

The Kind Old Sun Will Know

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The Kind Old Sun Will Know

by [DostoevskyBrosK](#)

Summary

A Pride and Prejudice AU set in World War I. Darcy has been fighting in the war for too long and is deeply disillusioned. He gets hurt and is sent back from the front. There at the hospital, he meets a certain beautiful woman he did not expect to see again. Their last meeting had ended in a fight and a botched proposal.

Notes

When I was a little girl, I found the beautiful anti-war literature that comes out of World War I. Those poems and novels are so poignant. Just recently, my sister read All Quiet on the Western Front, and then we watched the heartbreaking 1930 film together. That butterfly – it just kills me. I love Remarque. Anyway, it made me think of WWI, and I really wanted to write a Pride and Prejudice set in WWI. I played with their ages just a bit. Darcy is only 24 in this, and that means he is only four years older than Georgianna. I mainly wanted to do that because I feel like the youth of the war is always important. I wish I could do the idea justice, but it will never be as good as I want it to be. Nevertheless, I hope someone will enjoy! I have taken the title from a Wilfred Owen poem – and for all my chapter titles I am going to take from Owen's poetry too. I will put the full poem at the end of the chapter because they are so beautiful and should absolutely be read. I probably will have messed up some things that are easily researched, so sorry!

I have this story all mapped out, and I should be posting about every other day or so.

Note: This story is written by me (although obviously inspired by another's work). I do not want this posted anywhere else.

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Futility

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Darcy hunched his shoulders against the biting cold. He turned back and did a quick count of his men. It was one of the first things he picked up when he became an officer. *That was what, four years ago?* He was green and did not know what to expect from war. *I thought I knew having read accounts, but they hardly capture the reality. As if this is a normal reality anyway.*

When he first started, he constantly found himself counting the small group he was in charge of, looking at their faces, and seeing their exhaustion. Honestly, as the years passed into each other, this tic got worse. Darcy had joined mainly because his closest friend, and cousin, was already a part of the army. He could not stand thinking of Richard on his own in France. Not that it had mattered or saved poor Richard.

At that time, he set up his affairs and entrusted Georgiana with the day to day running of the estate and their finances, even if his uncles thought her too young at sixteen. *Now twenty.* She had come into her own the year before he left, after she was manipulated and betrayed by Wickham. Of course, she had not wanted him to come. *And how right she was. This bloody stupid war.* But he felt like he had to, especially when most of the men working for Pemberley got pulled into fighting. It felt deeply wrong to stay hidden behind his power and wealth while the men *Boys* of the estate went to die.

His willingness to fight had afforded him with special considerations. He could, at his own expense, get extra supplies sent to his group of men. He could request for certain transfers, as the mothers on his estate often asked him to watch their boys. And he could have escaped the fighting altogether. In fact, he could at any time escape the fighting. He had been offered a promotion several times, but he continued turning it down, knowing that he would be leaving his men. *To die.* This, in the dark, when he was trying to calm his heart, was the thing he felt most tempted by. The alluring offer to accept the promotion and be sent to London for strategy making. After years of the wary, he was weary, so weary, of fighting and of soldiering. He hated seeing the men *The boys* die. It tore at him, but neither did he want to be part of the problem. Join the group of disgusting men at the top who used everyone as mere pawns.

“Here men!” Darcy called. It was about mid-day, and just as good as any place to sit and eat.

They all stopped and formed a quick semi-circle around Darcy. “We will have our break now. Let us take about thirty minutes or so. We need to be back to the trench by sunset.” The men nodded. “Sure thing, Capt’n.” George cheerfully called. He was the first to settle down, sitting on the cold, hard dirt.

“Come on then, young lad.” Old Albert, so named because he was the oldest of the men at age twenty-five. “Sam, sit with me. I’ll show you how we feast when we are on a march.”

Darcy noticed that a strong wind had picked up in the last half hour of their march. It howled after the men as they trudged through the muck and sticky mud. *How does it get worse? What are we even marching to? Blast! Those idiotic instructions . . .* Darcy tried to regulate his breathing and let his frustration at the ridiculous orders they received this morning out. *Here we are, marching through a deserted farm. Why are we even worried about this? How are my men going to make it through another blasted winter? It is only the fall, yet the cold is getting bad. I sent for new boots over two months ago, and still they do not come. Sam's feet will be bleeding by the end of this march, and who knows what the others are suffering.* Gritting his teeth Darcy stifled a sigh. He reached up and almost rubbed at his hair unconsciously, a gesture that belied his anxiousness. He stopped himself just before his hair, hoping to hide his anxiety from his men. However, two of them noted the aborted movement and shared a meaningful look.

“We had been hoping for the cold not two weeks ago, eh, Cap’n. Look at us now.” George danced a bit, working to draw everyone’s attention to himself.

“Ech, yee maybe the heat wasn’t too bad,” replied John.

Darcy smiled easily at his men through the cold, even as the wind stung at his eyes, forcing him to blink. “Right as always John.”

John beamed to be noticed. He turned back, “Hear that, Sammy-boy?”

The youngest recruit, who had joined them not a month back, raised his head. “What you on about then, old man?”

“Cheeky lad! Who you calling old? Can’t be helped you a babe barely out of your sawdlin’ and me a man.”

“Oi, fuck right off with that. I’m old enough.”

The men continued teasing each other while Darcy rolled his eyes, pretending to find them tiring. *Truth is I would rather they be teasing and laughing. Good for morale.* He mused to himself. *We have little enough to be happy about. What a stupid blasted war. How is it still going on –*

All the sudden, the silence struck Darcy. *Too quiet.* He motioned with his hand and the laughter and teasing immediately died behind him. Cocking his head to the side, he willed himself to listen more keenly. *There.*

“Down men. Now! To the right.” He barked quickly.

As they all moved together shots broke out. Out of Darcy’s peripheral vision he could tell that most everyone had been able to find shelter. Yet, for some reason, John and Sam seemed stuck. They would not move. Darcy’s mind seemed to slowly process everything. *What are they doing? John! Sam!* “SAM!” he finally got his mouth to work.

The young kid looked up at him and shook his head mutely. Knowing without looking, Darcy anticipated the next spray of bullets. He pushed himself between them and the boy. His body jolted with the pain of a bullet striking the flesh of his side. He grabbed the boy as quickly as he could and pulled him behind his own body. One more bullet found its way into his leg. “John, move!” Darcy called, trusting the more seasoned man to keep himself safe.

“He . . . He can’t, Captain.” Sam said. “He was hit.”

Not John. No. Do not think of it now. Focus. Darcy tried to aim his gun and managed to shoot off in the direction the bullets had been coming from. His molasses mind registered in the distance of his thinking that his men had dropped into formation and were returning fire as well. “Must be three of them, maybe broken off from their unit, men!” He called as he calculated what had occurred.

From one moment to the next, time seemed to jump for Darcy. He felt obscured in pain. *That will not do. Push the pain away.*

The next thing he was aware of was George calling out, “I got one a ‘em, Cap’n. Maybe two. Think Bill got another.”

Darcy blinked. *Why is the sky there? Am I now on my back? Good Lord, Darcy, get it together. Your men need you right now.* Trying to figure out what was happening, he blinked faster, but it did not make anything clear up. He tried to speak but instead found himself coughing up what tasted of iron.

“Take it easy, Sir. We got enough trouble. Don’t need you adding to it none.” Someone said.

Is that Casey? Enough trouble? Darcy willed himself to speak. *This is important. Get it together.* “Tro...Trouble?” he managed to grit out.

“George, what is wrong with him?” Asked who Darcy thought was Sam.

George’s face appeared in Darcy’s swimming vision. He seemed to be glaring at someone. “Hush lad.” He turned his gaze onto Darcy. “Just a spot of bother, Sir. Doesn’t help us none to have you out of commission.” He was pushing Darcy down. “Rest, Sir. We are making sure they are gone. We will make sure you are safe.”

Darcy felt himself shaking his head. *Not me, my men.*

George smiled at him softly, “Course, Darcy Sir. We know well how to look after ourselves. Don’t you worry none. Rest.”

“Did . . . did you see? Did you see ‘im grabbing me? ‘E wouldn’t ‘ave gotten ‘urt none if ‘e ‘and’t. Why ‘e do that, Albert? Why?” *Oh dear, Sam is sounding a bit hysterical poor boy.*

“Calm down, lad. All might be well yet.”

Darcy could not seem to make sense of what they were saying and what he was hearing. He tried to shake his head, but nothing came of the movement. He felt helpless, worried and anxious for his men. He tried blinking again, but just ended up staring into the bleak sun. *Aren’t you supposed to warm us? Why do you look so cold? Now, in the middle of this stupid farm. What are they going to do? What is going to become of my men? Are they going to know what to do?* Darcy blinked a bit more, the sun warming in his vision for a second, maybe two. *Of course, they are. I am being too controlling again. Too condescending. Right? Is not that my problem. I think that it is. That was the last thing she said, was it not? Important. Want to remember. Need to change. Do my men think of me that way? Did I not change at all?*

As he continued to blink, shadows blocked out Darcy’s remaining view of the sky. He seemed to slowly drop into the darkness like the trickle and drop of treacle.

Note: This chapter's title comes from the beautiful Wilfred Owen poem "Futility"

Move him into the sun—
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds—
Woke once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

The Kind Ghosts

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Darcy could not seem to make sense of what was happening. He felt like his body was moving, but he was insensible of any real direction or change.

Pain. Pain dominated his mind, and so whenever he surfaced to the jolting movements of what had to be a wagon, he let himself slip into the last time he saw Elizabeth.

Her eyes were bright. Black but with a star of light in them. Good Lord, I am poetic in my imaginings. But with such a muse, how could I not be? Did I ever really say she was merely tolerable. What a dolt.

Pain broke into her image, sharpening her eyes into anger. *No. No, don't come to me when you are angry. Please.*

Darcy tried to squirm away but found that he could not move his body. “You are the last man in the world . . . Last man . . . I could EVER.” Her angry words bit at his mind, hitting him like cresting waves.

I deserve it. I do. But I cannot . . . cannot. Darcy threw himself into her anger. *I wish I could have known you better. As you deserved. At least Georgie got to know you.* He smiled. At least he thought he did. His face was not responding any better than the rest of his body. Georgiana had sent a letter right after her meeting with Elizabeth. She had been enamored of her right away. *She must have some element of power over us Darcys. She is our siren, pulling us inexorably to her.*

Elizabeth's angry visage seemed to immediately chastise him. *Yes. Yes. Of course, you are right. I most definitely should not be calling you a siren. Nor should I be blaming you for my attraction to you.*

Elizabeth's face seemed suddenly less severe. It softened around the edges. She came to him as she had looked right before he wrecked it with his anger-inducing idiocy. *Her eyes look almost inviting. She never really looked at me like that. I wish I had earned that. Maybe one day.*

He fancied he could feel her hand gently brushing his hair out of his eyes. But no, she was not the one doing that. That was not even gentle. Darcy felt his body lurch from left to right abruptly. His hair pushed into his eyes and then swept out with a disturbing regularity. The jerking of the wagon jumped to Darcy's fore. *I really wish I had not ruined it for us.*

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Elizabeth does not get much time to herself. The makeshift hospital she is working at is crowded and busy. She is always on her feet and working every moment she is awake. As the head nurse, Elizabeth has the power to make more time for herself, but she would rather bear the brunt of extra work. She wants to make sure the other nurses will not get worn down too quickly.

*I had to send three home just last month. This war is so vicious.*

The only time she allowed herself any sort of luxury was the second Sunday of the month. This was her own time. She could attend services in the morning and then spend two hours by herself in her own room. Well, not really a room at all, a closet. Small, but a luxury nevertheless. Another perk of being the head nurse, her own space, even if it only fit her small cot.

Elizabeth tried to let go of her responsibility for just a couple, short hours. It was hard to come down off the adrenaline she felt constantly working on tending to the sick men. She had learned a great deal over the past eight months. Not the least of which was that she did not want to be a doctor.

*When I am able to go home, I cannot wait to go back to the small work of keeping the animals healthy. I never want to see another wound that goes gangrenous on a man who begs for me not to take it from him.* She shook her head at herself, trying to clear it of the deeply disturbing images that followed hard after her every waking moment. *I want to help sheep be born again. Ugh. I miss the farm.* She smiled a bit as she remembered Acorn and Crescent, their two best horses. The horses Jane and she shared most often together. *That seems like another life ago. I cannot imagine just racing a horse in a field again.*

She let her mind wander over the animals on her father's small estate once again, but soon the darkness of her work crept on her again. She tried to stave it off once more by engaging in her monthly rumination. She sat up a little more in the bed and reached over to the box that acted as her night stand. Lifting it up, she exposed a small sachet of letters. She gingerly picked them up and worked her way through them. It was her favorite part of every month.

Elizabeth always started with the one from her mom. It honestly was the most impersonal. Yet, it did have a lovely description of the lace at an otherwise dull party. "With all you young ones off getting your hands dirty, the parties have been quite lacking their usual fun. Come home soon, or at the very least urge Jane to come." Even as she sighed, Elizabeth smiled a little. Rubbing the word "home," she let herself imagine just to be home. *Again. Delightful.*

She went through several from her closer friends, building to her favorite three.

The letter from her father was much more beloved. He teased her across the miles, but she truly felt warmed by his love evident in every word. "Daughter, how can you leave me for so long with such little useful company? That hardly seems right. I have picked up at least five new books I think you would find diverting. Maybe you can read them soon. Sal had a new

calf, which I imagine you would have named something like Utations, as if a cow would care for connections to family.” He chatted amiably away about the life she remembered almost as a dream.

The letters came to their hospital but rarely. Where they were posted was safe enough, but to get there from England, the water had to be passed over. The mail was irregular at best, but Elizabeth hoped to hear from home soon.

Next, she would look at Charlotte’s letter. She only allowed herself to keep one as a representation of each person. That way, she wouldn’t fritter away her whole two hours on one person. Or so she told herself. It might also have been to the letter she was leaving to the last. She always did like to end with it. Charlotte was describing how Collins lost his whole cabbage patch to lose pigs. It never failed to make Elizabeth smile, even as she experienced frustration at the inane Collins. She knew she needed to let her animosity go if she were to keep Charlotte as a friend, but it was trying. *Collins working as an indifferent minister while all these boys . . . No. I need to let it go. It is not as if it would be better if he were here to die.* Elizabeth chewed idly on her lip in contemplation. *No, I would not wish this on anyone, including the daft Collins.*

As was typical in these periods of repose, Elizabeth found that she could not help but laugh at him in the end. *He really is too ridiculous.* She flipped to the back of Charlotte’s letter for her favorite recounting of Collins’s doctored sermon. Charlotte had taken to slipping in passages of her own to Collins’s prepared sermon, and the one she wrote about in this letter was Elizabeth’s favorite: “As you will recall, Dear Lizzy, he does have trouble mixing up his themes. This past Sunday he was delivering a sermon on Lady Catherine’s favorite subject: fornication. Who knows why? It is not as if her husband is still alive to need the reminder. But poor Collins was trying to explain how fornication is frowned upon by God, but he inadvertently explained why some marriages fail. He focused mainly on the lack of satisfaction given to the female in acts of intercourse. He spent a goodish time, I dare say ten minutes, extolling the virtues of satisfying your woman. Every eye in church was fixed on me, and I am afraid I turned quite red. However, it was probably a needful sermon for many men to hear. I do not think it was too ill done.”

Elizabeth let herself laugh a little. *Ah, oh no. Poor Jude.* She pictured the slight man that had been brought in about two weeks ago. He looked near death when he arrived, but his personality was so bright. *I would have loved to see him get better. No doubt, he would have made someone very happy.* She took a deep breath, releasing the sorrow. Jude had been buried yesterday morning along with all the dead of the week. *All in a grave together. I suppose that is kind of sweet. Maybe the find solace together.*

She shook her head pointedly. *Let it go.* And reached for the last letter in the bundle. It was by far the most worn, as the other letters often got replaced when the latest arrived from her family. This one was stained yellow and wrinkled as if it had been wet at some point. However, it did nothing to diminish the fine, sharp writing that evenly spread across the thick paper. The quality of the paper was by far the finest out of her stack. It had been creamy, and she still liked to slide her fingers along its smooth path.

Mr. Darcy's letter. Elizabeth allowed herself a full five minutes of merely staring at it. She indulged in a quick memory of the portrait she had seen at his family home. She rather liked him best in the painting. It showed her something of him that she had always missed when she met in person. Granted, they had really not spent that much time together, but, of course, she had thought she knew him. *No. I was so misguided then. So ready to see the worst in him, the rich who I thought was taking the easy way out of the war. I mean. He was kind of the worst.* She smiled even so, thinking about the first disastrous meeting. Now, years later, it seemed merely funny. It had lost its teeth and the cruel prick of embarrassment she had felt at the time. *He is so awkward. How did I not see it?*

She picked up the letter and read her favorite passages. His language was a bit stilted in parts, but now she just found it charming. The whole beginning was so pathetic and, simply, precious. "I would not mind it so much now. Not so abhorrent" she whispered quietly to herself.

The ending was, naturally, her favorite. She smiled as she underlined the words with her fingers: "I will only add, God bless you."

*He ends the letter so charitably. He must have been so hurt, and I had been so angry with him. Now, with this war. It all seems so petty. So small. I would be so happy to see him again and just let him know I trusted him. I believed what he said. Does he even know that I met Georgiana?*

Elizabeth thought briefly on the time she spent with Darcy's sister. They were about the same age and had a lovely time together. It was right before Elizabeth finished her training and was sent to France. Her last bit of fun with her favorite Aunt and Uncle had led them to tour Darcy's home. She had felt strange and uncomfortable but when Georgiana came upon them she was so delightful. She was happy to know someone who knew her brother. *She misses him so dearly. As I do.*

Elizabeth breathed. Deep in. Deep out. She closed her eyes and gave herself ten minutes to just imagine.

## Chapter End Notes

Note: This chapter's title comes from the haunting Wilfred Owen poem "The Kind Ghosts"

She sleeps on soft, last breaths; but no ghost looms  
Out of the stillness of her palace wall,  
Her wall of boys on boys and dooms on dooms.

She dreams of golden gardens and sweet glooms,  
Not marveling why her roses never fall  
Nor what red mouths were torn to make their blooms.

The shades keep down which well might roam her hall.  
Quiet their blood lies in her crimson rooms  
And she is not afraid of their footfall.

They move not from her tapestries, their pall,  
Nor pace her terraces, their hecatombs,  
Lest aught she be disturbed, or grieved at all.

# Antlers through the Thickness of His Curls

## Chapter Notes

I really love these characters, and I always want to see more Jane. I do not think I do her justice at all, but I tried to draw on my relationship with my sister. She is beautiful (like Jane) and so sweet. I love when Elizabeth says, “If you were to give me forty such men, I never could be so happy as you. Till I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can have your happiness. No, no, let me shift for myself; and, perhaps, if I have very good luck, I may meet with another Mr. Collins in time.” It is so funny, but it also has something interesting to say about how differently we all experience the world. I also think it reflects my sister versus me – I am far too contrary to be happy in the way she is, but then again, I would not want it any other way.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Lizzy! Lizzy!” Jane’s voice cut through Elizabeth’s imaginings. Her eyes shot open. “Sorry to bother you, Lizzy. You know I would not usually interrupt your time, but we just got news. I knew you would not want to wait.”

Elizabeth smothered a sigh. “Jane, I know if you are getting me it matters. What news?”

“You said to be on the lookout for news from Brest.”

“Oh no, Jane. I was hoping this would not happen again. I thought we had our feet under us. How did we let this disease continue?”

“I know. Good thing you have been enforcing the mask recommendation made by Dr. Combferre. Remember how bad it got four months ago. We ran out of beds, and had them laid out on blankets on the ground.”

Elizabeth ran a hand against her forehead. “Ugh. Great. Does that mean what we were hearing is true? They decided not to have lockdown methods? I mean, I know it is in the middle of a war, but come on. How can they not be worried about this spread?”

Jane shook her head, “I do not know. You know my Bingley,” Elizabeth could not help the small snort of laughter. Jane continued unperturbed, and maybe a little pleased to have her ‘my’ noticed, “says the best way to handle this would be to quarantine them, but I do not see where we could find the room.”

“We are in real trouble. Already the beds are filled from the wounded. . . No. It will be alright. We will not get ahead of ourselves or borrow trouble. We have a system. We will just have to keep working it. I will go around and check our wards, make sure protocol is being followed and that we have not grown lax. And when, might I ask, have you had occasion to

quiz your Bingley about proper treatment of this influenza?" The women moved from Elizabeth's small closet and started walking back to where the general wards were housed.

Jane smiled, her face relaxing into the beatific saint face Elizabeth always thought of her as having. *This war has changed more than we realize, I think.* “Stop teasing. You know we exchange letters as often as we can. And that I have not been able to see him in what, six and a half months?”

“Oh, you mean when he showed up out of nowhere to serve as the doctor at our hospital for about a month. I do not think I have ever seen you so happy.”

“He was just following orders. He had to go to many hospitals to train people on the proper way to treat . . .”

“Oh, I am very sure that is true. And he just happened to pick the place we are stationed to start at. Very reasonable and innocent. It had nothing to do with the fact that you had been writing to him since he sent you the needed apology letter.”

Jane had stopped walking and had a funny smile on her face. Elizabeth sighed at her in an exaggerated way. “Yes, we all know you two are in love and disgustingly happy.”

“Lizzy!” Jane sounded scandalized to have it said so baldly. “As if you are not equally in love. I see you looking off into the distance. Gazing out the windows. Are not those signs of love?”

“Give over, Jane. I cannot be as happy as you until I am as sweet as you, and we all know that is never going to happen. Thank the Lord. Can you imagine two of you in the world?”

“You would be so lucky, Lizzy. Plus, you know I think you deserve all the happiness. And you are right. I would not want you to be anything other than you are.”

“Alright, enough of this. Let us get to work. Who did you say came from Brest with news on the illness?”

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The day passed in a flurry. Elizabeth felt dead on her feet hours before she would be able to stop. *So much to do*. She sighed to herself. She took a deep breath and tried to project positivity and joy for the young men in her amputee ward. It was one of the hardest places to be in the hospital because so many of them were demoralized and disheartened. It was a constant battle to keep their spirits up. They had not had a suicide for over two months, and Elizabeth felt sad to count that as a victory. *But, it is one. Much better than it had been.*

As she moved into the room, she was surprised to see Caroline sitting next to one of the beds. She still struggled to get on well with Caroline, but she did not hate being with her like she would have said she did in England. Caroline had joined when Elizabeth had convinced Jane

The other nurses nodded in agreement. Elizabeth set Leslie as the person to receive any new patients, and she went get her small amount of sleep.

Darcy felt someone wetting his lips, and he realized how thirsty he was. He tried to help them get him some water, but his body continued to be contrary. *I suppose, I always was a contrarian.*

“Probably infection, lad. Not sure what else we can do about it.” Old Albert sighed.

“Gotta get to the ‘ospital soon. Don’t we? ‘ow far off is it?”

That seemed to make Sam laugh. Darcy was not sure what he was hearing, but maybe Sam was pretending to be horse. *That seems like him, does it not? Still so much a kid.*

Darcy tried to open his eyes or to force words from his mouth but could not manage it.

Why does he sound so sad? Was not John with him too? Trying to ascertain his surroundings, Darcy attempted to focus on the one sense that seemed to be working currently: touch. He could tell he was still on a wagon, which was hardly surprising. They had been in the middle of nowhere, so it would take a goodish bit to get to where they were called to, and then from there a hospital would take longer. Yet, it felt like he was warmer on one side than another. *Another person in the wagon with me? More wounded? My men. What happened to them?* Darcy's heart starting beating more.

“’e waking up finally? Capt’n Darcy, sir, Capt’n!”

“Hush lad, even if he was waking up. I don’t think he would appreciate you caterwauling in his ear. Let’s focus on getting him to the doc.”

Darcy attempted to focus on his hearing as well. *Are my men alone? Joined by another company? It sounds like more than just mine. I cannot tell, what am I doing?*

More water was splashed on his lips. It felt so good. So cooling. *Oh right. I am not supposed to be hot right now. It has been cold. Why am I not cold? Am I cold?*

His mind spiraled for a bit, questions begetting other questions, concern for his men, hope that the war would end, the uncertainty, the inevitability of pain continuing, the spiral just kept going. Finally, Darcy let himself melt back into his own favorite world. *The first time I saw her. Year and a half ago? Is that right? I was on leave, distracted, anxious, and, of course, I let that get the best of me. What a prideful git.* His Elizabeth smiled, not looking at him, but it felt in response to his own thoughts. *Another chance. I need to make it out of this war and get another chance.*

Chapter End Notes

Note: This chapter’s title comes from the gripping Wilfred Owen poem “Arms and the Boy”

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;
Blue with all malice, like a madman’s flash;
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-heads
Which long to nuzzle in the hearts of lads,
Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth,
Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death.

For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;
And God will grow no talons at his heels,
Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls.

Minds the Dead have Ravished

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Over ‘ere. Our Capt’n needs help!” Sam called loudly. Darcy seemed to feel someone hovering over him. “Please ‘urry, Miss. I tried to bind ‘im, but I don’t think it looks good.”

More and more sounds trickled into Darcy’s awareness, crowding his mind. He tested his vision. Tried to blink. His eyes felt weighted and clumped together, and he wanted to rub at them. Managing to crack them open a little, Darcy finally saw a glimpse of light. He could not open them all the way but was able to start making sense of things.

Sam was there, and Old Albert standing next to him talking to a tall masked nurse. *Hospital. That makes sense. Focus. Listen. What are they saying?* As he tried by sheer force of will to sharpen everything into focus, one figure stood out. *Elizabeth!* Darcy was not sure if his heart really started to beat faster, but it felt like it was attempting to burst out of his chest and present itself at the feet of the one he loved. *Would not be surprised if that were to happen. No, focus Darcy. This is not as I have ever seen her before. My visions usually are much closer to me. Beyond that, she looks more beautiful than I remember or maybe I am just making her present better?*

Her dark eyes glowed, stars peaking out of the darkness. Her silky black hair was piled on top of her head with a little white cap nestled in her curls. *A white cap? Why am I picturing her as a nurse?* The figure turned more to his direction, and he noticed she wore a mask. *Is that her? Of course, it is. Why is she here. It is not safe here. Need to warn her. Her eyes still look so bewitching. No, get it together.* There was something profoundly tired about her eyes. *Has she not been sleeping? Elizabeth ...* “Elizabeth.”

“Capt’n?”

“Captain Darcy, sir?”

“Did you ‘ear ‘im, Old Albert? That was ‘im, right?”

“Yes lad, it was.” Albert looked to see Darcy’s eyes peaking open. Feeling heartened he turned back to the tall nurse. “Can we see about getting him looked over? We have another couple of wounded too.”

“What did ‘e say?” Sam murmured to himself, “I couldn’t manage to ‘ear. Sounded like a bird’s name, eh?”

No. Elizabeth, do not walk away. She seemed, for a moment, to hear his call and appear more vividly and brightly. Only to melt away into the background.

“are having to take in some of the local civilians too. . . disease spreading. . . short on beds.” Darcy tried to shake his head. This seemed important. “We have one for your officer, of

course. Let us move him first. Not sure about the other men with you. How many do you have?"

"Three that need seeing to. Casey, laying next to the captain and Corey. He seems to have gotten a bad cough along with the gun shot in his hand."

The nurse nodded, "We will send the sick one down there." She gestured down the way. "But first, let's move the officer. Jimmy! Oh dear. Where did that boy get to?"

"We can help move 'em, Miss." Sam piped up. Old Albert nodded.

"I suppose you will have to. Thank you. Come grab the blanket there. Captain did you say?"

"Aye. Capt'n Darcy 'e is. The best Capt'n." Sam said loyally.

The nurse smiled. "Of course. This way."

Darcy felt himself being jerked over. The blanket he was on moved beneath him, providing some steadying motion. He could not help moaning a bit as pain sparked bright in his awareness.

"Easy there, Capt'n. We gettin ya settled." A gentle hand was placed on his shoulder. The world spun in his vision of him. Everything blurred together as he was moved through the hallways. They finally reached a row of beds, all full. They had been jammed into a space much too small for so many of them, and there were some pallets on the floor. Darcy was placed in what appeared to be the last available bed. Old Albert and Sam moved off, their words getting lost in the garble of Darcy's mind.

Settle. Listen. Ugh . . . no. Pain.

Someone was messing with Darcy's side, pulling at his skin. "Sh lad, ye'll be just fine I'm thinking." A rough Scottish brogue pierced the pain. The pure surprise of it shocking Darcy into keener awareness. *Gruff, but comforting.* Darcy tried to open his eyes catching a glimpse of gleaming bald head, but found that he had to keep them squeezed tight as something moved around inside him. *No, no. Just a vision of Elizabeth then? Why can I not imagine her tending to me now?* The brogue broke in and put all thoughts of that to rest. Darcy found himself trying to huff a laugh, *Ridiculous to imagine her in the place of this bald man, I suppose.*

"Let's get this out o' ye. There. There. No trouble at all." The smooth brogue washed over him. "Bear with me son. There's a good lad." He continued to pull at the skin. Darcy was not sure for how long. It seemed like it could have been the work of ten minutes or an hour.

"All done then, lad. I think ye will be ok. Maybe some infection, yeah." A cool hand grace Darcy's forehead, and he relished the lightness. "Maybe a fever. That rain when ye were brought in here. It poured on ye something fierce, dinna it?" His head was gently lifted, his side pressed and stabilized with something.

Good. Feels good. He thought as he heard others approaching. *Keep focused. Check on the men. Old Al said Casey and Corey?* “C. . . Casey?” he managed to breath out.

Sam was right by his side, “Don’t ya worry non, Capt’n. They said rest ya should be right as rain. Do got yaself a little fever. Need to get that under control. ‘eard ya calling for some bird, didn’t I? What she then? Lucky to have ya, eh? Ah, and course ya worried ‘bout them other boys, are ya?” Darcy felt like he moaned in response. “Ok, ok! So, Corey was taken to a different area? Not sure where yet, but Old Al said he would check on ‘im. Casey don’t got no bed, but they puttin’ ‘im ‘ere by ya side.”

No bed for Corey? Unacceptable. I have already been seen to. Darcy's eyes opened wide. He took a clear breath, everything in him willing himself to speak. "No, Sam, not acceptable. Move . . . move Casey into this bed. Me to floor. Come. Sam." Darcy's steam was quickly running out, the pain and exhaustion catching up to him. *But this is something I must see through. This is when I can be a pompous, demanding dolt – to help my men.*

“Uh. No sir, beggin ya pardon and all. Are ya crazy? Ya need the be yaself.”

Darcy managed a small shake of his head, which sent the bells ringing in his mind. *Clarity. Confidence. That is what Sam needs from me right now.* “Come, Sam. This is an order. Move me down to Casey. Move Casey here.”

Sam grimaced but grabbed a passing man. “Oi, ‘elp me.”

They struggled for a bit, and Darcy let himself move in and out of awareness. When he was next looking up into the ceiling, he was comforted that he could see beds above him. He smiled slightly. *Good. At least Casey can be well looked after.* “Thank you.”

Sam appeared in his vision again. “Course Capt’n. I think ya crazy, but wouldn’t go ‘gainst ya none. Got to get back now. I only had ‘rders to take ya to ‘ere. Old Albert should be able to stay another day before ‘e gets sent back.”

Darcy managed to grab Sam's sleeve. "Be safe." He ground out.

“Course Capt’n. Need to make it through this bleeding war ta take ya up on that job ya promised me. Ma will be right proud, yeah?”

Darcy smiled, pushing all his hope and safety into this young boy. “Yeah.”

Sam disappeared, taking his bright, silly smile with him.

Elizabeth could not even find time to take a breath without being interrupted by someone needing some direction. The hospital was exploding with patients, and she was trying to

make sure nothing was falling through the cracks. She needed to keep the sick separate from the wounded, but make sure not to over tax any one nurse. *I need to breath.*

She slipped into one of the wounded wards to quickly let her eyes scan over it. A room crammed with men, all needing a quiet, peaceful atmosphere to heal. *I hope I can give it to them.* Her shoulders crumpled a bit thinking of all things that they would need to stretch to help accommodate the people who kept needing help. The area surrounding them seemed to be hit badly with the influenza. *I am so anxious it will spread to the wounded, who are already struggling to heal. How can I make sure we do not let the disease infect?* Now she walked over to the disease area they had tried to section off. A group of nurses had volunteered to work this area for now, hopefully keeping the disease regulated to this place. *Not that it worked great when we tried this in June, but it did seem to help by the end of July.* She shook her head. *We can only do our best, whatever that is worth.* She leaned back against the wall, looking through the small window on the door. One of the nurses noticed her and walked to the door.

“Everything ok Nurse Elizabeth?”

“Yes, thank you Nurse Sarah. Just wanted to see what you needed. Anything I can send your way?”

“Thank you, yes. I think I have a list written out.” Sarah went digging for her list out of her pockets, and a young man caught Elizabeth’s eye.

He seemed familiar, but could not quite place him. "I have a strange feeling I know that man." *Maybe when I was visiting Georgiana? That seems a bit ridiculous.*

Sarah saw her gaze, “Ah, you looking at the new solider that got brought in. I hope you do not know him. It does not look good for him, I am sorry to say. He thought he had a cold, but he had weakness in his body and shivers.”

“He going to make it, do you think Sarah?”

“I wish I could say, but I think his lungs already sound like they are filling up. We are going to do our best.”

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A few times through the night, or what Darcy thought was perhaps the night, Albert stopped by. He gave primarily gave Darcy water, but Darcy was surprised at how comforting he found Old Albert's presence. *Something so calm in his bearing.*

“You are burning up, Captain. I’ve told the nurses. They gave me some methods to hopefully help bring your fever down. Lord above, this hospital is filled to the brim. They are run ragged, sir.”

Darcy let the man work, enjoying what honestly felt like pampering. Beyond Old Albert, Darcy found himself to be quite in the way. A few times he got stepped on too.

“Oh dearie.”

“Didn’t see you there, love.”

“Who put you here?”

Albert stopped by and hand fed him some surprisingly delicious soup. “Not too much, sir. Got to keep you from being revisited by it. Just enough to give you some strength to fight.” His soothing words washed over Darcy.

“Thank you, Albert.” He managed to say. “For taking such care. How are our other boys?”

Old Albert let himself sigh a bit. “Casey seems alright, I suppose. They working on him still. But, Captain, I am worried about Corey. He got shot in the hand, which isn’t great, but hardly likely to kill him. Yet, he came down with a cold or something, but it come on him fast. Looks nasty.”

“Cold?” Darcy leaned back, staring up above him at the tiles on the ceiling a sick feeling sinking into his stomach. “Be careful, Albert. Listen to the nurses. Do not go anywhere they have not explicitly told you to be.”

“Yes sir. Mostly going to be keeping track of you lot, won’t I? Now, get some sleep, sir.”

Darcy smiled at him. Before he allowed himself to melt into sleep, he noticed that he was almost half under Casey’s bed. *Might be best to get all the way under. Would it not? That way no one would step on me again.* It seemed like a very good idea, so Darcy managed by slow fits and starts to wriggle all the way under Casey’s bed. He then let dreaming take him, welcoming a pair of fine eyes to happily haunt his dreams. This time his fantasy was dressed as nurse and wiping his fevered brow. He slept with a smile on his face, not even noticing how much time was passing and how strange that Old Albert had not come back to check on him.

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your patience - I love me some angst! The 'reunion' will be in the next chapter. This chapter’s title comes from the poignant Wilfred Owen poem “Mental Cases:”

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?  
Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,  
Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish,  
Baring teeth that leer like skulls’ teeth wicked?  
Stroke on stroke of pain – but what slow panic,

Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?  
Ever from their hair and through their hands' palms  
Misery swelters. Surely we have perished  
Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish?

—These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.  
Memory fingers in their hair of murders,  
Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.  
Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,  
Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.  
Always they must see these things and hear them,  
Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,  
Carnage incomparable and human squander  
Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.

Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented  
Back into their brains, because on their sense  
Sunlight seems a bloodsmear; night comes blood-black;  
Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh  
—Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,  
Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses.  
—Thus their hands are plucking at each other;  
Picking at the rope-knouts of their scourging;  
Snatching after us who smote them, brother,  
Pawing us who dealt them war and madness.

# The Thing They Know and Never Speak

## Chapter Notes

I hope this chapter doesn't disappoint.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Several nurses were gathered in the large room of the hospital. It was what housed the most beds with the most patients who now needed to be helped with their bathing and using of the restroom or at least taking up their bed pans. Elizabeth breathed a deep sigh. *Everyone's favorite part of the day.* She allowed herself a wry smile. The exhaustion was really setting in. *I keep feeling like we will get this outbreak under control and then I can sleep.* But something had been scratching at the back of her mind for the past day or so. A certain unrest she could not name or place. Jane stood at the bed across from her, helping a patient, while Elizabeth was helping another young man. *Philip I am pretty sure,* when she became aware of Leslie's sharp voice. "Do not touch me again," the forceful statement made most everyone in the room look up.

"Come now, Nurse. Can't you see you are the only medicine I need?" A smarmy voice replied.

Elizabeth smiled at Philip, assuring him she would be back. Jane joined her as they both walked over to see what the trouble was. They assured several people as she passed that they would handle it. The nurses were a pretty protective lot, and had, frustratingly, seen several unpleasant incidents get ignored or brushed aside by doctors. They decided that together they would help each other. "Nurse Smythe." Elizabeth nodded to her. "Would you mind checking on the status of Bunbury?" Leslie gave her a grateful smile.

This protocol was one of the first things Elizabeth instituted when she was appointed head nurse. It was something the nurses could use at their discretion to get away from patients who may be making them feel uncomfortable or if they experienced any sort of untoward behavior, that they did not want. Jane worked to soothe another patient, standing by close enough to intercede as well if it was needed.

Elizabeth turned her head to see the problem patient, only to be stopped short. *Oh blast.* She resisted the desire to turn on her heels and leave him by himself. "Ah, Mr. Wickham. I suppose I should have known based on the reception you were receiving from poor Nurse Smythe."

His face, which had already been leering, became a bit more aggressive. "Elizabeth."

"I think you will find that I am Nurse Bennet to you."



“Yes. That is why I think we may have caught him in time. He came in yesterday with a couple wounded and one sick man. Now, we are pretty sure the sick one did not have this disease when he came in. His symptoms were more akin to the earlier May variety we think. Anyway, one of the men he came in with was hale and hearty. He was I think supposed to get a report on the hospital and take it back to the frontlines to make sure they do not overcrowd

us. That is what I understand from him, but he was also checking in on the three men he brought with him.”

Sarah moved a little away from the door and gestured at a man lying in bed near the door. He seemed to be mumbling something, *Maybe “Catherine?” or is it “Captain?”*

Sarah sighed. “A sweet dear, really. He had been helping us a great deal, but he seems to be struck down with it now as well. I have put him in this bed, and I do not think he will want to move anytime soon. However, there was a chance he came in here to check on his boy and then out to check on the wounded he knows only to come here again? I am not sure of the timeline for whom he checked on when or who all he helped. As you can tell, he is not very coherent right now, so I cannot get a clear answer. If you could do a favor for him, I think he would be most grateful. Obviously, I am keeping him in here, but he is anxious about the two in the main ward. Would you check on them and tell me how they are doing so that I can assure him one way or another. I think he said their names were Casey and Captain Darcy?”

*Darcy? Captain Darcy? Could he be here?* Elizabeth felt her heart start to beat rapidly, her hands felt floaty, and she had a hard time hearing the rest of what Sarah was saying.

“I am not really sure about their names, but it would be nice to make the sweet man feel comforted. Other than that, I just thought you should be made aware. I know we are already monitoring things, but keep a keen eye out in the main ward I would say.”

“Of course. Let me go check on that right now.” Elizabeth said, and hurried away, maybe before Sarah was done talking.

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Darcy was sure Old Albert would be by soon. *He would not leave me this long. And I am so thirsty.* He tried to crane his neck up to see if he could catch anyone's attention. Darcy still felt disjointed and not quite himself. His mind was buzzing as if bees had taken to building a nest there. *Which would not be the worst thing, would it? A little honey? What the hell am I saying?* He tried to clear his mind and focus, but he felt so weak. He only managed to move his head a little, seeing more of the room beyond the underside of Casey's bed.



Elizabeth felt her heart pounding as she pushed back into the main ward. *If he is here, he has to be here. I would have seen him on my rounds otherwise.* She was so caught up own thoughts she missed Caroline trying to mock her about Wickham's presence and she completely missed Wickham trying to get her attention.

His hand just would not move, no matter what he tried. Then, suddenly, the foot moved away and between the space of a blink Elizabeth appeared in front of him. “Ah, that explains the beauty of the ankle then.” *Elizabeth. I never get tired of seeing you.* “You still look quite exhausted.” Darcy tried to scoot over. “Should you lay down?”

Elizabeth was shocked. *Darcy here. Under a bed? He did not seem to realize it was me. It has been a while since we have seen each other.* She crouched down more to see if she could see him better. “What are you doing under the bed, Darcy? Do you recognize me?” She asked quietly. He beamed up at her, his face looking like the sun breaking out of the clouds. *His dimples. I do not think I could ever get tired of looking at his face.* She felt an intense longing to stroke his hair and smooth out a curl. So she did, touching their soft texture and smiling at him. However, her hand strayed to his forehead, which felt quite hot. *Wait, what is he doing in the hospital?* “Why are you here, Darcy? You are not wounded, are you?” As she asked, she reached to get some water for him.

It was so lovely to have his angel so close to him. Even in his best visions she had been a good distance away. *Her eyes are so lovely, even now. Bewitching.* She seemed to be asking him something, but as soon as her hand touched his hair, he could not make sense of her words. Gentle caresses he had only dared imagine before coming to fruition. *Ah, bliss.* The coolness of her hand soothed his aching head better than anything since he had gotten hurt. He tried to push his head further into her fingers, which responded by moving from his forehead. *No, do not leave. I need your touch.* Yet it quickly moved down his face, briefly cupping his cheek, and ending behind his head. She helped lift him up as she gave him a drink of water. Darcy felt a moment of clarity as the cooling water refreshed his parched mouth. *Wait, the water is real . . . that must mean.* “Elizabeth?”

This chapter's title comes from the chilling Wilfred Owen poem "Smile, Smile, Smile"

Head to limp head, the sunk-eyed wounded scanned
Yesterday's Mail; the casualties (typed small)
And (large) Vast Booty from our Latest Haul.
Also, they read of Cheap Homes, not yet planned;
“For,” said the paper, “when this war is done
The men's first instinct will be making homes.
Meanwhile their foremost need is aerodromes,
It being certain war has just begun.
Peace would do wrong to our undying dead,—
The sons we offered might regret they died

If we got nothing lasting in their stead.
We must be solidly indemnified.
Though all be worthy Victory which all bought.
We rulers sitting in this ancient spot
Would wrong our very selves if we forgot
The greatest glory will be theirs who fought,
Who kept this nation in integrity.”
Nation?—The half-limbed readers did not chafe
But smiled at one another curiously
Like secret men who know their secret safe.
(This is the thing they know and never speak,
That England one by one had fled to France
Not many elsewhere now save under France).
Pictures of these broad smiles appear each week,
And people in whose voice real feeling rings
Say: How they smile! They're happy now, poor things.

Kind Jesus Fouled

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Elizabeth found herself smiling at the tone of his voice. *He looks so impish.* “Yes. Are you wondering if it is me?” She could not keep from stroking his cheek, rubbing his dimples. *His eyes look a bit hazy, clearly suffering from a fever.* She let her eyes wander down his face, “You must excuse me Darcy. I want to check the wound that brought you here.”

“Fitzwilliam, please . . .”

He looked at her with soulful eyes looking like pools of melted chocolate. *A treat. Such kind eyes. How did I ever think he was a pompous, selfish man?* “Fitzwilliam then. I would say it is good to see you again, but I have to confess I wanted it to be in another context.”

Elizabeth gritted her teeth when she saw Darcy's bandage soaked through. She quickly got up to get fresh bandages.

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Darcy was lost gazing into the crystal goodness of Elizabeth's face. His Elizabeth. *Well, maybe not mine, but still Elizabeth here . . . actually present with me?* He felt himself smile deeply, but then she moved away. "Elizabeth?" *Please do not leave me. Not before I am able to tell you how ardently I admire and love you. Oh wait, I did already try that. Maybe this time I could do it better?* Before he spiraled too far, Elizabeth was back. Her cool hands were running down his side, sliding down further and . . . "Miss Elizabeth!"

Elizabeth laughed. *Perfect sound*. “Come now, you just told me to call you Fitzwilliam. And do not worry. I do this all the time. I am a nurse, you know.” Darcy could not help how wide his eyes got. *List all the kings and queens of England*, he thought as she peeled back his pants and exposed his side.

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Elizabeth could not stop the quirk of her lips but did manage to stifle her giggles. *He is too precious*, she thought as she observed the deep blush that suffused his cheeks as she pulled down the side of his pants to get to his wound. Her smile died away as she looked at the deep hole in his side. Leaning down, she smelled it.

Darcy stared at her. *The stare I remember. The stare that pulls me, even now, further into him.* Now it felt like a palpable hug, a comforting blanket surrounding her. “I can wait as long as you need me to, Elizabeth.”

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“Lizzy!” Jane called.

“Who?”

“Oh Lizzy! Really? It will be just like when good Charles came here to woo me. Your Darcy. But oh no, why is here? Wounded or ill?”

An ugly voice cut through her whispering and what was to be Jane's response. "Oh the little lord himself is here, is he? I hope he does have the illness that kills that makes you drown in your own pompous, selfishness. I suppose any number of pretty nurses are there to help him. Revolting, arrogant, pretentious git." Wickham sat up in the bed and made sure to raise his voice, "You here too, old Darce? You missed the only man who has known your sister intimately. Well, I suppose she could have known others by now, the little slut. Broke her in though, didn't I. Stretched her, placed my mouth on . . ."

“Oi. None o’ that.” A different soldier leaned up. “Stop your bellowing, Wickham. Good men are trying to recover here, and they can’t with your salacious drivel you’re spewing. And I

don't know who this 'Darce' is, but I'll thank you to not talk about his sister that way, you leech."

Most of the soldiers were pushing themselves up if they could manage it. Even down the way Casey had stretched himself up. "Not talking about Captain Darcy are you? He is the very best of men. Tell him he is going to get it."

A different soldier sneered back at Wickham, “Always knew you were no good. That’s Casey that is. Known him not a day, and I’d take him over you anytime.”

Caroline walked towards Elizabeth and Jane. “I told you that man was no good.” She lowered her voice, clearly intending for just the women to hear.

“Now Caroline, dear. You know I am glad we are to be sisters soon, but I think we would have been more open to hearing your perspective if you had been kinder when we first met, my dear.” Jane replied, placing her hand on Caroline.

Caroline shrugged, “You are probably right. But I cannot help the way I am. Or I suppose I can, but who can be bothered?” Caroline sighed. “Either way, is Wickham right? Is Mr. Darcy here?”

Elizabeth knew she should not tempt the tentative peace they had established between them, but even so, “Fitzwilliam is here as it happens.” She smiled sweetly at Caroline who blanched at the intimacy.

“Is that not a little forward, Eliza?”

"It might be, but he did ask. I would hate to disappoint a wounded man in his recovery."

Caroline seemed to grit her teeth. “Just as well” she muttered as she moved off.

“Lizzy!” Jane whispered but was smiling.

“Sorry sister of mine. I do try, most of the time. Come, help me with this. I need to get poor Fitzwilliam a bed. I think I have a plan, but it is a bit unorthodox.”

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Darcy was pleasantly shifting in and out of wakefulness. His body still felt weighted down, tired, but his spirit felt buoyed, lifted. *Elizabeth here. Actually here. She seemed happy to see me, I think. Her eyes were shining. But her eyes always shine. Of course they do. She is light.* He continued thinking in terms that would have surely made him blush if another were privy to his thoughts. But he also was not sure he would care. His heart's content here. Being kind to him, welcoming him. It was too wonderful to worry overmuch about what others would think. He thought he heard some loud voices echoing across the ward.

Casey leaned slightly over his bed, not quite able to see all of Darcy, but making out some of his face, “Sorry Captain, sir. Just some soldiers talking and trying to get attention I suspect. Don’t worry none.”

“Oh yes sir. I am feeling so much better after just a day of not being jostled about and such.”

“No, sir. I haven’t seen either of them since I woke up this morning. Of course, I wasn’t expecting to see Corey. They said they were taking him to isolation, but Old Albert. I did expect to see him.”

I hope that is all it is. Darcy tried to stifle the dark direction his thoughts were taking. *He did say he was going to visit Corey, who was going to be held in isolation. Maybe he just is stuck in that ward himself now.* Darcy felt that was cold comfort and could not quite manage to make himself believe it in any event.

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“I hope I am not interrupting anything?” She said when she was near enough. “We are just going to move Captain Darcy here to a proper bed.”

“Hey!” Darcy called.

Elizabeth was directing the front and could not stop herself from looking down into his chocolate eyes. “This bed is a little out of the way, but it is the only option I could think of.”

Reaching their destination, they placed Darcy in the new space. Jimmy left them and Jane discreetly went to wait on her sister in the hall.

“What is this room?” Darcy asked, quite confused. “Why has the hospital not been using it?”

“Well. They have been.” Elizabeth felt her face heat up. “We just do not have any other place to put you, so I am going to be sharing a bed with Jane. You can use mine while you recover.”

“This . . . this is your bed, Elizabeth?” Darcy’s voice sounded so reverent. *He is going to make me blush even more.* “You are giving up your space for me? Oh no, Elizabeth. You cannot do that. You are the one who is working so hard, and you need proper rest.”

“Well, that settles it then, does it not? How could I get rest knowing you were cold on the floor? You will be much warmer here, and I promise not to forget about you. Jane said she would check in on you too, so you will not be neglected. Although I suppose you might feel a bit lonely.”

“Are you kidding? I do not think I have been properly by myself since my last leave a year when I was staying with my aunt. . . When I met you again.” Darcy smiled a little. “Then I had to embarrass myself by being such a boob.”

“Oh do not say that. I think we were both a little foolish, and your letter.”

“Do not mention my letter, Elizabeth. I cannot believe I gave that to you.” Darcy was turning redder and redder.

*We cannot have that.* “I will get rid of the letter if you wish, but you must know it has brought me a lot of comfort.” Elizabeth reached to where his letters were stored. She pulled out his letter and took his hand in hers. “In fact, it has long been my favorite source of comfort while working as a nurse.” She showed him the worn letter, which had been so lovingly kept by herself. “The end is charity itself, you know. It has never failed to make me feel almost as if I was having another conversation with you.”

“I suppose that would not be too hard to achieve since I tended to awkward silence in your presence, Elizabeth.”

“True. You seemed set on staring me into love rather than the more traditional form of wooing.” Elizabeth laughed a little. She squeezed his hand and then set it down. “Now rest, Fitzwilliam. You need to restore your body. I will get food and be back in an hour.” His smile followed her out of the room, filling her with peace and hope.



Darcy was not sure how long he slept. He knew Elizabeth had come in at least once and got some food into him, but he was ashamed to admit he had quickly fallen back into slumber. *It*

*seems very dark. Of course, it could be the middle of the day, and it just seems like there is no sun since I do not think there was a window in this room. This room – I mean Elizabeth's room. I am in the same place she has slept for who knows how long. He rubbed the fabric a bit, imagining it was her hand he was lovingly stroking. Maybe soon these fantasies will be in the past. She seems to receive me well. She is going out of her way to help me. I think I need to try declaring myself to her yet again.*

Darcy's musings were cut off when the door to the small closet creaked open. No light accompanied the sound, and Darcy was not sure what he was seeing. It looked like there was a darker shape, a figure, hobbling toward him.

"Remember me, Darcy old chap?"

*Wickham? Here?*

## Chapter End Notes

This chapter's title comes from the evocative Wilfred Owen poem "Soldier's Dream"

I dreamed kind Jesus fouled the big-gun gears;  
And caused a permanent stoppage in all bolts;  
And buckled with a smile Mausers and Colts;  
And rusted every bayonet with His tears.

And there were no more bombs, of ours or Theirs,  
Not even an old flint-lock, not even a pikel.  
But God was vexed, and gave all power to Michael;  
And when I woke he'd seen to our repairs.

# My Helpless Sight

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I thought it would be good to have a wee picture of our dear poet I have been quoting for this story. Poor little Wilfred Own:



“Yes. Hello Darcy. I’m surprised you remember me with all the lack of consideration you have given me. You bastard!”

Darcy bit his tongue, feeling frustration and rage boiling inside. *Do not sink to his level. Need to play this smart. You are stuck in a bed, for heaven’s sake. Blast. Focus.* Darcy noticed what

he thought was a glint in what little light Wickham had let in by opening the door. *Bloody Wickham has a knife What am I going to do?*

“Look at you here, a sitting duck. Just waiting for someone like me. How the fuck did you make it? Saw you joined up in 1914 like a git. Ready to ‘serve your country’ like an idiot. All those other men died. Why not you, dammit!”

Darcy tried to pull himself up, move away from the hulking figure that seemed to be stumbling toward him.

"You selfish fucking prick. All you do is take, take from the world. What about me? Remember how that goat your father loved me? I was fun to spend time with, unlike you. Boring old Darcy. What did that old buffoon think of you?"

“Do not talk about my father, George.” Darcy’s voice was cold. Chillingly so if one had a mind to pay attention to it. Wickham, of course, was not.

He pushed forward, hobbling. “You unmitigated bastard, lording yourself over everyone. I, ME, I should have been made captain. I should have gotten the opportunity to move away from the front.”

From what Darcy could see Wickham raised his hand, as if in preparation to strike. *I only get one chance at this. Not as if I am at my best right now. Got to make it count.*

“I cannot believe what an idiot you are. You could have been cooling your heels in London, doing strategy. Your position is wasted on you. And I mean to take it from you.”

Wickham made his move towards Darcy. He had misjudged where he thought Darcy was, which allowed Darcy to grab Wickham's arm, twisting him around. Wickham's knife caught Darcy's cheek, but he could tell it was shallow. Holding Wickham taut in such a manner was deeply painful. "Arggh." He could not hold back the cry of his pain.

Wickham struggled against his hold. “Let me go you bastard. This is my time. You need to . . . just. . . die!” Wickham attempted to scramble away from, pulling uselessly.

Darcy tightened his hold. *Ugh. He really is going to make me do this, is he not?* He steadied himself. Increasing the pressure he was putting around Wickham's neck, he felt his stitches pulling apart. "Wickham, why are you always such an impossible –"

Wickham squirmed and weakly pushed against him. Darcy kept his hold strong, even through the pain was excruciating. Wickham's strength clearly was leeching out of him. Finally he went limp. *Took longer to make him pass out than I thought, probably since I am not . . .* Darcy removed his hold, panting. Sweat glistened on his face, and Darcy tried to calm himself and push Wickham away from him.

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Elizabeth took a deep breath. *This is going to be hard. Poor Fitzwilliam. This poor man died in so much pain. This disease is so cruel. Should I tell Darcy that he was calling for him? No, that seems cruel. But I can tell him what Nurse Sarah reported to me I suppose.* She sedately walked to her room, sad to have to wake him, but knowing he would rather know. And yet, a little excited, just at the prospect of seeing his dear face again.

She found her door open, which was a bit unsettling. But nothing compared to when she turned the lights on. The first thing Elizabeth saw was Wickham covering most of the bed and then blood. She could see him breathing, and frankly was not overly concerned with him. She pushed Wickham aside, letting him slide to the ground.

Elizabeth saw Darcy. He was panting, eyes glazed. There was blood on his face, and he was glistening. *His skin. No, focus.* “Darcy! What happened? Are you alright?” She grabbed her handkerchief and wiped at the blood. It revealed a shallow cut as she cleaned him up. She held his cheek in her hand, searching his eyes.

“Elizabeth.” He managed to say. “My Elizabeth. Oh dear. I am sorry. I did not mean to say my, of course.” He started blushing as Elizabeth worked on cleaning his wound.

“Do not worry, Fitzwilliam. It is a shallow cut. Just bled a lot. What happened? Why is Wickham in your room? We should probably get something to handle him.”

Darcy shook his head. “Elizabeth, I am really not sure. You know what I told you in the letter I sent. Wickham just came in spewing jealousy and brandishing a knife.”

“He what? Let me get the orderly, and we will sequester Wickham until we can call an inquest.”

Elizabeth saw to it with the help of Jimmy and then returned to Darcy. “Oh dearest, you pulled your stiches. Lean back and let me re-do them for you.” Elizabeth pushed him back into the bed and pulled out her kit. “This does not look too good, Fitzwilliam. I am afraid it will prolong your healing. Although, yes, it looks like I” Elizabeth got up and left, returning quickly with a something in her hand. “Let me add this into your wound. I think it will help get the infection to finally die.” Elizabeth worked steadily, pleased with her work when she was done. Elizabeth sighed deeply. She finished binding him up. Then, took Darcy’s hand in her own. She leaned down and caught his eyes.

“Fitzwilliam, I am so sorry to have to tell you this. You have already had such a dreadful night. I know you are in a great deal of pain, but . . . I also know you would rather know. Your Albert, who brought you in, he seems to have caught what Corey had. It is an aggressive, quick moving disease. Oh, Fitzwilliam. He died tonight. It was why I was coming to your room.”

Fitzwilliam seemed to crumble. He melted back into the bed, the devastation clear on his face. “Old Albert?”

“I am afraid so. I do not want to add to your sorrow, but Nurse Sarah did share his last coherent words with me, for you to know. He spoke of you. He said he wanted his captain to

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Elizabeth finally managed to find the time to stop by her room. Darcy's skin looked flushed and healthy in a way that it had not since he had been brought to the hospital, but pain still lined his eyes. "Fitzwilliam." She smiled at him. His face turned to her, ever so slightly, and the sun broke through the clouds. *My favorite view. Nothing could compare to the light in his face when he smiles, the way his eyes shine.*

"Elizabeth."

"How are you now?"

He shrugged a bit. "Worried. Thinking of my men. Feeling bad for being so happy to be here with you."

Elizabeth sat next to him on the bed. "I am glad you are here with me as well."

"Elizabeth, I know I botched this before. But I love you, so desperately, so completely. You help me know myself. You shine before me as sun to turn to and grow towards. To make me a kinder, better man. Your goodness, your wit, your spirit. You are wholly a delight. Will you . . . will you allow me to write letters with you?"

Elizabeth's face was suffused with joy, glowing. She could not stop herself from laughing, and she rather did not want to. She felt so incandescently happy, in a way she had never done before. "Of course. But you will not need to for a good bit. I am not afraid to tell you that you will be recovering from your wound for at least a week, if not longer. I will be caring for you." Elizabeth stood up, "I love you too."

She walked just out of her room but ran into Caroline. "Oh sorry, Caroline! I was just seeing to my Fitzwilliam." Elizabeth turned back, her eyes meeting with Darcy's.

Caroline smiled at her, although both Elizabeth and Darcy did not take note, "I suppose I should go see to my Will as well."

She walked on, but Elizabeth lingered, just gazing into Darcy's kind eyes, held in thrall for one moment more.

## Chapter End Notes

EEK! All done for this story, sort of. I am going to add to this story just a little – two chapters, one set before this story (to help us see a little of Elizabeth and Darcy's trouble) and one set after (a picture of peace time), both from Georgina's perspective since I didn't get enough of her in this story!

This chapter's title comes from the melancholic Wilfred Owen poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" (you knew this one was coming).

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,  
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling  
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling  
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—  
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,  
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,  
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—  
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori.

And just because I can't help myself here is "Anthem for Doomed Youth" as well:  
What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
— Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.

The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

Am I the only one crying? So many poor dead boys in this war – not to mention the  
civilians and just \*sobs\*

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