

ACT ONEScene 2.

In the darkness a servant (or Mr. Bennet ?) enters with a lighted taper, and lights the lamps. As the SERVANT exits, MR. BENNET, followed by COLLINS, enters.
It is the night of the ball.

COLLINS

As I was saying to you, Mr. Bennet, there are, indeed, a number of points relevant to our discussion to be found in the pages of Fordyce's Sermons. If you would care for me to read the chapter I have in mind, possibly we could discuss the matter further ?

MR. BENNET has clearly come into this room to escape.

MR. BENNET

That is most kind of you, Mr. Collins. Most kind and most worthy, and there are few things in this world, I dare to say, which would give me greater joy. Unfortunately at this moment I have other matters to attend to..

COLLINS

Quite so, yes. Some other time, perhaps.

MR. BENNET

I most sincerely hope.

COLLINS

Her Ladyship has been kind enough to flatter me that seldom has she heard a voice more suited to the reading of sermons than mine.

MR. BENNET

Ah, yes, your other subject - the nobility ! I am inclined to agree with her. There are some voices constructed by the Almighty for conversation, and some for sermons.

COLLINS

'Twould be a pity if we were all similarly gifted.

MR. BENNET

It would indeed, sir, it would indeed.

COLLINS

For myself, now, I find that the turning of a phrase and the delivery of a sermon come to me with equal ease. I have more than once observed to Lady Catherine that her charming daughter seemed born to be a Duchess. These are the kind of little things which please her Ladyship.

MR. BENNET

May I ask - do these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are they the result of previous study ?

COLLINS They arise chiefly on the moment, sir, chiefly on the moment. I do sometimes amuse myself with arranging little elegant compliments which may be adapted to various occasions; but I always endeavour to give them as unstudied an air as possible I feel that I succeed in it.

MR.BENNET Incredibly so, it appears.

MRS.BENNET enters. She is dressed for the ball.

MRS.BENNET Good evening, Mr. Collins.

COLLINS bows.

Dear me, none of the girls down yet? Really, Mr. Bennet, you have fathered a most unpunctual brood.

MR.BENNET They all arrived on time, my dear. Almost monotonously so.

MRS.BENNET We shall never reach the ball! You are ready, are you, Mr. Collins?

COLLINS Quite prepared thank you, yes.

MR.BENNET You are sure? You would not like to....wash, or go to your room or anything?

COLLINS Quite sure, I thank you.

MR.BENNET (a grunt) Oh! (A sudden bright thought) Mr. Collins - indeed you are prepared, perhaps after all there is time for a short reading from Fordyce's Sermons. If you would care to find the book, and discover the place, and then return.....?

COLLINS With pleasure, sir, with pleasure. Pray excuse me, Mrs. Bennet. (He bows) I will be back as soon as possible.

MR.BENNET Please do not hurry yourself unduly; you will require your breath for reading.

COLLINS Very true, sir, very true.

MR.BENNET We anticipate your best performance.

In the doorway, COLLINS encounters ELIZABETH. She is dressed for the ball, and looks extremely attractive.

ELIZABETH (an acknowledgement) Mr. Collins.