

ELIZABETH (quietly) Please, Mr. Darcy.

DARCY You are sure.

She nods. DARCY crosses to the door.

Your servant, Mrs. Bennet. Excuse me, Aunt - Miss Bennet.

He bows slightly, exchanges a look with ELIZABETH, and follows MRS. BENNET off.

ELIZABETH May I offer you something, madam? Some refreshment?

LADY C. No thank you. Be seated, Miss Bennet.

ELIZABETH sits. A pause.

You can be at no loss, Miss Bennet, to understand the reason of my journey hither. Your own heart, your own conscience, must tell you why I came.

ELIZABETH Indeed you are mistaken, ma'an. I have not been at all able to account for the honour of seeing you here.

LADY C. Miss Bennet - you ought to know that I am not to be trifled with.

ELIZABETH Indeed I do.

LADY C. However insincere you may choose to be, you shall not find me so. My character has ever been celebrated - for its sincerity and frankness; in a cause such as this, I shall certainly not depart from it. You understand?

ELIZABETH So far, madam, yes.

LADY C. Very well. A report of most alarming nature reached me yesterday. I was told that not only was your sister - Jane, in she called - not only was your sister on the point of receiving a most advantageous offer, but that you - that Miss Elizabeth Bennet - would in all likelihood, be soon afterwards united to my nephew. To my own nephew, Mr. Darcy.

ELIZABETH (rising automatically - unbelievably) Me, madam? Mr. Darcy

LADY C. I said so, did I not?

ELIZABETH May one enquire, Lady Catherine, where you obtained such news?

LADY C. One may not! I regard it impertinent of you to ask.

II-3-25

ELIZABETH

I see.

LADY C.

Though I know it must be a scandalous falsehood - though I would not injure him so much as to consider the truth of it possible - I instantly resolved on setting off for this place to make my feelings known to you.

ELIZABETH

If you believed it impossible to be true, I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far.

LADY C.

I found him here, did I not? To my surprise, I must admit - I thought him safe in London.

ELIZABETH

So far as concerns me, madam, I think him quite safe here.

LADY C.

I insist, at once, upon having this report universally contradicted.

ELIZABETH

Your coming to Longbourn, to see me and my family, will rather be a confirmation of it. If, indeed, such a report exists.

LADY C.

If! Do you, then, pretend to be ignorant of it? Do you not know that such a report is spread abroad?

ELIZABETH

This is the first that I have heard of it.

LADY C.

Indeed! And can you likewise declare that there is no foundation for it?

ELIZABETH

I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your Ladyship.

LADY C.

Miss Bennet - I insist on being satisfied! Has he - has my nephew - made you an offer of marriage?

ELIZABETH

Your Ladyship has declared it to be impossible; you would not injure him, you said, so much as considering the truth of it.

LADY C.

It ought to be so; it must be so, while he retains the use of his reason. But your arts and allurements may, in a moment of infatuation, have made him forget what he owes to himself and to his family. You may have drawn him in - I would not put it beyond you.

ELIZABETH

If I have, I shall be the last person to confess it.

LADY C.

Miss Bennet, do you know who I am? I am his near relation - I am entitled to know his concerns.

ELIZABETH

But you are not entitled to know mine, nor will such behaviour as this induce me to be explicit.

LADY C. This is not to be borne ! Miss Bennet - this match, to which you have the presumption to aspire, can never take place. Never ! Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter. Now, what have you to say ?

ELIZABETH In that case, Lady Catherine - you can have no reason to suppose he will make an offer to me.

LADY C. (after a second) The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. Whilst they were in their cradles his mother and I planned the union. Do you suppose that now I intend to see those plans wrecked - ruined by a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family ? Do you pay no regard to the wishes of his relations ?

ELIZABETH If there were no other objection to my marrying your nephew, I should certainly not be kept from it by knowing that his relations wished him to marry Miss de Bourgh. You all did as much as you could in planning the marriage - its completion depended on others.

LADY C. Its completion, girl, depends upon my determination, of which I have, I may warn you, an ample share. I have not been used to submit to other people's whims.

ELIZABETH If Mr. Darcy is not inclined to his cousin, why may he not make another choice ? And if I am that choice, why may I not accept him ?

LADY C. I will tell you why. You would be slighted, censured and despised by everyone connected with him. Your name would not be mentioned by any of us.

ELIZABETH Tut ! Heavy misfortune indeed !

LADY C. Is this to be endured ? If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up.

ELIZABETH I am a gentleman's daughter; your nephew is a gentleman. So far we are equal.

LADY C. You are a gentleman's daughter - true. But who was your mother ? Who are your uncles and aunts ? And what of your youngest sister ? I am no stranger to the details of her infamous behaviour. I know it all. And is such a girl to be my nephew's sister ? Heaven and Earth - of what are you thinking ? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted ?

II-3-27

ELIZABETH

You can now have nothing further to say; you have insulted me in every possible method. But allow me to say, Lady Catherine, that the arguments with which you have supported this extraordinary application have been as frivolous as the application was ill-judged. How far your nephew might approve your interference in his affairs I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no further on the subject.

LADY CATHERINE moves angrily towards the door, then stops and wheels round on ELIZABETH.

LADY C.

Tell me, once and for all - are you engaged to him ?

ELIZABETH

(after a moment) I am not.

LADY C.

And will you promise me never to enter into such an engagement ?
(A pause) Will you, Miss Bennet ?

ELIZABETH

I will make no promise of the kind. You have greatly mistaken my character if you think I can be worked on with such persuasions as these.

LADY C.

So this is your final resolve. Very well. I shall know what to do ! Do not imagine, Miss Bennet, that your ambition will ever be gratified. I take no leave of you - I send no compliments to your mother. I am seriously displeased !

She endeavours to make a sweeping exit. In the doorway, however, she almost collides with MR. BENNET. He carries a letter.

I do not admire your family, sir. I do not say farewell to you.

MR. BENNET

In that case, your Ladyship, I can scarcely be blamed for not saying hail to you.

LADY CATHERINE looks him up and down, gives one of her snorts, and exits.
MR. BENNET hesitates for a moment, then calls after her:

My warmest regards to your coachman, however.

ELIZABETH

You are in a very flippant mood, Papa.

MR. BENNET

Flippant perhaps, my dear - with all due cause ! Puzzled, perhaps, nevertheless.