

Darcy POV #5

Clutching at straws, Darcy was about to say something to Miss Elizabeth as a way of extricating himself from the vexatious company of Sir William. However, before he could prepare any clever words in his head his bothersome companion blurted out,

“My dear Miss Eliza, why are not you dancing? Mr. Darcy, you must allow me to present this young lady to you as a very desirable partner. You cannot refuse to dance, I am sure, when so much beauty is before you.” His white, bushy eyebrows performed a jig at the thought.

Darcy watched in horror as Sir William grabbed her hand and offered it to him. Surely, savages had more manners! However, far from shrinking from the thought of dancing with Miss Elizabeth he found that the idea elevated his mood enormously—and not just as a means of escape. He relaxed.

Lifting his hand to receive hers, his mood tumbled as she instantly drew back, eyes flashing.

“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.” Her tone was agitated, her cheeks flushed.

Darcy dropped his hand.

“I should be honored to dance with you, Miss Bennet,” he began, hoping he did not sound too eager in light of her unmistakable disdain.

Pressing her lips together so tight they were white, she shook her head, causing the black, side curls to tremble.

“But you *must*,” Sir William pressed as she responded by pushing her palms down, her agitated eyes glued to the floor.

The spike in spirits Darcy had experienced just moments ago, took a downward turn.

“You excel so much in the dance, Miss Eliza,” Sir William persisted. “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.”

She raised her graceful features, the former exasperation replaced by a pleasant, though perhaps, insincere smile. “Mr. Darcy is all politeness.”

She was mocking him and the slight stung, though he could not help respecting her audacity in snubbing someone so far her superior. This was her revenge for his refusal to dance with her at the assembly hall, he was sure.

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

Sir William was completely oblivious to the battle of wills waging war beneath his very nose.

Rather than favouring Sir William with a response, Miss Elizabeth arched a brow, turning sharply away and marched across the room to her friend. Sir William stood like a fish, mouth open in stunned surprise.

As Darcy watched her retreat, he had to bite back a smile. The more he learned about this intriguing, stubborn woman, the more he admired her. She was quite unlike any female he had ever met.

“I can guess the subject of your reverie.”

Miss Bingley.

Darcy closed his eyes and took a deep breath before replying. “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.” Whereas Bingley had been blessed with a generous dose of affability and kindness, that well had run dry by the time of Miss Bingley’s birth.

“I was never more annoyed!” she continued in her acid tone. “The insipidity, and yet the noise; the nothingness, and yet the self-importance of all these people! What would I give to hear your strictures on them!”

Her comment gave him pause. Was this how he sounded when speaking of strangers who were not as wealthy or connected as he? Was Miss Bingley merely reflecting sentiments she had heard *him* utter. The thought was not a pleasant one. Perhaps he was more like his snobbish Aunt De Burgh than he imagined. He must remedy that fault at once. Furthermore, his friend’s sister had been less than subtle in telegraphing her attraction for him, an attraction which was purely one sided. Perhaps a clever answer could kill two birds with one stone.

“Your conjecture is totally wrong, I assure you,” he responded, his gaze still following Miss Elizabeth. “My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.”

Thumbed her nose at his status

“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 face of a pretty woman can bestow.”

Miss Bingley immediately fixed her eyes on his face, and desired he would tell her what lady had the credit of inspiring such reflections. Mr. Darcy replied with great intrepidity,

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet.”

“Miss Elizabeth Bennet!” repeated Miss Bingley. “I am all astonishment. How long has she 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 so serious about it, I shall consider the matter as absolutely settled. You will have a charming mother-in-law, indeed, and of course she will be always 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.