Hearing Light

by tree

Summary

The oft-told story of Elizabeth and Darcy’s first kiss, told again.

Notes

Many, many thanks to catie56, without whose enthusiasm this would never have been finished.

See the end of the work for more notes

Suppose

you hear the light when it comes, and suppose
you are dressed in yellow

Jen Denrow

Days of rain and high winds followed Elizabeth Bennet's engagement to Mr Darcy. The close confines of family and neighbourhood soon began to grate and stifle her as they never had before. She was wild to be outdoors; to have some peace; to be alone with her betrothed for more than a handful of minutes at a time. And though he bore it well for her sake, she knew Mr Darcy felt it even more keenly.

So it was that the first morning showing a little sunlight through the clouds found the pair taking a
turn in Longbourn's park, in all its soggy splendor.

Carrying a basket and scissors, Elizabeth led Darcy to a slight rise where a small lake of yellow chrysanthemums sat waving in the brisk wind, their heads nodding rich and buttery against dark green leaves. She set down her basket and went to work, snipping a long stem here and a shorter one there, and gathering the cut flowers to herself.

“Fitzwilliam,” she began after a time, glancing up at his face and back down just as swiftly. “Do you—that is, have you—“ she cleared her throat and felt her cheeks burn.

“Is something troubling you?” Darcy asked.

“A little,” she admitted.

He moved closer and took the scissors from her with one hand and captured her fingers in his own. “I hope you know that it is my wish for us to be frank with one another, even if the disclosures may at times be unpleasant.”

His handsome face was so very grave, she thought, and yet she wondered, not for the first time, how she had missed for so long the kindness of his eyes. “I do know. And it is my wish as well. It is only that I don’t know how to begin.”

Taking a deep breath, he seemed to steel himself. “Is it—are you uncertain of your choice, Elizabeth?”

For a moment she met his gaze blankly, with a slight frown. “My choice?” she echoed. Then understanding entered with the force of a blow. “Oh!” she cried and dropped her flowers to place her other hand on his sleeve. “It is nothing like—no!”

His resolute expression softened with relief, and he reached for her empty hand, only to look with some incomprehension at the scissors still in his grasp. Elizabeth gave a little laugh and took them from him to place in the basket. The fallen flowers she likewise bent to collect.

“I believe, however, that I am offended you think so little of the constancy of my affections,” she said. “How ever did you come to that conclusion?”

Darcy’s gaze shifted to a point in the distance. “You have seemed distracted these last two or three days. Several times I felt that there was something about which you wished to speak to me but that you could not bring yourself to do so. I thought perhaps,” he continued in a softer voice, “that you had reconsidered.”

“How thoughtless I’ve been. Forgive me.”

“There is nothing to forgive,” he said with some surprise.

“For causing you distress, there is.” Elizabeth looked down at the cheerful heads of the chrysanthemums. “I did not think and I ought to have done. Yet you know me so well, I thought you must know this too.”

When she met Darcy’s eyes again, his expression was faintly quizzical. “What is it I ought to have known?”

She touched his jaw, lightly. “I love you, Fitzwilliam.”

His face first paled and then flushed, the colour high across his cheekbones like a burn. He grasped her hand where it lingered on his cheek and pressed it, closing his eyes. For a moment
they simply stood so. Then Darcy opened his eyes. “I have no happiness without you. Every day I know it more.” He pressed a tender kiss to her fingers and let their hands fall between them, still entwined. “I did not think it possible to feel more happiness than I did on the day you accepted me. And yet with each new day, I find it is so.”

His look was so intense, so intimate, that Elizabeth felt herself blush, felt her breathing quicken. “Yes,” she said, “for me as well.”

Without thinking, she began to step closer to him, drawn by the warmth of his eyes and the pressure of his hand, but to her mortification, tripped over the basket of flowers. Laughing, she allowed Darcy to steady her, and then bent to rescue the blooms a second time. Straightening, she brushed at her skirts. “I think I have had my fill of flowers for the day.”

They walked farther from the house, and after some little time, Elizabeth forced herself to speak. “I am being very foolish, I suppose. My own awkwardness has prevented me from talking with you.”

“And will you not tell me now?”

“It is only that... Some nights ago, Jane and I were talking as we prepared for bed. It’s something we have done since we were children. One of us will visit the other of an evening and we keep each other company.”

Darcy nodded in encouragement. Elizabeth licked the corner of her mouth nervously and felt something dash through her as his eyes followed the motion. “On this night, in particular,” she continued, slowly, “Jane was speaking of Charles, that is, Mr Bingley, and of the expression of their—um—affection.” She coughed a little. “Physically. And I—well, I—” she fumbled for the words.

“You wonder why I have not kissed you.”

“Yes,” she blurted inelegantly, relieved to have the mortifying question out at last.

“I see,” he said.

Her small face was flushed from the wind and, looking down at her, Darcy was astonished anew that she seemed to grow lovelier and more charming with each passing day. “Make no mistake, Elizabeth, I want very much to kiss you. But I do not wish to do so where anyone might see or when we must steal our moments.”

She lowered her eyes to where his hand covered hers on his arm. “Of course,” she said, softly. “I told you I was being foolish.”

“Not foolish,” he said. Stopping, he turned to her and urged her chin up with his finger. “If not for the necessity of being in company so much, we could have spoken sooner, or...” With her dark eyes regarding him steadily, he found himself unable to recall what he had been about to say. “You are so lovely.”

She smiled and looked down, then raised her eyes again with a bright, clear look. “I hardly know what to say when you look at me that way.”

His forehead furrowed slightly with unease. “Does it disturb you?”

“No,” she said quickly, then, “Yes,” with a laugh. “It is disturbing, but in a very pleasant way. I once thought you looked at me only to find fault.”
Remembering the sharp bewilderment of his earliest fascination with her, Darcy shook his head. “Perhaps I might have, at the very beginning, but it was soon after that I began to look at you only for the pleasure of looking.”

She blushed and bit her lip, but held his gaze. Desire was a sweet, churning ache within him. “Elizabeth—” he began, and felt the first splash of rain.

They both looked up as a gentle but steady shower broke from the clouds. Elizabeth determined swiftly that though the main door of the house was closer, the stillroom would likely be unoccupied. She pulled at Darcy’s hand and dashed toward the door of the stillroom, laughing when they all but tumbled through together.

Inside, the air smelled faintly of the summer lavender left out to dry. Darcy removed his coat, placing it over a chair, while Elizabeth shook out her skirts and struggled with the damp buttons of her spencer.

“May I be of assistance?” Darcy asked, as he came to stand in front of her.

All at once she was aware of the room’s emptiness and its silence save for the patter of rain on the eaves and their breathing. They were entirely alone. She nodded, and watched in fascination as his long, elegant hands reached out to unhook the stubborn fastenings. Drops of water clung to his dark hair and glittered in the dim light. His bent head was so close she could see the fine, pale skin under his jaw, behind his ear.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“Elizabeth,” he said, in such a voice, his face so very close. She held her breath.

His hands were still at the buttons of her spencer, holding lightly to the placket, as one long finger began tracing gently along the delicate bone at her collar. Warmth spread everywhere from that single touch, as though he had opened a vein of sunlight under her skin. Darcy moved, bent closer yet, and the breath she’d been holding shuddered out.

Their lips met in a soft, dry brush like a whisper, like the movement of his single finger at her collar. Elizabeth could smell his soap and something more. The very intimacy of that, even more than their kiss, made her shiver.

“Fitzwilliam,” she said, and he looked at her with a new intensity, the blue of his eyes very dark. She could only return his look, dazzled and tumbled about with feeling, until she rose up to press her mouth to his in return.

This time his lips were slightly parted when they met hers. Elizabeth mimicked the motion of his mouth, the delicious pull and slide of it, until she was tingling all over, her heart racing. Behind her eyelids, the room spun and spun. She gripped his arms to steady herself as his hands moved slowly, surely, to mould her waist. When his tongue sleeked across her bottom lip, she gasped into his mouth.

Darcy pulled away, eyes concerned. "Are you—" his voice was so low she hardly recognised it. Taking his face between her hands, she drew him to her again, whispering, “No, don’t stop.”

Their mouths met less gently now, more confidently, entirely open. Elizabeth licked at his lip and was rewarded with a sound she had never heard from anyone. Something inside her echoed it, and she heard her own wordless voice answer him, and then they were pressed together and his tongue was touching hers and she had never, never imagined anything like this. She was breathless, trembling, burning. His hands moved up to cup her head, her cheek, and she was
astonished at the warmth and breadth of those hands – how much of her they encompassed.

Darcy’s mouth moved across her face, pressing kisses to her jaw, in front of her ear. There was a high-pitched song in her head, the soft hum of pollen-drunk bees. She opened her eyes to find the room had filled with clear, lemony sunlight, even as the rain spilled through it. “The light,” Elizabeth said. “Can you hear it?” Then she laughed at her own fancy and turned her face to kiss his palm.

There was such openness in her, Darcy thought with a kind of wonder; it was not naïveté, but something more generous, more joyful. And it—she—had captured him utterly. Undone, he pressed his brow to hers, one hand still cradling the warm weight of her head. This close he could see the ring of bronze around her iris, almost yellow, like a cat’s. “You have the most beautiful eyes,” he whispered, and watched as they fluttered closed. “They were the first part of you that I loved.”

Elizabeth turned her smiling lips up to kiss him sweetly. “And what was the second?”

In answer, he kissed her again.

End Notes

The genesis of this fic was a sudden, remarkably clear image I had of Elizabeth and Darcy standing together in front of a tall window filled with sunlight. Some weeks later, I stumbled upon those lines from “I have never cared for nice party cakes” by Jen Denrow and wondered how she knew exactly what I was going to write. Then, of course, it all went to hell.

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