

Darcy POV 14

Jane Bennett had made little progress by the following evening and Darcy was surprised to find that he was not sorry for it, now that the immediate danger to her health had passed, since it meant her sister had remained in residence.

Though Miss Elizabeth took dinner on a tray in her sister's room, she ventured downstairs after her sister was asleep.

This evening Darcy was employed in writing to his sister, Miss Bingley cloying at his elbow, continually interrupting his progress by suggesting messages for him to write to Georgiana. The unusually sober Mr. Hurst was playing piquet with Mr. Bingley while Mrs. Hurst made a sport of observing their game.

Since the whole room was engaged, Miss Elizabeth picked up some needlework she had started, but Darcy, noticing a slight curl of her lip, was sure she was listening to his one-sided repartée with Caroline.

“What studied handwriting you do have, Darcy,” she chattered. “And how is it that you keep your lines so straight?”

“Practice, madam,” he replied.

“And you write so much! If I were parted from Charles, I should likely fill no more than half a page. You have written at least three already. How delighted Miss Darcy will be to receive such a letter.”

Her constant patter had succeeded in irritating every nerve and fearful that his current mental state would be betrayed by his tone, he made no answer.

“You write uncommonly fast.”

He gritted his teeth. “You are mistaken. I write rather slowly.” Sneaking a glance at Miss Elizabeth, he saw that she was focusing all her attention on her stitches.

“How many letters you must have occasion to write in the course of a year! Letters of business, too! How odious I should think them!”

Her twittering was sending him dangerously close to an outburst. “It is fortunate, then, that they fall to my lot instead of to yours.”

“Pray tell your sister that I long to see her.”

He was under the impression that Caroline was reasonably well educated but was beginning to doubt the fact. “I have already told her so once, by your desire.”

Perhaps he could finish up the letter and move away from her.

“I am afraid you do not like your pen. Let me mend it for you. I mend pens remarkably well.”

What utter nonsense. Bingley had suggested that Caroline had a preference for Darcy which he had pooh-poohed, but he was beginning to suspect that Charles was right. Why else would she stay by his side uttering banalities? It was becoming more

and more difficult to remain cordial. If he let her perform any little service for him it might cement in her mind that he returned her affections.

“Thank you—but I always mend my own.”

“How can you contrive to write so even?”

He was silent. What he really wanted to tell his sister was how annoying Miss Bingley was at the present time.

“Tell your sister I am delighted to hear of her improvement on the harp, and pray let her know that I am quite in raptures with her beautiful little design for a table, and I think it infinitely superior to Miss Grantley’s.”

He was hurrying to finish and was even at that moment writing the closing. “Will you give me leave to defer your raptures till I write again? At present I have not room to do them justice.” He placed the quill in its stand and folded the paper.

“Oh, it is of no consequence. I shall see her in January. But do you always write such charming long letters to her, Mr. Darcy?”

He needed a flame to melt the wax and form the seal. Perhaps he would be forced to leave the room to find one.

“They are generally long; but whether always charming, it is not for me to determine.”

“It is a rule with me, that a person who can write a long letter with ease cannot write ill,” she retorted.

This was ludicrous.