The Second Chance

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Summary

ONESHOT. Mary is sitting quietly doing some embroidery, when to her surprise she receives a visitor. It is Mr Collins, who she had not expected to see again after his abrupt departure from Longbourne... Mary x Mr Collins
A/N: I am so sorry about what I’ve done with these poor characters, OOC moments are probably frequent although I did my best to retain how I perceive their characters to be in canon. Hopefully it’s not too bad. Anyway, I hope you enjoy reading this oneshot :)  

DISCLAIMER: I own nothing, I’m just a fan of the lovely Jane Austen’s stories.

“Dear cousin Mary, would you care to accompany me on a walk in the garden?”

Mary looked up from her embroidery work to the smiling face of Mr Collins. He had one hand behind his back, the other outstretched towards her. She was very surprised that he was asking her to take a walk with him. Surprised that he was here, in her home. She had not expected to see much of him anymore, since he had left Longbourne with such haste and in a bad temper. “Are you sure that you would not prefer to have another of my sisters walk with you? Or perhaps...Miss Lucas?”

“I seek no other company but yours, dear cousin Mary. A walk with such a lovely young lady like you will be a pleasure. And I very much enjoyed hearing you play yesterday. Oh, such a wonderful rendition and a singing voice surely bestowed upon you by an angel. Please do come. If you do not come with me, I shall be most distressed...”

Mary looked back down at her embroidery and completed another row of fine red stitches, though it was a wonder she managed to keep her hands steady. She was trembling slightly, and she was not quite sure why. A strange feeling had come over her. It was far from unpleasant; it was in fact delightful but hitherto an unknown feeling to Mary. She had a strong admiration for Mr Collins, but all that had yielded so far was a mild resentment of her prettier sisters whom Mr Collins had much preferred. He had asked for Elizabeth’s hand in marriage, and had been rejected. And now here Mr Collins was, talking to her so jovially when up until now he had scarcely talked to her at all. Mary
realised that she might just be the next one he had chosen to propose to. If so, it was a startling prospect. She thought about her reply carefully. It would not do to seem too eager, and perhaps she had misread him entirely and there would be no proposal. She had to keep her composure and not let the hope that had risen in her heart overwhelm her. Nothing was certain yet. “I’m sorry; I believe I should continue on with my embroidery. Perhaps another time...”

Mr Collins frowned, and then his face cleared again as it became apparent that Mary’s pale skin now had a light pink flush. “Dear, sweet Mary, have you the heart to refuse my request? I ask only for a little of your time. I insist that you join me, I shall not move from this spot until you agree to walk with me.”

Mary smiled slightly. “Well, if you are quite sure, I shall put my embroidery away for now. I can finish later, I suppose...” Mary was true to her word, and set her embroidery aside before placing her hand into Mr Collin’s own. He helped her to rise from her seat, and then offered his arm to her. Mary accepted willingly, resting her hand in the crook of his arm. It was not long before they were outside, and making their way to the garden. The air was fragrant with the scent of blooming roses, fresh and pleasant although a trifle too cold for Mary’s liking. Yet, she felt a warmth from within herself as she walked with Mr Collins. She was very nervous, but she could not stop herself submitting to feeling a sense of excitement as well. Mr Collins paused by a low iron wrought bench.

“Shall we sit, dear cousin?”

Mary sat down on the bench and Mr Collins followed suit. He took hold of her hands and looked straight into her eyes. His stare was intense. It seemed to Mary like he was searching for something. In the short time she had known him, she had never seen him look quite so serious as he did in that moment. It made her a little nervous, but she held his gaze. After a while he spoke again. “I made a terrible mistake when I offered your sister my hand in marriage. Pleasing to the eye she may be, but entirely unsuitable to be my wife. She has a very different temperament to mine. I had considered proposing to Miss Lucas. She would accept me gladly, but I feel no connection to her. She does not love me, nor I her. And I sense she never would be able to grow to love me. Truthfully, I do not think I will be completely satisfied unless I marry a Bennet. I do so wish to avoid taking the estate away from your mother and you, and my other cousins, upon Mr Bennet’s time of passing – though I fervently desire that he lives for many more years to come. I’m sure he will do. It was my foolish, foolish pride that blinded me from seeing how wonderful you are, dearest Mary. I know that I would come to love you, in time. Do you think you could come to love me? I feel that you would be a dutiful wife, and we would be happy together. I know for a fact that Lady Catherine De Bourgh will soundly approve of you.”

Mary took some time to absorb what Mr Collins had said and mull over her reply. She would not refuse him. It would be very unwise. She held a high regard for him, and could easily envisage spending the rest of her life with him, and any children that might come along. Pushing her own feelings aside, the sensible part of her knew it would be beneficial to her family if they were to marry. “Mr Collins...I believe most sincerely that I would be capable of loving you. I already have a fondness for you. And you are a man of faith, which I respect. As you know, I delight in reading, and religious texts form a great part of the books I desire to read. When I first met you, and you read to the family from the book of Fordyce’s Sermons it was truly captivating. I wish I could have heard you preach for longer. I could have listened to you for hours on end. Furthermore, I am glad that you would think of choosing me.” Mary paused, seeming pensive. “I must admit that I would have preferred that I was your first choice, but I cannot blame you for wanting Elizabeth to be your wife. After all, she is so beautiful and strong, and has a definite charm. It is no wonder you would prefer her above others. I am plain, and that is the truth I have to face. Still, I have a solemn nature and I cannot change that. So, I embrace it as much as I can. You are very different to me. You can be serious, but you are able to smile easily, and show a thorough enjoyment of life...And I do think that
sharing my life with you will perhaps bring out a lighter side to me. I loathe dancing, since I think it a frivolous pursuit but I would dance with you regardless, and I would like that very much. There are a number of things I would like to do with you. We could go for walks. You could practice giving your sermons to me. And I would say more, but I think I have talked enough for now.”

“Cousin Mary, you are far too modest. I see beauty in you. Not like your sisters, who have a more classic beauty, but nonetheless you have a refined look. You are delicate, and remind me of a porcelain doll with your fair complexion, and your fine dark hair. Oh, and your eyes, there is such a warmth and intelligence there. I shall write you a poem extolling your virtues, dearest Mary. I could say much more about how wonderful you are, but I shan’t do that. I am impatient; I can bear the suspense no longer. Will you do me the great honour of becoming Mrs Collins? Will you marry me, cousin Mary?”

Mary nodded, ever so slightly. She did not have to think about her reply, she simply told him exactly what she was thinking. “I am pleased to accept your proposal, Mr Collins. And I thank you for this day, which I shall remember as one of the happiest days in my life.”

Mr Collins brought one of Mary’s hands up to his lips and pressed a soft kiss onto the back of Mary’s hand, causing her to flush pink for the second time that day. “I am overjoyed at the thought of becoming your husband, dearest Mary. We must make haste and talk to your parents. And I must send a message to Lady Catherine De Bourgh, I am sure she will be pleased with me. She did so wish for me to be happily settled in Hunsford with a wife by my side.”

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Mr Bennet was perplexed when he heard the news. He was sitting in his study, alone with Mary who had requested a private audience with him. He had known it had to be something quite serious Mary would want to discuss with him, but he had been surprised to find out what it was. “Mary, will you not rethink this decision? I must tell you quite frankly that I believe Mr Collins is an insipid fool. This may seem harsh, but it is true.”

Mary’s reply was swift. “I know that he is not sensible in many aspects, but that does not worry me. Also, I think the rejection he received from Elizabeth served to make him more thoughtful. He did flatter me with empty words, but he also spoke to me with honesty. And he will be good to me, Papa. Also, I have a fondness for him. I think we will get on very well. I can be happy with him. And there is a likelihood that this will be my only chance to marry. I do not attract suitors like my sisters would be able to. You know this to be true...”

Mr Bennet smiled warmly at his daughter. “What I do know for certain is that you are beautiful, Mary. All my daughters are. And although I do not often say it, you know I love you and your sisters very much. Your mother also, even though dealing with her nerves will probably send me to the grave earlier than expected.”

“Oh, Papa...Don’t say things like that. You will live a long and healthy life. You must, for Mama’s sake and ours,” Mary rose from her seat and crossed the room to where Mr Bennet sat at his desk. ”If you won’t give Mr Collins your blessing, then I will not marry him,” Mary felt a sense of sadness from the mere thought of not being able to marry Mr Collins, but it was important to her that her father approved of the match.

Mr Bennet remained silent for some time. He observed Mary, who was avidly waiting for his
answer. For reasons he did not comprehend, his daughter had a liking for Mr Collins. That did not settle well with him at all, but as most fathers do, he wanted his children to be happy. Mr Collins was a respectable gentleman, after a fashion and despite his foolish nature. Even though Mr Bennet could not bear the man’s company for extended periods of time, he consoled himself with the thought that Mr Collins would primarily be at Hunsford, which was a good distance away. And as Mr Collin’s wife, Mary could likely ensure that her sisters and mother were comfortable and could remain at Longbourne even after Mr Bennet passed on. That would be a great comfort to him, and go a long way towards his tolerance for Mr Collins. “My child, if you truly wish to be married to such a man, I will not stand in your way. I will give my consent. Please understand that if you change your mind at any time, even during the wedding ceremony itself, do not be afraid to say so. I will support you if you decide you do not wish to go through with the marriage.”

“Oh, Papa...” Mary embraced her father affectionately. “This is wonderful. I shall call Mr Collins to come, and then I shall tell Mama the news. I am sure she will be thrilled. It may well be that she already knows...”

Mr Bennet sighed. “Wait a while before you send him in, Mary. Grant me that time to prepare myself for what is sure to be a lengthy, tedious speech from my future son-in-law.”

Meanwhile, Mr Collins was in the drawing room, wherein also Mrs Bennet and her two eldest daughters currently resided. Jane was regarding Mr Collins with an air of quiet curiosity, and a polite smile on her face. Elizabeth was rigid in her seat, sitting silently and with no trace of a smile on her face. “What a joyous day this has become!” Mrs Bennet practically beamed at Mr Collins. “I am so glad you came back to Longbourne...”

“Ah, madam. I feel sorrow that we parted ways so abruptly. I’m afraid I was rather impolite, and I am so ashamed of my behaviour towards you, madam. You welcomed me into your home with a warm hospitality, and I was grateful for that. It was merely the incident that occurred with cousin Elizabeth that led me wrongly into a fit of bad humour. My departure from this dwelling was swift, and I should not have behaved in such a manner. Yet, I did need the time away from here, so I could reflect on my actions. Your kind message encouraging me to return to Longbourne was much appreciated, madam.”

“Why have you come back?” Elizabeth asked, her tone frosty, ignoring her mother’s look of reproach. “Surely not just to pay us a visit. I thought you intended to leave. I had not expected we would see you again,” And to Elizabeth, that would be most agreeable.

“I would like for us to be friends, cousin Elizabeth. You see, your dear sister Mary and I are to be wed.”

Mrs Bennet gasped in shock. “My...How sudden this all seems. I did happen to notice you and Mary taking the air but I thought nothing of it. Oh, I am so very pleased.”

Elizabeth shook her head slightly. “Mama, you do not fool me. I do not doubt for a second that it was you who persuaded Mr Collins to set his affection on Mary.”

“I did nothing of the sort!” Mrs Bennet exclaimed, although she seemed somewhat uneasy with Elizabeth’s hard stare set upon her.

Mr Collins opened his mouth to deny what Elizabeth had said, but then thought better of it. Mrs Bennet had mentioned Mary in the message she had sent. Only briefly, but still it would be a lie if he denied Mrs Bennet had not played a part in sensing that Mary would be a good match for him.
Jane spoke up then. “Lizzie, please. Let us reserve our judgement until we can speak to Mary ourselves.”

“Yes, perhaps you’re right Jane. I just hope Mary will not suffer because of Mama and her meddling ways...”

“I am hurt that you would say such a thing,” Mrs Bennet started to sob, although her eyes were still dry. “Oh, how cruel you can be to your mother. My poor nerves can’t take this. I would call Mr Bennet, but he would be most disagreeable and take your side, Lizzie...”

Jane strove to placate her mother with soothing words of comfort but it was in vain. Mrs Bennet only sobbed harder, and brought out a handkerchief to wipe away her non-existent tears.

At this point Mr Collins hastily excused himself from the drawing room. He saw Mary coming towards him and hurried towards her.

She was concerned by the state of him. “Mr Collins, whatever is the matter? You look quite startled...”

“Nothing, my dearest. Your mother and sister are having a small disagreement, and I felt it would be better if I did not get myself involved.”

“Ah, I see. Do not worry; I am sure it is nothing too serious. My father wishes to see you now,” That was not quite what Mr Bennet had said, but Mary chose to word it in a nicer way.

Mr Collins squared his shoulders in a most determined fashion, although his eyes betrayed that he was somewhat nervous. “I shall go to him directly.”

“And I had better go and see what is happening in the drawing room,” Mary briefly rested a hand on Mr Collin’s shoulder as they passed each other. “Everything will be fine. Papa will not oppose our match, I am sure of it.”

Mr Collins caught hold of her hand for a few moments, and dropped a light kiss on her cheek before continuing on his way. Mary watched him go, a smile forming on her face. She was not used to smiling so much, but she had never found many reasons to smile before. As she was about to enter the drawing room, she heard the sound of footfalls behind her. Turning, she saw Kitty and Lydia coming towards her. They were giggling about something, which would likely be idle gossip. Mary laughed, and her younger sisters stared at her in confusion. Mary was not the sort of person who found amusement easily. She was not one to partake in gossip and held a mild disapproval for gossip in general. Yet strangely it did amuse her that for once she would be a source of gossip with Kitty and Lydia. “Sisters, come. I have some news to share with you...”

All her fear of becoming an old spinster was no more. Soon she would no longer be Mary Bennet, she would be Mary Collins. The thought made a jolt of happiness run through her. She had woken up expecting the day to be an ordinary one. She had never thought that this would be the day that would change the path of her life forever.

Thanks for reading and if you have any thoughts about the story please share them with me :)

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