

*Darcy's Passions: Fitzwilliam Darcy's Story*  
(*The first proposal from his point of view*)

The Collinses' arrival came at last, but to Darcy's dismay, Mr. Collins offered Lady Catherine his sincerest apologies for his cousin had taken ill. *How could Elizabeth be ill?* he thought as he purposely took a seat near the fire. *She seemed in health this morning when he observed her in the park.*

For the next half hour, Darcy went through the motions Society demanded, but he could not separate his mind from the thoughts of Elizabeth Bennet. If she were truly ill, he must do what he could to comfort her. Agitation wracked his being; now, he fully understood how Bingley felt when Jane Bennet became ill at Netherfield. Yet, possibly Miss Bennet's illness was a sham; she expected his offer this morning only to find Edward in the park in his stead. *Of course, did they not congenially meet in the park each morning?* Her distress of not seeing him today created her infirmity, or it could be a means of their being alone. *Yes, it must be so.*

Convinced of the latter, Darcy excused himself from the party using the pretext he and Edward would depart in a few hours, and some business still needed addressed. Edward, he assured the gathering, better entertained than did he. Returning to his chambers, Darcy retrieved his greatcoat, hat, and walking stick, and not wishing to be seen by his aunt's guests, he took the back stairway of the servants' quarters. He had to be to Elizabeth, and he had to be there now. He had a purpose—a purpose that would ironically change his life forever. Walking the quarter mile to the Hunsford cottage, he tried to review what he would say and to plan how Elizabeth would react to his condescension.

He rang the bell, and, within moments, a servant admitted him to the inner room where he found Elizabeth agitated and flushed. Darcy's heart lurched in his chest when he saw her. His hope sprang from the depths of his love for her; obviously, she awaited his appearance. He came forward and immediately inquired about her health although in countenance, Elizabeth appeared more flustered than unwell. "I came with a wish of hearing you are not suffering," he extended his excuse.

Coldly civil, Elizabeth answered him. "As you may see, Sir, I am well."

He ignored her bit of testiness; naturally, his coming not to her earlier upset her. Darcy tried to recall exactly what he wished to say to her this morning; he planned his speech carefully, drafting it several times. Although Elizabeth hid it well, he assured himself that she would welcome his attentions, and as such, he accepted the seat she offered. Yet, his nerves would not allow such constraint; he had to move, and within a few moments, he paced about the room. He could feel Elizabeth's eyes following him. Taking a deep breath to steady his nerves, Darcy finally turned to her. His mouth went dry as he tried to form the words he must say soon or lose his opportunity. Silence ensued for several minutes before he could compose himself; eventually, he approached her, taking three quick steps to stand before Elizabeth and, unceremoniously, blurted out, "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."

Elizabeth remained silent, which initially bothered him, but Darcy convinced himself she waited only to hear of his deep regard for her; so, he continued. "Miss

Elizabeth, my regard for you began when we first met in Hertfordshire. I was, admittedly, foolish to not seek out a proper introduction at the assembly, but my station in life does not allow me the luxury of associating with those of inferior society, and I was at first blind to your attraction. At Netherfield, I found worthy your devotion to your sister, as well as your kindness to Maria Lucas and others who sought your good wishes. Of course, I struggled for several months as to my feelings for you. One must realize the superiority of my family's connections had to be a concern for our alliance; the censure and disdain we are likely to encounter with such an unequal match was another consideration, but after much self reproach, I accepted the inferiority of your family's connections, and I offer you my hand in matrimony."

Fully expecting her acceptance, Darcy did not understand the gamut of emotions flashing across Elizabeth's face. When she spoke, he froze with the vehemence lodged in her words. "Mr. Darcy, she began slowly, "in such cases as this, it is the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. But I cannot—I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry to have occasioned pain to anyone. It has been most unconsciously done, however, and, I hope, will be of short duration." *How could he have so misread her mind?* "The feelings which you tell me have long prevented the acknowledgement of your regard can have little difficulty in overcoming it after this explanation."

His ears deceived him; Elizabeth refused his proposal. Disdaining any visual form of weakness, Darcy worked hard to compose his thoughts and control his rage before speaking to her again, but his hurt and anger showed clearly, and he did not speak for what seemed to be an infinite period. At length, in a voice of forced calmness, he said, "And this is all the reply which I am to have the honor of expecting? I might, perhaps, wish to be informed why with so little endeavor of civility, I am thus rejected. But it is of small importance." He tried to give an appearance of nonchalant indifference, which he truly did not feel.

She turned on him angrily. "I might as well inquire why, with so evident a desire of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility, if I was uncivil? But I have other provocations—you know I have. Had not my own feelings decided against you, had they been indifferent, or had they even been favorable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man who has been the means of ruining perhaps forever, the happiness of a most-beloved sister?"

*So, she knew his part in separating Bingley from Miss Bennet. From where had Elizabeth heard it? Edward—Edward unknowingly told Elizabeth of his deceit. How she must hate him—although what he did, he would do again—he did it for Bingley's own good.*

Her continued condemnation of his actions interrupted his thoughts. "I have every reason in the world to think ill of you. You dare not, you cannot deny that you have been the principal, if not the only, means of dividing them from each other; of exposing one to the censure of the world for caprice and instability and the other to its derision for disappointed hopes and involving them both in misery of the acutest kind. Can you deny that you have done it?"

Darcy pretended to be unmoved by her words. "I have no wish of denying that I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your sister, or that I rejoice in my success. Toward him I have been kinder than toward myself." He showed her no remorse for his actions, and he even looked at her with a smile of affected incredulity.

The shift of her shoulders and a rise of her chin should have warned Darcy there was more to come, but he still doubted her defiance. He could claim his allegiance to Mr. Bingley in the affair with her sister, but Elizabeth knew of other offenses, and she began to attack him with those. "But it is not merely this affair on which my dislike is founded. Your character was unfolded in the recital, which I received many months ago from Mr. Wickham. On this subject what can you have to say? In what imaginary act of friendship can you here defend yourself?"

*Wickham's name—she spoke Wickham's name.* Jealousy crushed Darcy's heart; his worst fears confirmed. George Wickham, the man whom he most detested in the world, smote Elizabeth. *How could that be?* Unable to stop, Darcy came in close to let his true feelings be known. He loomed over Elizabeth's petite form, trying to use his size to dominate her. "You take an eager interest in that gentleman's concerns." Darcy's tone changed, and his color heightened.

With fervor, Elizabeth shortened the distance even more as she challenged, "Who that knows what his misfortunes have been can help feeling an interest in him."

Nearly spitting out the words, Darcy replied contemptuously, "His misfortunes! Yes, his misfortunes have been great indeed!"

Energized by their encounter, Elizabeth's response accused Darcy of reducing Wickham to a life of poverty by depriving him of his rightful income. "You have done all this, and yet you can treat the mention of his misfortune with contempt and ridicule."

"And this," cried Darcy, as he walked with quick steps across the room, "is your opinion of me? I believed if anyone knew me it would be you, Miss Elizabeth, but according to you, I am a calculated manipulator. I thank you for explaining it so fully." Darcy turned to face the woman to whom he foolishly gave his heart. "But perhaps these offenses might have been overlooked had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design." Yet, he could not stop at that; he was angry; he was devastated; his own pride hurt—attacked and destroyed. Darcy never sought favors from another; he never needed to do so; being reduced to applying for adoration and respect offended every fiber of his being. He taunted Elizabeth satirically by describing how he could have applied for her hand with false compliments, but he prided himself on always speaking the truth; and truthfully, he had qualms about an alliance with Elizabeth. "Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections—to congratulate myself on the hope of relations whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?"

If Darcy thought Elizabeth would accept his words as the voice of reason, he greatly mistook her. His rebuke infuriated her. "You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner." Darcy stiffened at these words; he prided himself the most upon being a gentleman, and she called him on this matter; his color paled as she continued her ridicule. "You could not have made the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it. From the very beginning, from the first moment, I

may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others. I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry.”

Darcy could stand it no more: “You have said quite enough, madam. I perfectly comprehend your feelings, and have now only to be ashamed of what my own have been. Forgive me for having taken up so much of your time, and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness.” And with that said, he hastily quit the room and the house; yet, he could not do so without one last wistful glance at Elizabeth.

Leaving the Parsonage, Darcy momentarily did not know where he was; this was a nightmare from which he must awake. *Elizabeth!* He wanted to scream her name; a knife through his heart would have been less painful; at least, from a stab wound he would die; living without Elizabeth’s love would haunt him for the rest of his life. *The last man whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry*-those were her words! She always hated him. Darcy thought of the many women he thwarted or ignored; he knew the slightest nod of his head would secure their attentions, but the one woman he desired found him to be arrogant and conceited. The memory of the last few months recoiled and bounded forward into an empty vault.

His gait drove him towards Rosings; surprisingly, his legs worked even though his heart lay shredded by Elizabeth’s words. *If you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner.* Darcy ran his hand through his hair and tried valiantly to steady himself. He totally lost his perspective. Nearly staggering up the stairs, he made his apologies to his aunt and retreated to the sanctuary of his chambers.