An Unexpected Visitor

by Minuialeth75

Summary

Mr Darcy's troubled thoughts as Elizabeth Bennet comes to visit her sister Jane at Netherfield. Pride & Prejudice 2005 movie verse.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

"When was Bingley going to make an appearance for breakfast?" Darcy wondered.

Caroline deemed it necessary to comment to him on almost every sentence of the letter she had received on the morn. It made it very difficult to focus on the reading of his newspaper, but telling Caroline she disturbed his concentration would be most uncivil.

If Bingley had deigned gracing them with his presence, he knew his friend would have been amiable enough to listen to his sister's thoughts and even to expand on them. But as it was, his good friend was probably more interested in checking on the health of their pretty guest upstairs. Though he wished his attendance, he did not blame Bingley for finding Miss Bennet's company more agreeable than that of a bored friend and a too-voluble sister.

Hmmm…A Mr Harper had taken his life after losing all his money and property at gambling. He left a widow and a child. What a foolish death. What a senseless way of leading a life. An existence spent in vice, an escape from the consequences of it, leaving a woman and an innocent child dealing with debtors and a terrible financial situation.

"Lady Bathurst is redecorating her ballroom in the French style. A little unpatriotic, don't you think?"
The sharp contrast between the article he had just read and the frivolity of Caroline's comment pushed an answer near his lips that would have sounded very much like "Why should I care? It is a ballroom and, as you know, I will do everything possible to not set foot in it."

But of course, he chose silence and resumed his reading, searching for a more cheerful article. It was a tedious task if one wanted to avoid emphatic descriptions of latest balls and debutantes' gowns.

So absorbed he was in his search that Darcy did not really pay attention to the entrance of the butler. It seemed they had a visitor since the man was announcing a Miss Elizabeth… Bennet? The memory of the pretty young woman came to the forefront of his mind, sending thoughts of reading into complete oblivion. Why was she here?

Upon her entrance, he avidly took in her windswept, untied hair and her rosy cheeks – both eclipsed by her fine, bright eyes. In his fascination, he did not hear Caroline's soft gasp of shock, nor see her disgusted expression. Yet something soon nagged at the back of his mind. He realised with horror that his surprise had made him lose all sense of propriety and that he was still seated. He abruptly stood on legs that seemed made of lead, inwardly cringing at the great deal of noise he thus made. "What an oaf!" he thought as he bowed.

"Good Lord, Miss Elizabeth, did you walk here?"

Darcy wondered why there was reprobation in Caroline's voice. But Miss Elizabeth did not seem to notice since she replied with a smile:

"I did."

He did not remember exactly where the Bennet family resided but she must have walked quite a distance at any rate, since Netherfield was isolated from any nearby property. Obviously she did enjoy walking. Darcy would have liked to make a comment on this particular fact but to his chagrin, he found himself unable to utter a single word, not even a "Good morning". Was he tongue-tied because of her presence? If so, why did she have the power of rendering him speechless? What did make her so different from the other women he had met?

And why was Caroline keeping silent, burdening him with the task of making small conversation?

"I'm so sorry. How is my sister?"

So she was here to see her sister. He heard himself reply, "She's upstairs" as if it was someone else who had spoken. Of all the answers he could have given to the question, it was certainly one of the most uncivil. Why not, "She still feels poorly" instead? It was as if some part of him had secretly desired to see her leave the room as soon as possible. She made him ill at ease and he could not fathom why.

"Thank you", she replied in her musical voice. Was it his imagination or did she sound embarrassed?
The pink on her cheeks had not abated and made her look lively and healthy. Barely tolerable indeed. He could not help but think her graceful when she curtsied, and he felt a pang of regret as he realised that the path of her feet was leading her out of the room. His eyes stayed trained on her as if they had acquired a mind of their own.

"Not handsome enough to tempt me." How he regretted those words! He had known them a lie even as he had uttered them. Had he tried to lie only to Charles that night? Or also to himself? Had he endeavoured to pretend that he could not find her remotely attractive since her social rank was obviously so below his own? To know for certain that she had heard his disparaging comment made him want to cringe in shame. He still remembered the shock he had felt when he realised that she had somehow overheard him. He had to admit to himself that he had briefly admired her when she threw his careless words back in his face. She had treated him as if they were of equal social standing. He knew other women would have kept silent to stay in his good graces. Could he find a way to make amends for his insulting remark... Or at least to know her better? But was it sensible given her family? Bingley did not seem to mind them but he was not Bingley.

"My goodness, did you see her hem? Six inches deep in mud. She looked positively…"

Charming. What made Miss Elizabeth Bennet so special?

End Notes

I don't own Jane Austen's beloved characters (in the book or in the 2005 movie). This story was patiently betaed by Plange at the Longbourn Loungers.

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