

Episode 10

“Is Miss Darcy much grown since the spring?” said Miss Bingley: “will she be as tall as I am?”

Having so much enjoyed his last sparring match with Miss Bingley Darcy engaged his intelligence in fashioning another arrow meant to pierce the annoying woman’s soul. “I think she will. She is now about Miss Elizabeth Bennet’s height, or rather taller.”

The arrow missed its target by a mile.

“How I long to see her again! I never met with anybody who delighted me so much. Such a countenance, such manners, and so extremely accomplished for her age! Her performance on the pianoforte is exquisite.”

Her gushing compliments of his sister did not sit well with Darcy. He was the premier champion of his sister but Miss Bingley’s praise was too much and it made him cringe.

“It is amazing to me,” said Bingley, “how young ladies can have patience to be so very accomplished as they all are.”

Miss Bingley looked up from her cards sharply. “All young ladies accomplished! My dear Charles, what do you mean?”

“Yes, all of them, I think. They all paint tables, cover screens, and net purses. I scarcely know any one who cannot do all this; and I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished.”

Here was a subject upon which Darcy did have opinions. If every young woman were deemed accomplished then it rendered the expression meaningless.

“Your list of the common extent of accomplishments has too much truth. The word is applied to many a woman who deserves it no otherwise than by netting a purse or covering a screen; but I am very far from agreeing with you in your estimation of ladies in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half-a-dozen in the whole range of my acquaintance that are really accomplished.”

Miss Bingley placed her cards face down on the table. “Nor I, I am sure.”

“Then,” observed Elizabeth with a hint of indignation in her tone, “you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished woman.”

He dropped his own cards and locked eyes with Miss Elizabeth whose tightened jaw was evident through her creamy skin. “Yes; I do comprehend a great deal in it.”

Miss Bennett was not intimidated and refused to drop her gaze, challenging him in his opinions as a strange feeling unfurled in his chest.

Completely oblivious of the tension, Miss Bingley utterly agreed with his views, crying, “Oh, certainly no one can be really esteemed accomplished who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with.” She moved her cards as if they were a fan. “A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing,

drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and, besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved."

It infuriated Darcy that in this instance he agreed with Caroline. "All this she must possess," he added, desperately thinking of a way to include Miss Elizabeth in the conversation again. He glanced at the forgotten book on the couch. "And to all she must yet add something more substantial in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading."

He hoped to ingratiate himself by this last statement but to his horror she hotly responded, "I am no longer surprised at your knowing *only* six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing *any*."

No matter how hard he tried, this fascinating female took umbrage at whatever he said. He scrambled for a clever retort, one worthy of her intelligent wit. "Are you so severe upon your own sex as to doubt the possibility of all this?"

"I never saw such a woman," she declared hotly. "I never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe, united."

Her statement incurred the wrath of the other women at the table who had completely forgotten the game of cards.

"What injustice against gentlewomen!" cried Mrs. Hurst.

"I know many such women!" clamoured Miss Bingley at the very same moment.

"Order, order!" bellowed Mr. Hurst. "Are we playing or not?"

Darcy's spirits fell as Miss Elizabeth lifted her chin, turned on her heel and left the room.