Safe Havens

by monimala [archived by yuletide_archivist]

Summary

George doesn't know what to do except to try and make Orry laugh. (Mixes both mini-series and book canon.)

Notes

Written for Joanne

"Did you see Cadet Hazard partaking of the fine brews at the establishment known as Benny Haven's? No, sir." Orry executes a clumsy salute, alcohol slurring his consonants and vowels to an even softer, huskier, pitch than usual. "But I did see him partaking in the kicking of your fine Georgian posterior."

George claps his hand over his mouth in an effort to stifle his laughter, and then gives up and lets the noisy chortle loose. Fiske is nowhere to be found tonight, the barracks are empty save for him and Orry, and Orry's truly atrocious impression of Bent. "Stick," he gasps, wrapping his arm around his waist in an effort to stifle the wheezes. "Stick, did you just refer to Bent's posterior as 'fine'?"

"Did I?" A look of horror crosses Orry's face as he slumps at the foot of his bunk. His brows knit together as he tries to work out what he may or may not have just said. "Well, Hell, Stump," he then sighs with a rueful shrug. "I guess one too many trips to Benny's really *does* impair the judgment."
It always amazes George how *proper* Orry is. He even swears like a gentleman, his tongue wrapping around the letters like he's saying a kind, "How do you do?" George has never been one for polite greetings. Fists first and then a handshake, he thinks, remembering how they met in New York... tussling in the dirt with those roughnecks like they'd been born to it. Orry's been powerful melancholy since then. There's a sadness in him, from missing Madeline, that George sees overtake him when no one else is watching. He doesn't know what to do except to try and make Orry laugh, to take him to Benny Haven's and sit shoulder to shoulder with him as they throw back a few pints and tell stories of wars they've yet to fight.

"I think your judgment's just fine," he assures, dropping down next to Orry, nudging him along on the narrow mattress to make room. "Bit 'tetched,' maybe, but I think that's everyone at the Point."

A smile teases at the edges of Orry's mouth. "You've been talking to Jackson again, haven't you?"

It's George's turn to do an impression, and he launches into an eerily accurate rendering of the soft-spoken Virginian... only spouting some of the most vulgar limericks he picked up from the Irish workers at the foundry. Doubling over with mirth, Orry wipes tears from his eyes. "Y-you're no Christian, George Hazard," he drawls. "You're no Christian at all." Which just sends them both into fits once again, rocking back and forth and clinging to each other as they struggle to catch their breath.

Orry's hair, perpetually too long in the style of a fashionable southern gentleman, tickles George's nostrils and he raises a hand to brush the strands out of both of their faces. His fingertips trail across Orry's brow, linger just a shade too long, and George nearly swallows his suddenly thick tongue. It's been too long since he's seen Alice Peet, that's all. He needs a little comfort. He's gone too many weeks without squiring a pretty female on his arm or investigating what's under her skirts. George Hazard, practically a dandy --or at least that's what Virgilia likes to sneer when she sees him fuss overmuch with his ties.

"S-stump?" He doesn't know if it's Orry's natural accent or his sudden shyness causing him to stutter, only that he seems to have the same problem with his ever so dulcet clipped Pennsylvania tones when he whispers back, "Stick?"

He half expects Fiske to practically fall over the threshold in a tumble of gangly limbs and awkward steps, his appearance louder than the door itself, and send this strange moment back into the ether from whence it came. But no such interruption occurs, and George finds himself moving from Orry's unruly hair to his shoulder, fingers pressing firmly into the soft cloth of his shirt.

He leans forward just enough to feel the warmth of Orry's breath on his lips.

And then, and only then, does the door bang open and the nervous Ohioan stumble in.

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There are a dozen times over the ensuing years where George thinks of that lost moment at the Point. What might have been, what wanted to be, and what it may have meant. What it could still mean.

He thinks on it when he meets Madeline LaMotte for the first time in a crowded ballroom and realizes just why Orry will never be able to love another. She's unearthly. She's perfect. She's Orry's ideal.

He remembers at Churubusco, when Orry refuses to look at him, hiding beneath the bandages and behind the misery, and he ends up at a dance where he meets the most charming girl in the world.
He ponders it when he marries that girl, too. He looks at Orry, standing up for them, and wonders what Constance would say if she knew of that long ago cold night after an endless round of drinks at Benny Haven's. Probably what she always says about Orry: "Ach, George. You love him dearly. There's no wrong in that."

He feels the past especially strongly when Orry comes to see him in Lehigh Station as the country teeters on the edge of war. Secession fever leadens the air and shatters their windows and he finds himself side by side with a man he served with, justifying their friendship to a bloodthirsty mob. The danger is nothing compared to rifle shot and cannon fire, but it almost feels the same.

After the crowd disperses and they put their rifles away, they adjourn to Orry's rooms so he can pack a bag. The faster they can spirit him out of Belvedere, out of Pennsylvania, the safer it will be for everyone. "Just like old times, isn't it, Stump?" The weariness in Orry's eyes tempers the forced cheer in his voice. George can't help but marvel at how they've somehow grown *old*. Those boys who mocked Elkanah Bent and sought pleasure in a laundress' lush charms are long gone.

And he may never see the man who took one of those boys' places again.

Fists first and then a handshake. That's how they met. But, by God, that's not how they're going to part. Not if he can help it. Unabashed tears prick at his eyes --they've come more naturally, more often, since Hope was born-- and he clasps Orry in a hug, completely distracting from the other man's efforts to gather his things.

"Better than old times, Stick," he promises, hoarsely. "It's going to be better than old times, just as long as we get through this damnable call for war."

"We will. I swear we will." Orry's arms come up, encircle him, and it's as though every stupid, pointless argument they've ever had about Brett and Billy, about slavery and the factory and secession is wiped clean. For the moment, *this* moment, they're two bold, young adventurers again, returned triumphant from a jaunt for contraband at Benny's. And George, practically a dandy then and anything but that now, brushes Orry's hair out of both of their faces before kissing him, gently, on the mouth to seal his oath.

He's always thought that Orry swears like a gentleman, his tongue wrapping around the letters like he's saying a kind, "How do you do?" He swiftly learns that Orry kisses like that, too.

Hours later, George sees him to the train, pins his own rosette to his lapel with shaking fingers and memorizes the brave set of Orry's countenance. Tom Jackson would likely call them both "etched," if he were standing with them today. George prefers to think of it as "hopeful." Infinitely, foolishly hopeful.

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