

## Scene 8

*As Arthur pours over his letter-in-progress Lydia enters quietly, holding mistletoe. She sneaks up on him.*

LYDIA. Surprise!

ARTHUR. Dear god, what is the meaning of this?

LYDIA. Just a little reminder that you shall not escape my company for long.

ARTHUR. I'm so sorry but you shocked me with your...flora.

LYDIA. It is often remarked upon, my shocking character. Were you writing someone a letter? A private letter?

ARTHUR. *(Stuffing his letter to Mary in his book.)* No, no I wasn't. Just taking notes.

LYDIA. About what?

ARTHUR. *(Lying.)* Giraffes.

If you will pardon me, Mrs. Wickham, I was just leaving the library for the night.

LYDIA. Leaving! Oh dear! I had hoped we might continue our discussion of the natural world. Perhaps you could tell me more about this?

*She presents the mistletoe.*

ARTHUR. Oh. Mistletoe. Yes, it is a parasitic plant, interesting actually in that it is quite a poisonous evergreen that causes terrible gastrointestinal distress if consumed.

LYDIA. And yet...it manages to inspire such an affectionate holiday tradition.

ARTHUR. Yes, I've always found that rather odd. One is encouraged to embrace under the bough, but don't get too close or romance will turn to...vomit.

LYDIA. You are ever so funny, Lord Arthur. I could listen to you all night.

ARTHUR. I don't know why you would bother. Mrs. Wickham, I believe I shall, yes... I will bid you a good night.

LYDIA. Perhaps I could borrow a book to read, even this one you carry with you so often.

*Lydia hints at Arthur's book.*

ARTHUR. This book? Oh. Well. You are welcome to it if you like. The early chapters are quite compelling, if I do say so. Though perhaps Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia* might be a better introduction.

LYDIA. Nono, this one seems just fine for me.

*Lydia snatches his book.*

ARTHUR. Enjoy your reading then. I really must rest. It has turned into a rather eventful day.

LYDIA. Of course it has. Good night, Lord Arthur.

ARTHUR. Please do call me Mr. de Bourgh. And good night.

*Arthur leaves.*

*Lydia opens the book and reads the letter tucked within, thinking that Arthur's letter to Mary is for herself. She knew he adored her! She reads.*

LYDIA. He even mentioned my laugh!

*Arthur runs back in.*

ARTHUR. Excuse me Mrs. Wickham but I believe I left my notes in that book and must retrieve them immediately—

LYDIA. You darling man! I knew you felt the very same as me!

ARTHUR. As what? As who?

*Mary has come in unnoticed by Arthur and Lydia, the letter that she found in her book in hand, her smile drops as she witnesses...*

LYDIA. You said what I was desperate to hear and more.

ARTHUR. You? No. Oh no.

LYDIA. And you mention my laugh, and my hair, and my cheeks are the very definition of pink.

ARTHUR. Mrs. Wickham, you mistake me. That letter was—

LYDIA. I knew if I might only encourage you with the small note I left in your book—

ARTHUR. Your note? I never read a note. What note?