

## **Colliding. 2, Patrick**

by mazaher  
March, 2011

::

He is there.

I step out of the back door of the Royal Albert Hall in the night air, chilled by yesterday's north-western gale, and there he is standing, shivering.

He has come. He has waited for me.

::

I have been playing Beethoven tonight, the *Moonlight* sonata he used to love. I have played for him, for the image of him in my mind which has stayed with me every day and every night since the moment we parted.

I didn't allow myself to believe he could be, he would be in the audience.

After the concert, I linger inside as long as I can possibly do. I feel enveloped by his imagined presence, warmed by the memory of the depth in those eyes which I haven't seen for so long, soothed by the phantom sound of his voice asking me, pleading with me in that last moment, to take care of myself.

I have, my Jack, I have fed myself with music and with the thought of you. That's all the care I need. Do you like how I play? Have I suffered enough to know, really know, how Beethoven must be played?

Wrapped in the feel of him, I barely hear the congratulations, return the handshakes. I don't care for the invitation by the Duke of Marlborough to play for his guests at Blenheim, for the written contract in the hand of the impresario tugging at my sleeve, for the ladies asking autographs and the gentlemen offering me cigars. I smile, nod, thank, and send them away one by one, until finally I am alone. I shut the door.

I sit silent and still in the half-dark dressing room, in front of a mirror full of troubled shadows, and review my life.

All these years, these short and longest years, I have been on the run.

As my dead father still pursued Sherlock Holmes through Colonel Moran's bulldog tenacity, so his ghost pursued me. How does one defend himself from a ghost? The son I was could never save himself. I must change, become another, my own man, and to my desperation I find that I can't, so strong is my father's hold on my life.

He always saw me as something which he owned. At best as a younger version of himself, his key to an immortality of sorts; at worst as a means to an end, expendable ...replaceable. In either case, I finally couldn't bring myself to call it love. And yet I couldn't escape, I can't, because I still don't dare conceive of an alternative!

As for my mother— yes, she loved me. (Here I am, already thinking of her as though she's dead). But she loved him first and foremost, to the point of going insane when he died.

I was the last thing she would have willingly renounced: but renounce me she would, infallibly, if only he had asked. Even now, in her small tidy room at St. Patrick's asylum in Dublin, where they try to make her days tolerable, the name her lips remember is his, not mine.

Only my Jack ever loved me as a fellow human being. The Devil knows that I don't deserve to even be allowed to love him back. He's worth much better than I am.

After we parted, I tried to leave behind the very idea of love.

I told myself that love is just illusion, that what I seemed to be seeing in Mr. Waszowski was only in my overactive imagination. (So reasonable, the voice of my father in my mind, so coolly friendly, so insufferably patronizing...)

I made myself believe that there must be better, out in the vast wide world, and that I just had to reach out and take it. I tried to forget my Jack in the women and the men whom I had,

or who had me. A blasphemous rosary of one-night stands in all the colours of ivory and rose and caramel and ebony, in all the languages of words and whimpers and growls, and every grain left me aching with loneliness, because nobody else...

Nobody else ever seemed to see the world like we do.

Jack and me.

Two pieces of a puzzle, two different shapes, meaning nothing unless they are fitting together. But the pieces have been thrown away, and who will pick them up and fit them to each other again?

I found out too late that I had wasted a miracle. I, the sinner, son of a sinner, have been given a miracle! and I have wasted it.

There is no blackest sin.

I stand and leave the empty dressing-room, the whisper of my cape and the rhythm of my steps the only sounds along the corridors of the theatre now asleep.

The valet waiting just inside the back door gives me the good-night. The door creaks open, then slams shut behind me. The key is turned from the inside.

It is late night, and it is cold. The wintry air is biting, and the slap of a chilled gust of wind draws me brutally from the rêverie of the past couple of hours, making my eyes water.

I press the heels of my hands on my eyelids, wipe the tears. I sigh. The spell is broken. I am alone. My phantom Jack has gone, this is London, I am who I have always been, or a bit worse, and he is as irrevocably lost to me as the notes of the sonata have melted into thin air. I open my eyes.

The first thing I see is the orange glow of a cigarette burning in someone's hand, five steps on my left. I turn to look... and the opposite ends of the world turn around at the same time and meet in an impossible kiss.

My Jack is here.

And once again I cannot move, I cannot speak, like I could not when he embraced me after we had said our farewells, in an empty house in Dublin, four years ago.

A wave of bliss washes over me, followed by a wave of shame.

Who am I, what have I become, what is he seeing, after waiting for me all these years in the cold of St. Bart's halls, all these hours in the cold of a winter night?

How can he believe I will ever be worth his pain?

But I owe him a greeting, at least, and there is only one fitting word that comes into my mind, at the same time an acknowledgement and blessing.

"You," I say.

"You" he answers, and I hear a quiet triumph in his voice, like the smile he tries to keep from lighting up his face, and fails.

He is a warlock. He keeps me spellbound, all the while as he breaks through my father's spells like they were no more than nursery rhymes. He teases me about my long hair and newly-grown goatee, and as his voice dances up to my ears I find my own voice again.

I am Papageno, something less than human, but awakened by his music and following, following.

I don't know what I am saying, only that it is the truth. Nothing less can do. I can't wear a mask with him. He knows me too well already. I want him to know me truly, completely, before inevitably leaving me behind.

He cannot want me.

He will not want me.

He must not.

Not again.

But then,

"I come to serve, Patrick."

He says my name, which I have tried to discard from my own self in the same way my mother has forgotten it. He says it as though it is something precious; he says it like he hasn't uttered the word in these four years.

And I am broken.

I capitulate.

I am ashamed of myself, but if he wants me, by God, I will have him.

"Are you sure?" I ask.

He draws himself up at parade rest.

"More than of anything else in my life," he answers.

Then I turn around and walk away.

And he follows, he does follow, the other half of my heart, he follows me, be it even to our perdition.

::

The next day he comes to see me in my apartment in Kensington. We bicker about the goatee, which I have shaved. (I'll never tell him that it is so that I will not rub his face when we will kiss-- \*if\* we will ever kiss).

He makes me blush with a compliment.

He can rob me of words just as easily as he can give them to me.

I tell him to shut up, but he won't.

I love him so much that I must tell him:

"I hate you."

His eyes seem to say he doesn't quite believe me.

::

Two weeks have passed when one early morning I hear a horse-drawn lorry stopping under my windows. Furniture is unloaded and transported upstairs, next door.

There is a figure I know so well, standing tall beside the shining pair of black Shires in their brass-hung harness, choosing a cigarette from a silver case and tapping it gently before lighting it. He takes a draw and blows a puff of smoke. I read satisfaction in the line of his shoulders, joy in the curve of his lips, elation even in the way he pockets the case. I touch my hand to the windowpane, and instead of cold glass I feel the warmth of his cheek.

I have prayed for this.

God or the Devil have listened.

I don't care which.

He's here.

::