

Darcy POV Part 2

Sir William Lucas's Card Evening Part I

"Can you believe we have received an insulting invitation for cards at Sir William Lucas's. I can think of no greater punishment," declared Caroline Bingley waving the invitation in her hand while moving toward the fire.

Darcy watched as Bingley sprung from the chair he occupied, to retrieve the invitation before it was cremated.

"I shall take that, sister," he responded. "I quite fancy getting to know my country neighbors better."

His sister's dark eyes flashed knowingly. "I wager that your interest is one particular neighbor, brother."

"I am not ashamed to admit it," he replied. "Darcy, you will accompany me, will you not?"

Darcy considered the question. He had been in the company of Miss Elizabeth Bennett twice since the fateful public ball and on each occasion, she had impressed him more. She had an intelligence and humor he was unused to witnessing in young women as a rule, though the mustard seed of fondness that was beginning to take root in his chest was most inconvenient considering that he had polluted the association by insulting her when they first met. And he was convinced that at the second and third gatherings, where they were both present, she had spent a good part of the evening criticizing him to her friend, Miss Charlotte Lucas.

He could not blame her. Had he not humiliated and provoked her at the ball? How many times had he revisited his comments since that day and wished he could go back in time to avoid the gaffe. But the temptation to enjoy her company was surprisingly powerful. Perhaps he could make efforts to improve her estimation of him.

"If I must," he responded, unwilling to let Miss Bingley suspect his growing interest in Miss Bennet. "But I cannot promise to enjoy it."

A smirk on the angular face of Caroline Bingley was evidence enough that he had succeeded in his deception.

Darcy and Bingley arrived fashionably late, and the boisterous card party was in full swing as they were announced. Miss Jane Bingley looked up, fixing her stare on his friend, but he was surprised that her features were not animated with the affection he might have expected given his friend's obvious enthusiasm for her.

A swift perusal of the room revealed that Miss Bennett had not noticed his own arrival, which wounded his ego more than a little, and was currently entertaining her fellow card players with her magical laughter.

He swallowed down his mis-placed attraction as Sir Lucas approached with the false smile of hospitality Darcy was well accustomed to.

"Mr. Darcy! Mr. Bingley! How honored am I that you have chosen to attend my little soirée." His simpering tone grated on Darcy who looked over Sir Lucas's head to avoid having to make eye-contact. His gaze settled again on Miss Elizabeth who was smacking her cards on the table in triumph. It was evidence that her manners were not those of the fashionable world—Bingley's

sister would never make such a show of winning—but he was nonetheless affected by her easy playfulness.

Darcy's interactions with Miss Elizabeth's mother, who would have been her instructor in social manners, had been mortifying. She was crass and rude, with the motivations of a social climber. Mr. Bennett had clearly married for fancy rather than material matters, and Darcy was not altogether surprised at Miss Elizabeth's lack of propriety. In fact, in contrast to her mother, Miss Bennet and Miss Elizabeth's manners were far superior. Which betrayed an encouraging natural grace that could not be marred by an inadequate teacher.

As he now observed her from across the room, Darcy could not help noticing that though Miss Elizabeth's features were not perfectly symmetrical, the sum of them was extremely pretty.

As if suddenly aware of his examination, she snapped her head in direction, her lips pressed together in displeasure. He quickly averted his gaze.