Five Women Fitzwilliam Darcy Never Married

by Elizabeth (anghraine)
Chapter 1

Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing!

-- Emma, Ch 10

Mr Woodhouse has never been a robust man, but after Emma’s seventeenth birthday, he falls into a rapid decline. She consults with Mr Knightley and Mr Perry, and within a few weeks, father and daughter - and paid companion - are settled in Bath.

Emma does not quite approve of Bath society. She receives none of the deference owed to Miss Woodhouse of Hartfield, and there is certainly nothing elegant about the crowds jostling her in the Pump Room.

She far prefers to walk outside with Miss Taylor, whenever they both can be spared.

“One man almost knocked me to the ground,” she protests, “and then gave me the most impertinent look! He did apologise, but only after another lady - who I have never before seen in my life - told him my name and fortune. It took me fifteen minutes to get rid of him.”

Miss Taylor murmurs something indistinct and soothing.

“No, then a Lord Clare asked to be introduced to me! An Ir -”

“- Irish viscount,” a crisp male voice is saying, as Emma’s quick, indignant stride propels her around the corner, “just good enough to be quality at Lyme - oomph!”

The voice belongs to a tall, handsome man, very young and very startled. “I beg your pardon, madam,” he says, instantly earning his way into her good graces.

“Oh, it is quite my own fault,” Emma replies frankly. “Most things are - but I thank you nevertheless.”

Everybody laughs, and the young man’s companion, who she vaguely remembers meeting a few days earlier, introduces him as Mr Darcy of Pemberley.

Emma curtsies, Mr Darcy bows, and within short order they find that he is her fourth cousin once removed, and heir to her great-great-grandfather’s family.

Mr Tilney looks on with an air of distinct satisfaction.

Five meetings and one dance later - just one, because Mr Darcy is the only man in the world who hates dancing more than Mr Knightley - they discover that their opinions coincide on every conceivable subject. He is solemn where she is lively, and satirical where she is earnest, but none of this matters - theirs remains a tie of affinity, an instinctive accord that permeates their every conversation.

They cannot speak their minds quickly enough. The words tumble incomprehensibly together as they grasp each other’s thoughts in dangling half-finished sentences. It is not a matter of understanding; sometimes Emma doesn’t understand him at all. But she knows him, simply by knowing herself.
[Mary] was long in finding among the dashing representatives, or idle heir-appar ents, who were at the command of her beauty, and her twenty thousand pounds, any one who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, whose character and manners could authorise a hope of the domestic happiness she had there learned to estimate, or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head.

-- Mansfield Park, Ch 48

It is not, Mary thinks, in her nature to love as other women do. Only Henry is beloved - Henry, brother and confidant and dearest friend.

She does not wish to fall in love. Someday, she will trade her name and fortune for a fine marriage, jewels and carriages and the utter subjection Mrs Crawford lived under, but for now, she is young, and beautiful, and she means to sell herself high.

Then she meets handsome Edmund Bertram, tall and golden-haired and nothing like what she has planned for herself. He is solemn, earnest, even severe over insignificant matters of decorum, of form. She does not know why she loves him and can scarcely believe that she means to accept him, to accept the stagnant provincial seclusion that comes with him.

Then his fool of a sister runs off with Henry and - and they could salvage it, they could, if he would only understand. Instead he looks at her with startled, pained eyes, as if she had hurt him, but at the same time as if he had never seen her before, and turns away.

The first year is the worst. Mary is at her most charming, laughing and dancing and breaking hearts with a vengeance. She knows that it is all Edmund's fault, and Fanny's, and even on particularly difficult days, Mr Rushworth's.

It is her sometime friend Flora who overhears the gossip, overhears Mary spoken of as a very proper niece to Admiral Crawford. She does not need to hear it - she can imagine it all, the smug nods, the shrill voices pregnant with suggestion - but Flora's half-unconscious gift for mimicry means that she does.

Mary spends several months ingratiating herself with the most respectable, prudish set she can find, and the talk soon slips away. But she cannot forget.

Henry's similarities to their uncle, small and insignificant though they are, have occasionally caused her a flutter of concern. She could not bear it, she tells him once, if he should become like him.

In a flash, she realises that Henry, impulsive rather than calculating, exuberant in selfishness and generosity, was never in any danger. She, who has taken such pleasure in feeling injured, she is hard, careless and ambitious - a proper niece to the Admiral, indeed.

For the first time in two years, she deliberately thinks of Mansfield Park, of everything that happened there, of Edmund and Fanny and even that fool Rushworth.

She looks at Henry and thinks, It was our fault.

The entire world seems to tilt on its axis, and she is only too glad to leave behind introspection for
Lady Leigh's masquerade, and to hide herself behind a mask.

That night, she meets a stranger - a golden-haired young man with elegant hands and a clear tenor voice. His manners, though well-bred, are formal and unconciliating; he talks no nonsense, pays no compliments, and though indifference is fashionable right now, he takes it to such lengths that she knows fashion has nothing to do with it.

He is taller than Edmund, his hair brighter and less tidy, but the resemblance is unmistakable. So when he coldly asks her to dance, she accepts.

"I am terribly sorry to disappoint," she says, her voice full of laughter. "There, now you may despise me if you dare."

He catches his breath audibly, but only replies, "Is that so?"

They dance, and she carries on light, clever conversation, but for quite the first time since the age of fourteen, makes no attempt to flirt or bewitch. He responds when civility demands it, his tone so solemn and tranquil - so like Edmund - that the flashes of dry wit always startle her into a laugh.

At the end of the ball, after everyone has removed their masks, they happen across one another again. It is strangely disconcerting to look at his face, the smooth, well-modelled features almost exactly as she had imagined.

They exchange a few civil words and part, Mary blushing and he avoiding her eyes. It takes her several moments to realise that the drums thundering in her ears are not drums at all.

Later that night, Henry says, "I hope you are not seriously thinking of Darcy."

"Darcy?" she repeats blankly.

"That young giant you amused yourself with this evening - Mr Darcy of Pemberley. He is the worst kind of prig, Mary, not at all your sort."

"He sounds very much like my sort," says Mary, with an arch smile that falters after a moment. "Henry? Am I very like my uncle?"

He stares. "You? - like the Admiral? What nonsense!"

Somehow, Mary is not comforted.

An appropriate amount of time later . . .

She can feel his high, sharp cheekbones beneath her fingers, tendrils of hair catching in her hands, his gripping her shoulders. There is nothing shy or gentle about this, their first kiss.

When she steps away, Darcy says in his most stiffly formal tone, "I presume, Miss Crawford, that your gesture signifies an acceptance of my hand?"

Her laughter, not quite so brittle and unrestrained as Fanny Bertram would remember it, rings out. It seems that love is in her nature, after all, but sentimentality still is not, and this she loves too, the strain of cool insouciance fully equal to her own.

His eyes are shining, and crinkled at the corners; his lips are already twitching into a dry smile. Compared to Edmund - and she always compares him to Edmund - he is vivacity itself.

Henry gives his consent easily enough, but still watches them in bewilderment, questioning Mary
at every opportunity.

Some believe that husband and wife must be everything to each other, the conjugal tie subordinating all others; Mary knows better. She and Henry are, and have always been, and will always be one another's most intimate friends; and so it is Henry to whom she pours out her heart.

"I am not the spoilt, flighty creature of three years and a half ago," she says. "This is a second chance for me, do you not see it? A chance to do it right, to be happy without sacrificing what I am. I shan't throw it away, this time."

Within two days from meeting shy, sweet-mannered Georgiana Darcy, he understands.

In due time - about three weeks after their engagement - she tells Darcy enough to make him understand.

"I am not Edmund Bertram," he tells her.

"No, indeed." He may be everything that Edmund was - but he is also everything he was not. She does not even hesitate. "Who was she?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I know, of course, that I am perfectly delightful in every way, but even my charms are not sufficient to so quickly and easily gain the notice of a man such as you. When we first met, at Lady Leigh's masquerade, you could scarcely bear to look at me. You saw somebody else that night, as much as I did."

It is almost a full minute before Darcy, gazing dispassionately at Mrs Grant's prize rosemary, breaks the silence.

"Her name was Elizabeth," says he, "and I loved her."

Mary smiles into his eyes, then reaches up to touch his cheek.

"I understand," she says.

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