

COLLINS enters.

COLLINS Mrs. Bennet, madam. (He bows) Miss Elizabeth. I have been searching for you, for whilst Miss Jane is dancing constantly with every sign of pleasure, the dance floor just as constantly lacks the grace and charm which you alone might lend it.

MRS.BENNET If you wish to stand up with Elizabeth, Mr. Collins, I am sure that she will be most delighted.

COLLINS Thank you, Mrs. Bennet, thank you. But may I hope, madam, for your interest with your fair daughter Elizabeth, when I solicit, rather than the pleasure of a dance, the honour of a private audience with her ?

ELIZABETH What ?

MRS.BENNET Oh dear ! Yes - certainly. I am sure Lizzy will be very happy - I am sure she can have no objection. Well - I will see where Lydia is - and Jane and Mr. Bingley - I will see--

ELIZABETH No, Mother, do not go. I beg you will not go. Mr. Collins must excuse me. He can have nothing to say to me that anybody need not hear.

MRS.BENNET No, no, nonsense Lizzy. I desire you will stay where you are.

ELIZABETH But Mama....

MRS.BENNET Lizzy, I insist upon your staying and hearing Mr. Collins. I insist upon it.

She exits hastily. As she goes, we hear her greeting MISS BINGLEY off.

ELIZABETH Mama..please....

MRS.BENNET I insist.

She tries to follow, but COLLINS, with remarkable agility, bars the way.

COLLINS My dear Miss Elizabeth, allow me to assure you that I have your respected mother's permission for this address.

ELIZABETH My Mother's permission ? Have you indeed !

COLLINS Almost as soon as I entered your house I singled you out as the companion of my future life. But before I am run away

COLLINS
(Contd)

with my feelings on this subject, perhaps it would be advisable for me to state my reasons for marrying you.

ELIZABETH

Pray, Mr. Collins, there is no need to enumerate.....

COLLINS

No, it is proper that you should know. Firstly, I think it is a right thing for every clergyman to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, I think it will greatly add to my happiness; thirdly, it is the advice and recommendation of that very noble lady whom I have the honour to call patroness. "Mr. Collins" her Ladyship said, "Choose a gentlewoman for my sake, and for your own let her be a useful sort of person able to make a small income go a good way. Find such a woman," she said "bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her." Actually visit her! I would observe, fair cousin, that the notice of Lady Catherine is not the least of the advantages I have to offer.

ELIZABETH

Doubtless your advantages are many, Mr. Collins, and it is not for me to belittle them...

COLLINS

I appreciate your concern that all you may ever offer is one thousand pounds in the four per cent and you may assure yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when we are married. And now nothing remains but to assure you in most animated language of the violence of my affection.

ELIZABETH

Mr. Collins - accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me. I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do other than decline them.

COLLINS

Decline them? (He laughs) You must give me leave to flatter myself, dear cousin, that your refusal is merely words of course. I therefore conclude that according to the practise of elegant females, you wish to increase my love by suspense.

ELIZABETH

Can I speak plainer? Do not consider me as an elegant female, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart.

COLLINS

From your heart! Oh, the success of my love!

ELIZABETH

I thank you again for the honour, but to accept is absolutely impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it. And now, sir, pray excuse me.

COLLINS bows low. As ELIZABETH moves to exit, MRS. BENNET, all a-flutter, enters.