### The Christmas Tree

**by Small_Hobbit**

**Summary**

John Thornton has been decorating the Christmas tree for his new wife.

“You may go in now,” John Thornton said to his wife.

Excitedly, Margaret Hale opened the parlour door. She had been banned from the parlour since the previous afternoon, when John had arrived carrying a Christmas tree, assisted by two of his men. He had refused to let her in, despite her offer to help him decorate it and she had been forced to spend the evening in the dining room.

They had returned from attending the Christmas morning service and John had once again disappeared into the parlour, this time telling her he would be only a few minutes. She had quickly run to find her sewing box, where she had hidden the two small presents she had bought for him, so they too could be hung on the tree.

They had agreed they would not spend much on each other in the way of Christmas gifts. They were financially stable, but there would not be much to spare should there be problems in the coming months and so both were happy with the idea of token gifts.

Or so Margaret had thought. However, when she opened the door she stopped in the door way. The tree was beautifully decked out, covered in decorations, ribbons, and little gifts, and ablaze with candles.

“John,” Margaret said, “it’s beautiful. And it puts my presents to shame.”
“I wanted only the best for my wife on our first Christmas together,” John replied.

“But I thought we had agreed we were not spending much on each other.”

“Rest assured, I have spent more time on you than I have money. You cannot imagine how long it took me to wrap each of those sweets individually.”

Margaret looked more closely and realised many of the decorations were formed of small sweets wrapped in scraps of muslin, inexpertly stitched together. She laughed and took John’s hands, inspecting his fingers.

“I see you have something to learn as to the nature of sewing,” she said. He smiled ruefully at her.

She continued to look at the other items on the tree. “But you cannot deny you have spent money on these wooden toys and the lavender sachets – the sewing on those is most certainly not yours.”

“It is true I paid for them, although perhaps less than you might expect. And I was sure you would not mind, for I asked those of my workforce who I thought might like to earn an additional shilling if they could make me something for my tree. In this way I was able to provide my wife with the tree she deserved and my workers could afford extra for their own celebrations.”

Margaret turned to her husband and there were tears in her eyes as she threw her arms around him. He bent down to kiss her, but before he could she said, “I have one more thing to tell you. I had thought of waiting, but this seems like the perfect time. I am with child.”

She did not resist as he swept her up into his arms and began to kiss her passionately.

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