A Glance of the Eye

by tree

Summary

Playing dress-up. Takes place in hl's alternate universe Not Every Gentleman, in which Elizabeth Bennet has been raised as Edward Bennet. Edward and Darcy have been living together at Pemberley for about a year when this story takes place. Unfortunately, it's rather necessary to have read NEG or be willing to be spoiled in order to understand this fic. So, go read NEG. This'll wait.

Notes

In alphabetical order, my thanks go to:

anhraine, for lending me Cecily (or at least her name and parts of her wardrobe);
catie56, for being my enthusiastic first reader; and
hl, for letting me play in her awesome universe.

• Inspired by Not Every Gentleman by hl (hele)

One of the most wonderful things in nature is a glance of the eye; it transcends speech; it is the bodily symbol of identity.
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson
Edward examined himself in the glass. The dress had been Georgiana’s idea: a bit of fun on a cold, wet morning. To own the truth, he looked ridiculous. Georgiana was built on a much larger scale than he, to begin; his hair was too short, and his manner too masculine altogether, to appear at all fitting in a gown. And yet, the overall effect was unsettling. He was unable to banish the thought that if he turned just so, from the corner of his eye he could almost see someone he might have known.

"What do you think, then?" asked Georgiana as she came to stand behind him. Her usually pale cheeks were slightly flushed from the work of playing lady's maid, and some of the pins had fallen from her curls. The change in her over the past twelvemonth was quite extraordinary. Edward found that he had come to cherish her as a sister almost as much as he did Jane. More even, in some ways.

"Shall we try your hair?" she continued. "I have some very pretty bandeaux that would be charming if we arrange them together. Or perhaps a turban?" she said, more to herself than him, he thought, as she angled his head this way and that. "No one would even notice your hair then."

"No one is going to notice it now," Edward said dryly. "It's not as if I were going into society this way, my dear."

"Of course not. But aren't you at least a little bit curious to see the entire picture?"

He wanted to say no. For most of his life he could, very easily, have said no. Now, though, since his father's ultimatum, since Darcy, everything was different. Things that had seemed distant or absolute had become malleable, and wonderfully, terrifyingly possible.

"I suppose," he said, drawn again to his reflection. "A little." No one would see, he reasoned with himself. What could be the harm? Finally acknowledging Georgiana's hopeful expression, he laughed and sketched a comic bow. "Do with me what you will, Miss Darcy."

"What an excellent doll you are, Edward!" she cried, and set to work.

After a much shorter space of time than he had expected, Georgiana had dressed his hair in several strips of fabric in pale colours of lavender and yellow. She had brushed the hair from his crown forward, so that dark curls spilled over his forehead from underneath the bandeaux. The entire effect gave the illusion that his hair was much longer than it truly was.

"Where did you learn to arrange hair so artfully, Georgiana?"

"Cecily says that Lady Dunham keeps her hair quite short out of habit, and this is a style she often wears. You really look quite pretty, Edward."

He made a face at her in the mirror. "Just what every gentleman aspires to, I'm sure."

But Georgiana was not attending. "Of course!" she said, with a little clap, "Cecily!" And ran lightly out of the room.

Edward exchanged bewildered glances with his reflection.

Ten minutes passed, and another ten, and Edward had almost made up his mind to undo all of Georgiana's work and hide away in the library for the rest of the morning when she returned. She was panting lightly, as though she'd run all over Pemberley, and she held a pale yellow mass in her arms. Her expression was triumphant. "I knew it! I remembered as soon as I mentioned her that Cecily had left some things here last she stayed with us. She can be very careless, you know.
But I am sure it will all fit you very well, for she is quite your size.”

As she spoke, she tumbled the bundle in her arms onto the chaise and set about extricating individual items. There was even a pair of slippers in the middle of the pile. Edward examined their flimsy construction with suspicion. He should have much preferred a stout pair of boots.

"Now then," said Georgiana, when all was arranged to her satisfaction, "there is a chemise, stays, a petticoat, the gown, slippers, and stockings. What else? Oh, a shawl. You shall have one of mine." She turned to Edward. "What do you think?"

What Edward felt was a knot in his stomach. "An admirable job, my dear."

She made an exasperated sound. "I mean do you like them? I thought the yellow would be most flattering, but if you do not care for it there are others from which to choose."

Choose? He shook his head emphatically. "No, the yellow is lovely. An excellent choice."

Georgiana pinked prettily. "Well then, I shall leave you to undress alone. When you've managed the chemise, I shall come and help you with the stays."

Georgiana closed the door, and Edward merely stood and stared for a moment at the garments before him. There was an unreality to the situation that made him feel outside himself, as though at any moment he would wake up in his own bed to find it was all a dream. Yet something within him was determined to take this singular step and discover what might lay beyond it. He had denied it, run from it, even stood against it; now he wanted to understand it in some small way.

He took a steadying breath and divested himself of Georgiana's comically overlarge gown. Unbinding his breasts was the work of a moment, and then he slipped the chemise over his head. Rationally, Edward had known that donning one article of ladies' attire would not make any material change in him, and yet it was with something like disappointment that he discovered it was only rather like wearing an abbreviated nightgown. He wiggled his toes and laughed quietly at himself.

When Georgiana tapped lightly at the dressing room door, Edward bid her in and then fidgeted while she fitted the stays.

"Are you always this difficult to dress?" she asked with a little huff.

"Forgive me. I'm used to dressing myself."

"Yes, of course. I did not think of that." She stepped back and examined him. "I think Cecily is a little larger in the, um, hmm—" she gestured vaguely at his chest "—but in spite of that it will do admirably."

Edward looked down curiously at the stays. Despite appearing almost like a hunting apparatus, they were in fact quite comfortable, much more so indeed than the wrappings he habitually wore. Perhaps, he thought, it could somehow be contrived to have something made for him to wear at home. It would be especially welcome in the summer.

"Petticoat," Georgiana announced, and Edward moved obediently at her direction. Once she had it fitted to her satisfaction, he took a few experimental steps to test the feel of his new undergarments. They were quite soft and light, and while he felt startlingly bare around the middle it was rather pleasant all in all.

He looked up to find Georgiana's mirthful gaze upon him. "And what amuses you so, dear sister?"
"Oh, Edward, to see you striding about! Young ladies do not walk so."

"Indeed they do not. Well, then, I shall promise to be an excellent student, if you would consent to teach me."

"Of course I will. But first we must finish dressing you."

While Georgiana was busy stuffing cotton into the toes of Cecily’s too-large slippers, Edward donned the stockings and garters. Finally he was fastened into the gown, slid into the slippers, and his costume was complete.

For a moment he simply stood, looking down at himself. He turned his arms this way and that, and then pointed each foot so that it peeked from under his petticoat.

"Shall you look in the mirror, Edward?"

Smiling, Georgiana held out her hand. He took it and together they crossed to the long glass. It was the strangest sensation. The lady looking back at him was familiar, and he himself felt exactly the same, and yet — he could not put it into words nor even identify precisely what he was feeling. Elation, a certain trepidation, a giddy excitement. All of those and still something more: a certain sadness, perhaps, for what might have been.

"Well?" Georgiana prompted.

"You have worked a marvel, Georgiana. I can scarcely believe it myself." Edward turned and smiled at her fully. "And now shall you teach me how to walk?"

Their lessons completed, Edward and Georgiana repaired to her sitting room to read and embroider, respectively. Edward attempted to soothe his nervous anticipation with one of Shakespeare’s comedies, but the witty verbal ripostes only served to remind him of Darcy.

Avoiding the temptation to slouch or sprawl in his chair as he was wont to do, he shifted slightly and once more felt the soft movement of his thighs against each other. How on earth did women go about all day with this whisper of skin on skin, he wondered. He felt practically undressed without the comfort of breeches. It was most unsettling, this constant reminder of how open, how bare, he was under the flimsy layers of underclothes and gown. There would be nothing to stop someone from sliding their hands from his ankles to his knees, or higher; nothing between those hands and his skin, or a dark head bent to press a kiss to the tender flesh above—

A log in the fireplace popped and Edward jumped.

Georgiana looked up from her sewing. "Are you well, Edward? You look rather flushed."

Edward gasped out a choked little cough and nodded. "Perhaps I am too near the fire. I'll just—" He gestured toward another chair and fumbled with his book. As he was clumsily altering his seating arrangement, a different voice spoke.

"Georgiana, are you unwell? Mrs Reynolds tells me that you have hardly left your rooms all day."

Georgiana smiled. "I am perfectly well, thank you, Fitzwilliam."

"I am glad to hear it."

Edward felt first frozen and then hot all over. The dull ache low in his belly throbbed and the skin
on the back of his neck prickled. The heavy volume of Shakespeare tipped from its precarious perch and fell with a thud. He felt the room's attention shift to him.

"I beg your pardon. I was unaware you had company," said Darcy in a more formal manner.

"I don't believe you've met my friend," Georgiana said easily. "Fitzwilliam, this is Miss Elizabeth Bennet."

Edward stood, certain his knees were quite actually trembling, and issued a fair approximation of a curtsey. When he finally raised his eyes, he found Darcy frozen, his face blank.

At a delicate cough from Georgiana, Darcy seemed to gather his wits and bowed. "A pleasure to meet you, Miss Bennet."

They all sat and both Edward and Darcy watched Georgiana pour tea with undue fascination. Edward thought he might be sick, but was reassured that his hands did not actually shake when Georgiana passed him his cup. He could feel Darcy's eyes on him, but kept his own trained on the window. It was too humiliating. Darcy was angry, was sickened, wanted him out of his sight. Edward had not seen such a look on his face since Darcy had first learned the truth.

At length, Georgiana set her cup down and declared she had just remembered something about which she needed to speak to Mrs Reynolds immediately. Before Edward could even think to form a protest, she had slipped from the room.

The sound of Darcy shifting in his seat sent Edward up and over to the window. He felt desperate for some fresh air, exercise, for everything to be normal again. Why in God's name had he done this?

He lay his hot forehead against the cool glass and waited.

"Ben—" Darcy cleared his throat "—Miss Bennet."

Edward half-turned his head, but Darcy did not continue. Finally, Edward spoke. "Are you angry with me?"

"Why should I be angry?" Darcy sounded genuinely confused.

It gave Edward the courage to turn and face him directly. "Because of this." He indicated the gown, the hair, the slippers. "Because I am pretending to be something that I am not, but that... I am. It's a lie. All of it; everything."

Darcy only looked at him for a long moment. Then he rose and moved to stand with him at the window.

"You are who you are."

"And who is that?" Edward's voice was sharp.


Edward felt a warm rush of relief as he recognised that Darcy was in earnest.

"Although may I say that your current attire is remarkably...flattering."

Edward felt the warmth of relief turning into another kind of heat at the expression on Darcy's face. He shifted slightly and again felt the soft brush of his thighs against each other. Really, it was almost unbearable being so exposed. Turning back to the window, he began, "Georgiana—"
"Clearly has no intention of returning for some time."

Darcy’s long fingers began smoothing the fabric of Edward’s wrap where it lay across his shoulders. With each pass it shifted, finally slipping away altogether, until each stroke caressed bare skin.

Edward felt light-headed. Never had so slight a touch suffused him with such heady desire. "Surely she would not leave us alone for so long, sir. I am, after all, her guest."

Darcy’s trailed his fingers maddeningly across Edward's nape, and then softly, so softly, touched his mouth just behind Edward's ear.

Gripping the windowsill, Edward closed his eyes. "You are perfectly correct Miss Bennet," Darcy said, stepping away. "It was a very great pleasure to have met you. If you will excuse me, I have some business to attend to in my study."

Darcy’s steps had faded entirely from hearing before Edward felt able to release his grip on the sill. His thoughts were muddled by arousal, but it was very clear that Darcy was giving him a choice: stay here and all would be forgot, or go to Darcy and explore whatever possibilities they made together.

Edward’s courage always rose with every attempt to intimidate him.

After giving himself a few moments to regain his equilibrium, Edward made his way to Darcy’s study and knocked softly on the door. He entered swiftly and closed the door behind him, turning the key in its lock. Darcy sat at his desk, framed by the grey light from the window behind him. Rain obscured the view and ensured them absolute privacy.

What would it be like to enter this room as Miss Bennet? Edward wondered. Of course, he would never be here if he were — young ladies did not enter the private studies of gentlemen alone. But suppose that he—she—really was a friend of Georgiana’s. Suppose she had come to know Darcy as nothing more than Miss Darcy’s brother. Suppose that everything was the same but that one detail. Would she be brave enough, foolish enough, to do this?

Heart racing from equal parts fear and desire, Elizabeth forced herself to cross the room. Mr Darcy had removed his coat and sat only in his waistcoat and shirtsleeves. Never before had he been so informally attired in her presence.

He looked up as she stepped around the desk. "Is there something I can help you with, Miss Bennet?"

She opened her mouth with not the slightest idea of what she could say. Simply by being here, alone with him, she was breaching propriety. Perhaps he would despise her for it later, but she was determined now.

Unable to speak, she reached out and took his hand from where it lay against the desk, brought it to her mouth, and placed a kiss upon it.

Darcy’s reaction was immediate. Making a strangled sound, he rose abruptly from his chair. His hands moved to her face and then his mouth was upon hers. Pressed against him, she had never been so aware of how much larger than her he was. She struggled to push herself nearer, even as their mouths fought each other wildly. The hard press of his sex against her belly did nothing to ease the savage ache within her. This, she understood now, was what she had wanted all along.

Finally Darcy pulled back, panting. "Take them off."
Her mouth was still open and wet from their kisses. Feverish and trembling from the terrible heat burning her skin, she would have done anything, without question. Turning, she offered him her back. "I cannot manage the buttons." She did not recognise her own voice.

With little respect for fabric or stitches, the fastenings of her gown were undone. Slowly, she faced Darcy again, and stepped out of the gown. The petticoat followed.

"That's enough."

The expression on his face transfixed her.

"On the desk," he said, and removed his waistcoat.

She eased herself onto the desk, the wood cool against the backs of her thighs. No thought of modesty or decorum or reputation touched her. All she could think of was him.

He sat in the chair again, facing her, and ran his palms flat along the tops of her thighs, under her chemise. She squirmed a little against the desk, wanting but hardly knowing what.

"Please," she whispered.

He forced her legs apart and took her over.

His hands were large and strong, his mouth impossibly hot. He was not gentle and it thrilled her.

Before long she was writhing desperately against his mouth, beyond shame or even thought. The pleasure was too keen; she could not contain it. "I can't, I can't," she whimpered. But even as she said it, climax tore through her and left her limp and gasping.

She watched dazedly as Darcy rose and struggled with the buttons on his breeches. She pushed herself up on shaking arms to kiss him. They tangled together on the desk until finally, finally, he slid long and hot into her.

They rocked against each other without rhythm or finesse. He was huge above her and within her, his eyes intent upon her face.

"Edwa—"

"Elizabeth," she said hoarsely. "Call me Elizabeth."

His eyes closed as if he were in pain. "Elizabeth." He moved faster, unrestrained, his heavy body pressing her into the wood until she felt the bright, fierce pleasure burn through her again. She cried out with the shock of it and he opened his eyes.

"Oh God, Elizabeth," he said, as he spent himself inside her.

Afterwards they lay somewhat awkwardly, staring at the ceiling.

"I believe some of these documents will be lost causes," said Edward, shifting against the papers stuck to his back. "I hope there is nothing too important here."

"I'm afraid their contents quite escaped my notice," said Darcy without interest. "My mind was more agreeably engaged."
Edward grinned wickedly and rose from his prone position. "I ought to return to my rooms to change out of this costume, I suppose. Some of it will need to be washed or poor Cecily will have a terrible shock when she next visits."

"Cecily's visits are seldom and, as erratic as she is, I am quite certain she has forgotten all about whatever items she left with us." Darcy sat up and grimaced at the state of his clothing. "It would be as well to leave them where they are. We may have need of them in the future."

"On the next occasion Miss Bennet comes to visit, perhaps?"

"Indeed."

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!