Reasons

by AngelQueen

Summary

Madeline accused him of seeking revenge, but that was only the beginning of George's motives for hunting Elkanah Bent.

Notes

I have always had an enormous love for John Jakes' *North and South* trilogy and the miniseries that was made based off it. Both the books and the miniseries had their strong and weak points, but what I always had a particular love for in the miniseries was the romance between George Hazard and Madeline Main in Book III. James Read and Lesley-Anne Down had lovely on-screen chemistry together.

This little ditty is set after George leaves Madeline behind at Mont Royal to head west to find Charles Main (I refuse to call him Charlie) and rescue Charles' little son, Gus, from the increasingly mad Elkanah Bent.

He left Mont Royal within twenty minutes of receiving the telegraph about Bent’s kidnapping of little August Main. His horse bore him toward Charleston with the ease and speed of an animal that knew where he was going. This left George to prepare himself for the task ahead, but that was a task easier said than done.

His thoughts were going everywhere. Some went to Bent, and how he desperately wanted to kill the son of a bitch, while others went to Charlie Main, a man unaware that his only child was in the hands...
of a madman that had plagued them both for years. Then there were yet others, reaching back behind him, through the dust left by his horse’s hooves, toward Mont Royal. Toward Madeline.

She had been right, of course. He was seeking revenge. Bent had taken too much from him, from both their families over the years. George hadn’t forgotten that Bent had been the reason for Orry’s mangled leg, which had caused him never-ending amounts of pain over the years, since the war with Mexico. There was also no doubt in his mind that Bent had been the one who wielded the knife that had ended Orry’s life.

Then he’d killed Constance, killed her when George was coming home from visiting another woman…

He had spent months paralyzed from guilt. Even if Constance had sent him to South Carolina with her full blessing, knowing he wouldn’t rest easy unless he knew that his best friend’s widow and son were safe and secure, he had been wracked with shame afterward. His beloved Constance had been stalked and murdered by a madman who had had a grudge against George for decades while George’s thoughts had been full of a beautiful, Southern widow. That had been why his message to Mont Royal informing them of Constance’s death had specifically included a line that Madeline not come to Lehigh Station. He couldn’t have borne Madeline’s presence, not then. He hadn’t held her responsible, of course, even as he could clearly recall the expression on her face during the time they had spent together. He had blamed only himself.

That guilt had sat in his gut for so long, fed by lack of sleep, alcohol, and the darkness of his study as he poured obsessively over the leads on Bent, sent to him by the Pinkerton detectives. It had driven him to neglect his grieving children, to drop Hazard Iron completely into the hands of Jack Quinlan, to even snap and snarl at his beloved sister-in-law, Brett Main Hazard, when she had visited the family from California.

It had only ended when Jack had thrown the door open to let in the light, both from the afternoon sun and from the heavenly, lovely lady who had come seeking his help against those who would see her destroyed. Madeline’s arrival had breathed life, or rather the desire to live, back in to him, something George would be forever grateful for.

So he had told her the truth. There was nothing that would stop him from coming back to her. He had never thought to have a reason to live again, except to perhaps see his children into adulthood, but now he had every reason. George had never thought he’d love anyone other than Constance, but he’d been proven wrong.

He could only hope that, wherever she was, Constance didn’t feel as though she had been betrayed.

Still, for all of that, revenge was not his only reason he was going off to find Bent. He was determined to save little August, it was true. He owed Charlie for his assistance in getting him out of Libby Prison. He hadn’t lied to Orry when he’d told him that he couldn’t have lasted much longer in that hell. Orry was gone now, and there was nothing George could do for him except to take care of Madeline and Orry Junior and avenge his death on the bastard that had murdered him. But Charlie was still alive, and George refused to see the man lose his son.

And that wasn’t the end of it, George admitted to himself as he finally left the forested areas of the low country and started along the straight road that led to Charleston. He was going after Bent because he knew it was the only way any of them would be safe. Bent had been nursing this grudge against him and Orry for decades, even since George and Orry had defied him that first day back at the Point, and he had extended it to their families as well. Constance and Orry had only been his first victims. August was clearly next, along with Charlie.
Bent would not stop until he had destroyed every last one of them. George knew he could surround the Hazards and Mains with bodyguards, could hide them away until Bent died of old age or found a monster worse than him. They would have to spend the rest of their lives looking over their shoulders, wondering if this or that day would be when Bent caught up with them.

It was no way to live. Not for him, not for any of them. After all they had endured, they deserved to live their lives in peace.

George stared grimly ahead, toward Charleston. One way or another, this was going to end. Bent was off hiding in the wilderness of the West, and if George had anything to say about it, he wouldn’t be coming back out.

It was the only acceptable outcome.

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