

COLLINS

52 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

ACT II

things roll everywhere. COLLINS goes down on all fours to rescue them. He is sprawled under the sofa as he mumbles.)

COLLINS. Then you will persuade her to grant me a private audience? (He gets up and hands her the various spoils he has salvaged.)

MRS. BENNET. (Excitedly) Yes, yes, my dear Mr. Collins, at once. (Calls. She looks all around) Lizzie, my love! Where on earth did my girls go? They were here just now.

COLLINS. Shyness, no doubt, my dear Mrs. Bennet. Miss Elizabeth is avoiding me out of maidenly modesty.

ELIZABETH. (Enters from library r.) Where you calling me, Mama? (COLLINS by this time has his head stuck under the couch. ELIZABETH looks over couch and sees him) Oh, Mr. Collins, have you finished your sermon? (As she notes his idiotic fatuous smirk and her mother's agitation, she fears the worst and makes for the French window to escape) If you'll excuse me— (As he puts out a detaining hand) I want to reply to this letter from Mr. Wickham. (Heading for door r.c.)

MRS. BENNET. (Stops her) No, Lizzie, Mr. Collins has something to say to you— (Moves toward r.c. door herself, takes ELIZABETH'S hand and draws her back. When ELIZABETH resists and tries to escape, panic-stricken, she says angrily) Elizabeth, I desire you to remain here. (She pulls her over to L. of sofa.)

ELIZABETH. (Returning reluctantly; protesting through above speech and business) But Mr. Collins can have nothing to say to me that won't wait, Mama. (Mrs. BENNET close to door, evidently intending to exit.)

COLLINS. (Fondly) It's perfectly understandable and indeed proper that a young girl should display this modesty, my dear Mrs. Bennet. Pray, don't

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blame your charming daughter. (Mrs. BENNET kisses ELIZABETH and backs out of r.c. door. Closes door.) Indeed, Miss Elizabeth, it is an added incentive. (Plants himself in front of her. She sits, with a sigh of resignation, in chair c.) You can hardly be in doubt as to what I am about to propose, my dear and lovely Elizabeth! (She turns away from him.) Your natural delicacy may lead you to dissemble—but I flatter myself my attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. (He grows more pompous every minute) I have singled you out as the companion of my future life— (Waits for her exclamation of wondering gratitude—but she is silent) And before my feelings run away with me—I owe it to you to tell you the reasons. (ELIZABETH looks at him questioningly. COLLINS nods in reassurance) That very noble lady, my patroness, has condescended to advise me to marry, and even goes so far as to promise to visit—actually visit—the lady I bring to the parsonage as my wife—if I choose wisely. Another reason, my fair cousin, is that you have the honor of knowing her nephew, Mr. Darcy. The mere fact of your acquaintance with him would do much to recommend you to her favor. And charming and genteel as he is, his manners are as nothing to those of his noble aunt. (She looks at him.) You can learn so much from her. These, dear Miss Elizabeth, are my motives. And now nothing remains but to assure you of the violence of my affection. (He kneels. ELIZABETH moves away from him, closer to table.) I know that one thousand pounds invested at four percent is all you will have as dowry—and—even that you will not receive until your mother's death, which lamentable event may not occur for several, nay, many years. (Pauses) But you can rest assured that on that score no ungenerous word of reproach shall ever pass my lips after we are married.

ELIZABETH. (She looks down on him. Slowly)

COLLINS cont.

Aren't you a little hasty, sir? You seem to forget that I have made no answer to this dazzling offer! I appreciate the honor you have done me— (He raises her hand, which he had to grab for, to his lips. She rises from him so quickly that she nearly upsets him) —but candor compels me to decline it.

COLLINS. (Rising slowly with broad grin) Indeed, I understand, dear Miss Elizabeth— Yes, it is quite a charming and delicate custom for young ladies to say no when they mean yes. (Archly, shaking a finger at her) I am, therefore, not at all discouraged and shall hope to lead you to the altar before very long.

ELIZABETH. (Astonished and getting exasperated) Upon my word, sir, you are difficult to discourage. I assure you I am not one of those idiotic young ladies you describe, if indeed they exist outside of novels. Difficult as it seems for you to believe—I will not marry you.

COLLINS. Come, come, Miss Elizabeth— ELIZABETH. You could not make me happy, and I certainly could not make you so—

COLLINS. Such charming modesty! ELIZABETH. What is more, I have no ambition to try. (She crosses toward R.C. door. He runs up to cut her off. She then starts L. to go out through conservatory. Stops to deliver next line) And if your friend, the Lady Catherine de Bourgh, really knew me, she would utterly disapprove of me for the exalted position you offer.

COLLINS. (Suddenly sobered) Oh—if I thought Lady Catherine would disapprove! (Reflects; looks her up and down) Ah, but no—impossible! You can be sure that when I have the honor of seeing her ladyship again—

ELIZABETH. You had better ask her to choose for you; only select a young woman with a humbler and more contrite heart—

COLLINS. Ah, no, dear Cousin, my mind is made up. And I am too well aware that it is by no means certain that any other gentleman will ever make you an offer—so I naturally understand that your rejection of my suit is according to the usual practice of elegant females.

ELIZABETH. (Almost bursting into laughter) I see! Well, if you can, try to stop thinking of me as an elegant female. Just picture me as a rational creature with a most inelegant habit of speaking the truth. (As she crosses to exit R.C., COLLINS runs ahead and blocks the door.)

COLLINS. (Seizing her hand and kissing it) Ah, you are quite adorable!

ELIZABETH. (As she crosses him) Mr. Collins!

COLLINS. I am quite certain now that when my proposal is formally sanctioned by your excellent parents that you will plainly say yes.

ELIZABETH. No, Mr. Collins, I will as plainly as possible say no. (She crosses to library door. He tries to get to door. She brushes him aside) And you need not try to scamper in front of me again. This time I am going out by this door. (Exits R.)

COLLINS. (Looks after her) She loves me! (He crosses to W L.C.) She loves me!

Mrs. BENNET. (Enters R.C. from L.; comes down C.) Well—my dear future son-in-law—am I to wish you joy?

COLLINS. (Bows; crosses to Mrs. BENNET. With much assurance) Thank you, indeed I trust I have every reason to be satisfied. (Indulgently. Mrs. BENNET almost embraces him—"refusal" stopping her.) Of course, I know that my cousin's refusal naturally springs from her bashful modesty, and— Mrs. BENNET. (Alarmed, for she knows her Liz-zie) Refusal? (Shakes head) With her that does not mean acceptance—but—

COLLINS. You think she means it?

COLLINS cont.

Mrs. BENNET. Never mind, my dear boy. I'll convince her. (*Half to herself*) Headstrong, foolish girl!—She never knows her own interests! But I'll teach her! (*Forces him into chair c.*)

COLLINS. (*Worried*) Headstrong? Foolish? But, dear me! Those qualities will not make her a very desirable wife! (*Pauses*) If she actually persists in rejecting— (*Rises*)—my suit—I pray you, madam, I pray you—don't force her. I fear if she has those defects—she will hardly succeed in making me happy.

Mrs. BENNET. (*Laughs frightenedly*) Oh, no; oh, dear no. The dear child is merely willful in these matters and so shy—you can't imagine. All her life she has run away from admiration. She's a veritable gazelle, I assure you. Just wait a minute! (*She pushes him back into chair*) I will call her papa. He always brings her to reason. (*She exits quickly*) R.C. to L. *But she has finished COLLINS.*

COLLINS. (*As he paces*) Headstrong? Foolish? (*Goes to bell rope; pulls it frantically. Goes off R.C. to R. to get hat; comes back smiling. He has decided to propose to CHARLOTTE*) Ah— (*As HILL enters R.C. from L.*) I have just remembered a call I promised to make on Sir William Lucas. Will you be good enough to saddle one of your master's horses for me?

HILL. Certainly, sir—the groom was just about to take Ranger for his morning exercise—he is ready saddled. If you will hurry—we can catch him before he mounts— This way, sir— (*They go out quickly through French windows.*) Mrs. BENNET'S voice heard even before she enters with BENNET. She is saying: "Oh, Mr. Bennet, we are—"

Mrs. BENNET. (*Off*) Oh, Mr. Bennet! Oh, Mr. Bennet, you're always so slow—we're all in an uproar. Come, come, quickly. You must use your authority. (*They enter R.C. from L. He goes with the aggravating slowness and absence of response to excitement*

of his type to the L. fireplace to warm his back; watches her amusedly.) Why, he has gone! Oh, my dear, you must do something. (*Calls*) Elizabeth! (*Tearfully*) Lizzie refuses to marry Mr. Collins! You must force her to change her mind— You must make haste, Mr. Bennet—or he will change his and not have her. (*Goes to him.*)

BENNET. I have not the pleasure of understanding you. May I ask what you are talking about?

Mrs. BENNET. Of Mr. Collins and Lizzie. Lizzie declares she won't have him and he begins to say he won't have her—

BENNET. Then it seems entirely settled on both sides. What am I supposed to do?

Mrs. BENNET. (*Between sobs*) Tell her you insist on her marrying him. Elizabeth!

BENNET. Where is this misguided girl?

ELIZABETH. (*Who has just entered from library*) Here, sir.

BENNET. (*Looks at Mrs. BENNET. Mrs. BENNET nods directly. Sternly*) Come here, my child. (*ELIZABETH comes down and stands in front of him. Mrs. BENNET crosses and stands behind ELIZABETH.*) I understand that Mr. Collins has made you an offer and that you have refused it.

ELIZABETH. I have, Papa.

BENNET. Very well, let's come to the point. Your mother insists on your accepting him. Isn't that so, Mrs. Bennet?

Mrs. BENNET. Or else I shall never speak to her again.

BENNET. Then it seems that an unhappy alternative awaits you, Lizzie. (*Balances his glasses in his hand*) From this day forth you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never speak to you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins—and I—will never speak to you again if you do.

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