

A/N: After a pause because I got absorbed by my other story (The only reason to marry is love), I will now continue this one. This is the last chapter covering the 8 episodes on screen and after that I will dive into the continuation.

I am well aware that many great continuations have been written already so perhaps there is no need for another, but my intention was always to write the story I want to return to and read myself and then I need it to have an ending beyond what we saw on screen. I expect it will be a few chapters after this, but probably not a full-blown second season. I will continue to focus on Charlotte and Sidney because if I'm honest they are the ones I really care about.

Chapter 18: The end of naivety

In retrospect Charlotte would always think of her stay in Sanditon as divided in a *before* and an *after*. Not a before and after The Kiss, even if that in so many ways had rocked her world, but before and after The Fire.

Up until the fire, everything about Sanditon had been an exciting adventure and fairy tale. All the things she had seen and experienced, the new acquaintances she had made, her curious dislike for Sidney transforming into love - everything had been covered by a veil of rosy romance. Even the sadness she felt when she thought her feelings for Sidney unrequited had been romantic somehow.

The fire efficiently tore that veil apart, leaving harsh reality exposed to her eyes, though it took her a few days to fully grasp it.

Tom's grand apartment buildings were burned to ashes and with no insurance to cover the losses, so much else vanished in that fire. A furious Lady Denham

withdrew her investment and Tom had to come up with a financial solution in terms of a new investor within a week, if he was not to be turned over to the debtor's prison and his family ruined. Charlotte had thought Tom to be a man of action, but now saw him paralysed, a visionary with a crushed vision. He whined like a sulking child with a broken a toy over the misfortune his own irresponsible actions had brought upon him. Instead of taking accountability he now looked to Sidney for help. Charlotte's respect for him crumbled to pieces when she saw how he, without hesitation, laid the heavy responsibility to find a new investor on his younger brother's shoulders. He simply shrugged his own saying that Sidney was so much better connected and what good would it do if he also went to London instead of remaining in Sanditon, consoling his family. He had deceived everyone; Sidney, Lady Denham, the workers and worst of all his wife and Charlotte found it impossible to understand what could drive a man to do such things. He begged for Mary to forgive him but in Charlotte's opinion did nothing to earn that forgiveness, just waited for it to fall in his lap. He showed little or no concern over Old stringer's death. He gave his condolences and attended the funeral, but the loss of a life seemed to be of minor importance compared to the destroyed buildings and his own financial trouble.

When the veil was removed from Charlotte's eyes she could see that Esther Denham indeed had been right that time when she said that Tom was a megalomaniac who would bring his family to ruin. He was a fascinating man whom she had admired, but in the end one who took far more than he gave without thinking of the consequences and realising the truth was a painful awakening. Once again, it dawned on her how naïve she had been in her judgment of people. Tom's intentions may be good, but the road to hell is paved with such and for the first time she fully understood why Sidney had been reluctant to help him.

She was deeply grateful that the events did not expose Sidney to be the same fickle personality as his brother. Quite the contrary. In the past she had accused him of stepping away from responsibility and not being there for Tom or Georgiana as could expected from a brother or guardian, but now he proved his worth to the

point that she almost wished he was less loyal to his family. She loved him all the more for it, but at the same time secretly wished that it was someone else than him who had to leave for London and try to save the family. However, she did understand the cascade of serious events Tom's imminent ruin would cause. His shame would be the entire Parker family's, and not just Mary's and the children's but also his siblings'. *If* Sidney would ask her to marry him, she would undoubtedly accept because her love made her want to stand by his side through thick and thin, but she knew that an honourable man like him never would propose to a woman under such circumstances as it would mean sharing their disgrace. He had to save Tom not only for Tom's sake but also for everyone else's, and to secure his own future happiness.

Her thoughts often returned to that magic moment on the balcony, before they were interrupted by Edward Denham. It was their last purely happy moment together. In fact, those minutes had been like the epitome of happiness. Everything about Sidney had suggested he was going to propose to her, from the way he wrapped her hands so tightly in his, to the intensely loving way he looked at her and the words he said before the conversation abruptly ended, never to be resumed. It had felt like destiny that he would propose there, where he once had chastised her and left her teary eyed behind. This time he had awaited her eagerly and she had been so nervous, joyful and expectant that she could not quite believe it was really happening. *And then it was not.* He was pulled away from her, first by Edward, then by the fire and things were never the same.

When he left for London, it had felt like a lovers' goodbye even if the word 'love' never had been spoken. His lips had almost touched hers when he said he would come back to her, so they could finish that conversation. She sensed that it took all his self-discipline not to kiss her there in the middle of the street and that he barely could stand the thought of leaving her behind. She had faith in him finding a solution, but strangely also had an ominous feeling in her gut and wished she could make him stay or go with him and support him. She did not want to become like

Mary, a wife who helplessly was left on the spectators' bench, but they were not even engaged yet, so there was no way she could insist.

The week when he was gone was terrible. Besides missing Sidney and worry exceedingly about the future of Sanditon, she had tried to support the equally furious and anxious Mary and console the devastated James Stringer.

Mary was so angry with Tom that she hardly could stand looking at him, let alone speak to him and Charlotte had to act as their go-between which she found quite awkward. Living under their roof, it was obvious to her that if Mary had been able to she would have walked out on her husband. He had gambled with their future, lied to her face and set the town and his grand plan far above his own marriage. Her trust in him had been destroyed, her love overturned. The best she could hope for now was for Sidney to rescue them all or she would be left with nothing in terms of marriage, reputation and means to live off. She was a patient and loyal woman, but her limit had finally been reached. For Charlotte it was something of a shock to watch their relationship crumble. She had thought them a happily married couple, complementing one another well, but now realised how fragile everything could be if one deceived the other and the equilibrium disturbed. It was therefore something of a relief when the Parkers returned from Old Stringer's funeral and surprisingly seemed to have reconciled. Mary commented on it later when they were alone, even if Charlotte had not asked.

"Tom asked my forgiveness today, in the church after the funeral. Perhaps he sensed it would be harder to get my forgiveness than God's", she sighed and gazed into thin air without smiling.

"And did you?"

"I said that I do forgive him. I told him I still love him. The first was a lie, the second unfortunately is not. He is a fool, but I am the bigger fool for having gifted him my heart. Now I have to live with my choice, there is no other way. Remember that, dear Charlotte, choose your husband wisely because it is a life-long commitment and none other will have such impact on your happiness."

Her frowned brow changed into a soft smile.

“Something tells me you have already chosen and if it is indeed so, I think you never will regret that choice.”

Charlotte’s cheeks turned hot and she was grateful when a cry from baby James interrupted their conversation. Even if she hoped that she and Mary would one day be sisters, not only friends, she would never speak of it before there had been an actual proposal. Oh, pray that Sidney would return so her mind could find peace.

During Sidney’s absence she also spent time with Mr. Stringer. Charlotte felt immense compassion for him. He had lost his father and their last words had been spoken in anger because James wanted to move to London for an apprenticeship as architect. After his father’s death, feelings of guilt had made him decline the offer. Instead he would remain in Sanditon and help rebuild the town his father had been so proud of as a posthumous apology. In one strike he had lost his only family and his dream and unlike Tom, he had no blame in the misfortune. Stringer had never been anything but hardworking and kind and deserved more.

It was with some uneasiness Charlotte realised that she may also have been part of Stringer’s dreams and hopes. She could not be sure, but it was something in the way he complimented her at the ball and said that he hoped that the man who had won her heart deserved her. There was a raw edge to his voice then, one which she never heard before or after. It made her guard her behaviour towards him in a different way than before because she would never want to lead a good man on. Stringer was a valued friend, but nothing more and she would not have him hope so. When he grieved his father, she wanted to embrace him and tell him everything would be alright, but it was not her place to hold him and she could give no such promises. She knew as little as him what the future held.

Still, during the days Sidney was gone she had believed there was hope. Hope of rebuilding Sanditon and keeping the Parker’s reputation intact, hope for her and Sidney as a couple. When he finally returned it turned out that only one of them was possible at the cost of the other.

That was the day when the last shreds of the romantic veil before her eyes disappeared, as if blown away by the salty sea breeze.

When she heard the ruckus from downstairs and realised Sidney had come, her heart had made a somersault of happiness. They would finally be together again. Perhaps they would be engaged soon and be allowed to show their affection towards one another freely.

Immediately when she saw him, she froze inside, knowing something was wrong. His entire family jumped with joy over some news he had delivered before she entered the room, completely oblivious to his subdued manners, but Charlotte immediately picked up on a strange vibe. The tension in his body, the averted gaze, lack of a smile and the clenched jaw did not indicate he was a bearer of glorious tidings even if Tom extatically proclaimed that he was. Her instincts told her he was sad or angry or both. Still, she would not have been able to predict the words that were to come over his lips, ending her dream brutally even if he tried to say it gently.

She watched him intently as the others left, eager to go and share with lady Denham that Sanditon was saved even if Charlotte had not yet understood how.

When they were alone he moved closer and his eyes finally met hers, there was no joy or victory in their depth, only a pain so deep that it felt almost like a physical punch merely to behold. He did not speak, only breathed as if every breath was hard to take.

“What is it?” she asked when she no longer could bear the oppressing silence.

He grabbed her hands, like he had at the balcony, but she knew with terrifying certainty that he would not continue where he had left off that time. Now it felt like he clung on to her for dear life, like he needed the connection to find strength to say what he had to say.

“Charlotte. My dearest Charlotte.”

Why did she get the feeling that he was saying her name because he was unsure if he would be allowed to say it again? It made the angst bloom fully in her chest.

“I had hoped that when I returned I would be able to make you a proposal of marriage.”

He swallowed.

“But I cannot be.”

His eyes seemed like dark pools of despair in his handsome face now, begging for forgiveness already before he delivered the blow. She wanted to reach out her hand and touch his cheek, but somehow sensed it was not hers to touch again.

“The fact is I have been obliged to engage myself to Mrs Eliza Campion.”

He watched her expression shift as she tried to process his unfathomable words.

“Please believe me that if there was any other way to resolve Tom's situation... I would...”

“I understand.” She inhaled sharply, trying to keep herself together. Tried to maintain her dignity, like she had that day in the tent when she had been ridiculed. Tears began welling up in her eyes, but she did not want to cry in front of him. Every part of her wanted to be with him, but despair made her tear away.

“I wish you every happiness. Excuse me”, was all she managed with choked voice before turning and running up the stairs.

Afterwards she regretted her hasty exit many times. It had been her one time alone with him, the one opportunity when it would have been possible to ask how such an engagement came about. Ask if part of him was happy; if he still had feelings for Mrs. Campion; if he loved *her*, Charlotte. Then again, she knew she would never had stooped to ask those questions even if she had stayed and there was nothing he could say to make things better.

He had told her he had hoped to propose to *her*. He had confirmed it had not simply been a frivolous girl's imagination running wild when she thought he would. His hopes had been the same as hers. That knowledge would always reside in her heart, but the harsh reality was that the one way Sidney had found out of his family's predicament was to offer himself to someone else. Someone with a substantial fortune.

The pain that followed was so much worse than when she first realised he own feelings and thought Sidney did not reciprocate them. Now she *knew* that he returned her feelings and it had made them deepen from an infatuation to love. Yet he would not be hers. He was not free to choose her.

When she returned to her room, the first thing her eyes fell on was the letter she had been writing to Alison just as Sidney arrived. It seemed to be mocking her now.

Alison, it is possible that my future, too, could rest on Sidney's swift return. I wish I could tell you more. But it may be that very soon I will have the most exciting news to share.

It was only a half an hour ago that she had been so hopeful and believed that she might soon have news of an engagement to share. Everything was different now and in pure desperation she crumpled the letter and tossed it away. Her hopes and dreams had crumpled just like that. How could fate be so cruel? Or was fate like it always had been and she had only been a naïve girl for thinking that she would get to marry the man she had fallen in love with? Her thoughts kept on spinning until she did not know what to believe anymore.

Was his love for her as deep as hers for him, or would he in time be pleased with this arrangement? Then she remembered his words about being his truest self with her and deciding on not joining Mrs. Champion to London. She reminisced the all-consuming feeling when they kissed, the look in his eyes at the balcony and the very different look just now and she felt convinced that he was as unhappy as her right now. Perhaps feeling even worse, because he would have to marry a woman he did not love. Charlotte was at least still free.

Her heart broke that day. She thought she would break altogether and stayed behind when the other's cheerfully disappeared off to Lady Denham. Sidney did not take it lightly but seeing him pretend to be happy to keep appearances up for the family would be equally painful, so she stayed away. At dinner time she let them know she was unwell kept crying in the solitude of her room. A concerned Mary came knocking at her door, but respectfully left when Charlotte asked her to.

She shed tears for herself, for him and for them. For the life she had glimpsed which never would be theirs to share. She cried until there was an empty stillness inside her and she knew that she never would be the same. The carefree Charlotte who thought all stories end well was gone. When she rushed out the doors after Sidney's confession, she was another and she knew she would never see the world quite in the same way again.

She realised she could not stay in bed the next day without raising unwelcome questions, so she pulled herself together. She was not sure how she managed the charade but dug out the strength from somewhere deep within. At breakfast she was told Sidney had returned to London already. Part of her was relieved she would not have to face him in front of the others, part of her wept silently because they had not even been allowed a proper parting.

She felt nauseous when Tom chirped that of course Sidney must be eager to officially be reunited with the woman he had dreamt of for so long and perhaps there might be a wedding before the end of the summer. Perhaps even in Sanditon and a reason for the London beau monde to return here again. Mary on the other hand looked searchingly at Charlotte, but Charlotte shook her head in response to the unspoken question. She had nurtured a hope, but Sidney had broken no promise to her. Her dream had been shattered but what was that compared to saving an entire family and a town? Nothing. Her dreams were nothing and she preferred not to talk about it because it would be even more painful if everyone understood the sacrifice being made. The perceptive Mary understood her silent request and did not speak of it again for the duration of her visit in Sanditon but

when they were alone she silently hugged her and Charlotte allowed her tears to wet Mary's shoulder for a while, before she wiped them away and gave her a brave smile.

She did not speak much of it with Georgiana either. It was no secret that her friend disliked and distrusted Sidney and she knew that if she told her everything that had come to pass, from the kiss to the near-proposal, Georgiana would only say that it proved what she had known all along. That he was a man who could not be trusted. Charlotte knew that was not the truth and could not bear her friend thinking so, thus chose to carry her sorrow alone.

When Georgiana a few days later received the news of Sidney's engagement through a letter where he also informed he would not come to Sanditon again for the foreseeable future as his commitments kept him in London, she could not resist commenting to Charlotte.

"For a while there around the ball I thought he was playing some game with you."

"No, indeed he was not playing any games with me. Mr. Parker has been nothing but kind to me and has not misled me in any way", Charlotte answered softly.

"So you don't hold grudges against him?"

"He is the last person on this Earth I hold any grudges against. You should not be so hard on him."

Georgiana snorted.

"I beg to defer. Anyway, I think he gets what he deserves. His fiancée seems to be a cow."

This remark was too much for Charlotte to leave unchallenged and she answered with a fire that took Georgiana completely by surprise.

"He has done nothing to deserve that! He has tried to be a good guardian to you. He saved you from ruin when you ran off to Otis and was abducted to London and he paid of Otis's debts even if he had no reason too. You are behaving like a spoiled

child! How about you grow up and realise you are not the only one who has encountered hardship in your life and try to show some gratitude towards those who want to help you?"

Charlotte got to her feet and stormed out of Georgiana's room and Mrs. Griffith's house and ran down to the beach. She did not want anyone know of the love they had lost, yet it was hard to pretend like a sacrifice had not been done. She was not a child anymore and therefore found it hard to put up with Georgiana's petulant childish nonsense.

Georgiana did not ask her forgiveness or try to make amends in any other way when they met next. Charlotte did not regret or take back her words and so for the rest of the summer, she acted politely when they met but their easy friendship was not the same as before. Charlotte was less inclined than ever to confide in Georgiana what actually had passed between her and Sidney or how much she continued to grieve him even as the weeks passed and so they gradually grew further apart.

In the weeks that followed much of the town's attention was on the upcoming wedding between Lord Babington and Esther Denham. Charlotte was genuinely happy for them, but there was a small thorn of envy in her heart which she was not proud of and she dreaded the wedding day as she realised Sidney would for sure return to take part of it.

If she was growing apart from Georgiana, she was unexpectedly becoming closer to Esther instead. After she had helped to take care of Esther during the ball, when Edward had done his best to shame her publicly, Esther had sought her company more often. It seemed as if Charlotte through her kindness and loyalty, much like Babington with his unwavering affection for Esther, had broken through her defences and gained her trust. Babington gradually made her open up and bloom, but she was still a very private person, slightly wary to her nature and did not ask Charlotte unwelcome questions. Charlotte therefore found peace in her company in an environment which she otherwise found increasingly hard to endure. They often strolled along the beach or in the Denham Park gardens in companionable

silence or discussing the safe topic of wedding preparations. Therefore it was natural that Esther, who did not have many friends, came to ask Charlotte if she would be her maid of honour and Charlotte, who did not know what else to say, accepted.

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With trepidation she walked in Esther's footsteps that day, all the way to the altar. Sidney was Babington's best man and walked by her side. She had known he would be and tried to brace herself for the encounter yet seeing him again had taken her breath away. He was a tall and utterly handsome stranger and it seemed impossible that he nearly had been hers. For a moment she thought she had imagined it all, but then their eyes locked and she knew it was not so. The air between them seemed to fizzle when they walked side by side, but their hearts were heavy. Only they, Babington and Mary, knew that they had hoped to walk this aisle as bride and groom.

When the vicar performed the wedding ceremony, they stood on either side of Babington and Esther and Sidney's eyes did not leave her face. If she had doubted his feelings even a split second over these weeks, she did not have to doubt any more. His eyes spoke silently to her and she somehow knew that he inside repeated the wedding vows, just like she did. They belonged together, until death did them part and no man could separate their hearts even if they could not live as husband and wife. The wedding couple today was Lord and Lady Babington, but to Charlotte, no one existed in this church except Sidney when 'I do' echoed inside them.

It was painful to go separate ways after the ceremony. Naturally he had brought Mrs. Champion, anything else would have been strange as they were engaged and much of the time she clung possessively to his arm. Charlotte did not expect there would be another opportunity to talk to him. In the church he had been hers, out here they had to act as common acquaintances again and she actually preferred to avoid him over having to pretend to be that.

“Well, Miss Heywood do you still proclaim your independence?” Lady Denham interrupted her train of thoughts. “Or is it that none of our young men have taken your fancy? I wager we’ll see you walk down the aisle very soon.”

Her sharp eyes rested on Charlotte and she got the distinct feeling that the old lady *knew* and perhaps even understood better than anyone here that true love had been sacrificed for the greater good. Before she could answer, Lady Denham turned to someone behind her.

“What do you say, Mr Parker?”

Suddenly Sidney was standing in front of them, but before he in turn could answer, Lady Denham was pulled aside by one of the other guests, leaving them awkwardly to their own. What do you say when there are a thousand things to say and you can speak none of them?

“How do you do, Miss Heywood?”

It was the first time she heard him speak today and the deep timbre set her nerves on fire. She was not Charlotte to him anymore and it hurt them both.

“Very well, thank you.”

His eyes continued to mirror everything she felt, everything they could not say.

“And your family, are they well?”

His question reminded them of the clifftop walk that day, when he had rambled on before they kissed.

“Very well.”

“Ah.”

“How are your own wedding preparations?”

She had to ask, not to break down and cry and tell him she loved him, not to ask him to choose her instead and forget about everything else.

“Elaborate.”

The dull pain in his voice cut through her like a knife. How would they be able to live through this, live a life without one another?

Mrs. Champion appeared out of nowhere and grasped his arm again with a smug smile, awaking them both from the trance.

“Well, who would have thought planning a London wedding could be so exhausting? Perhaps we should have simple country affair like this one, dear.”

She chuckled maliciously in the way that seemed to be significant for her.

“Though I don't think it would be quite our sort of thing, do you? Men, what do they know?”

Charlotte simply stared at her without saying anything, hating that she mentioned of things as ‘theirs’ and simultaneously spoke condescending both of this wedding and her fiancé. If she had been a different person, Charlotte would have pitied Mrs. Champion because Sidney married her for money, but she sensed so clearly that she did not marry out of love either. She wanted to possess Sidney and she did not want him to be happy with anyone but her. Charlotte had no idea how the engagement had come to be, but the little she had seen of Mrs. Champion made her believe there was no reason to feel sorry for that woman. Her heart ached for Sidney who had to live his life with her, when it so obviously was the last thing he wanted. For Charlotte, this would have been easier to endure if she had known he was happy.

“Good day, Miss Heywood.”

Mrs. Champion led him away like a dog on a leash, maintaining her smirk and Sidney glanced over his shoulder as a silent goodbye.

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The plan had always been that Charlotte would stay in Sanditon until the beginning of August and if she had left earlier it would have raised questions she did not want to answer. Thus she stayed the few remaining weeks but spent most of her time

with the children or reading. She could not stand Tom's company as he now was absorbed in the re-building plans, as enthusiastically arrogant as before. Georgiana and she were coolly civil, and she did not voluntarily search her company. Esther and Babington were wrapped up in marital bliss. Arthur was too jovial, Diana too hypocondric. Stringer she liked as much as before, but she avoided him to some extent not to nurture the unwelcome feelings she suspected that he held towards her. When someone loves you and you do not love them in return there will always be a certain awkwardness in the relationship which is difficult to disregard for either party. In the end Mary was the only one she could stand but she often avoided her too because she found her compassionate glances and unspoken questions hard to bear. When the day came to travel home to Willingden, and she bid the family farewell outside Trafalgar House relief was the overarching feeling inside her.

"Goodbye, Tom. I hope the rebuilding goes well."

"Don't you worry, my dear. Sanditon will rise from the ashes as sure as eggs are eggs."

She smiled sweetly at him and wondered how it was possible for a man to be so self-centred that he was completely oblivious to the havoc he had caused around him. How he could not understand what his brother had given up, the grief he had caused Mary and the pain she herself endured? It was all about him and the town and they were collateral damage. She hoped he would succeed so their sacrifice would be worth anything.

When she turned to Mary, her sadness over parting was not feigned.

"Goodbye, Mary. I cannot thank you enough for your kindness. You've been such a good friend to me."

She had indeed and Charlotte knew that if she had allowed her, she would have tried to console her more over losing Sidney.

“I am only sorry that Sidney couldn't be here to say goodbye. He has other commitments”, Mary said, almost as if she could read her thoughts

“I do understand.”

“Despite everything, I do hope you don't regret coming to Sanditon.”

“How could I? It's been the greatest adventure of my life.”

It was true. Her papa's warnings had come true, so had Esther's, yet she was unable to regret coming. She could not imagine a life where she had not met Sidney and experienced all the things she had. It had been laughter and pain and it had changed her profoundly. It had been blissful to be the naïve girl she had been when the carriage rolled into this town, but she would not want to go back.

The carriage drove away, soon left the Sanditon streets behind and climbed the steep road up on the cliff tops. Through the window she could see a last glimpse of the townhouses, the vast greens up here and the sea stretching out at the foot of the cliffs. The same view that had taken her breath away the first time she saw it. It still did even if she knew it well by now.

Suddenly she heard a familiar male voice shout something to the driver and he halted the carriage. Curiously she opened the door and saw Sidney dismount from a horse and come striding towards her, looking like he had been riding all the way from London to catch her.

She had not seen him since the wedding and just the sight of him made her heart race. The fact that he stopped mere inches from her even more so. There was a flutter of hope inside her. Had he come to tell her he could not let her go? That he had found a way?

“I couldn't let you go without...” His voice broke. “Tell me you don't think too badly of me.”

“I don't think badly of you.”

It was true. His eyes had already told her the true nature of things. He would marry her if he could. Her heart sank, because she realised he had not come to ask her to stay. He had come to say goodbye. To part forever. To give her the proper parting she had wished for. She regretted that wish now because nothing could be more horrible than this.

“I don't love her, you know.”

She understood that was as close as he could come to telling her he loved *her*, without acting like a dishonourable scoundrel. Yet that was crossing a line too.

“You must not speak like that. She loves you and you've agreed to marry her. You must try to make her happy.”

She knew that otherwise he would hold himself in contempt, he must remain the good man he was, or he would be destroyed and fall apart. She needed to know that he would remain himself, somewhere.

He knew she was right, yet he grimaced.

“Yes. Yes, you're right. I have to fulfil my side of the bargain.”

He breathed heavily and she sensed he wanted to kiss her. She wanted it too, wanted it with every part of her, but she also knew it was wrong. It would taint the memory of the pure, beautiful kiss they once had shared if they kissed now when he was engaged to another. The air between them shivered, but their lips never met.

“Goodbye, Charlotte.”

She wanted to ask him how she was supposed to live her life without him, now that she knew that he existed and loved her, but she did not. She knew he did not have the answer.

“I wish you every happiness. Goodbye.”

Hastily she stepped inside the carriage again and they took off, leaving Sidney behind.

She was sure she never would forget him.

She wondered if she ever would love another man again.

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Sidney remained where he was until the carriage finally disappeared out of sight, taking Charlotte away from him and his heart with her, leaving an empty space inside his chest.

Then he kneeled on the grass and cried until there were no more tears to cry.

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