

Episode 8

When dinner was over, Miss Elizabeth returned directly to her sister. As soon as she was out of earshot Miss Bingley began abusing her.

“Sister, have you ever seen such poor manners? She has an air of such impertinence and pride, the like of which I have never observed in a suppose gentleman’s daughter. And as for her conversation! Are they mute during dinner at Longbourn? Haha! What am I saying? They never stop talking.” She wagged a fork at her sister. “Now that I know her better I cannot see any beauty in her complexion and her dress was at least two seasons old.”

“Oh, yes sister! She has nothing to recommend her but being an excellent walker. I shall never forget her appearance this morning. She really looked almost wild.”

Two wolves began fighting in Darcy’s chest and he realized he was gripping the stem of his glass with a ferocity that might lead to bloodshed.

Miss Bingley shrieked like a barn owl. “She did indeed, Louisa. I could hardly keep my countenance. Very nonsensical to come at all! Why must *she* be scampering about the country, because her sister had a cold? Her hair so untidy, so blowzy!”

Every muscle in his legs was fighting to jump up and give them a piece of his mind.

“Yes, and her petticoat;” continued Mrs. Hurst. “Don’t forget her petticoat, six inches deep in mud, I am absolutely certain, and the gown which had been let down to hide it not doing its office.”

“Your picture may be very exact, Louisa,” said Bingley, a hint of color on both cheeks, “but this was all lost upon me. I thought Miss Elizabeth Bennet looked remarkably well when she came into the room this morning. Her dirty petticoat quite escaped my notice.”

Before Darcy could agree, Miss Bingley chirped in again. “*You* observed it, Mr. Darcy, I am sure, and I am inclined to think that you would not wish to see *your sister* make such an exhibition.”

She had sprung a verbal trap. “Certainly not.” As he struggled to find the words to come to Miss Elizabeth’s defense, Miss Bingley began her tirade again.

“To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! What could she mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum.”

This was too much. He slapped his hand on the table as Bingley cried, “It shows an affection for her sister that is very pleasing.”

Darcy refrained from shouting bravo.

Then Miss Bingley unwittingly provided him with the perfect opening for a rebuttal.

“I am afraid, Mr. Darcy,” she observed in a half whisper, “that this adventure has rather affected your admiration of her fine eyes.”

“Not at all,” he replied, catching Miss Bingley’s eye, “they were brightened by the exercise.”

He took great delight in seeing her speechless for once.