

“I can readily believe,” answered he gravely, “that reports may vary greatly with respect to me; and I could wish, Miss Bennet, that you were not to sketch my character at the present moment, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either.”

“But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity.”

“I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours,” he coldly replied. She said no more, and they went down the other dance and parted in silence; and on each side dissatisfied, though not to an equal degree, for in Darcy’s breast there was a tolerably powerful feeling towards her, which soon procured her pardon, and directed all his anger against another.

They had not long separated, when Miss Bingley came towards her, and with an expression of civil disdain accosted her:

“So, Miss Eliza, I hear you are quite delighted with George Wickham! Your sister has been talking to me about him, and asking me a thousand questions; and I find that the young man quite forgot to tell you, among his other communication, that he was the son of old Wickham, the late Mr. Darcy’s steward. Let me recommend you, however, as a friend, not to give implicit confidence to all his assertions; for as to Mr. Darcy’s using him ill, it is perfectly false; for, on the contrary, he has always been remarkably kind to him, though George Wickham has treated Mr. Darcy in a most infamous manner. I do not know the particulars, but I know very well that Mr. Darcy is not in the least to blame, that he cannot bear to hear George Wickham mentioned, and that though my brother thought that he could not well avoid including him in his invitation to the officers, he was excessively glad to find that he had taken himself out of the way. His coming into the country at all is a most insolent thing, indeed, and I wonder how he could presume to do it. I pity you, Miss Eliza, for this discovery of your favourite’s guilt; but really, considering his descent, one could not expect much better.”

“His guilt and his descent appear by your account to be the same,” said Elizabeth angrily; “for I have heard you accuse him of nothing worse than of being the son of Mr. Darcy’s steward, and of *that*, I can assure you, he informed me himself.”

“I beg your pardon,” replied Miss Bingley, turning away with a sneer. “Excuse my interference—it was kindly meant.”

“Insolent girl!” said Elizabeth to herself. “You are much mistaken if you expect to influence me by such a paltry attack as this. I see nothing in it but your