

ACT ONE

Scene 4

SERVANT shows WICKHAM in.

SERVANT I'll tell Miss Elizabeth, sir.

The music from the ball dies and the lights fade in again to discover that we are back at the Bennet's house.

It is the day after the ball. WICKHAM sits nervously on the edge of a chair. After a moment he rises and moves to look out of the window. He is clearly not at his ease.

ELIZABETH enters.

ELIZABETH Mr. Wickham -- you wished to see me ?

WICKHAM Indeed yes, Miss Bennet. Thank you.

ELIZABETH Pray be seated.

WICKHAM Thank you. I will not keep you long.

They sit. A pause, then:

Miss Bennet, I owe an apology for my behaviour at the ball last night. The fact is that, being unexpectedly faced with Mr. Darcy, I acted in a manner which I fear requires some explanation.

ELIZABETH Please do not feel, Mr. Wickham, that you have to apologise. It was clear that something had passed between Mr. Darcy and yourself which is painful to you; that, I assure you, is enough.

WICKHAM Had I been aware that he was here instead of Derbyshire I would not have attended the ball.

ELIZABETH He is a man of very large property in Derbyshire, I understand.

WICKHAM His estate there is a noble one. A clear ten thousand per annum; as I have every possible reason to know. (He rises and begins to move about the room) Unfortunately the world is blinded by his fortune and consequence, or frightened by his high and imposing manners -- it sees him only as he chooses to be seen.

ELIZABETH I for one am not blinded, Mr. Wickham. His pride serves me to annoy me.

WICKHAM Is he likely to remain much longer ?

ELIZABETH Nothing has been said of his going away.

WICKHAM I see. It is fortunate, perhaps, that the regiment moves to Brighton. Though I have no reason for avoiding him -- his behaviour to me has been scandalous.

ELIZABETH Scandalous ?

WICKHAM His father, Miss Bennet - the late Mr. Darcy -- was one of the best men that ever breathed, and the truest friend I ever had. My father was his steward -- he gave up everything, and devoted all his life-time to the care of the Darcy estate. They were the most intimate of friends. When Mr. Darcy died, he thought that he had provided for me amply. He bequeathed me the living of his church. Unfortunately he had reckoned without his son.

ELIZABETH How could his will be disregarded ? Why did you not seek legal redress ?

WICKHAM There was an informality in the terms of the bequest. A man of honour could not have doubted the intention; but Mr. Darcy chose to doubt it. He refused me both the living and the money and left me penniless.

ELIZABETH But this is infamous ! What can have been his motive -- what can have induced him to behave so cruelly ?

WICKHAM Had the late Mr. Darcy liked me less, his son might have borne with me better. We were brought up together; and his father's attachment to me irritated him, I believe, very early in life. I was brought up not for the army but for the church, and should at this time have been in possession of a most valuable living, but for...

ELIZABETH But for what ?

WICKHAM I can only suppose but for jealousy. Miss Darcy -- his sister -- did all she could to help me, but she was too young to have much influence.

MR. BENNET enters. He does not immediately see WICKHAM.

MR. BENNET Lizzie, my dear -- have you seen my library book about ? Lydia was talking of taking it to change; most thoughtful of her,