**Illuminate**

by brilligspoons

Summary

A series of fluffy/romantic ficlets about John and Margaret after their wedding written for prompts received on tumblr.
“Oh, no, it was nothing like a love match,” Fanny says to her gaggle of acquaintances, “though I’m sure it came as close to one as two people such as my brother and Margaret could manage. They are both of them too practical and unimaginative for something so delightfully romantic.”

Margaret doesn’t mean to eavesdrop on her sister-in-law, but Fanny’s voice is too distinct and almost impossible to ignore, even with the low hum of conversation filling the room. She schools her expression carefully and devotes all of her attention back to the two elderly women who latched onto her when she and John first arrived at the party. They appear not to have heard Fanny, or are pretending they haven’t, and despite Margaret’s initial despair at being cornered by the least interesting guests, she feels a swell of gratitude flow through her.

The words aren’t spoken with ill intent, of course. Margaret believes Fanny to be bereft of true malice, though she is often uncaring and childishly vindictive. No matter how innocent, though, Margaret still fights to keep the stabbing hurt they inspire from eating away at her thoughts.

She wonders, sometimes, about her and John. He had declared his love for her well before she even had an inkling of her inheritance, and she feels confident that their marriage meant more than a return to financial security for him. But the angry words they’d hurled at each other during his first proposal, and all the bitterness and sorrow they’d seen since - Margaret can’t help but play out all of them in her head, over and over again, until she makes herself sick with doubt.

A warm hand lands on her shoulder suddenly, startling her out of her thoughts. She knows without looking around that it’s John. Her companions greet him warmly and inform him of their conversation topic - something about religious pamphlets.

“I’m afraid I must steal my wife away from you, ladies,” John says. “We are unused to keeping late hours.”

“Oh dear,” says one, “I did think you were growing weary, Mrs. Thornton, but we were having such a lovely time.”

“It was a pleasure,” Margaret replies as she stands and takes John’s arm. “We will have to continue this another time. Good evening.”

They say their goodbyes to Fanny, and then to their hosts, and as they retrieve their coats, John leans close and murmurs, “I thought to save you from their clutches earlier, but Slickson had some business to discuss that couldn’t wait until morning, according to him. I apologize.”

The warmth in his voice sends a shiver racing down Margaret’s spine. John wraps her in her coat, and once she’s settled takes hold of one of her hands and raises it to his lips, eyes fixed on hers the whole time. With this gesture, Margaret’s doubts and worries melt, at least for the moment, and she is content.
There’s a cup of tea, recently poured judging from the steam rising from it, on the table beside her when she opens her eyes again. Margaret inhales the scent of it and sighs in relief when her stomach doesn’t start to turn. She sits up properly and sets the book she’d been reading before she fell asleep down before reaching for the cup.

“My mother is beginning to think you’ve taken ill.”

She jumps and almost overturns the tea, catching it just before it spills. “I thought you were going to be at the mill until late,” Margaret says. John nods and moves from the chair across the room to sit with her on the sofa. She takes hold of one of his hands, and he leans over to press a gentle kiss on her cheek. “Thank you for the tea, John.”

“You’re welcome. Now, reassure me that you’re well so that I can bring a favorable report back to Mother.” Margaret takes a sip of her tea rather than answer him immediately. John’s fingers tighten around hers. “You - you are well, aren’t you?”

“Wouldn’t you like tea as well, John?”

“Margaret,” he says.

“Yes, I’ll be fine,” Margaret says. She cranes her neck up to kiss him properly. Removing her hand from his grasp, Margaret wraps it around John’s wrist and moves him until his palm is resting flat across her abdomen. “The baby and I will be very fine, indeed.”

John blinks. “Baby.”

Margaret takes another sip and smiles into her cup. “Baby.”