

Catherine and the Colonel

Joseph P. Garland

On the rainy afternoon when they were returning from the solicitor's office in a carriage, Anne smiled at Kitty.

"And what, my dear Catherine, do you think of our Colonel Fitzwilliam?" she asked.

"He is surely not a handsome man and I think he loved his wife quite well and would have loved their child even more."

"Aye. A love like that will not soon be forgotten or gotten over. I do not know if a man can ever recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman, though I never met his wife. My knowledge comes only from the Colonel himself, who spoke of her virtues when I saw him while she was still alive and especially when the child was expected."

"I'm sure you will learn love yourself."

"But what of *him*? The Colonel?" Anne asked.

"I think he is very fond of you. I think he enjoys being with you quite much, now that he needn't worry that people will think him an adventurer after your money."

"Adventurer?" Anne laughed. "I've never known anyone less a corsair than him. Do not prove yourself such a fool, Catherine. This cousin is no more suited for me than the other was."

"Mr. Darcy?"

"The very one," Anne replied with a smile. "You know what I mean and stop avoiding it. Do you love Colonel Fitzwilliam?"

"Love'? Me? Now who is the fool?"

Anne would not respond, and Kitty could not abide the silence.

"He is civil enough, I suppose. With his small fortune."

"Do you need anything more than a 'small fortune'?"

Kitty laughed. "I am not my sister Lydia. Though she may have to survive on something less than a fortune of any size."

"She has her brothers-in-law."

"Who are not quite what they were in the way of money. And, of course, there's Mr. Collins swooping in when my father dies." It was the type of thing she would never dare say in the presence of

her mother or her younger sister but neither was with them and her favourite woman was.

"You have again, my dear Catherine, avoided my direct question. Do you or could you love the Colonel."

"You quite astonish me," Kitty said truthfully. The thought had never occurred to her before. But its appearance had a profound effect on her. Her countenance changed markedly.

"Do you think it is something I *should* consider?"

"I think it something you *must* consider. I believe he is in danger of becoming very much in love with you."

This was absurd to Kitty. She'd not had a hint of any such nonsense.

She said, to correct the illusions Anne obviously had, "Do you not see how he hovers around *you*? How often he comes to visit me but mostly sits with *you*? Talks with *you*?" This was ignored, and Anne fought to keep her expression blank with a hint of disapproval.

"Do not forget, Catherine, that he is a soldier, trained to use a bit of stealth to achieve his objective."

"Oh, you are just too absurd."

In this new silence, Kitty was without the words to fill it. Could she love Richard Fitzwilliam? Another soldier like Wickham, that dangerous obsession she'd had as a girl.

Alas, they were soon back at Russell Square and Taylor had the carriage door open, holding an umbrella that gave both women cover as they hurried up the steps to the foyer and no more was *said* about the widower.