.

Darcy paced again after Mr Bennet’s question. The older gentleman was a bit taken aback by this
behaviour. He was expecting Mr Darcy to at least wave dismissively and tell him, in a proper manner that compensation was not necessary. He had joked to his favourite daughter that Darcy would rant and storm about his love for her, but he did not think that Darcy was capable of such a thing. Though chasing after Wickham and making him marry Lydia was something rather out of the common way he supposed. Now his future son-in-law had stopped, glancing at him.

‘Did Mr Gardiner state how much was put towards the match?’ Darcy finally asked. Mr Bennet frowned. His brother Gardiner had sent him the letter with the details of the debts and to assure him that all that was required was the pittance he would have given her upon his death. He had strongly suspected that much more had been laid down to make sure the match went through. Mr Bennet sighed.

‘I believe my brother-in-law was trying to lead me to believe that it was not much at all, but I am sure it could not be so. Would you be so kind as to tell me the true amount, Mr Darcy?’

Darcy looked away. This might have been a performance of sorts, but this was a point he hadn’t truly wanted to admit to the Bennet family. He had seen Elizabeth outside, glancing in. She was out of sight now, but he knew she was still there. It was time. ‘Nine thousand pounds,’ he admitted quietly. There was silence in the library as Mr Bennet allowed the information to sink in. His back was still turned to the window so he was unable to see the reaction on the face of his dearest daughter upon hearing the amount. Elizabeth stared at her fiancé, a shocked expression on her face. Darcy surreptitiously glanced past Mr Bennet’s shoulder to see his beloved and he silently hoped that Elizabeth did not feel in any way indebted to him further. For him, the hand of Elizabeth Bennet was worth his entire fortune, and more. He was relieved when Elizabeth’s face softened in admiration of him and smiled at her. Luckily for him, his future father-in-law was still glancing at the floor in wonder.

‘Well then, Mr Darcy. You must know that I do not have that kind of money at hand. I must beg that we discuss a repayment system until such time that you have received the full amount,’ Mr Bennet said quite seriously. Mr Darcy stood to his full height and continued to look rather grave. Another quick glance outside the window showed Elizabeth move to the side so that she was not most likely to be seen if her father should turn around.

‘Mr Bennet, I must soundly refuse your suggestion!’ Mr Darcy declared forcefully. His face had become much more animated than Mr Bennet, or indeed any other Bennet other than Elizabeth had ever seen. His pacing began again, more frantic than his previous pacing when he first entered the room and for the next few moments, he extolled the virtues of the lovely Miss Elizabeth Bennet to one Mr Thomas Bennet before finishing with, ‘And as to the matter of repayment regarding your youngest daughter and Mr Wickham, I can assure you that you have no need to repay me, as I do believe I am taking away the ‘brightest jewel in the county’ as recompense’

Here Mr Bennet narrowed his eyes. He had heard that particular description about his second oldest daughter before, and upon hearing the muffled sounds of female laughter nearby and the now calm Mr Darcy, he answered with, ‘And if I rescinded my blessing of your marriage to my daughter?’

Mr Darcy thought about it for a moment. ‘I have a far superior carriage available to me, sir. Unlike Wickham, I would go straight into Gretna Green with Miss Elizabeth,’ he replied calmly. Mr Bennet then turned around to look outside the window, but he could not see his daughter. However, being her father, and having known her all her life, knew exactly where she was. ‘Elizabeth Bennet! I know you’re there. What inducement did you offer for your young man to do such a thing?!’

Mr Darcy started. He had not expected Mr Bennet to have seen through his performance quite so quickly, but upon further pondering, he could not but know that his Elizabeth had very obviously
been taught by her father, her intelligence encouraged by this man, the father of his beloved. The sound of rich laughter was now louder than before and Elizabeth stepped out of the way and into where her father and fiancé could now clearly see her through the glass. Mr Bennet opened the window outward and smiled at his daughter.

‘Papa, I did no such thing. I merely related to him what was said between us when you were giving us your blessing. It was all his idea, I assure you!’

Mr Darcy smiled at the sight of Elizabeth in the afternoon sunlight, laughing at her father, and giving him loving glances in between. Mr Bennet glanced back at Mr Darcy. ‘And here I thought that she was the daughter with the most sense. Pray, what have you done to my girl to have turned her into such a harridan?’ he asked with a smile playing upon his lips. ‘If that is the case, then I happily relinquish my duty to her over to you. I thought you had been suffered enough, Mr Darcy. I see that I am wrong, but if it is your dearest wish to be tied to this impertinent woman, then let that be in your shoulders!’

‘T’is a heavy burden to bear, sir. Should she become too much, I should make my excuses to attend business in London and leave my younger sister to her tirades’

Elizabeth look affronted for a moment before smiling. Her Mr Darcy and her papa were teasing her! Goodness, what had she done to deserve such a thing? She tilted her head before shaking it.

‘If my father is correct in describing my character at this time, do you not think it dangerous to leave poor Miss Darcy alone with me? I may make her an impertinent lady, with the right guidance’

‘You are indeed correct, Miss Elizabeth. Maybe I should take Georgiana with me and leave you to run Pemberley yourself,’ Mr Darcy suggested

‘No, that will not do, Mr Darcy. I am a harridan, as my father puts it. I should order another carriage from the many that I am sure you own and follow you to London, sir’ Elizabeth was enjoying herself now and her father was watching in amusement at the light hearted conversation his favourite daughter was having with the man she would marry. Indeed, Darcy was a tall and imposing fellow, but Mr Bennet was happy to see that he was also willing to learn to lighten his mind, learn to laugh at himself and others without cruelty. Yes, he was a man worthy of his Elizabeth after all. The subject at hand was still in his mind.

‘Mr Darcy,’ he interrupted. ‘Though I know you to be joking, I would like to offer to pay you back for your kindness to my poor Lydia. Nine thousand pounds. Indeed, how is half such a sum to be repaid?’ he wondered aloud.

‘Papa, do you not find it strange that it is not a rounded ten thousand pounds?’ Elizabeth asked from the window.

‘Yes, the sum did seem quite odd. How do you explain it, Mr Darcy?’

‘Wickham asked for twenty thousand pounds. It was negotiated down to nine thousand, but that is taking into account all his debts, plus the one thousand I settled upon Miss Lydia, and the one thousand she will get from her initial dowry. All in all, I have put away eight thousand to bring their marriage about, but I shall not give them a pound more. I am sorry, sir, but if the Wickhams exceed their income, it will not fall to me to help them further, though they will be my brother and sister’

‘Understandable, my son. I should not want to give them a shilling myself,’ Mr Bennet murmured. Neither Elizabeth nor Mr Darcy missed that he had called Darcy ‘my son’ and the look that was passed between them showed their joy at hearing this, even after such a harsh statement regarding
the man’s youngest daughter. ‘Elizabeth, I imagine that Lydia will apply to you for money after you are wed, but I urge you to exercise caution about going into your own funds to help your silly sister. She must learn her lesson and earn to use money wisely. I fear this lesson will not be learned for quite some time’

‘Papa, all will be well. Now, may I ask for your permission to walk for a while with my fiancé? There is still some daylight left and it is not too cold yet’

‘Yes, yes. Off with you too. Not too far though, and take Mary or Kitty with you’

Mr Darcy bowed and left the room as Elizabeth made her way back inside to entreat one of her younger sisters to chaperone them outside for a while. Kitty, still finding Mr Darcy imposing, insisted that it was too cold, but Mary agreed that to exercise for a short while after practicing on the pianoforte would be good for her.

ONE YEAR LATER

‘My dearest Mrs Darcy, what is the meaning of this?’ Fitzwilliam Darcy raised an eyebrow at his beautiful wife as she entered his study without knocking. He had kept his tone light until he saw the distressed look on Elizabeth’s face. He knew his correspondence had to wait. ‘Elizabeth. Please tell me what is troubling you’

‘I received a letter from Hartley; from Jane’

‘Are Mr and Mrs Bingley well? I know she is about to start her confinement. Is your sister ill? I have not heard from Charles’

‘No, no that isn’t it. Lydia and Wickham are with them. I fear it is causing undue restlessness to Jane, though she is far too cheerful in her letter’

‘As per usual,’ Mr Darcy murmured. Elizabeth slowed herself a small smile at his insight.

‘Indeed. I do believe that the Wickhams are currently in between regular lodgings. As per usual,’ she finished off quietly.

Darcy raised an eyebrow at her tone. ‘And have exceeded their income?’ he inquired wryly. Mrs Darcy pursed her lips in response, enough for her husband to know the feeling of his beloved wife. Elizabeth’s most beloved sister, Jane Bingley nee Bennet, was entering her fourth month of her first pregnancy. Only a mere six weeks previously, Jane and Charles had left Netherfield at the end of its lease and moved into an estate only thirty miles from Pemberley, named Hartley. The Wickhams had apparently come a few days ago, without warning, and knowing that they would not be welcomed at Pemberley, had descended upon the Bingleys. Darcy wasn’t surprised to hear about the financial situation. With such a pair consisting of George and Lydia Wickham, money was never going to be always on hand. Mr Bennet might have joked about the Bingleys exceeding their income, but both Jane and Charles were prudent and though they were generous, they were smart about their money. Unfortunately, Jane still felt the familial bonds with their youngest sister and would often send some sort of monetary package every quarter to them. Darcy knew that Elizabeth had sent them something, but knew it was not money. He could understand why she wouldn’t wish to speak to him about it, and he would never press her regarding it, but this was enough. To cause more stress to Jane Bingley at such a delicate time was abhorred by him and seeing his wife in such a state... he was tired of Wickham getting his foot in everybody’s lives like this. He had an idea...

ONE MONTH LATER
Mr Bennet was shown into Pemberley and announced. Elizabeth’s eyes lit up and rounded at seeing her father. It must have been Providence to have brought him here; she had only discovered that she too was now with child, like her older sister, and that the cousins would be so close to each other in age and distance meant a lot to the Darcys and Bingleys. Elizabeth had sent away the note to Hartley the previous day, as well as one to Longbourn. Surely they had not received it at that time. She threw herself into her father’s arms as he caught sight of her as well, a smile on his face.

‘Papa! What are you doing here? I take it that you have not received my news?’

‘Actually my dear, I arrived in Lambton late last night and a note from your husband was awaiting me upon my arrival with your wonderful news. I do believe I have incredible timing, my love’

‘It is so good to see you. Unexpected, but very wonderful, Papa’ Mr Bennet’s smile widened as he watched Elizabeth’s facial expression change as she thought through his words. ‘Papa, did my husband know you were coming to Pemberley?’

‘Yes. He wrote about a fortnight ago, requesting my presence here’

‘Whatever for?’ Elizabeth frowned in confusion. How had Mr Darcy kept such a thing from her?

‘To help him regarding the Wickhams. It is about time I do my part in that situation. Your Mr Darcy may have refused monetary payback, but I felt that this was such a small thing I could do in order to thank him.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I understand that Lydia and Wickham have arrived at Hartley without any notice’

‘True’

‘You and Jane are my pride and joy, and while I love Lydia, I also am very disappointed in her. I have already warned Mrs Bennet about what will happen’

‘And may I now be informed?’ Elizabeth requested pertly.

‘I suspect that you would rather get the information from your husband. And pray, where is the tall, imposing Mr Darcy right now?’

‘I do believe he is attending to some of the tenants at this time,’ she replied

‘And your newest younger sister, Miss Darcy?’

‘She is currently doing some studies with Mrs Annesley. She shall be done directly. Now, I will ring for a fresh round of tea. I suppose I must speak to Mrs Reynolds about a room for you, Papa. Why did you stay at Lambton?’

‘I wasn’t sure when I would arrive, and I did not want to wake the household should I come late into the night. I was happy to stay at the inn. Your excellent husband tried to assure me that coming straight to Pemberley would not be a problem, but I wrote last week in my reply that I shall stay at the inn the night before, so that I may surprise you. Do not worry your dear head about it, Lizzy. Your husband and I have a plan for the Wickhams.’ If Elizabeth thought she was able to extract the necessary information from her father, she was wrong. However, she was determined to get it from her husband.

Upon his arrival, Fitzwilliam Darcy was able to manoeuvre his way to avoid Elizabeth and find
Mr Bennet to confirm their plan in his study, Georgiana asked to distract Elizabeth in the music room. At dinner, Elizabeth shot her husband many looks throughout the meal that he deftly ignored, much to the amusement of Mr Bennet and the concern of Miss Darcy. Finally, as they retired for the night, Mr Darcy was escorting his wife to their chambers, dismissing the staff for the evening, Elizabeth whirled on her husband.

‘May I ask as to why you and my father have conspired behind my back?’

‘I did not want you to worry unduly about your sisters’

‘Mr Darcy, my father is here and I appear to have been the only one who did not expect him’

‘I also wanted to surprise you, Mrs Darcy’ he told her in a low voice. She looked at him sharply.

‘Do not think you can seduce your way out of this, Mr Darcy,’ Elizabeth stated forcefully.

His smiling face frustrated her further. ‘I would never think to do such a thing, Mrs Darcy’ He sat on the bed as she watched him through narrow eyes. Her natural curiosity got the better of her.

‘Oh! Please just tell me about your plan regarding the Wickhams. Do the Bingleys know?’

‘Only Charles does. Once I got your father to agree to the plan, I informed Mr Bingley of it. I did not want to cause any further stress to Mrs Bingley’ Elizabeth looked at him for a few moments, eyes swimming with tears all of a sudden. Mr Darcy saw this and quickly got back up, going around to Elizabeth’s side of the bed and kneeling before her. ‘Elizabeth,’ he murmured. ‘Elizabeth, tell me what is wrong? Are you ill? Have I done something to cause you to be vexed? Please, my love?’

Elizabeth threw her arms around his neck and wept onto his shoulder. After several moments, she pulled away, a sheepish look on her own lovely face. ‘I am so sorry, William. I was warned that sometimes my moods might become strange. I am not upset with you. You are doing this for my sister. Is there anything you would not do for my family?’

‘I will not see you or Jane put up with the Wickhams in such a manner for much longer,’ he said determinedly. This time, when Elizabeth’s arms went around, she added a long and passionate kiss to his lips.

‘I truly have married the best of men,’ she murmured when they pulled apart.

‘And I have married the best of women, Elizabeth Darcy’

Elizabeth agreed to stay at Pemberley and with Georgiana. Music often helped Mrs Darcy feel calm, especially the way the accomplished and modest Miss Darcy played. As desperately as Elizabeth was to be with Jane, her morning sickness was quite heavy and she was rather afraid that seeing Wickham and Lydia’s faces would make her feel further sickly. Mr Bennet and Mr Darcy made their way the following day after Mr Bennet’s arrival to Hartley, their plan in mind, ready to execute.

After they were announced, they were taken to a large drawing room where Lydia looked indifferent and Wickham looked wary. Jane welcomed her father with open arms and a warm smile to her favourite brother-in-law. Not that she would admit it out loud, but even she had to tell herself that between the two men, Mr Darcy was all that was good and kind and wonderful to her Lizzy, while Wickham could no longer charm Jane with his open face and smile. Though Jane was curious about what was happening, Charles encouraged her to sit down to hear all.

‘Mr Wickham,’ Mr Bennet started, ‘I have not had the pleasure of hearing from either yourself or Lydia about your residency here at Hartley. I had to be informed of it by the inhabitants of the
estate as well as Pemberley. I do hope all is well in the regulars?’

‘My commission has finished sir,’ Wickham replied in a low voice. ‘I have been seeking appropriate employment in Town’

‘Then pray, would not being in Town be more beneficial to the search, Son?’

‘Mrs Wickham expressed a wish to visit her sister’

‘Indeed, Papa. Why are you so interested in what we do? My dear husband is taking good care of me, as you see’ Mr Bennet, Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley all raised an eyebrow at the statement, and even Jane’s eyes rounded in her version of disbelief.

‘Well, I certainly see that,’ Mr Bennet continued on. ‘I have a proposition for you both regarding your future and income’

‘Papa?’

‘Do not lie to me, Lydia. You and your husband have squandered away the settlement put upon you on your marriage. Your mother might have nerves and spoiled you, but she never spent more than she ought, and I thought she had taught you the value of economising’

‘But my dear father, we have not spent everything, have we, darling?’ Lydia turned to her husband, who was no longer looking at anybody in the eye. Wickham knew that this was it. If Mr Bennet and Darcy were to give them money now, it would be it. They would be destitute with nowhere to go if they spent it all.

‘What is your proposition, sir?’ he asked quietly. Lydia frowned at him and opened her mouth to speak again, but a stern look from her father stopped her.

‘Colonel Fitzwilliam has settled lodgings for you in Nova Scotia, where you will train their militia for an income. You will not be promoted unless you actually do work, Wickham,’ Darcy told him. ‘We will give you five thousand pounds and your passage for you and your wife. This is the last time I ever put money towards you’

‘He deserves it,’ Lydia cut in.

‘Hush, you ignorant girl!’ Mr Bennet snapped. ‘Of all my daughters, I knew you to be the silliest in all of England and now you shall be the silliest in all of Canada. You almost make me say that I shall not miss you at all’ Jane’s quiet gasp at their father’s harsh words sounded and Bingley moved over to stand by her. ‘You will learn to economise. Wickham, Lydia will have control of the money and you will both see to it that it is spent prudently. No more gambling, no more dissolute behaviour and if you cannot abide by that, then I shall truly cut all ties to the both of you. You are deserving of each other. I had wished for a sensible man for each of my daughters, but it seems that I only have four sensible daughters deserving of those. Lydia, my dear, I am sorry for failing you as a father. I should have checked your behaviour much earlier. I shall pray for you.’ With that, Mr Bennet left the room and Jane got up to follow him out. Lydia was left with her mouth hanging open and Wickham’s head hanging even lower. Darcy and Bingley looked at them for a few moments before Mr Darcy spoke.

‘Your ship leaves in seven days hence from London. I assure you that I would escort you myself if I could, but I would much rather stay at home with my wife whom is now with child and my dear sister and enjoy my family time. Bingley, should you require any help in transporting the Wickhams to London, you need only send word to me.’ He looked at Wickham and Lydia again and bowed. ‘I wish you both a safe journey across the oceans and on your endeavours in Nova
Scotia. May your future be productive and please accept my wishes for your good health and happiness’ He left the room and followed the hushed voice of Jane Bingley as she spoke to her father in the Hartley music room, Bingley right behind him. As they joined Mr Bennet and his eldest daughter, the fair voice stopped.

‘Jane, dearest. Please do not fret. It is for the best,’ Bingley assured his beloved wife.

‘But so far away! Does Mama know? And Kitty and Mary? And Lizzy? Surely Lizzy did not encourage this’

‘No. She did not know of it until yesterday, and in the end, she approved of it also’

‘Lydia is just a child!’

‘Lydia has made her choices in life, and these are the consequences, Jane dear. It is just a shame that those particular consequences have been paid by all of us. You are in a most vulnerable state, my dear. I could not bear to have Lydia and Wickham impose on your good heart and that of your husband’s for much longer. It is done. In seven days, they will on board a ship to Canada and there I can only hope that they learn sufficiency. One day they may return, but without our help. Do not be downcast, Jane. You have time to say goodbye to your youngest and silliest sister. It is your mother who is lamenting the most. I daresay I shall never hear the end of it when I return to Longbourn’ Mr Bennet allowed a wry smile onto his face. ‘Mrs Bennet was most upset when I told her of sending her favourite daughter to Nova Scotia. Smelling salts could not help in that instance. I suppose I must encourage her to focus on the two remaining daughters we have at home’

‘We would be more than happy to have Miss Bennet and Miss Kitty to our home. Miss Kitty was most kind while she was with Mrs Bingley and myself at Netherfield in the summer’ Bingley offered.

‘That’s very kind of you to offer, son, but I do not think I could survive without at least one of my daughters for my dear wife to fawn over. Mary is still rather in doubt about mixing with the world more, though she is doing a credible job of speaking to people now at Meryton assemblies. Maybe Kitty would be glad to come and visit you and Lizzy during your confinements, Jane dear’

‘It would be lovely to see Kitty again. I am afraid that the Season in London is out of the question at this time’

Mr Bennet smiled at Jane ‘Understandably, my dear. Do not worry; Kitty has become much less insipid since spending some more time with you and Elizabeth over the year. Maybe I should suggest that the Wickhams go to Longbourn before going to London and say goodbye to the family,’ he wondered aloud.

‘I had hoped that you would stay in the area a while longer, Mr Bennet,’ Darcy said. ‘It has been quite some time since you have been to Pemberley and I know Elizabeth would love to spend some time with her father’

‘Indeed, and this is your first visit to Hartley,’ Bingley piped in. ‘It would be a shame for you to leave early with the Wickhams’

‘Maybe I could persuade one of you to contribute a carriage to take the Wickhams to Longbourn and I shall stay on at Pemberley for a while longer, if that is all right with you, Darcy’

‘Perfectly, sir. Though I suppose that Mrs Darcy would want to farewell her younger sister. I would not-’
'Would you be so kind as to allow Lydia to spend the night at Pemberley and return here? I am sure Elizabeth would wish to say goodbye to her sister.'

'I have no objections,' Darcy replied, though all in the room could tell that the idea of having even Lydia Wickham under his roof was not appealing. Darcy knew that it was only fair that Elizabeth be allowed to see Lydia one last time. The Wickhams may not ever return to English soil, or if they did, it would not be for many years hence. Surely one night of Mrs Wickham’s exuberant behaviour could be tolerated in such a circumstance. Mr Bennet cleared his throat.

'Well, now we have that sorted, I had best tell my youngest to get herself into motion. Bingley, you and Jane will be all right with Wickham still here tonight?' Bingley nodded, a smile on his face. 'I am sure that we shall be fine in that respect. As Jane is not disposed to want to venture far from the estate at this time, one of our carriages should be sufficient for Wickham and Lydia to travel with to Longbourn and onto London,' he offered. Jane nodded her ascent to the plan and stood.

'I shall come with you, Papa. Lydia will most likely have some words to say to the plan. I should hope my being with her might calm her'

'Bingley and I will discuss the travel issue and join you shortly'

- 

And so Lydia descended upon Pemberley with her father and Mr Darcy, where Elizabeth welcomed her with politeness and Georgiana Darcy welcomed her with shy elegance. The young woman had baulked the first time she had met Lydia Wickham, but it had not been out of jealousy. No, pity had been the only feeling that Miss Darcy had for the youngest Bennet sister, and alarm at her character. If Elizabeth’s lively, sportive manner had concerned her in the early days, it was nothing compared to the loud, brash Lydia. Assured that it was only for one night, Georgiana was more than happy to excuse herself from any hostess duties and retired early from the evening. Mr Bennet and Mrs Darcy listened to Lydia’s complaints and lamentations with practised composure, while Mr Darcy tried not to look at her in distaste. No, he had decided to follow the lead of his wife and father in law, and tried to block her voice from penetrating into his mind. When Elizabeth made her excuses and suggested they all retire for the night, he was most relieved. He escorted Elizabeth to their chambers after wishing their guests a good night.

'William, thank you'

'Whatever for, Lizzy?'

She smiled at his shortening of her name. Her dutiful husband hardly allowed himself such informality, especially not in front of others, but here, in their private rooms, she was most pleased when his iron grip on duty and standards was softened. She quite liked it when he called her ‘Lizzy’, though she had begged him not to use ‘Eliza’, for it reminded her of Miss Caroline Bingley. In turn, Mr Darcy was happy for his wife to use the name ‘William’ for him. Such a small pleasure, but they took it in their stride. The use of these names was significant. They both wished for their time together to be with ease again.

'Allowing Lydia here tonight; for me to say goodbye. Though I must say, her behaviour is rather trying. I still cannot believe her sometimes. Is it terrible of me to think that I may not miss her after all?'

'You father said as much when we were at Hartley earlier today,’ he informed her.

A look of surprise came over her. ‘Indeed? And did my father express such a thing in front of
Lydia and Wickham?’

‘Yes he did’

‘Well then, if that has not caused any significance to Lydia, I hope she finds happiness in Nova Scotia’ Darcy stayed quiet as his wife finished talking. ‘William, what are you thinking of so quietly there?’

He turned to smile at her, lying next to him. ‘I was thinking at how lucky I was to find such a kind, beautiful and intelligent wife. And that you might be angry with me that I compare your sister with you in a most disparaging way’

‘Pray, how can you compare Jane and myself? For I know that Jane will always be found to be a perfect angel,’ Elizabeth cried out lightly. Darcy could hear her teasing tone however and a small laugh escaped him.

‘My dear, you know very well which sister I spoke of, and even to the lovely Mrs Bingley, I would still find you to be much more exceptional!’

‘But you are biased, my dear husband’

‘I am most attentive to these things’

-

To Longbourn the Wickhams went, to say goodbye to the remaining Bennets before travelling onto London, escorted by Colonel Fitzwilliam, as Darcy’s request when the plans for the Wickhams were being set into motion. Mr Bennet stayed behind, intent on furthering his perusal of the Pemberley library and visiting Jane and his Lizzy until the Bingley carriage arrived back and Colonel Fitzwilliam could confirm that he had seen with his own eyes that Wickham and Lydia had boarded the boat and were still on it when it left port.

When it was time for Mr Bennet to return to Hertfordshire, he found Darcy alone in his study.

‘Son, may I have a few words with you?’

‘Of course, sir. Please do come in. Would you like me to send for Elizabeth?’

‘No. I wished to speak with you alone before I left. I shall say my farewells to Lizzy after this.’ Mr Bennet was then quiet for a moment, as if trying to remember what it had been that he wished to say and how to convey it. ‘You are a constant surprise to me, Darcy. You ask for my daughter’s hand in marriage when I think she dislikes you, I then learn of a previous proposal, you sought to save my least deserving child from complete ruin and you performed for me when I jested to Elizabeth that you would rant and storm about your love for her. You are a good man, and there is no way I can thank you for what you have done for my family. The cost to me at the time, was my dearest and most sensible daughter, but I know that you make her happy, and that you have learned from her as well. You have grown high in my esteem and I am very proud to call you my son in law, and my family’ Mr Bennet finished his speech and look across at Mr Darcy, stunned and humbled into a different silence. He had respected his father in law highly, despite his faults, for how could he not, when he had helped produce and shape his Elizabeth? He had not expected this at all, and Darcy found himself rather embarrassed by it, but also rather joyful.

‘Thank you sir. That means a great deal to me. I-’

‘No no. I don’t want to hear any sentimentality from you. You save that for your wife. I must say that I am happy to know that my first lot of grandchildren are coming from Jane and Lizzy. You and Bingley will make excellent fathers. You learn from my mistakes though, won’t you?’
‘Well, I-’

‘No, don’t say it,’ Mr Bennet interrupted again. ‘I should stop sporting with you. Thank you for your hospitality and for once again, paying far more than what is was worth for the Wickhams. You take care of my Lizzy now, won’t you?’

‘With everything I have,’ Darcy replied seriously before smiling back at Mr Bennet. ‘I would rant and storm about my love for Elizabeth if I had the time, sir. But I fear I have much to do now’

‘Good, good. I shall go find Lizzy now’ He left Darcy in the study to find his favourite daughter for a more loving farewell than the one he’d had with Lydia. To Hartley he went for one last night and to say goodbye to Jane and back to Longbourn he went the next day, knowing he was leaving behind Elizabeth in capable hands. There were many evenings of wonder indeed! And it was finally an end to the matter of the Wickhams.

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