Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme

by hl (hele)

Summary

Charles Bingley missing moment angst, in less than a thousand words. Based on the ballad Scarborough Fair. First feeble attempt at character analysis in fiction form.

Notes

With apologies to everyone for writing a quasi-songfic, and to T. S. Eliot, who must be spinning on his grave. I don't think he would be overly concerned for me borrowing a line, but I trust he would be horrified by the quality of the surrounding writing.

Many many thanks to Steph who betaed this for me really quickly and encouraged me to post it. Any lameness in this story comes exclusively from me.

Charles reached the stable in long listless strides. He sighed, restless, climbed on top of his horse and urged it forward. Soon the afternoon raced at his sides.

He was alone, for perhaps the first time in many days. He did not want company, and he surprised himself with this quiet admission. Not because he was admitting the fact--he was not one to deceive himself--but because he felt it.

I am not one to deceive myself, he thought, and had to bite back a humourless laugh; he had done so not very long ago. He had thought he knew her mind: he who now did not even want to know her name.
How many more shared looks would he have to endure between his sisters? How many questions that hung in the air unasked? Their eyes said 'Oh, sister, is he thinking of her again?' And every time without fail he wanted to defy them and shout 'Yes, I am! I could never forget her!'

But then again, he never shouted.

Regret clouded his mind almost constantly, and he dreamt of going back to her, but he could never pass the insurmountable barrier that was the knowledge that she did not want him. Sometimes he thought it did not matter, but he was not one to deceive himself, and he knew that it mattered more than anything.

He tightened his hold on the worn leather, and his steed slowed to a trot. He forced them loose again.

Days which had once flew past in her presence now crawled, as if mocking the conflict between his heart and mind. He thought it was ridiculous, this relativity of time.

He remembered Darcy's assurance and logical advice, and though he trusted his friend's judgement more than his own, he could not imagine how he could possibly forget her. He knew Darcy would find his present weakness ridiculous and could not but agree with him. He found himself ridiculous as well.

He remembered their discussion. He dissected it every now and then, hoping to find answers where there were only questions. Darcy had been so, so sure, that he could not help doubting of his own conclusions. All his observations were dismissed as much sentimental rambling; which they were, of course. That did not had to mean they were false, but there was no convincing Darcy of that, and in the end, he did trust Darcy more than he trusted himself. The downside of not taking himself seriously was that no one else did.

If he was sincere with himself, and he thought he often was, he knew that he would not forget her, simply because he did not want to. Because hope was the last thing to let go, and to him, she was hope itself.

Sometimes he was almost tolerably well. He made the effort to smile and be agreeable and compliment the hostess in his usual jovial manner. He smiled and went shooting with fathers and brothers, and smiled and asked young fashionable women to dance. He made the effort to do all those things that had not required of him any effort to do before.

All to stop the probing looks.

It worked, they were appeased until their smug gazes made resentment well up on his chest, and the least he could do was to scowl at them. They were alarmed then. He had never before felt anything with such strength. He had not thought that feelings like these existed.

The sun hung low on the sky, barely warm.

He was fine, until a flash of colour seen in the corner of his eye reminded him of one of her dresses and the way it clung to her, or a soft spoken word of her gentleness, or a pair of eyes in another's face, none ever quite matching his memory of her but causing him to become undone all the same.

Or until some girl offered to sing for the company an old country song, and his sisters pushed him to offer to turn the pages. Their eyes seemed to ask, almost begging, 'Is she not accomplished? Is she not beautiful?' For him, no one could compare. Jane did not sing. He sweet voice had only spoken of commonalities with him, but he had imagined it saying so much more. He choked on the answers to questions that were never asked and he stood at the girl's side like the dutiful gentleman he was, and
smiled.

And it worked until the verses reached through his very core, his mind suddenly stripped, and thoughts that should have been kept private were bared to lamplight. He had thought them ridiculous, those verses, at first. An endless succession of impossible tasks. The words' meaning had once eluded him.

Now he knew that the man in the song was not asking for a treadles shirt, or a patch of earth between the sand and the sea--he was asking to be given her heart. That was the truly preposterous task the singer dared not name.

Now he knew that he would ask of Jane everything if he could.

The words chased him. Alone through half deserted streets, he urged the horse forward, faster, as if he could drag his soul towards forgetfulness, and a future without her.

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