



**THE
WICKHAMS
CHRISTMAS AT
PEMBERLEY**

BY
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AND MARGOT MELCON**



★
DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



CHARACTERS

MRS. REYNOLDS—Late 50s, early 60s, the housekeeper at Pemberley, knows all and sees all, has been on staff since Darcy was a child, a mother figure to the household.

BRIAN—A footman, in love with technology and inventions, sincere and earnest, perhaps a bit arrogant.

CASSIE—The new housemaid, a village girl, an orphan who came from less than nothing. The opportunity to work at Pemberley means security she has never had, and she takes this job very seriously. She is sometimes maybe too eager and a bit headstrong.

MR. FITZWILLIAM DARCY—Head and owner of Pemberley.

MRS. ELIZABETH DARCY—Mistress of Pemberley.

GEORGE WICKHAM—Grew up at Pemberley, son of the former steward, once a soldier, has been in and out of trouble (of his own making) his whole life.

LYDIA WICKHAM—A bright, warm, and charming personality, if sometimes a bit much, eloped with Wickham at 15 and is now somewhat trapped in this marriage.

SETTING

December, 1815.

The lower floor of the grand Pemberley Estate, particularly the common room where servants gather and eat.

NOTE

The play works best when pacing is swift. The banter and transitions must flow to earn the moments of pause, hesitation, and sincerity.

THE WICKHAMS CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY

ACT ONE

Prologue

Letters from all of our characters pop into space.

LYDIA. Darling Lizzy!

I've been terribly lazy in writing you—with my many social engagements it is positively impossible to remember my older sister all tucked away in that big house—but we shall see one another very soon because I am coming to Pemberley for Christmas! Mother insisted, and I know a holiday without all of us together would be incomplete. I shall forgo my dear Wickham, who remains consumed with...business. I arrive within the week! What a happy Christmas it shall be!

Your sister, Lydia

LIZZY. Dear Jane,

I have just received word from Lydia that she too will join us for the holiday, and will thoughtfully be coming alone. I do so appreciate your willingness to travel, especially in your expectant state. I could not face the holiday without you and your Mr. Bingley. I trust you will arrive as planned, with Mary in tow, and that Mother and Father and Kitty will follow on Christmas Day, along with Georgiana.

Mr. Darcy and I anticipate a very full house with...glee.

Lizzy

DARCY. Mr. Bingley,

As your dear Mrs. Bingley is in the family way, Mrs. Darcy and I hope to provide all she requires during your time at Pemberley. Our expert housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, will have everything prepared.

I look forward to not only braving the Bennet women with you, sir, but also to sharing in a large brandy.

Your friend,
Fitzwilliam Darcy

MRS. REYNOLDS. To the shopkeeper, Lambton Village
Dear Sir, What follows is the year-end order for Pemberley Estate.
Please provide:

Fifty pound flour
Forty pound sugar
Five pound each, raisins and figs
Two pound each, walnuts and almonds
Cinnamon sticks and clove

LYDIA. And, Lizzy, will you make sure Mrs. Reynolds has loads of those sugary biscuits with the orangey bits on hand? I adore them.

MRS. REYNOLDS. And several bags of oranges.
Merry Christmas, sir.

Kindly,
Mrs. Reynolds of Pemberley Estate

CASSIE. Mrs. Reynolds,
I humbly accept the position of housemaid at Pemberley Estate. It will be an honor to serve you, and Mr. and Mrs. Darcy.
Cassie

Out of Cassie's letter the lights widen as Brian enters in real time and space to greet her. They are old friends teasing each other.

BRIAN. Cassie? My god, is that you? I wasn't told you'd be coming.

CASSIE. Hello then! It has not been so long since we've seen each other, Brian. Is your eyesight failing you, or just your mind?

BRIAN. You still think you're clever.

CASSIE. And you still think you're important enough to be told when someone is coming, but you're not.

BRIAN. I'm just a bit surprised to see you. I was expecting the new housemaid to arrive this morning.

CASSIE. And she has. Hello again.

BRIAN. *You're* the new maid? For Christmas?

CASSIE. Mrs. Reynolds wrote that the house required extra hands and my trial as housemaid was to begin straightaway. So here I am.

And eager to get started. Can you tell me where I could find her?

BRIAN. Of course. It'll be so wonderful to have you here.

CASSIE. Just as when we were young.

BRIAN. Except this time I won't let you win all the footraces.

CASSIE. *Let me win?* I won fairly every time and you know it.

BRIAN. I was being a gentleman by losing to you!

CASSIE. The day you're a gentleman is the day I'm the queen.

This makes Brian laugh.

BRIAN. It's good to see you Cassie. Welcome to Pemberley.

Brian takes Cassie's bag for her and escorts her in...

Scene 1

The lower floor of the grand Pemberley Estate, home to Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy and his still-new wife, Mrs. Elizabeth Darcy (née Bennet). The nobility are upstairs enjoying fine food and company. This is downstairs, where live the engineers of this house and all its staff, kitchens, cellars, laundry, and more.

Particularly we are in the common room where servants gather and eat. The large kitchen is just offstage, a stairway leads up to the main house, doors to the outside garden entrance, and a hall to servants' quarters and apartments.

Early morning. December 22nd.

Brian is tinkering with something when Mrs. Reynolds enters, in a hurry, always in a hurry, humming, always humming.

MRS. REYNOLDS. *Brian.*

BRIAN. *(Snapping to attention, trying to hide his tinkering.)* Good morning, Mrs. Reynolds.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Not a good one if you have so little to do that you can sit idly by three days before Christmas.

BRIAN. I'm not idle, I'm working.

MRS. REYNOLDS. You're trying my patience. Have you been upstairs yet? The breakfast table should be laid.

BRIAN. The table is ready, because it is always ready, because I always ready it.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Look you. This house is going to fill up any moment, and I have no time for disobedience.

BRIAN. Isn't Christmas supposed to make people merry?

MRS. REYNOLDS. It's supposed to make people busy. So none of your inventions today, I don't want you distracted.

BRIAN. (*Putting away his tinkering.*) I'm not distracted. I'm just... considering...

MRS. REYNOLDS. Oh, pray tell, what is so pressing that it deserves your consideration today of all days?

BRIAN. Well, it's about—

MRS. REYNOLDS. I don't actually want to know. I want you to keep your thoughts to yourself.

BRIAN. It's nice to see Cassie again.

MRS. REYNOLDS. To yourself. I said. *To yourself.*

BRIAN. You did not tell me you were hiring her as the new maid.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Am I required to check with you now? Please forgive me. Only I thought I ran this household!

BRIAN. No, I'm glad she's here. She is a good worker, clever, fast in a footrace. I've always admired her for that.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Now, don't you start.

BRIAN. Don't start what? I'm saying I like her!

MRS. REYNOLDS. I don't like *you* liking *her* like *that*.

BRIAN. That is not what I meant.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I'll not have you proposing to her within the hour.

BRIAN. I'm not! She's a friend not a...girl.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Mmhmm. You just keep to yourself and stay out of that girl's way.

BRIAN. Honestly, I have no ideas about Cassie. She is a welcome

addition is all that I was trying to say. I will help her as she finds her way about this maze of a house and you can't tell me otherwise.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I scrubbed you in your bath as a boy, I can tell you whatever I like. Now, if you are quite through, everyone is arriving and we have much to do.

BRIAN. Yes ma'am. And Mrs. Reynolds...be merry.

Brian hurries up the stairs before Mrs. Reynolds can scold him. Mrs. Reynolds starts singing as she heads out the door to the kitchen.

Scene 2

Later that morning.

Mr. and Mrs. Darcy happily come down the stairs, hand in hand.

They are looking for Mrs. Reynolds but, finding the hall momentarily empty, they indulge in a moment of privacy before the house is overtaken.

DARCY. I know it is the holiday, but could we not just hide down here until after the new year?

LIZZY. We cannot and you know we cannot because I know it is my family you are hiding from.

DARCY. That's not true.

LIZZY. Of course it's true, but now you're quite stuck with us so it is a very good thing you love me.

DARCY. It is. And I do.

LIZZY. And it will be over soon and we shall return to our quiet lives again.

DARCY. Though it shall not be quiet for much longer, I hope. When our family grows?

LIZZY. With Jane expecting I'd hoped for a reprieve from the endless interrogations about children, but alas I fear quite the opposite.

DARCY. I am eager. I won't deny it. (*Lowering his voice, whispering.*) In fact, I wonder if we shouldn't take advantage of this momentary solitude to—

LIZZY. *Mr. Darcy.*

DARCY. Before everyone arrives! There is a quiet spot just off the hall here where I used to hide as a boy—

LIZZY. Good lord, what if someone should find us?

DARCY. We are heads of this house. What would they say?

Mrs. Reynolds enters consulting her ledger of the entire house's business.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I would say that there are twenty-three bedrooms upstairs and every one of them is preferable to a hallway.

LIZZY. Oh my goodness.

Lizzy is mortified, disentangling herself from Mr. Darcy, who is amused.

DARCY. How are you this morning Mrs. Reynolds?

MRS. REYNOLDS. I am busy and have a few things to go over with Mrs. Darcy, if you have quite finished what you were doing?

DARCY. Well *now* I certainly have. (*With affection.*) Mrs. Darcy. (*With glare.*) Mrs. Reynolds.

He exits.

LIZZY. My apologies, Mrs. Reynolds. We were attempting to find one last moment of privacy before the family arrives today. How can I help?

MRS. REYNOLDS. A few details for your approval, ma'am. First, we'll put Mr. and Mrs. Bingley in the largest guest bedroom when they arrive this afternoon.

LIZZY. She'll be grateful for the space I imagine.

MRS. REYNOLDS. In her condition I worry she might have trouble finding a single comfortable surface in the entire house, but we will do our best for her.

LIZZY. Of course you will and thank you. It would have never occurred to me.

MRS. REYNOLDS. One day it will, ma'am.

LIZZY. Oh, not you too!

MRS. REYNOLDS. I am not saying a word, ma'am.

LIZZY. No one will say anything directly and yet the air is positively thick with opinion.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Now now. This house has been in want of a crowd for a very long time. For so many years, Christmas was such a quiet affair with just Mr. Darcy and Georgiana, and I don't mind saying that I prefer how much livelier you have made Pemberley these past two years. So much more like a home again.

LIZZY. If anyone makes this place a home it is you, Mrs. Reynolds. Though it pleases me to hear you say as much. All of you native to Pemberley are so...orderly while my family is so...well, not.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Speaking of which: Now that your sister, Mrs. Wickham, will be joining us for Christmas dinner, I took the liberty of seating her as far from your mother, Mrs. Bennet, as possible. Keeps the noise down I find.

LIZZY. They do amplify each other, do they not?

MRS. REYNOLDS. I would never say as much to anyone but you. And just to be certain, we are *not* expecting...Mr. Wickham for the holiday?

LIZZY. Mr. Wickham? No. Absolutely not. Mr. Darcy has made it perfectly clear that he is not and will not be allowed at Pemberley.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Only I have heard Mrs. Wickham speak of him so often.

LIZZY. Lydia has no shame and no knowledge of the extremes to which Mr. Darcy went to save her reputation after she ran off with that man. In some ways I regret the role we played in sealing Lydia's fate.

MRS. REYNOLDS. No, ma'am you mustn't think that. You saved her.

LIZZY. Forcing Wickham to marry her? What sort of life did we sentence her to?

MRS. REYNOLDS. Say no such thing, ma'am. She'd be ruined if not for you both.

LIZZY. Yes, and most of the time I am able to pretend Mr. Wickham does not exist, and then Lydia arrives and speaks incessantly of him

which reminds me of her terrible match in him anew and sets Mr. Darcy's teeth quite on edge.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I know Mr. Darcy cannot forgive him but I remember a different young man: bright, curious, and loving. I believe there's still good in him. Somewhere.

LIZZY. Please tell me should you find it.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Oh now.

LIZZY. You must think me terrible but it is hard to regain my trust once lost.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Mrs. Darcy, you must never apologize for high standards. Have a biscuit.

LIZZY. Pemberley would crumble in a week without you.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Please don't mention it again, ma'am. Praise slows me down.

Now, if I may, for the menu. We'll have a traditional Christmas dinner on the 25th, but for the next few days we shall do quail and ham, roast potatoes, puddings with raisins, puddings without—I've never been able to get Mr. Darcy to eat a raisin and I don't imagine he'll start today—then I thought a rum punch, unless you'd prefer brandy.

LIZZY. Punch sounds gloriously festive!

MRS. REYNOLDS. Excellent.

LIZZY. *(Regarding her half eaten biscuit.)* And we must have these orangey biscuits in abundance, please.

MRS. REYNOLDS. As you like, ma'am.

She produces one more biscuit from her apron. Lizzy snatches it.

LIZZY. You are a wonder, Mrs. Reynolds.

MRS. REYNOLDS. My pleasure, ma'am.

Cassie comes in with a stack of something to fold. Sees Lizzy.

CASSIE. Ma'am—Miss—Missus, I'm so sorry.

Tries to curtsy, drops the pile of things as she does, gathers it up, tries to exit.

LIZZY. Quite all right. Please remind me of your name again, my dear?

CASSIE. Cassie, ma'am.

LIZZY. Cassie. Yes. Brian mentioned you when I saw him earlier. Oh! Speaking of, have you seen Brian, Mrs. Reynolds? I asked him to fetch something for me and wonder if he's returned.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Not that I know of, ma'am.

CASSIE. I saw him earlier this morning headed to the woods with one of the gardeners, ma'am.

LIZZY. Oh how tremendous!

MRS. REYNOLDS. What's this?

LIZZY. I'll explain later, though I do apologize in advance. Cassie, you are brave to dive in to your new position at a holiday, and we will all help you in whatever way we can.

CASSIE. Thank you, ma'am. I am so grateful to Mrs. Reynolds for giving me the chance to work at Pemberley.

MRS. REYNOLDS. You should be grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Darcy, not to me.

CASSIE. Yes, ma'am. It is a great honor to work for you and Mr. Darcy.

MRS. REYNOLDS. And I'm sure Mrs. Darcy has much to tend to before her guests arrive.

LIZZY. I do. But how kind of you to say, Cassie. Thank you both.

Mrs. Darcy exits upstairs.

Mrs. Reynolds smiles and Cassie curtsies and starts to head off.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Cassie.

CASSIE. Yes ma'am.

MRS. REYNOLDS. The ladies arriving will need help with dressing and readying themselves for dinner, then you will come straight back down and run the fresh laundry back upstairs.

CASSIE. Yes ma'am.

MRS. REYNOLDS. And, do not praise me in front of the mistress of this house.

CASSIE. Oh, I was just—I thought—

MRS. REYNOLDS. I don't need a discussion, I need your restraint.

CASSIE. Yes ma'am.

MRS. REYNOLDS. And next time anyone sends Brian on a secret errand you tell me as soon as you hear of it. I expect your honesty and your confidence over the next four days if you are to prove yourself worthy of Pemberley. Do not disappoint me.

CASSIE. Yes ma'am. I'm sorry, ma'am.

Mrs. Reynolds exits. Cassie panics, she cannot lose this job on the first day.

She gets right to work.

Brian enters from outside, covered in snow with a large spruce tree that has just been chopped down.

BRIAN. Make way! Coming in. I've got a tree!

CASSIE. You've got a *what*?

BRIAN. Mrs. Darcy asked it to be brought directly to the library. One of the gardeners could have done it but she trusted no one but me.

CASSIE. *(Laughing at him.)* You're putting that in the library?

BRIAN. "Find the largest, most festive tree you can!" she said. What makes a tree festive? They all look the same to me. I don't know, but it's something for Christmas?

CASSIE. What's a tree got to do with Christmas?

BRIAN. I think she's playing a trick on Mr. Darcy. Could you help me?

CASSIE. No, I will not, you just got me in trouble with Mrs. Reynolds.

BRIAN. I wasn't even here! How did I do that?

CASSIE. I don't know, but you did. You always do, even when we were children everything always ended with you forgiven and me run off the grounds.

BRIAN. *(He is struggling.)* Maybe you could help me up the stairs and *then* we can have a row? Mrs. Darcy was quite urgent about this.

CASSIE. Of course. It's just the busiest three days in the household with all the family arriving and I have no idea where anything is since I've only just arrived myself, but yes, happy to help you wrestle an unwieldy bit of greenery up the stairs instead of doing my job.

BRIAN. If you help me get this tree upstairs, I'll help you with all the dusting on the first floor. Do we have an arrangement?

She considers.

CASSIE. Second floor too and yes we do.

BRIAN. Happy Christmas, Cassie.

CASSIE. Do you want my help or shall we stand here all day?

Cassie grabs one end of the tree. Or does she just pick it up herself?

BRIAN. Good lord, you're strong.

CASSIE. A girl has got to be in this world.

And off they go heaving the tree through the hall and up the stairs.

Scene 3

The following day, December 23rd, early afternoon.

We hear Mary playing piano upstairs.

Lizzy and Lydia come down the stairs in mid-conversation.

LIZZY. But, Lydia, why must you always go after Mary like that? The way you two pick at each other, honestly. *(Calling.) Mrs. Reynolds?*

LYDIA. You cannot possibly blame me for Mary's moping, I have only just arrived and she is *always like that*. And what of the way she abuses me, constantly implying I am foolish and ridiculous? I am clever and bright and that is why I am such fun to be around.

LIZZY. I am positively exhausted by the both of you. *(Calling again.) Mrs. Reynolds?*

LYDIA. Are the holidays not supposed to be fun, or is Pemberley too grand a place for good cheer? *(Reaches over to tease Lizzy.)* Good lord, Lizzy! When did you become so serious?

LIZZY. I am not serious, I am the lady of the house and this house has had quite enough with your silliness.

LYDIA. Do you mean Mr. Darcy? Does he think I am silly? What did he say?

LIZZY. Please just stop for a moment to think before you say and do the things you say and do.

LYDIA. You and Father always speak as though I am suffering from...*myself*.

LIZZY. For this holiday, all I ask is that you exercise some restraint. Be considerate of your volume at dinner, don't go wandering the house demanding extra work from the staff, and please cease your flirting with Mr. de Bourgh.

LYDIA. What will I do to entertain myself then? I can't tease Mary, I can't speak with the one handsome gentleman here.

LIZZY. You are married!

LYDIA. Oh, stop scolding me Lizzy!

LIZZY. *Lydia, really*. A married woman should not behave in such a manner.

LYDIA. Perhaps *your* marriage prevents you from making new friends but mine does not.

LIZZY. What does that mean?

LYDIA. It means my husband adores me, and allows me freedom. Did I show you the bracelet my adoring husband has given me?

LIZZY. Five times at least.

LYDIA. It's a little bird.

LIZZY. I know it's a little bird. I do not care about the little bird.

LYDIA. The little bird is free to fly where it likes, and so am I and isn't that lovely?

LIZZY. I would not say lovely I would say reckless.

LYDIA. Oh now I know you still resent that I married before you—

LIZZY. I certainly do not—

LYDIA. —that you did not approve of our elopement—

LIZZY. I certainly did not—

LYDIA. —but enough time has passed that I wish you could see how gloriously romantic it all was. How it was meant to be!

LIZZY. (*Biting her tongue just a little bit.*) Mmhmm.

LYDIA. And that I am so, so, so so so so happy.

LIZZY. (*Sighs.*) Then I am happy too. Now, let us see if we can attend to the tear in your dress.

LYDIA. Yes, I was at the most gorgeous ball and it was caught as I made my way to the floor. I danced every dance, you know. Every one!

LIZZY. (*Not wonderful.*) Wonderful.

Lizzy and Lydia exit, looking for Cassie, just as Mr. Darcy enters the now empty hall. He is oddly at home in this room, having spent so much time here as a boy. He sneaks a biscuit.

Mrs. Reynolds comes in with a tray—busy busy, singing singing.

DARCY. Good day, Mrs. Reynolds.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Back again when you've got a full house up there not to mention a tree in the library!

DARCY. It is apparently a popular German custom...

MRS. REYNOLDS. In all my years at Pemberley. And you, sneaking down here for biscuits whenever you like.

DARCY. What good is being head of the house if you can't do that?

MRS. REYNOLDS. I shall never know.

DARCY. Oh now, you are as much head of this house as I am.

MRS. REYNOLDS. And when I am not in the middle of ten things I'll tell you how ridiculous that sounds.

Cassie enters, and starts, seeing Mr. Darcy. She tries to back out of the room quietly, but he sees her.

DARCY. Hello.

CASSIE. Sir. My Lord. Mr. Darcy.

She is flustered and curtsies multiple times, not knowing exactly how to address him.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Good lord, child. Call him "sir" and get on with it. (*To Mr. Darcy.*) This is Cassie. She's only just started yesterday.

DARCY. Welcome then. You are new, but you don't look unfamiliar to me.

CASSIE. Yes sir, I used to make deliveries from the shops. I was raised in the village but played on the grounds as a girl. And once, sir, I sold you and your sister some apples as you drove by in your carriage.

DARCY. It is kind of your family to allow you to come on so close to the holiday.

CASSIE. I have no family, sir. My father was... My mother died when I was just a girl. The village shopkeepers took me in and raised me, until I was old enough to work.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Everyone has got a story, let's not take up Mr. Darcy's whole day with yours.

DARCY. I hope you will make your home and family here, then, Cassie. You are very welcome.

CASSIE. Thank you, sir.

MRS. REYNOLDS. That's enough, then. Pardon sir, much to do. Come, Cassie.

DARCY. Of course, yes.

Brian enters.

BRIAN. Cassie!

MRS. REYNOLDS. Keep walking.

CASSIE. Yes ma'am.

Mrs. Reynolds exits with Cassie.

Brian watches her go then reveals that he's carrying a contraption—something like a press and a biscuit cutter. Or a rolling pin with biscuit-sized divots cut out.

DARCY. Brian, I thought I'd take the gentlemen on a ride today.

BRIAN. Excellent, sir, snowy but not too cold.

DARCY. Very good. Will you alert the groom that we'll need three ready after tea?

BRIAN. Absolutely sir.

DARCY. Thank you. What's this?

BRIAN. Just something I made for the kitchen. For stamping

biscuits—you can do four at once, saving the time the kitchen maids spend rolling and cutting.

DARCY. How clever.

BRIAN. They'll probably hate it. Mrs. Reynolds especially.

DARCY. Mrs. Reynolds does not like change, does she.

Cassie returns carrying a basket of something—hears this. Brian doesn't see her.

BRIAN. Not a bit. But think of how much time it'll save. The kitchen is already busy with Christmas, which means more people coming, which means lots of biscuits. I love to solve a problem, so I toss it over and over until—pop—out comes a thought. I suddenly see a solution. And once I see it, well I *have* to fix it so—POP—here's a biscuit...maker...thing.

DARCY. (*Impressed.*) Hm. What do you think, Cassie? Would you have any use for this? For biscuits?

Cassie smiles at the biscuit stamper. Brian whips around unaware of her 'til now.

CASSIE. You know, Mr. Darcy, I think I would.

BRIAN. (*Handing it to her, smiling.*) For you.

Mrs. Reynolds appears in the doorway, and the biscuit maker is hidden.

MRS. REYNOLDS. These two weren't bothering you Mr. Darcy, were they? I fear they forget *their* holiday doesn't begin until the day after Christmas.

DARCY. I was just hearing about Brian's new...invention.

Brian coughs at Mr. Darcy, indicating that he not mention this.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Not again.

BRIAN. Oh but it's a thing for making biscuits.

CASSIE. It's a biscuit maker he says.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Brian, why must you insist on making a new thing that we already have a thing to do.

BRIAN. Just trying to make life a little easier around here.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I don't want things done easily, I want things done well. Cassie, weren't you on your way somewhere?

Cassie hustles out before she can get in trouble.

Off you go, Brian.

BRIAN. Yes ma'am. Good day sir.

DARCY. Good day.

Brian exits. Mrs. Reynolds makes to follow when...

Mrs. Reynolds, might I have a moment of your time to discuss the gifts for the staff for Boxing Day.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I'm sure anything will be appreciated, sir.

DARCY. Yes, well, Mrs. Darcy found my ideas wanting. Too... practical or some such thing.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Practical is appropriate for the staff: dress cloth for the maids, tools for the men. Very generous. Although...

She pauses, decides to go there.

It's not really my place to say, but... Your father would sometimes offer more. There are some gifts that only someone in a position such as yourself can provide. The gift of opportunity. There is Brian, for example. And his—

DARCY. Inventions. Yes.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Yes. They drive me mad but even I know that he has a mind.

DARCY. Brian is an excellent footman.

MRS. REYNOLDS. And with some guidance, who knows what more he could do. When your father saw potential in some of the children of the household on more than one occasion he provided means for advancement.

Darcy rises to leave.

DARCY. Thank you for your thoughts, Mrs. Reynolds. I'll return upstairs.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Yes sir and I do hope you'll consider what an opportunity could mean for Brian. He's a good boy.

DARCY. (*Becomes defensive and cold.*) Everyone said the same of young Wickham. After the opportunity that my father provided him was so abused, I am of no mind to repeat that particular mistake.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Brian is not Wickham.

DARCY. Wickham wasn't Wickham when he was a boy, and yet his behavior has come to plague us all and I'll thank you to judge him as harshly as I do.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I do judge him.

DARCY. First the corruption of my father's generosity, then the near corruption of my sister to get his greedy hands on her fortune. And the mess he nearly made of poor Lydia's reputation until I forced his hand. You have always held a softness in your heart for him and it has made you blind.

MRS. REYNOLDS. That's not true, sir.

DARCY. You could never see him for what he was, *never*.

MRS. REYNOLDS. (*Exploding at him.*) I saw that his life was harder than yours, much harder, every day it was harder. Always in your shadow, watching you enjoy every opportunity while he drifted, wanting the life you had and it turning him desperate. I don't approve of his actions but I do understand where they came from.

Pause. Darcy is pissed. His silence betrays this. Lydia enters.

LYDIA. Oh hello! I was looking for my dress? There was a maid mending it and...sorry. Did I interrupt?

MRS. REYNOLDS. I apologize, sir. If there is anything else I can do—

DARCY. No. That will be all.

Mr. Darcy leaves.

LYDIA. Mr. Darcy can be a bit flinty, can he not? Are you all right Mrs. Reynolds?

MRS. REYNOLDS. (*Flustered by that interaction.*) Perfectly fine, thank you for asking, dear. (*Getting it together.*) Now, what can I do for you?

LYDIA. My dress?

MRS. REYNOLDS. Your dress. Of course. I'll inquire with Cassie and send it up straightaway.

LYDIA. Actually, I'm happy to wait. Down here.

MRS. REYNOLDS. (*Taken aback.*) Down here?

LYDIA. I simply cannot go back up there. With all of the Happy Christmases and the happy couples.

MRS. REYNOLDS. It is that time of year.

LYDIA. How it all makes me long for my dear Wickham. Though I am the only one. My family does not care for my husband, you see. They may not say it directly, but the way they steal glances when I speak of him. They think him coarse and think us ridiculous.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Now, now, no one is thinking that.

LYDIA. (*The real reason she came down.*) Of course they are, they always are. But you know my Wickham. You practically raised him at Pemberley, and now he is as welcome here as a flood. But no one will tell me why: Why is Mr. Darcy made so angry by him? Why will my husband never come here? What is wrong with everyone?

MRS. REYNOLDS. It is not my place to say, dear. Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham have a history that is marred by years of affection and anger. The holidays are already complicated enough and their history is not your history.

LYDIA. But, I'd still like to—

MRS. REYNOLDS. Do not trouble yourself with it, dear. Have a biscuit and let's find your dress.

Appeased by the biscuit, Lydia follows Mrs. Reynolds out.

Scene 4

That evening. The only one in the hall at the moment is Cassie. She's reading. She loves reading.

Brian enters. Cassie doesn't stop reading.

BRIAN. You're up late.

CASSIE. Mmhmm.

BRIAN. Reading?

CASSIE. Mmhmm.

BRIAN. A book?

CASSIE. Mmhmm.

He comes in close, reading over her shoulder. He is hovering, just to bug her.

BRIAN. Shall I keep asking you questions so you can't concentrate?

CASSIE. I know that is what you are doing. That is why I am ignoring you.

BRIAN. Not if you're talking to me, you're not. What book is it?

CASSIE. *(Giving up in exasperation.)* Just a novel. Romance. Courtship. Love. It's good. You may borrow it when I am finished.

BRIAN. Oh, I prefer to study *real* things, not made up romances, but thank you for thinking of me.

CASSIE. I'm not thinking *of* you, I'm thinking *around* you. And romance *is* a real thing, between real people.

BRIAN. I am not interested in that sort of thing.

CASSIE. Which is why you could learn more from a book like this than you think.

BRIAN. What could I possibly learn from a novel? I'm trying to better my life, not escape it. Better my life and the world with innovation. Not fussing about with... people.

CASSIE. *People* are the way to better this world, and you'll not learn much about people by sitting alone at Pemberley tinkering away. Now, if you'll let me return to my reading, without further comment, I'd be grateful.

BRIAN. Just don't let Mrs. Reynolds catch you reading on the job.

CASSIE. I would never.

BRIAN. She's hard on you because she sees your potential. But I told Mrs. Reynolds how perfect you are.

CASSIE. You did *what*?

BRIAN. For the job I mean.

CASSIE. Are you mad! Do not praise me in front of Mrs. Reynolds. She'll think *you* think I need your help. And I don't!

BRIAN. No, that's not it, only I know how hard it is for you; I lost my parents too.

CASSIE. Your parents worked at Pemberley, you had a home here when they died.

BRIAN. I know, but I'm saying I understand—

CASSIE. You don't. I wish to earn my place here on my own. I'm not here for charity.

BRIAN. I'm only trying to look out for you. You might want to find someone with a good job, someone to take care of you.

CASSIE. I did not come here looking for someone to take care of me. I don't need that and I don't *want it*.

BRIAN. What is it you want, then?

CASSIE. I want books and tea and time to enjoy them. I want my own room and my own bed. I want to live without worry, for once in my life, with security that lasts beyond an odd job for a week. I want to start every day knowing I have tasks ahead and end every day knowing I did a good job.

BRIAN. That sounds like a wife to me.

Cassie is aghast at this thoughtless comment.

CASSIE. I've just got the job I've always dreamed of and a chance to take care of myself. I won't give that up, not for a husband or anyone else.

BRIAN. But you were the one talking of romance and love!

CASSIE. Love is about knowing another person and letting them be exactly who they are. If you can't understand that, you either do not listen, or *you do not care*.

BRIAN. Cassie, wait—

CASSIE. Perhaps you should borrow this after all. You are clearly in need of instruction.

She shoves the book at him and starts to storm out.

BRIAN. Cassie.

*The back door slams open as a man suddenly enters.
He's hurt, limping, bloody lip, jacket torn.*

My god!

WICKHAM. Help me.

CASSIE. *Good lord*. Who is that?

WICKHAM. *Help me.*

BRIAN. What do you think you're doing coming in here?

WICKHAM. I need to sit, I need water—no. Ale is better.

BRIAN. You are not getting ale, sir. You are getting out of here now.

WICKHAM. Does she still keep it in the cellar there? Of course she does.

BRIAN. You are already drunk and you're not staying here. Get out and get gone man.

CASSIE. You know this man?

WICKHAM. Brian and I have known each other since he was a boy, miss, and if he would recall that, he might be more inclined to help me.

BRIAN. You cannot be here.

CASSIE. Brian, he's hurt.

BRIAN. Cassie, he's drunk. Back outside.

Mrs. Reynolds hurries on.

MRS. REYNOLDS. What on earth is going on?

WICKHAM. Good evening.

BRIAN. He just showed up, Mrs. Reynolds, he just barged in.

WICKHAM. I did, but to my credit I have just weathered a brawl so I might not be thinking straight as an arrow.

BRIAN. I told him to go.

WICKHAM. You cannot turn me away.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Yes I can.

WICKHAM. But you won't. Because you're a better person than most. Because you taught me to read, to fasten my shoes. You know me better than anyone, Mrs. Reynolds.

MRS. REYNOLDS. That I do, George Wickham.

A beat for Mrs. Reynolds to decide...

(To Brian.) Fetch some water.

Blackout.

Scene 5

Late that night.

Wickham is seated in a fresh shirt examining his wounds. Mrs. Reynolds brings him some hot tea and begins tending to cuts on his face.

MRS. REYNOLDS. How many times have we sat together at this very table, my tending to your cuts and bruises?

WICKHAM. A few.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Quite a few. Sit still.

He winces at his wound but then smiles to her.

WICKHAM. Thank you, Mrs. Reynolds. I have missed you.

MRS. REYNOLDS. And I you, my dear.

WICKHAM. You have always helped me when I needed it, always understood me.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I've certainly tried, George, but you do make it difficult sometimes. You know very well you are not welcome at Pemberley, why in heaven's name would you think you could come here at Christmas, and bleeding no less?

WICKHAM. I had to come here. I was attacked.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Who attacked you, and why?

WICKHAM. That remains...unclear.

MRS. REYNOLDS. It looks fairly clear that he wanted to harm you, or at the very least embarrass you.

WICKHAM. He did *not* embarrass me, and the harm he did was (*Wincing again.*) minor. I was in the village inn, and suddenly this "gentleman" comes to me shouting some nonsense about his sister and lands his fist squarely in my side! I was caught completely unawares, which is the only reason it is not *his* wounds now being tended to.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I see. What did you do to his sister?

WICKHAM. I do not know his sister! Obviously, he meant to throttle some other person. I barely got out of there with my life.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Ah. So. What did you do to his sister?

WICKHAM. Nothing. I swear I have no idea which one his sister is.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Which one?

WICKHAM. Which person, whatever person. I am innocent.

Mrs. Reynolds reacts to this.

I was simply making my way near enough to find my beloved when I was robbed!

MRS. REYNOLDS. Robbed or attacked?

WICKHAM. Both! Yes! I'm desperate. You must help me. Lydia belongs with me. I am determined to make a new start. My wife is here, I want her back.

MRS. REYNOLDS. You are in no state to see her right now, and in the dead of night no less. You know very well what will happen if Mr. Darcy finds out you're here.

WICKHAM. It is not right that I'm down with the servants and she's up there.

Wickham rises to go upstairs. She stops him.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Down with the servants, indeed. I daresay no one is good enough for you anymore, are they?

WICKHAM. I do not mean anything against you, of course. It is just Darcy—always Darcy—the obstacle to my every happiness. He cannot keep me from my wife. It is not right.

He rises again, she blocks him again.

MRS. REYNOLDS. He is not keeping you from her, I am. You remain here at my great generosity and if you make a fuss and disrupt this house I will be generous no more.

WICKHAM. I only want to speak to her, Mrs. Reynolds. Please. Let me speak with my wife.

Beat.

MRS. REYNOLDS. You'll collect yourself and we will discuss it in the morning.

WICKHAM. Thank you.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Until then, *stay below stairs.*

Wickham nods. Cassie enters.

This is Cassie. Cassie will take your clothes to the laundry.

CASSIE. Yes ma'am.

WICKHAM. Might I request a little lavender in the rinse?

CASSIE. Yessir.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Don't waste the herb, Cassie.

CASSIE. Yes ma'am.

Cassie hurries off with the clothes as Brian comes in with others. He tries to get Cassie's attention, but she stalks by him. Brian hands Wickham the clothes. There is noticeable tension between them.

BRIAN. These might fit you. It is likely to get cold tonight.

WICKHAM. Thank you, friend. And I do not blame you for your reception, the state I was in. Had our positions been reversed, I would have barred you from your own home as well.

BRIAN. This is not your home. It is my job to protect this estate and the people in it.

WICKHAM. Of course it is! Standing guard for the Pemberley reputation! I understand. And I forgive you.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I must have missed the part where he *asked* for your forgiveness. Now Brian's going to watch over you while I get on with running the estate. I have plenty to do besides making you tea.

WICKHAM. Watch over me? Am I a prisoner now?

MRS. REYNOLDS. No. A prisoner cannot leave. But you can and should, before anyone else knows you're here.

Mrs. Reynolds exits.

WICKHAM. Brian.

BRIAN. Mr. Wickham.

WICKHAM. So I am Mr. Wickham now. We were once friends.

BRIAN. Perhaps as children.

WICKHAM. Then why not tell me what has been happening at Pemberley since I've been gone.

BRIAN. Below stairs is always the same.

WICKHAM. You have found a place here, working hard to keep the estate as fine as ever.

BRIAN. I am happy to do the work that is asked of me.

WICKHAM. Good. I would only worry that a smart man like you will be wasting his talents, his dreams, toiling away for another man's prosperity and never his own.

BRIAN. You may keep your worry. I only ask that you stay put and not make trouble.

WICKHAM. I am content to stay down here. Especially if that maid comes around again. She is very pretty.

BRIAN. She is none of your concern.

WICKHAM. (*Seeing Brian's reaction to his mention of Cassie.*) I may be able to give you some advice on how to win her.

BRIAN. I have no interest in winning her.

WICKHAM. Why ever not? She's...here.

BRIAN. *She's none of your concern.* Besides, your reputation with women is not the kind I want.

WICKHAM. Reputation is just another word for experience! I know women, my friend. Regardless of station—maid or great lady—they all want the same thing: to feel beautiful and to believe they are free. Your role as a man is to flatter their sense of vanity and present them with the guise of liberty, all whilst aiming them toward exactly what you want.

BRIAN. And what is it you want?

WICKHAM. Everything I can get. And so should you.

BRIAN. I have what I need, thank you.

WICKHAM. What you need, certainly. But what of what you want? You must have dreams beyond Pemberley?

BRIAN. I...

WICKHAM. You said it yourself—below stairs is always the same. Is this all you want from your life?

BRIAN. I am too busy with this life to consider any other.

WICKHAM. Afraid you'll realize all that you don't have? At the very least, find a pretty girl to keep you company. Here is what I

know—if you can make her laugh, convince her to help you, while making her think she is acting of her own free will, she will be yours forever. Or as long as you want her.

Cassie enters and clears her throat, which makes Wickham instantly shift his attention to greet her.

Brian, lovely talk. Cathy, always a pleasure.

BRIAN and CASSIE. It's Cassie.

WICKHAM. I don't care. Good night.

Wickham exits.

CASSIE. Good night indeed.

BRIAN. I'm sorry about that. He could spoil milk.

CASSIE. I've seen worse. Brian. I need to find Mrs. Reynolds. Do you know where she is?

BRIAN. Are you all right? What is it?

CASSIE. I just... *(Producing a letter.)* I found this in that man's jacket. I didn't mean to find it, I was getting it ready to send to the wash and I found it and it was already opened.

BRIAN. I'll give it back to him.

CASSIE. I don't think we should.

BRIAN. It's his correspondence, of course we should.

CASSIE. I read it. Accidentally I did and I'm saying that it is not good. Or *he* is not. At least according to this.

Brian reads the letter. Pause.

I think we should show someone.

BRIAN. Mrs. Darcy.

CASSIE. But Mrs. Darcy doesn't even know he is here. If she finds out Mrs. Reynolds let him in she might be cross, and Mrs. Reynolds might blame *me* and once again it will be *your* fault that everything's *my* fault!

Mrs. Reynolds enters.

MRS. REYNOLDS. And I'm sure there is a very good reason why the two of you are just standing here like well-fed cats.

BRIAN. Cassie found something.

CASSIE. But I didn't mean to—I wasn't snooping, ma'am.

BRIAN. You need to see it. Mrs. Darcy does too.

Mrs. Reynolds gestures for the letter, which Cassie hands to her. She opens it.

Scene 6

Late that night. The house is silent. Lizzy and Mrs. Reynolds are in their nightclothes. They are seated at the table.

LIZZY. But what is he even doing here?

MRS. REYNOLDS. He arrived several hours ago, came directly to the servants' hall drunk and bleeding, demanding to see Mrs. Wickham.

LIZZY. Good lord. Mr. Darcy cannot know he is here. He cannot.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I don't see how we can hide him for long.

LIZZY. Things are already in such a state upstairs with my sisters at one another, my mother to appear at any moment, an endless parade of unexpected guests! And then Wickham descends!

MRS. REYNOLDS. There is more ma'am. A letter you must read, though I hesitate.

LIZZY. What is it? What letter?

MRS. REYNOLDS. Oh, Mrs. Darcy, it is dreadful.

LIZZY. Then you must show it to me, at once!

Mrs. Reynolds hands over Wickham's letter. Lizzy reads.

How came this letter to be in your possession?

MRS. REYNOLDS. Cassie found it while emptying Mr. Wickham's pockets. She should not have read it, but when she did she immediately came to me.

LIZZY. She was right to do so. Do you believe the contents of this letter could be true?

MRS. REYNOLDS. I do not know why one would put such things in writing were they not true.

LIZZY. (*Reading.*) To Mr. George Wickham. Sir, you must instantly realize why I write to you—

MRS. REYNOLDS. Trust me, ma'am, it is worse read aloud.

LIZZY. It's scandalous! It's absolutely...

A thought pops into Mrs. Darcy's mind.

Oh my. What if...oh my.

MRS. REYNOLDS. What now?

LIZZY. Perhaps...nothing. But perhaps... Mrs. Reynolds, I must go to the village first thing tomorrow morning. This letter could mean...everything. I must find this man, immediately.

MRS. REYNOLDS. On Christmas Eve morning? At the very least, take Brian with you.

LIZZY. If you can spare him. In the meantime, Mr. Wickham must not be discovered. Lydia cannot know he is here and for all that is holy, neither can Mr. Darcy. May I rely on you?

MRS. REYNOLDS. I am, as always, at your service.

LIZZY. Thank you, and thank Cassie, too. She did right by coming to you.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Let us reserve our praise until we see how this ends.

LIZZY. Until the morning, Mrs. Reynolds. I wish you a good night.

Lizzy turns to leave, runs straight into Wickham, who stumbles slightly before regaining whatever small composure he can muster.

WICKHAM. Elizabeth! Good evening.

LIZZY. Mr. Wickham, you're here.

MRS. REYNOLDS. He is here, and he will not be so informal to the lady of this house, regardless of our surroundings.

WICKHAM. Excuse me, Mrs. Darcy. I did not mean to offend. How wonderful to see you again.

LIZZY. Would I could say the same of you; you look as though you have run into some misfortune.

WICKHAM. This? It is but a scratch, a badge of honor for those who must contend with the sufferings of lesser men.

LIZZY. Honor, you say? And what was the substance of this honorable disagreement?

WICKHAM. Honestly I cannot recall.

LIZZY. Mr. Darcy has an excellent memory. (*Pointedly.*) It is a trait we share.

MRS. REYNOLDS. As it is very late, I'd suggest we all return to bed.

WICKHAM. I am yours to command, Mrs. Reynolds. Mrs. Darcy, a good evening.

He starts to leave.

LIZZY. Mr. Wickham.

He stops.

You are my sister's husband and it is only to protect her that I do not disclose your whereabouts to my husband and the rest of this house. I will not have you upset the holiday.

WICKHAM. (*Talking about the past as well as the present.*) It was never my intention to upset you, Mrs. Darcy.

A slight moment between them as Wickham leaves.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I am sorry, ma'am.

LIZZY. That man! I must to bed, if I am to be off early in the morning.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Good night to you, ma'am.

Lizzy leaves. Then returns instantly.

LIZZY. I'm a fool to think I'll have any sleep after this. Might I trouble you for more of those delicious biscuits?

MRS. REYNOLDS. Of course ma'am.

Mrs. Reynolds hands her a tin of biscuits and Lizzy leaves with them. She sits alone for a moment before Brian peers around the corner and enters.

BRIAN. Did Mrs. Darcy say I'm to the village tomorrow with her?

MRS. REYNOLDS. You know full well what she said, I heard you listening.

BRIAN. How do you *hear* someone *listening*? That doesn't make sense.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Don't question me.

BRIAN. I cannot believe I used to think Wickham so fine a man.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Take care how you judge others, Brian. At any moment, you might catch a man at either his best or at his worst. Be ready to depart with Mrs. Darcy first thing in the morning. Good night.

She dismisses Brian, and is left alone with her thoughts.

Scene 7

The next day, morning, December 24th. It is quiet in the servants' hall until Mr. Wickham shuffles in, searching for his letter, clearly sore and deeply hungover.

Cassie enters with a dress to mend, speaking very loudly to annoy Wickham.

CASSIE. Good morning, sir, how is your headache?!

WICKHAM. (*Wincing at the noise.*) Better, thank you.

CASSIE. Very good, sir.

She slams something down on the table nearby, making him wince again.

WICKHAM. Cassie, is it?

CASSIE. The same name I had yesterday.

WICKHAM. I have a rather urgent request of you. I have misplaced a letter. It was in my pocket and I am wondering if you came across it when you took my things for washing last night. I must recover it.

CASSIE. A letter? I don't recall a letter.

WICKHAM. You didn't see it? A letter? Addressed to me.

CASSIE. I do know how letters work. And no, I have not seen it.

WICKHAM. I would be grateful if you would alert me immediately should you find it. It is correspondence of the utmost importance.

CASSIE. Certainly, sir.

WICKHAM. Thank you, and please call me George. I am the son of a steward, I know life downstairs. And I feel we are friends, now that we have agreed to help each other.

CASSIE. Have we?

WICKHAM. Well, perhaps after you find my letter I can help you in return.

Brian starts to enter the hall, but stops, listening.

CASSIE. And how would you help me?

WICKHAM. *(Sizing her up.)* You're new, aren't you. I can tell. New and not yet recognized for your entire worth.

CASSIE. That is none of your business, sir.

WICKHAM. *(Continuing to read her like a book.)* You are a village girl, spent your whole life looking to this grand house as the height of importance. Admiring this fine estate, and all the people in it.

CASSIE. You assume to know quite a lot about someone you've only just met.

WICKHAM. You're clever, strong, you can take care of yourself. And like me I bet you thought this place would provide everything you could dream of if you could truly belong here. But let me tell you, it will not, and people like us will never truly belong in a place like this. Now I know there is a world beyond Pemberley. I could show you things far better than this.

CASSIE. And why would you do that for me?

WICKHAM. Because friends do favors for each other. We are so alike, you and I. We could be each other's friend in this world... If you could peek your head into Mrs. Reynolds' sitting room and check her desk for my letter? My dear—

Wickham gets close to touch her shoulder or back or flips a ribbon on her dress just enough for Brian to see and instantly flinch, turning and hurrying away betrayed and shocked.

He leaves too fast, not in time to hear Cassie, as her head snaps up, a look of rage. She is inches from Wickham's face.

CASSIE. *Not. Your. Dear.*

My friendship, my confidence and my favor is only given to those who are of better stuff than you.

WICKHAM. Find me that letter, girl. And watch your tongue around your betters.

CASSIE. Oh... I do.

*Mr. Wickham takes his now throbbing headache and exits.
Cassie is shaking she is so mad. Also worried she has just yelled at someone above her station and she might be fired.
She takes deep breaths.*

Just get the man some tea! Make sure he doesn't leave the hall! How hard can that be? Two days! You cannot last two days before—

In the middle of Cassie's tirade, Lydia enters.

LYDIA. Oh! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to interrupt. But you don't seem to be speaking to an actual person.

Lydia looks around, as if she might have missed something.

Cassie quickly checks to make sure Mr. Wickham has completely gone and stands, fumbling with the dress she was mending.

CASSIE. I was just mending your dress, Mrs. Wickham. I am nearly done in fact.

LYDIA. Oh, well, that's lovely! I wondered if that split in the lace could even be fixed.

CASSIE. Just took a steady hand. Shall I bring it up to you when I've finished.

LYDIA. I'd honestly rather wait. It is intolerable upstairs.

CASSIE. Is it?

Lydia nibbles on biscuits as Cassie sews.

LYDIA. And it is nice to talk to...a friend. May I call you a friend?

CASSIE. Of course ma'am.

LYDIA. Oh good. I have need of one. I don't know why but the holiday seems to make everyone just a little bit more so than they already are. And how it all makes me long for my dear Wickham. Without my dear husband, especially at Christmas—well, nothing makes you feel more lonely than being in a room filled with people.

CASSIE. I am very sorry to hear that ma'am.

LYDIA. I should be used to it by now. My husband is so often away on business, you see. But oh, when he is home and we are together, that is what makes all the rest worth it.

CASSIE. Are you sure?

LYDIA. Sure of what?

CASSIE. That the rest is worth it?

LYDIA. Of course it is. Consider the alternative—no man at all!

CASSIE. That does not sound so bad to me.

LYDIA. You sound just like Lizzy! Or, rather, how Lizzy used to sound before she said yes to Mr. Darcy. Do you know Mr. Collins?

CASSIE. No.

LYDIA. Good for you. He's got the charm of a housefly but he's too big to swat. She said no to his proposal, thank goodness. Did you know my sister even said no to Mr. Darcy himself once.

CASSIE. I cannot imagine anyone saying no to Mr. Darcy.

LYDIA. Well she did. She turned him down insisting that she'd rather be alone than with a man she did not care for.

CASSIE. As I said, no man at all does not sound so bad.

LYDIA. Oh come now. I think you must be fretting over a particular man or else you would not say such a thing. Who is he? What can he offer? How tall is he in riding boots?

CASSIE. All men are the same. A man sees only what he wishes to in a woman—someone to take care of him, there to do his bidding, one who is already a servant so why not a servant for him? They assume that marriage is all a woman could ever want.

LYDIA. It is all I ever wanted. Is it not what you want?

CASSIE. I want my own life. It is more precious than anything a man could ever offer me.

LYDIA. You are unlike anyone I have ever known. I so wish I could lure you away from Pemberley to work for Mr. Wickham and me.

*Cassie blanches at the thought of working for Wickham.
Lydia does not notice.*

CASSIE. I have only just started here at Pemberley, ma'am.

LYDIA. Yes of course. And life at our little house is not nearly so grand as the life you'd have here.

CASSIE. *(Smiling.)* I doubt my life will ever be grand, ma'am.

LYDIA. Perhaps neither will mine.

Lydia has a rare introspective moment.

CASSIE. May I get you some tea?

LYDIA. Thank you, no. I will take more of these biscuits with me though.

CASSIE. It was very nice talking with you.

LYDIA. It was nice talking with you as well.

Lydia exits upstairs, forgetting her dress.

Scene 8

December 24th, later that evening, after dinner. Cassie is mending Wickham's jacket as Wickham enters. They are flinty with each other.

CASSIE. I'll never know why Mrs. Reynolds won't at least put you to work if you're going to sit here all day under foot.

WICKHAM. It's a pleasure to simply watch you.

CASSIE. Has that ever worked? Even once, on anyone in the world?

WICKHAM. It has.

CASSIE. Then the world is more foolish than I thought. I pity those who cannot see through you.

WICKHAM. Not everyone is as smart as you. Is that my jacket?

CASSIE. It needed mending.

WICKHAM. And you were the unlucky maid that got the task?

CASSIE. I would not inflict this task on anyone else.

He throws a raisin at her.

What are you doing? What was that?

He throws another at her.

Are you throwing things at me? What is that? Stop throwing things at me!

WICKHAM. They're raisins and I'm not throwing them.

She laughs at his idiocy.

CASSIE. You are a grown man acting like a child. Stop it, stop it now!

Wickham keeps throwing raisins at Cassie.

Brian has entered and sees what looks like a flirtatious game as he loses control.

BRIAN. Cassie. I just wanted you to know that... I am so disappointed in you.

CASSIE. You what? Brian—

Wickham smiles at Brian, snacking on raisins.

WICKHAM. Delicious.

BRIAN. *And you. I know exactly what you're doing.* You are a rogue. Indecent and not charming and if Mrs. Reynolds will not put you out, I will.

WICKHAM. Oh come now.

BRIAN. Sitting here like you own this house, pursuing that which is not yours!

WICKHAM. You should be more specific. What are you on about?

Mrs. Reynolds enters.

BRIAN. *(To Wickham and Cassie.)* I heard you scheming, I saw you smiling. Both of you.

WICKHAM. Are you talking about *her*?

CASSIE. Are you talking about *me*?

BRIAN. I'm *talking about* your private conversation. *The way you leaned in close. The way you laughed!*

CASSIE. I did no such thing! Brian, stop this.

BRIAN. How could you. You knew what he was and still he would win you.

CASSIE. He did nothing of the sort. Brian.

MRS. REYNOLDS. What's this?

BRIAN. I saw it, Mrs. Reynolds. I told you that man brings trouble wherever he goes.

CASSIE. I would never, Mrs. Reynolds, never.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Go to your room, Cassie.

BRIAN. Wait! No. Send Wickham away, not Cassie!

CASSIE. Mrs. Reynolds, please.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Now, Cassie, I do not have time for this today—

Mr. Darcy and Mrs. Darcy descend the stairs. They are mid-conversation. Wickham has no time to exit. Mrs. Reynolds, Cassie, and Brian try to hide Wickham—standing in front of him.

DARCY. Mrs. Reynolds, you'll not believe me but we need to ready the carriage for Miss de Bourgh at once.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Of course sir. You needn't come down here to tell me. I'll send Brian—

DARCY. Yes and tell Brian I also need his assistance collecting Mr. de Bourgh's things.

LIZZY. Thank you so much, Mrs. Reynolds. Mr. Darcy, we should return back upstairs—

DARCY. Honestly, dear, I am in need of a quiet moment. With all that is going on upstairs, I am not at all at my...

Mr. Darcy finally sees Wickham. Everything stops.

Leisure.

Wickham and Darcy lock eyes. Who's going to talk or shout first? Wickham waves, sits comfortably and eats his raisins.

Silence.

And then...

DARCY. Someone. Explain, please.

LIZZY. Darling please—

MRS. REYNOLDS. Perhaps it would be better to—

DARCY. *What is he doing here—and is that a RAISIN?*

MRS. REYNOLDS. Mr. Wickham arrived late last night, sir, and I made the decision to—

DARCY. You made the decision!

MRS. REYNOLDS. —to allow him to stay until such a time as he was in his right mind.

DARCY. After I have expressly forbidden this man from returning to Pemberley, after what he has done to disgrace this house?

WICKHAM. Well now, I am sitting just here, you know.

DARCY. You shall not speak.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Sir, he was not fit to be seen and Mrs. Darcy agreed with me that it would—

DARCY. (*Rounding on Mrs. Darcy.*) And you knew as well?

LIZZY. It is more complicated than you may think, darling.

DARCY. Think of Georgiana, arriving in the morning! Think of Lydia, a set of stairs away!

LIZZY. I am thinking of Lydia, if you will only cease your tirade and listen.

DARCY. I will tirade as long as I see fit.

LIZZY. Well you shall do it to an empty room then as *I will not stand here and listen to you be ridiculous.*

MRS. REYNOLDS. Might I suggest that we all take a moment to lower our voices.

WICKHAM. Indeed. Some of us have quite a headache and are not feeling our best.

Darcy cannot even.

DARCY. This family has given at every turn and you dare come here scheming and begging.

WICKHAM. *I have to beg!* That is what life is for the rest of us who weren't born the rich son of a rich man. You know nothing of hardship so you know nothing of hard work.

DARCY. You have never worked in your life, you have stolen, deceived—

WICKHAM. *I have survived.*

DARCY. Yes. To the chagrin of us all.

MRS. REYNOLDS. *Fitzwilliam Darcy!* That is not the kind of talk I expect from you.

DARCY. You forget yourself, Mrs. Reynolds. Do keep in mind who is, in fact, head of this household.

MRS. REYNOLDS. This man is a guest at Pemberley.

DARCY. A guest indeed.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Yes, *mine.*

Darcy is instantly betrayed.

LYDIA. *(From upstairs.)* Where on earth has everyone gone?

CASSIE. Mrs. Reynolds!

LYDIA. Mrs. Reynolds?

MRS. REYNOLDS. Lydia.

LIZZY. Lydia, don't. Stop her.

DARCY. Mrs. Wickham do not descend those stairs.

LYDIA. Oh hello, Mr. Darcy! Cassie, after all that I have forgotten my dress—

LIZZY. LYDIA!

LYDIA. WHAT?

Lydia sees Wickham. Freezes.

WICKHAM. Hello, darling. Happy Christmas.

Everyone stops. Lydia screams for joy at the sight of her Wickham. Blackout.

End of Act One

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Christmas morning. Dawn.

Lydia sneaks downstairs and Wickham sneaks out of his room. They embrace.

WICKHAM. My darling.

LYDIA. Finally!

WICKHAM. At last.

LYDIA. Together!

WICKHAM. At last!

LYDIA. Oh my dear husband. You've been here this whole time?

WICKHAM. And fighting every minute to see you. They wouldn't let me see you.

LYDIA. I knew you'd come for me.

WICKHAM. Of course I would. I always do.

LYDIA. It's so hard when you're away, George. Sometimes I think you've forgotten me.

WICKHAM. How could I? My perfect little—

LYDIA. ...bird.

WICKHAM. bird!

She pulls away from him. Toying with her bracelet.

LYDIA. George this is not what I want for us. Meeting in secret, kept apart, always unsure of where we stand, always waiting! You have been gone so long.

WICKHAM. I know and I am sorry. You know that I leave you only because I must. It is for you I work so hard and travel so far. For us.

LYDIA. For us.

WICKHAM. It's always for us. To make a better fortune. You know this.

LYDIA. I do but... None of my sisters' husbands leave them so long and so often, better fortune or no.

WICKHAM. Your sisters and their husbands do not understand us. But it is they who are wrong. We are alone in this life. It is you and I together against the world. That's why I came here to find you. Fought my way through attackers and rogues—

LYDIA. Attackers?

WICKHAM. *And* rogues to be by your side, knowing full well that I would be turned away, but nonetheless I came.

LYDIA. But why, George? Why are you turned away from this house? Why do they keep us apart at every turn?

WICKHAM. All you need to know is that I am here, despite the constant hostility I have weathered since my arrival. Spend another Christmas without my beloved? Unthinkable. I'm lost without you.

LYDIA. It does not always feel that way, George. It feels—

WICKHAM. I know how it feels—

LYDIA. No, George, you don't. When you are away you have friends and engagements while I am alone, with no one to talk to and nothing to do. We have no money, the shops won't give me credit, we cannot entertain, and even if we could I haven't had a dress made since we wed, we must move house so often it is exhausting. I hate it! I had to travel alone, George. I was afraid and spent more money than I should have.

WICKHAM. How much did you spend?

LYDIA. All that I had.

WICKHAM. How much did you have? Lydia, we need that money.

LYDIA. I had no choice! Don't be cross with me. Father will give me more. And Lizzy too.

WICKHAM. Did they give you this bracelet too?

LYDIA. This? It is a cheap token I have been pretending is a gift from my adoring husband.

WICKHAM. Please don't be angry, darling. I have plans for us. Great plans.

LYDIA. What plans?

WICKHAM. My dear, we are to go...abroad. Just after the new year.

LYDIA. Abroad?

WICKHAM. Yes. A new life far away from here, away from all this stuffy boredom, we will go where we can be together and free and—

LYDIA. *ARE WE GOING TO PARIS?!?*

WICKHAM. *(Of course lying.)* ...yes!

LYDIA. *Oh my darling, I knew it! A life of balls and gowns and dancing and French people!*

WICKHAM. All the French people we could ever desire!

LYDIA. Oh, George! You're terrible! Keeping this from me, when you know exactly how happy it would make me.

WICKHAM. Because your happiness is the only thing that matters! And it will be of only moderate cost that I'm sure we can procure from your father. Though of course as long as you are with me, I have all that I need. But if you could ask your father, I'll lay out the amounts.

LYDIA. He and Mother arrive later this morning.

WICKHAM. *(He knew this, that's why he's here.)* Perfect. I'll find the letter, you get the money. Meet me here after dinner, ready to depart.

LYDIA. To Paris.

WICKHAM. To...Paris. To our new life together.

Lydia and Wickham are close, and he caresses her hand, her cheek. Lydia is being courted again and is falling for it. She dives in for another kiss.

Mrs. Reynolds enters.

MRS. REYNOLDS. ABSOLUTELY NOT.

WICKHAM. Good morning.

MRS. REYNOLDS. No. You, upstairs. You, to your room.

LYDIA. Mrs. Reynolds, really.

WICKHAM. Brian is in my room.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Because it is Brian's room and you should be grateful to be there at all.

WICKHAM. We are man and wife and have every right to speak as we wish.

MRS. REYNOLDS. This is Pemberley, you have no rights here. Back to your rooms, both of you.

LYDIA. To spare my husband the embarrassment of further reprimand, I will go. I love you.

Lydia starts to go, then Wickham sweeps her into a passionate kiss—purposefully showing off and securing Lydia's swooning affection for him.

WICKHAM. Remember to ask your father.

Lydia nods and is turning toward the stairs when someone is heard coming down the stairs.

DARCY. (Offstage.) Mrs. Reynolds! Mrs. Reynolds.

Those downstairs panic, Lydia cannot be caught with Wickham.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Oh my, not that way. Down this hall, child.

LYDIA. What?

WICKHAM. Go out the back door, Lydia.

LYDIA. What?

MRS. REYNOLDS. Good lord, she will not. Lydia, go.

Mrs. Reynolds gives Lydia a shove down the hallway and turns back into the room in time to see Darcy enter and head right for Wickham. It is just on the edge of getting physical.

Mr. Darcy, may I help?

DARCY. This matter is not your concern and I will have your interference on this man's behalf no longer.

MRS. REYNOLDS. But sir—

DARCY. That will be all.

Mrs. Reynolds storms out, dismissed from her own kitchen, as Darcy rounds on Wickham.

Wickham. You will leave this instant. I have told you, repeatedly and in no uncertain terms, that you are not welcome here.

WICKHAM. First, I am confined downstairs, then I am thrown out into the snow? And this is the behavior of a gentleman.

DARCY. If you were a gentleman you would go and never come back here again.

WICKHAM. I will stay where I am until I have what is mine.

DARCY. *Nothing here is yours.*

WICKHAM. I *am* a part of this family, Darcy.

DARCY. Yes I know. It was something I rather *insisted* upon.

WICKHAM. And never cease to remind me of, at every turn.

DARCY. Because you never change! You would have abandoned poor Lydia with nothing but a ruined reputation until I paid you to marry. I all but walked you down the aisle myself.

WICKHAM. To control me, once again.

DARCY. To legitimize you both. I gave you decency and here you come to take further advantage.

WICKHAM. Of course I have to take advantage! When was I ever given advantage in this world?

DARCY. Why must you always be given? Why can you never earn?

WICKHAM. How dare you speak of earning anything? You had everything handed to you. You watched me wither in your shadow and did nothing.

DARCY. I trusted you! My father trusted you! That is everything!

WICKHAM. I loved your father. But in the end, I was no better off than I would have been as any other son of a steward. Educated well but always just out of reach from the finest society, the most beautiful women, the wealth and riches that I would never attain. Your father's generosity brought me nothing but disappointment.

DARCY. Because you used my father. You betrayed him and I would not let you do that to me nor to my sister.

WICKHAM. How is your dear sister? Will she be joining us for Christmas?

DARCY. *(Full brother rage at her very mention.)* She will never spend a moment in the same room as you ever again. If you are not gone before she arrives I will add to your list of injuries and it will be my pleasure.

Fierce full pause.

WICKHAM. All my life, I have lived under your scrutiny. All my life you have been there, impeding me, waiting for me to fail. But now, I plan to go where the influence of Fitzwilliam Darcy means nothing and I will live free of you.

DARCY. And where is that?

WICKHAM. Abroad. As soon as the new year turns.

DARCY. Abroad.

WICKHAM. Indeed.

DARCY. Make no mistake, in any country, in any language, you will be seen as you are, recognized as a liar and a cheat. You can run away like a child, but like a child you will not get far on your own.

WICKHAM. I will not be on my own. Lydia will be coming as she is my most beloved wife. Thanks to you. I certainly wouldn't have married that silly girl any other way. But now she *is* lawfully mine, as is her meager fortune, as is her entire future.

Silence.

DARCY. I will not allow you to take her.

WICKHAM. You do not have to allow anything. My wife. My life.

DARCY. There are no words for how...despicable a man you are.

WICKHAM. The word you struggle to find is *practical*. I will get what I want.

DARCY. That you will not.

WICKHAM. I have so far. Except your sister. I shall always think of her as the dove that got away.

Wickham has officially crossed the line.

Darcy hauls off and hits him, beautifully, in the face.

He exits, leaving Wickham on the floor. Mrs. Reynolds enters.

MRS. REYNOLDS. You just cannot stop getting hit, can you?

Mrs. Reynolds helps Wickham offstage.

Lydia emerges having heard it all. She is shocked, like ice water down her back. Everything about her husband's debauchery is confirmed.

Her love is a lie.

At first she seems lost, helpless, scared at this news.

Then rage overcomes her in an instant and she grabs whatever is nearby and throws it on the ground.

As soon as the thing hits or shatters she changes to sheepishness and tries to clean it up rapidly and quietly.

Cassie runs in having heard the noise. Cassie sees the mess and starts helping Lydia clean. They clean together. In silent acknowledgement of what's happened.

Perhaps they share a glance and a supportive smile. Mrs. Reynolds returns, stands in the doorway, observing this moment. Lights dim.

Scene 2

It is later that morning. The household is very busy preparing for Christmas Day dinner and the ebb and flow of houseguests, but for a moment the hall is quiet as Cassie distractedly busies herself with a task.

Brian enters, carrying all of Anne de Bourgh's belongings.

BRIAN. Cassie.

CASSIE. No.

BRIAN. Please Cassie, please listen to me.

CASSIE. Listen to what? What could you possibly say?

BRIAN. I am trying to apologize, trying to say I'm sorry.

CASSIE. Would you please put down Miss de Bourgh's luggage. You'll ruin it.

BRIAN. It's not my fault she arrives late, then decides to leave early, and then decides to stay again.

CASSIE. Don't touch it. I have packed and unpacked her so many times the past two days, I know how it all goes together.

BRIAN. Let me help. I can help.

CASSIE. No. You. Can't.

Cassie turns to go.

BRIAN. Please. I told you I'm sorry, I will say it a hundred times.

CASSIE. And still it will not be enough to repair what you have done. I have to leave.

BRIAN. Miss de Bourgh can wait a few moments for her bonnets.

CASSIE. *Leave Pemberley, Brian.*

BRIAN. Leave Pemberley?

CASSIE. The way Mrs. Reynolds looked at me. The embarrassment of it, the accusation.

BRIAN. I meant that look for Wickham, not you!

CASSIE. It doesn't matter. When those kinds of accusations are made it is always the women who are blamed first. I shall leave before I'm asked to. I have lost everything thanks to you.

BRIAN. That has not happened.

CASSIE. It has happened! You do what you like without regard for whom you hurt, *just like Wickham.*

Brian certainly had never considered himself like Wickham...

BRIAN. I just... I don't know why it made me so angry, to think you would be drawn in by him, to think he could earn your trust.

CASSIE. You saw Wickham trying to lure me into his confidence, but did you see me deny him? Did you bother to ask me what happened? No. You think you know everything, Brian. You never account for others, you never ask, and you never listen. When you care for someone, Brian, you listen.

BRIAN. I am listening now.

CASSIE. It is too late for that. I am telling Mrs. Reynolds I will leave after dinner tonight.

BRIAN. I want to fix this. Tell me how.

CASSIE. I am not one of your little inventions that can be so easily fixed.

BRIAN. Please, don't go. Cassie.

CASSIE. It is too late.

And with that, she is out.

Brian is a flustered mess and heads out the back door.

Lizzy enters pulling Mr. Darcy down the stairs.

LIZZY. Because we should not speak of this upstairs.

DARCY. Good lord, why not?

LIZZY. Go. Keep going.

DARCY. Do not push me!

LIZZY. Go!

DARCY. I will not until you tell me where you were yesterday morning—Christmas Eve! We have family upstairs, a ne'er-do-well downstairs, puddings with *raisins*. What have you been doing that was so urgent?

LIZZY. I was in the village.

DARCY. Wickham is absconding abroad with your sister, and you're to the village!

LIZZY. Excuse me—who is absconding with whom?

DARCY. He and Lydia are off as soon as the new year arrives.

LIZZY. What? No. No, he will not take her. *Again.*

DARCY. He's free to do what he likes with his own wife.

LIZZY. Which is why I intend to free her from that distinction as soon as I can.

DARCY. Free her from *what* distinction?

LIZZY. The distinction of being Wickham's wife.

That got his attention.

DARCY. Divorce is what you intend to pursue? Divorce?!

LIZZY. Exactly! Lydia can finally regain her freedom, you can finally escape this tie to a man you despise, and we could finally repair the great mistake of forcing their marriage in the first place.

DARCY. Darling. Your spirit is admirable but your strategy is flawed. It's simply unheard of: a woman gaining a divorce on her own?

LIZZY. It's not unheard of. I know of...*one.*

DARCY. It is impossible to initiate, difficult to prove cause for, and to find a judge who would be sympathetic to a woman—

LIZZY. I have information that will make you reconsider everything. This letter was found in Wickham's pocket. *(Handing him the letter.)*

DARCY. *(Reading.)* To Mr. George Wickham. Sir, you must instantly

realize why I write to you on behalf of my sister whom you know intimately, which has resulted in a most unfortunate situation for her. I anticipate your immediate reply with your promise of marriage as we expect the arrival of the child in the early spring. With haste, Mr. Charles Worthing.

Pause.

No.

LIZZY. Yes.

DARCY. No.

LIZZY. I'm not sure why this is a shock to anyone. This is what brought me to the village on Christmas Eve morning, to find this Charles Worthing, who told me everything.

Mr. Worthing's sister, who is the unfortunate subject of this letter, swears the child is Wickham's, and that he made her promises. Mr. Worthing went to Bath to confront Wickham, only to learn that our dear brother was, in fact, already married. He pursued Wickham here to attain satisfaction for his sister, finding him at the inn and causing his injuries.

On reading the letter, I thought to contact Wickham's former commanding officer who, in a lengthy response I received just this morning, corroborated the young lady's account in detail and reported that Wickham's reputation had been further blackened by a multitude of debts and lies stemming from his extravagant lifestyle. Wickham came to Pemberley presumably to recover Lydia and flee to where these scandals could not reach him. I suspect taking Lydia has less to do with her companionship than it does with obtaining necessary funds from our father to support his escape.

Pause.

Don't you see? Wickham can be proved to be a scoundrel! He will finally pay for a lifetime of deceit, and Lydia can be free of him. We all can.

DARCY. You are a masterwork.

LIZZY. I know.

Off they go! Mrs. Reynolds enters, having heard their conversation and the threat to Wickham's safety. She considers, and exits quickly.

Scene 3

*Later that evening. It is after Christmas dinner.
Brian is clearing up when Wickham comes in evermore
desperate for that letter.*

WICKHAM. Brian, my friend. I was wondering if you might help me.

BRIAN. I will not and neither will Cassie, not now, not ever.

WICKHAM. Cassie? Is she the one who called me a wretch and sewed my pockets shut?

BRIAN. Your pockets?

Wickham shows his coat pockets sewn shut. Brian tries not to laugh.

WICKHAM. Rather brilliant prank actually because she must have hidden all the shears as well. I do hope you can put aside all that nonsense about she and I—honestly, a kitchen maid?—and help me find a letter. It was in my pocket and it is most urgent that I recover it.

Cassie enters, saving Brian from lying.

CASSIE. We know nothing of your letter, Mr. Wickham. Perhaps it fell out on the road the night you showed up here, drunk and bleeding.

She hands Wickham the shears she was hiding in her pocket.

WICKHAM. (To Brian, re: Cassie.) She's not very nice.

Wickham starts to leave but Mrs. Reynolds enters and goes right to him.

MRS. REYNOLDS. George, you cannot stay here any longer.

WICKHAM. I'm not leaving without Lydia.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Mr. Darcy has the letter. He knows. You must leave. Now.

*Wickham hears what she's saying and bolts offstage.
Mrs. Reynolds watches him leave and takes a moment to
regain herself before consulting the ledger with her lists of*

preparations in it and begins to tick things off, one by one. She does not look at either Cassie or Brian.

BRIAN. Mrs. Reynolds, about Cassie—

CASSIE. Brian.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Not now, I'm busy.

BRIAN. But you must hear it! You have to.

MRS. REYNOLDS. There's nothing I have to do that I'm not already doing.

BRIAN. I was wrong! What I said about Cassie and Wickham. Not Wickham. That part was right. But about Cassie. I was wrong and I'm sorry.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Cassie?

CASSIE. I hold Mr. Wickham in no great esteem—*no* esteem at all—but I realize that he *is* your guest. I deceived him about the letter, I shouted at him, and I interfered in matters that were none of my concern. And I may have also sewn his pockets shut. For all of that I am sorry. And I realize that means I must leave Pemberley. But I am not sorry for refusing to be used by him, in any way. I promise you on my life I would never do anything unbecoming to this house or to my station.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I know you wouldn't. And I'd have thought that Brian would have known as much. (*To Brian.*) What were you thinking?

BRIAN. I don't know I just—

MRS. REYNOLDS. I know exactly what you were thinking, you were jealous, because you fancy the girl and always have.

Brian registers this.

Now, please leave Cassie and me alone.

BRIAN. Yes ma'am.

Brian exits but lingers by the door listening. Mrs. Reynolds turns to Cassie.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Just because you are in service, it does not mean a man may use you however he likes. You should never be afraid to come to me if a situation like that arises again. You are not alone.

CASSIE. Yes ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. You wish for me to stay then?

MRS. REYNOLDS. Of course I do.

From Brian's hiding spot he can't help but cheer this news.

BRIAN. TREMENDOUS!

MRS. REYNOLDS. *Brian.*

BRIAN. Sorry.

MRS. REYNOLDS. *I can hear you listening!* CASSIE. GO ON!

Brian emerges from his hiding spot, smiles at Cassie, and exits upstairs.

CASSIE. I am truly grateful ma'am.

MRS. REYNOLDS. The work will not get easier, you know. It will always be hard work.

CASSIE. I do not mind the work, Mrs. Reynolds. I like hard work. I like feeling like I have something to show for my time at the end of the day. I have learned that from watching you.

MRS. REYNOLDS. From me?

CASSIE. Pemberley would not stand for a day without you. I so admire you for it. If I can say so, ma'am.

MRS. REYNOLDS. This one time, I will allow it.

Lydia enters steaming. She flops down at the table, maybe between them?

LYDIA. Do not ever marry! Never! That's what I've learned this holiday: No woman should marry *ever*.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Good evening, Mrs. Wickham.

LYDIA. Oh! Please do not remind me by calling me by that man's name. If only the institution of marriage never existed. LOVE IS WRETCHED. Unless you're Lizzy and Darcy. Or Jane and Bingley. And now Mary and Arthur! But who can live up to them?! Their love makes the rest of us look like fools!

CASSIE. Mrs. Wickham, you are no fool.

LYDIA. Yes I am. I blindly trusted that man and he was deceiving me. They all were! Darcy, Lizzy, Father. All thinking they knew what was best for me, all scheming to make me appear a decent person and not a wanton wretch without a husband.

CASSIE. You are never, will never be a wanton wretch.

LYDIA. (*Dramatically.*) And yet here I sit before you. A foolish girl who married the first man who proposed, thinking it was romantic. And oh, it was romantic! But I did not see beyond the moment to what our lives would be. And do you know the worst of it? I still love him. After everything, after the truth, I still do. And he says he loves me. If love is the problem, what is the solution?

Mrs. Reynolds is about to say something but is cut off by Cassie.

CASSIE. My mother believed a man who said he loved her. Over and over he said it, and over and over she believed him. But when he decided we were of no more use to him he abandoned us with nothing. I wonder what might have been had she realized he was not honest. You are young and beautiful, you have a family that cares for you, and now you have the truth. What will you choose to do with it?

Lydia sits with this notion. It stops her. After a moment, she reaches for Cassie's hand. Mrs. Reynolds watches impressed.

Scene 4

It is late on Christmas evening. The house upstairs is quiet, but downstairs is still stirring.

Brian is seated at the hall table, empty save for a project with which he is tinkering. Cassie enters and sits next to him.

CASSIE. What are you making?

BRIAN. (*Startled.*) Oh. It is just something I've been working on. It was meant to be a gift for Boxing Day.

CASSIE. For who?

BRIAN. (*Of course it's her.*) For someone very important, whom I terribly misjudged.

CASSIE. Ah.

BRIAN. I think I may have ruined a very valuable friendship in my haste and arrogance.

CASSIE. And jealousy.

BRIAN. And jealousy. Though I did not even know that is what it was.

CASSIE. Thank you for saying that.

Pause.

BRIAN. It was obvious I was talking about you?

CASSIE. Yes it was.

BRIAN. I would do anything if it could make up for my mistake.

CASSIE. I don't need you to do anything for me. You just need to listen to me. You are important to me, too, but what I truly want is to know that I can take care of myself.

BRIAN. So, I am important to you?

CASSIE. *(Eyeroll.)* And that is the only thing you hear.

BRIAN. That was the best bit! *(Smiles.)* You are the wisest, strongest person I have ever known.

CASSIE. And the fastest.

BRIAN. And the fastest.

They finally smile with one another again.

Wickham enters from the hallway dressed for travel. He is pulling Lydia with him by the hand.

LYDIA. George, please.

WICKHAM. Bring your things, darling. We shall start our great adventure together. Do you have the money?

LYDIA. George, stop. I will not run from my family. Why can we not simply go upstairs, together, and—

WICKHAM. No.

LYDIA. I am so tired of this, George. They can help us!

WICKHAM. I said no. Do you have the money?

She produces a purse.

LYDIA. Yes, but George—

Mrs. Reynolds enters.

WICKHAM. Good. *(To Cassie.)* You, girl. Take Mrs. Wickham's things to a carriage at once.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Cassie does not answer to you, George.

WICKHAM. (*Losing his patience.*) Then you tell the impertinent girl to do as I command, and to pay for my ruined coat out of her wages.

LYDIA. Don't speak to her like that!

MRS. REYNOLDS. I recall your coat being in shreds when you arrived.

WICKHAM. Lydia, we are leaving this instant! Bring your purse and let us go before we are no longer able.

LYDIA. Is it me, you so long for George, or my purse?

WICKHAM. I'm sorry, darling. I am not myself. This place does bring out the worst in me. Please. I must go, we must. Because it is you and I, together, against the whole world. As it has been. As it will always be.

*Wickham takes her hand, kisses her. Lizzy and Darcy enter.
Lizzy immediately goes to Lydia.*

LIZZY. Lydia, come upstairs with me.

LYDIA. I am in the middle of a conversation with my husband at the moment.

LIZZY. Lydia, talk to me.

WICKHAM. There are some conversations that are best kept between a man and his wife. We are trying to decide where to go on our adventure together.

LIZZY. What?

LYDIA. Paris, we already said Paris, are we not going to Paris?

WICKHAM. Of course we are.

LIZZY. Absolutely not!

LYDIA. Lizzy, I... I know it seems impulsive. But perhaps a trip is just what we need.

LIZZY. Lydia, he is deceiving you!

WICKHAM. You accuse me, based on what information?

DARCY. Based on decades of knowing your true character.

LIZZY. Based on a recent conversation I had with a Mr. Charles Worthing.

LYDIA. Who is Charles Worthing?

WICKHAM. Darling—

LIZZY. (*To Wickham.*) I held my tongue once before about your behavior and have lived to regret it. I will not do it again.

WICKHAM. Don't listen to this darling—

LIZZY. Mr. Worthing confided to me how you were run out of Bath, chased by creditors. You must go abroad because you are so heavily in debt there is no place in England left to go. Shall I spare Lydia from knowing the rest?

LYDIA. What does everyone seem to know that I don't? Lizzy, please stop discussing my business as though it were yours to manage.

WICKHAM. Exactly! Do you see now, my love, how they conspire against us?

LIZZY. We are not conspiring, we are trying to help you, sister.

LYDIA. I will not let you protect me from the truth anymore.

WICKHAM. The truth is that I am the only one who loves you and understands you and wants to take you away from this place immediately.

DARCY. Do not even think of it.

WICKHAM. Lydia.

LIZZY. Lydia, come to me.

WICKHAM. Lydia now.

LYDIA. Will all of you never cease giving me orders! This is my life and I'll have a say in it! (*Turns to Darcy, maturing in an instant.*) Mr. Darcy, I trust that you will tell me the truth. Sir.

DARCY. (*Deciding.*) There is a woman. She is with child.

WICKHAM. Lydia—

LYDIA. A woman?

LIZZY. There is also a letter. Which proves the child is his.

Wickham's face falls as Lizzy pulls out the letter, handing it to Lydia to read. Before she can read it, Wickham grabs the letter.

WICKHAM. That letter proves nothing except a young woman is determined to spread shameful lies because of her own immodest behavior.

Cassie steals the letter back and hands it to Lydia.

DARCY. The letter led us to her brother, Mr. Worthing, whose right and left fist you recall from the inn the other night. We also received a letter from members of your regiment confirming you had been seen with the girl and had boasted of your conquest. There is evidence to obtain a hearing before a judge to dissolve this marriage that never should have been.

LYDIA. *(Somewhat sharply.)* Mr. Darcy, while I thank you and Lizzy for your concern, please do me the courtesy of allowing me to decide what will become of my marriage. *(Turning to Wickham.)* Is this true, George?

WICKHAM. I told you these people will do anything to discredit me.

LYDIA. Is this true, George?

WICKHAM. Of course it's not true! And I will not stand here and be interrogated by a *silly girl*. Either you believe your own husband or—

LYDIA. Go.

Lydia stares him down. For once in her life, she is in complete control of the room. She has made her choice.

You may go.

Beat. Wickham knows when he's losing. He salvages what's left of his dignity.

WICKHAM. Yes I think I will. And I shall finally be free of you all for good.

DARCY. I would not exactly say free, Wickham. Officers have been alerted to your location by Mr. Worthing.

WICKHAM. Officers?

DARCY. If they are not coming for you already, they will be soon.

LIZZY. It seems once we started asking, it took very little to find... how many is it darling?

DARCY. Nearly a dozen.

LIZZY. Yes, nearly a dozen who will swear you owe thousands of pounds—gaming, debts, schemes. It would seem that while adultery

is enough to free Lydia from this marriage, it is not enough to send you to jail. Being a confirmed cheat, however, is.

DARCY. I hear the jails in England are all full up, but ships are leaving for the convict colony in Australia every day. You did say you wanted to go abroad, did you not?

WICKHAM. Darcy. This is excessive. What would your father say?

DARCY. He believed in justice as much as he believed in generosity. He would say good riddance.

WICKHAM. Lydia, darling, please.

LYDIA. It is clear I have never been your darling, darling. And I am not the silly girl you ran off with.

WICKHAM. No, you'll be a divorced woman at eighteen. You will be notorious.

LYDIA. Hadn't you heard George, notorious is very in fashion these days. Now get out of my sister's house.

Lydia stands firm. Lizzy joins her sister and takes her hand in allegiance. Wickham turns to Mrs. Reynolds.

WICKHAM. Mrs. Reynolds—

MRS. REYNOLDS. No more, George. You will come here no more. I'll walk you out.

WICKHAM. Mrs. Reynolds.

MRS. REYNOLDS. I. Will walk. You out.

Wickham's entire demeanor changes. He is utterly alone, having lost the two people he thought would never turn their backs on him.

Mrs. Reynolds moves to take Wickham out the back door. Just as he is at the threshold, Lydia calls to him.

LYDIA. George.

With great poise she hands him the purse.

Merry Christmas.

Then, she turns her back on him. As does Mrs. Reynolds. Left with nothing Wickham takes the purse and walks out. Mrs. Reynolds stands at the threshold and watches him go. The room is suddenly brighter.

*Lydia turns to Lizzy, grabs her into a hug.
Lizzy comforts her, holds her. Sisterhood.*

LIZZY. Well done, sister.

LYDIA. I can't believe it.

LIZZY. Believe, my dear.

Lydia turns and hugs Darcy—which is way more than he is prepared for.

LYDIA. Thank you. For all that you did. For all you have done.

Darcy pats her back, giving Lizzy the "How do I stop this?" look.

DARCY. It was my great pleasure...sister.

LYDIA. Oh my! What will become of that poor woman?

DARCY. There is no need for her to suffer for his actions. I will write to Mr. Worthing after the new year to make arrangements for his sister.

LYDIA. I am relieved.

DARCY. *(Taking a breath.)* Well, Brian, before the night ends, might you help me upstairs in the library? I want to make sure we are set up for the Boxing Day celebration tomorrow, and we may need to move the lovely tree that Mrs. Darcy has installed.

LIZZY. You will not remove my tree, Mr. Darcy!

DARCY. *(Rolling his eyes.)* I said move, dear, not remove. Just to the side.

LIZZY. Well, that's all right then.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Brian will ensure your tree remains intact, Mrs. Darcy. As it has been quite a day, I will say good night to you all. Happy Christmas.

BRIAN. Good night, everyone.

Mrs. Reynolds exits down the hallway; Brian and Darcy exit upstairs.

LYDIA. Oh, Lizzy, what will I do?

LIZZY. We shall see. But I have no doubt of your future now. I am truly proud of you.

LYDIA. You are proud? Of me?

LIZZY. So proud. And I am so sorry I thought I knew your life better than you. In the future, I vow not to interfere. So much. Mr. Darcy vows to do the same, though he does not yet know it.

LYDIA. Thank you, Lizzy. Now I shall be free to visit you as often as I like!

Lizzy reacts to this.

But of course we must go to London for the new year first. Imagine how glorious it will be, arriving to a party with a beautiful new dress and just a hint of scandal.

LIZZY. *(Turning to Cassie.)* Good night, Cassie, we'll leave you to begin your holiday, finally.

Lizzy and Lydia turn to leave, but...

Actually, if it wouldn't be too much trouble, might I—

CASSIE. Biscuits?

Cassie produces a box of the biscuits.

LYDIA. Oh, yes please! LIZZY. Exactly what I had in mind.

CASSIE. Enjoy ma'am. Happy Christmas.

Lizzy and Lydia exit together, eating those yummy biscuits.

Scene 5

Morning. The next day. Boxing Day. It is a day off and the servants' hall feels a bit festive—nothing like the lavish decoration upstairs, but cozy and lovely.

Brian is up early making the final adjustments to what looks like a little wooden writing desk that sits on the table.

Cassie comes in. Silently watches him for a bit.

She exits and comes back with two cups of tea. Hands him one.

CASSIE. Morning.

He holds a finger to his lips. Quiet. Don't wake anyone else.

He directs her to his new contraption. She's confused. What is the odd box?

He takes his tea and unfolds one arm of the contraption into what now appears to be a cupholder.

She laughs at this.

He takes the lit candle on his work table and unfolds another arm which is obviously made specially to hold a lit candle.

He unfolds and reveals another arm that has a pincushion, with needles and pins already on it. Another arm has a clock. The desk also contains a drawer with paper, hooks for hanging keys, and a drawer with a nice cozy lap blanket.

Cassie delights in all this—trying to keep quiet.

He's created a perfect, portable desk with book-holder, beverage stand, reading light, activity center. She is overwhelmed.

BRIAN. It is what you wanted. I think. I listened. I tried.

CASSIE. It is...perfect.

She's moved almost to tears—he gets her. Or he is trying to.

Mr. Darcy enters, stands in the doorway, not quite coming in.

BRIAN. Before I leave you to enjoy your holiday, I wanted to let you know that Mr. Darcy offered me a position in London when we were in the library last night.

CASSIE. London?

BRIAN. His London house. He thought I'd like being closer to all the new inventions and innovations happening there. And I would. I will. So many great minds doing great things.

CASSIE. Not great minds, great people. But being near them isn't being of them.

BRIAN. I know but it's a start. All this isn't just tinkering: It is my future.

CASSIE. Then Mr. Darcy should support that future.

BRIAN. He is. He's giving me a gift.

CASSIE. Of continued service. If he wants to give you a real gift, it would not just be the same chores at a different house.

Darcy enters fully.

DARCY. Good morning.

BRIAN. Morning, sir.

Mrs. Reynolds enters.

DARCY. Ah. Good morning, Mrs. Reynolds.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Good morning sir.

CASSIE. *(About to give him a piece of her mind.)* Mr. Darcy—

BRIAN. Cassie do not even think of it.

CASSIE. Mr. Darcy, have you seen what Brian has made for me?

BRIAN. Cassie.

CASSIE. Brian is a good man, sir, with a brilliant mind that can see problems that need to be solved and actually solve them. That's a rare gift, sir! And he needs you to see that.

BRIAN. I'm so sorry, Mr. Darcy. She does not know what she's saying, or apparently, to whom she's saying it.

DARCY. Oh I think she does. And I do think I agree with her. With much being made of the mechanical revolution in England, perhaps you might find an apprenticeship would better suit your skills. If you'd allow me, I'd be happy to make inquiries on your behalf.

BRIAN. Sir. I would. And I would never know how to thank you.

DARCY. *(Indicating Cassie and Mrs. Reynolds.)* I'd thank them.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Mr. Darcy, I should not have let George Wickham into this house, against your wishes. I simply could not let go of the boy he once was.

DARCY. Mrs. Reynolds, we shall not mention it.

MRS. REYNOLDS. And now what you have done for Brian...

DARCY. You were right. Brian is not Wickham. I should have listened to you. I am surprised I have not learned that by now.

MRS. REYNOLDS. As I have said, praise slows me down. Now, Cassie and I have prepared all the boxes to be handed out later to the staff if you and Mrs. Darcy could preside. Cassie will be by my side so I might show her the way it's all done. By the time next Christmas has come and gone I will have begun her training.

CASSIE. Training?

MRS. REYNOLDS. I think you'd make a fine housekeeper one day.

CASSIE. I would be so grateful for the chance to learn, ma'am.

DARCY. What are you saying, Mrs. Reynolds?

MRS. REYNOLDS. That one day I may need a replacement. And Cassie has proved she has the right temperament for it.

DARCY. I will not hear of you retiring.

MRS. REYNOLDS. One day, I said. Not tomorrow. Though I had thought when the time comes I might stay on to take people through Pemberley when they come to tour. I am proud of this house, and I do like to show it off.

Mr. Darcy takes her hand, earnestly.

DARCY. Good. Because Mrs. Darcy and I would never know how to raise the future inheritor of Pemberley without you.

Mrs. Reynolds gasps. Does this mean what we think it means?

MRS. REYNOLDS. WHAT.

Darcy nods, smirks.

WHAT.

This is maybe the only thing that could make Mrs. Reynolds cry. A baby Darcy on the way.

DARCY. Next Christmas will be an interesting one indeed. Please do not tell my wife what I have shared with you, she hasn't had the chance to tell her sisters yet and—

Mrs. Reynolds hugs Darcy.

Lizzy calls for Darcy on the stairs.

LIZZY. Darling? Where have you gone?

DARCY. Here darling!

LYDIA. Is he hiding from us all again?

Lizzy and Lydia have entered, and Lizzy instantly knows that Darcy already spilled the beans.

MRS. REYNOLDS. Mrs. Darcy! A baby!

LIZZY. (*Exasperated.*) Can no one in this house keep a secret long enough to make things interesting?

LYDIA. (*To Mr. Darcy.*) Can you believe it? I finally know one of Lizzy's secrets before Jane does!

MRS. REYNOLDS. Oh ma'am I am so happy for you. There will be much to do indeed. Cassie! There will be plans to make!

CASSIE. Yes, ma'am. What a happy day, indeed.

LIZZY. Thank you. I'm all nerves and excitement. And biscuits.

MRS. REYNOLDS. We'll need a great many of those and Brian has made just the thing to keep up with the biscuit making.

As Mrs. Reynolds fawns over Mr. Darcy and Lizzy, Lydia approaches Cassie.

LYDIA. Cassie, I'd hoped for one moment just to say...how much I appreciate you and all you have done for me these past few days. Thank you.

CASSIE. You are most welcome.

DARCY. Shall we share our secret with the rest of the household, Mrs. Darcy? Extend this Christmas just a little longer with one more gift?

LIZZY. A wonderful idea.

MRS. REYNOLDS. And how do you plan to tell them the good news?

DARCY. From a distance.

LIZZY.

MRS. REYNOLDS.

LYDIA.

Mr. Darcy.

Now, now you hush.

We are not that bad.

Mrs. Reynolds congratulates Mr. Darcy and Lizzy as they exit together, with Lydia following after she shares one last glance with Cassie.

Cassie turns to Brian.

CASSIE. So, you are off to London.

BRIAN. It would seem so. Thank you.

CASSIE. It is where you belong. We should all be where we belong.

BRIAN. Yes, we should.

CASSIE. Just don't...forget us here.

BRIAN. How could I forget you? It would seem Mrs. Reynolds was not as wrong as I thought about my...admiration. For you.

CASSIE. And perhaps all the time I was thinking around you, I was actually thinking...near you.

BRIAN. Near is nice.

He takes her hand. It's bold but he goes for it.

CASSIE. Have you been reading that novel I lent to you?

BRIAN. *(Smiling.)* It is actually quite good.

CASSIE. Then I have a request of you. Well, I have two.

BRIAN. Ah. The first?

CASSIE. Send me books to read, please. As many as you can. So I may make good use of this contraption every night.

BRIAN. Agreed. And the second?

CASSIE. Come back. I will be here at Pemberley, busy, happy, and certainly not waiting for you.

Cassie puts her cup of tea in the desk's cupholder...and tentatively kisses Brian's cheek. This is the best day of Brian's life.

A cacophony of sisterly squeals is heard from upstairs. "A baby!"

Lizzy must have told the family. A Christmas carol is played on the piano and the sound of voices singing carries downstairs to where Cassie and Brian share a dance and a moment.

Will they get together? Perhaps one day.

Blackout.

End of Play